

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In Memoriam

I AM WRITING with some very sad news. Dr. Ari Bleicher, z”l, has succumbed to his terrible illness—he was niftar last week. The family is just winding up the *shiv'ab*.

Ari had written the article on *Tefillat Shav*, which *Hakirah* graciously published in vol. 12, 2011. The *shivur*—and its publication in *Hakirah*—meant so much to Ari, and it was a source of great inspiration to his family and to those who knew him. In fact, it was mentioned a few times in the *hespeidim* at the *levayah*. I just wanted to let you know—and to express to you my heartfelt appreciation for what you did in sharing Ari’s Torah with the world. It is so hard to lose a friend and a *talmid*—but being able to go back repeatedly and read Ari’s meaningful words is no small measure of *nehamah*.

May you continue to have the wonderful *zechus* to share Torah with the world, opening eyes, exciting minds, and inspiring hearts.

Thank you so very much.

Rabbi Saul Zucker
Teaneck, NJ

Rabbi Shlomo Goren

I CHANCED upon volume 15 of *Hakirah* during my recent visit to the United States. I cannot adequately express the depth of my

positive evaluation of this issue. The articles cover many diverse areas of Jewish scholarship, including halakhah, philosophy and history. The entries represent a rare synthesis of traditional Torah study enhanced by scientific Jewish scholarship. I feel that the article entitled “A Yeshiva Curriculum in Western Literature” should be required reading for all yeshiva students who study the humanities on both high school and college levels.

Regarding the Hebrew essay on the halakhic rulings of Rabbi Shlomo Goren, a similar thesis is expressed by Hagai Ben-Artzi in his doctoral dissertation on the halakhic rulings of Rabbi Avraham Isaac Ha-Kohen Kook. Ben-Artzi also details the concept of “emergency” rulings to aid the fledgling *yishuv* in Palestine. Ben-Artzi’s volume is entitled “הראי”ה קוק כפוסק: יסודות חדשניים בפסיקתו של הרב קוק” published by Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 2003.

Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet
Jerusalem

DR. HOLLANDER’S discussion of the Langer case in *Hakirah* 15 as highlighting R’ Goren’s approach to *p’sak* sheds light on current events in Israeli conversions. While a complete review of the details of the case and R’ Goren’s *p’sak* is beyond the scope of this letter, I would like

to outline the basic halakhic arguments of R' Goren and, by doing so, demonstrate why any comparison between this case and the "conversion revocations" performed recently by those in the Israeli Rabbinate are completely unfounded.

Reconstructing the history behind the Langer case suggests the following chain of events. Around the year 1923 Hava Ginsberg, a girl of about 14 from Lukov, Poland, ran away from the home of her religious family with a significantly older, non-Jewish man named Bolik Borokovsky. Hava converted to Christianity and they married in a church. Hava's parents, deeply ashamed, combined bribes and threats to convince Borokovsky to convert to Judaism. Borokovsky agreed and traveled with his father-in-law to Warsaw where he was circumcised and where it is claimed he converted. Upon their return to Lukov it was claimed that Hava and Avraham (formerly Bolik) Borokovsky married in accordance with Jewish law. In 1933 they moved to Israel.

It seems they meant to make *aliyah* a year earlier with Hava's parents, but were delayed because their eldest son was registered as a Catholic. In 1942 the couple separated, Hava claiming that Avraham behaved like a Christian. There was no halakhic divorce (*get*). Two years later Hava married Otto Langer and together they had two children, Hanokh and Miriam.

In 1951, Borokovsky approached the bet din to remarry and

gave a *get* to Hava. Otto Langer then died and, in 1955, Hava appeared in the Tel Aviv bet din seeking permission to marry again. Upon questioning, the bet din realized that she had married Langer without a *get*. The bet din convened to consider this and, because Hava admitted she never told the rabbi performing her marriage to Langer that she had been married before, Hanoch and Miriam were declared *mamzerim*. No witnesses were brought to support any aspect of the case and, frighteningly unfortunately, there did not appear to be any attempt to resolve the problem of *mamzerut*.

In 1966 Hanokh approached the Tel Aviv bet din rabbinate seeking permission to marry but was told he could not. The case went back and forth between the local bet din in Petah Tikva and the supreme religious court, Bet Din haGadol P'Ururim, garnering national attention and causing the political upheaval described by Dr. Hollander.

With no leniency forthcoming, the case was taken out of the regular batei din and given to R' Goren, the military Chief Rabbi (the Langers were both in the military). R' Goren uncovered more evidence and gave a lenient *p'sak* signed by himself and 9 anonymous judges.

In his published work on the case, R' Goren first explains why he can reconvene a new bet din despite the existing *p'sak*. This is due to the severity of *mamzerut* and its equivalence to *dinei nefashot*, capital cases. He then describes the entire history

of the case including all the evidence and discusses new evidence that he has found. Finally, he explains at length his rationale for a lenient *p'sak*, the pillars of which are the doubts he has uncovered.

The first doubt is whether or not Borokovsky actually ever converted. There are three methods to prove conversion: 1) witnesses or documentation of the conversion itself, 2) a claim of conversion combined with a *hazakah*, presumption, that the person is Jewish, 3) one assumed to be Jewish claims that he was a non-Jew but converted, in which case he is believed since we have no independent reason to assume that he was ever not Jewish (*hapeh she'asar hu hapeh she'hittir*).

None of these three methods work in the case of Borokovsky. 1) There were no witnesses who could testify to the conversion and Borokovsky himself could not name the bet din in which he was converted or any of the rabbis who comprised the said bet din. 2) The *Shulhan Arukh* (*Yoreh Deah* 268:10) implies that a *hazakah* of Jewishness can be applied only if the convert claims he was converted in a specific bet din (which Borokovsky could not do). In addition, even if identifying the bet din is not necessary, there are numerous witnesses claiming that Borokovsky continued going to church after his "conversion," that he baptized his eldest son who was born soon after their marriage, that he ate pork, never acted like a Jew, and did not even like Jews. One witness did claim that while in Israel,

Borokovsky came to synagogue every day until his father-in-law died and still continued to come on Shabbat. This testimony was rejected because, first of all, he is only one witness and second, the testimony is contradicted by Borokovsky's own in which he demonstrated that he cannot identify the term "*kri'at sh'ma*," cannot properly continue the phrase "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," and does not recognize "*leכה dodi*." Furthermore, documents from social services working with Borokovsky's son assume Borokovsky is not Jewish and state that he attends Christian functions. Clearly, then, there is no presumption that Borokovsky is a Jew. 3) There are plenty of witnesses from Lukov who knew Borokovsky as a non-Jew and thus we have independent evidence of his initial status. If, in fact, Borokovsky never converted, there was no need for a religious divorce before Hava's marriage to Otto Langer. Indeed this was the assumption of the rabbi who performed that marriage. For though Hava never told him she had been previously married, witnesses say that the rabbi knew about her first husband and was sure he was not Jewish, that his conversion was fake. It is wrong, very wrong, totally incorrect to exclude two Jews from marrying simply because there was a rumor that Borokovsky converted. Remember we are dealing with a life and death situation (see *T'shuvot Rama* 12).

R' Goren felt that this first point is unchallengeable and uncovering

other doubts is not necessary. Nevertheless, following the path of the great *poskim* who are *m'zoref* as many *snifim* as possible, R' Goren uncovers four additional doubts. The second cause of doubt garnered all the attention: the Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hillebot Issurei Biab* 13:15-16) writes that one who converted for non-spiritual reasons is watched until we see what becomes of him. Borokovsky clearly converted due to the pressure and bribery from his father-in-law. The various witnesses and documents mentioned above demonstrate that he kept a Christian life even after conversion, thus the conversion is rendered invalid (the *Zafnat Paneah* on this halakha explains that if the “convert” subsequently returns to idol-worship it demonstrates there was no conversion in the first place).

Additional doubts uncovered by R' Goren are: 3) Even if there was a valid conversion, Borokovsky, when asked by the bet din in Petah Tikva, could produce no witnesses to his wedding or even anyone who could establish the presumption that he and Hava were married. In addition, since they were originally married as Christians, even if witnesses could be found claiming that they were presumed to be married (that there was a *hazakah*), we would say that the presumption was based on the non-Jewish wedding and that they were never married as Jews (see *Shulḥan Arukh, Even HaEzer* 16:1). 4) Borokovsky was forced to convert under the threat of being reported to law officers that he ran

off with a 14-year-old girl. Forced conversions are not valid. 5) Even if there was a valid conversion and marriage, the get eventually given by Borokovsky refers to him as Avraham *ha-ger* (the convert). Using this formulation, rather than the more appropriate Avraham ben Avraham Avinu, halakhically identifies Borokovsky as a *mumar*, one who rejects Judasim (see *Torat Gittin* 129). According to some Rishonim the *get* of a *mumar* works only via annulment of the marriage. Thus, the *get* caused the marriage to Hava to have never existed. Therefore, the marriage to Hava was retroactively annulled. All of this provides plenty of room to clear the Langers of the stigma of *mamzerut*.

With this as a background it is difficult to conceive the rationale behind statements comparing this case to modern-day revocation of conversion such as (see the blog “Cross-Currents”), “I wonder how many of those calling for Rabbi Attias’s scalp remember that Rabbi Shlomo Goren ‘freed’ a brother and sister from the halachic status of *mamzerut* by voiding their mother’s marriage at the time of their conception. And that was done, in turn, by voiding her husband’s conversion...” This comparison is simply appalling.

First, R' Goren’s main thrust was not at all to revoke conversion but to convincingly prove that the conversion never happened. R' Goren makes an almost irrefutable case that there was no bet din in

Warsaw and Borokovsky was actually never Jewish. However, even assuming there was a conversion, R' Goren suggests it can be revoked because Borokovsky immediately returned to Christian worship. This is not revoking a conversion of someone who identifies as a Jew but is lax in certain areas of Jewish law. This is someone who, before and after conversion, was an idol-worshipper (see *Noda b'Yehuda, Yoreh Deah* 1:69)!

In fact, R' Goren may not generally believe that this statement of the Rambam is halakhically acceptable. It is enough to cast doubt and add another *snif* to the permissibility of *mamzerim*.

But most importantly, unlike other halakhic questions, R' Goren has no need to prove anything. He need not prove that there was no conversion or that there was no marriage or that the marriage was annulled. Based on the *gamara* in *Kiddushin* (73a): “‘A mamzer shall not enter the congregation of God,’ a definite mamzer may not enter but a questionable mamzer may enter,” R' Goren merely has to foment doubt.

R' Goren's goal was to follow the ways of HaShem and defend the innocent souls who are branded with the stigma of *mamzerut* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32) so as not to take away the Jewishness of those attempting to come under His wings.

Yaakov S. Weinstein
East Brunswick, NJ

במאמרי בגליון 15 של הקירה (קיץ תשע"ג) סיפרתי על יחסו של הרב יחזקאל סרנה לרב שלמה גורן בהקשר של פרשיית "האח והאחות" בראשית שנות השבעים למאה העשרים תוך הסתמכות על עדותו של הרב יוסי הראל המופיעה בטיטות ספר שעל הכנתו שוקד יאיר שלג. יאיר הלוי, דוקטורנט באוניברסיטת בר אילן, הפנה את תשומת לבי לכך שהרב סרנה נפטר בשנת תשכ"ט והרי שהסיפור הוא מן הנמנעות.

פניתי ליאיר שלג, ולאחר בירור ראשוני הועלתה האפשרות שהארוע התרחש סביב פרשיית בנימין שליט, קצין בחיל הים שנישא לגויה ודרש לרשום את ילדיו כחסרי דת וכבני הלאום היהודי. דרישתו זו עוררה פולמוס, והיא מהווה את אחד מהשיאים של פרשיות "מיהו יהודי" בישראל. על כל פנים, פרשיה זו התרחשה קודם לפטירת הרב סרנה, ועם זאת יש להסתייג ולהדגיש שבדיקת העניין טרם העלתה מסקנות סופיות והחלטיות.

בהזדמנות זו ברצוני להודות לשלג והלוי על נדיבותם כלפי, ולמערכת כתב העת על שבזכות פרסום המאמר התבררה נקודה זו.

אביעד יחיאל הולנדר
פתח תקווה

Propriety of a Civil Will

RABBI A. YEHUDA WARBURG is to be commended for his valuable, comprehensive review of the different halakhic approaches regarding "The Propriety of a Civil Will" (*Hakirah* vol. 15 at 163) (hereafter "Propriety"). Yet, after all is said and done, as Rabbi Warburg himself points out, "there is no halakhic consensus to affirm a civil will [and] the chance of the overwhelming

majority of the assets to be distributed and awarded to a Torah heir(s) by a beit din is a distinct possibility.” Id. at 205. What then is a testator—or his *posek*—who believes in the validity of a civil will to do in order to avoid potentially divisive family disputes and ensure that the desires expressed in the civil will are fulfilled?

Here is my humble, respectful suggestion:

1. A formal “Beit Din for Civil Wills” should be established comprised of Rabbonim who agree with Rav Moshe Feinstein and other *poskim* (as Rabbi Warburg sets out in his article) that a civil will is halakhically acceptable. See id. at 169–73. Indeed, the Beth Din of America or any other established beit din can institute such a special court under its auspices.

2. During his lifetime, the testator himself, or through his attorney, can submit the civil will to the special beit din for a ruling on its validity. The beit din then renders its *p’sak* upholding the halakhic legitimacy of the will. As part of the *p’sak*, the beit din may also assert continuing halakhic jurisdiction over all matters concerning the will. Alternatively, the testator can sign a separate *shtar* directing all the heirs to adjudicate any claims relating to the will in that beit din—and in that beit din alone.

While there are no guarantees in life, the above approach should go a long way in mitigating, if not entirely foreclosing, successful attacks

by disgruntled heirs on a civil will for the following reasons:

First, under normal circumstances a second beit din cannot overrule a holding of the first, especially where the first beit din concedes no error. See generally “The Appeal Process in the Jewish Legal System” by Rabbi J. David Bleich in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (vol. 4) (Ktav 1995) at 44-45. Thus, even if a dissatisfied heir were to bring his claims to another beit din, ostensibly that beit din would be compelled to uphold the ruling of the “Beit Din for Civil Wills.”

Second, even if the second beit din were to demur as to the acceptability of Rav Moshe’s holding and that of the special “Beit Din for Civil Wills,” the other heirs would have a strong basis upon which to disregard any ruling by the second beit din, since the first one has already ruled.

Third, even if those heirs who were dragged into the second beit din were to accept its jurisdiction, given the lengths to which the testator went to ensure that his wishes were followed by submitting the will to the special beit din, they would have, at the very least, a very compelling argument that the second beit din should rule in their favor on the *kibud av* principle that Rabbi Warburg appears to find relatively persuasive. See Propriety at 198–203.

One could argue that it would be disrespectful of halakhah to establish a specific beit din designed to uphold Rav Moshe’s apparently minority view that Rabbi Warburg

terms “problematic.” Id. at 173. But Rabbi Warburg’s advice at the end of his article (at 205) that we educate our community to “seek halakhic and legal counsel regarding halakhic estate-planning techniques that will avoid the potential challenges to the halakhic efficacy of a civil will” appears to be no pragmatic solution, as he himself has written about the travails of “Drafting a Halakhic Will” (*Hakirah* vol. 10) that his mythical Rabbi Simeon Levy and his family underwent notwithstanding Rabbi Levy’s attempts, in his own Rabbinic capacity and then also after involving his local Rabbi, to write and effectuate a “proper” halakhic will.

For batei din to uphold (even) a minority opinion as a *I’chatchilah*, is a better option than allowing familial feuds to disrupt the wishes of a testator who sought to promote familial peace and harmony.

Yitzchak Kasdan
Silver Spring, Maryland

Rabbi A. Yehuda Warburg responds:

Thank you Mr. Kasdan, Esq. for your thoughtful review and kind comments regarding my essay dealing with the halakhic propriety of a civil will.

In reply to your proposal of setting up a “beit din for civil wills,” please be aware of the following: A decision rendered by a beit din is predicated upon the fact that there is a dispute between two individuals regarding a particular matter. Parties are requested to appear at a beit

din, argue their case (or have it argued on their behalf by rabbinical advocates and/or attorneys) and after a deliberation amongst the arbiters a decision is handed down. In fact, optimally the panel will be comprised of three dayanim to assure that there is an actual deliberation regarding the claims and counterclaims of the parties. If deliberations occurred and a party failed to be accorded the opportunity to be heard prior to the deliberation, the decision is null and void. See *Teshuvot Lehem Rav* 87; *Teshuvot Ba’ei Hayei HM* 1:18; *Teshuvot ve-Hanbagot* 5:357. If a panel fails to deliberate whether it should validate a civil will as a halakhic form of estate planning, any ensuing judgment is null and void. See *Teshuvot ba-Rashba* 2:104; *Teshuvot Maharbach* 147; *Teshuvot Maharit* 2, *HM* 79. As R. Feinstein rules, “the arbiter must comprehend, resolve the matter in his mind prior to ruling.” See *Iggerot Moshe, YD* 1:101. In other words, a dayan must inquire, assess the issue and then rule. A “beit din for civil wills” as described by Mr. Kasdan communicates to the reader a quite different type of proceeding.

Procedurally, Mr. Kasdan’s proposal in effect entails a convening of a panel of rabbis who would be rendering a *p’sak* concerning a civil will submitted to them for halakhic review, and any subsequent ruling would be no different than an individual who submits his question(s) to a rabbi for the purpose of rendering a decision. Any decision emerging from such deliberations would have the status of a *p’sak* authored

by three rabbis which may be subject to future review and potential rejection by a beit din rather than being considered a bonafide *p'sak din* emerging from a beit din proceeding convened due to a petitioner's request (in our case, a Torah heir) to challenge the validity of the civil will. And given the absence of a petition, subsequent hearing of the arguments from both parties or absence of deliberation relating to the merits of a civil will should this panel of "a beit din for civil wills" purport to operate as a beit din, any decision handed down by this forum would be null and void.

Even if the parties sign off that they will appear at "the beit din for civil wills" in order to afford the possibility to contest the testamentary disposition, the earlier *p'sak* which validated the civil will neither binds the original panel who may change their minds after hearing the facts and claims of the case nor binds the Torah heir who is challenging the will to accept the original *p'sak* of "the beit din for civil wills." The earlier affirmation of the *p'sak* of Rabbis Schwadron, Feinstein and Soloveitchik and others who recognize a secular will carries no more halakhic weight than a *p'sak* of Rabbis Hazan, Goldberg, Amar and others who invalidate it.

In fact, if during the testator's life, a Torah heir would challenge the validity of the will and the testator would proceed to a rabbi(s) (rather than a beit din) to affirm the will, it is incumbent upon the rabbi(s) to hear from the Torah heir and then render a decision which

has the status of the *p'sak* of a rabbi rather than a beit din judgment. See *Pithei Teshuva* HM 17 in the name of Meil Tzedaka. In the absence of hearing the other side, the rabbi(s) may only render a *p'sak* with the caveat "if the facts are as you presented to me, the decision is..." In other words, both decision making processes of a rabbi as well as a beit din are predicated upon the existence and presence of two parties and a rabbinic/beit din deliberation of the facts and claims of the opposing parties. Recently, *Machon le-Horoyah*, a beit din in Monsey, NY, bemoaned the fact that rabbis respond to a question from individuals and fail to factor into consideration the opposing side's perception of the facts and their claims. See *Meishiv Bebalakhab*, 38-39. As such, the proposal of a "beit din of civil wills," which is in actuality a rabbinic endorsement of a particular civil will (rather than a beit din confirmation of a testamentary disposition), does not comport with the basic procedural requirements of responding to a halakhic inquiry, namely "hearing the other side."

For all the above reasons such a proposal lacks halakhic foundation.

In reply to Mr. Kasdan's inference that given that I found Rabbi Simeon Levy's halakhic will to be flawed therefore there remain no solutions for proper halakhic estate planning is unfounded. Admittedly, as I have shown in "Drafting a Halakhic Will," a *matnas bari* (the gift of a healthy person) is an impractical technique and fails to serve as an av-

enue for distributing all of one's assets. However, there are other viable halakhic techniques to address testamentary disposition arrangements. When people approach me regarding these matters, I suggest various techniques and prepare documents that one can implement and supplement to a conventional civil will. And as I note in my recent book, *"Rabbinic Authority: The Vision and the Reality, Beit Din Decisions in English"*, Urim: 2013, 305–318, I discuss the effectiveness of a revocable living trust for estate planning. Such techniques have been rabbinically accepted and should serve as an effective deterrent for a Torah heir who is contemplating challenging a secular will in a beit din. And if for some reason, the Torah heir persists and commences a proceeding in beit din, the expectation is that the civil will ought to be affirmed in light of the document(s) prepared [i.e., "beit din proof"].

But again, as I mentioned at the conclusion of my essay, it is recommended that one contact a *dayan* in order to address estate planning arrangements, various global issues related to the contentious matter as well as particular *yerushah* matters. In fact, based upon my personal experience, even a telephone conversation with a potential plaintiff may "calm the waters."

As Mr. Kasdan aptly notes, "there are no guarantees in life" except for death and taxes. Having served as a *dayan* for over fourteen years, I have seen firsthand the truism that had people performed their due diligence—in terms of taking

some preventive medicine to avoid litigation and/or becoming educated on which halakhic / judicial forum(s) one should resolve one's issues in—prior to catapulting into any litigation, their lives, both emotionally and financially, may well have been different. With the presentation of this suggestion of convening a special beit din for civil wills, it is clear to me that Mr. Kasdan, as a Torah-observant Jew, is grappling with how to maintain familial stability while simultaneously attempting to avoid litigation and maintain the integrity of the halakhic process. In my estimation, the answer(s) lies elsewhere.

Hopefully, these matters have been clarified.

P.S. Let me mention that similar problems are encountered regarding a wife's civil will. According to halakha, a husband inherits his wife's estate. Therefore, should the wife's civil will provide that her assets are being distributed to a third party such as a child, documents have to be prepared that will protect her wishes as well as fend off the possibility of having a beit din disinherit her designated beneficiary.

Jewish GIs' Dog-Tags

I WOULD LIKE to thank you for a very interesting article on Jewish soldiers in WWII and their dog tags.

My grandfather Herbert Schwartz *a"b* fought in the US army during WWII as a combat engineer. He was captured by the Nazis three times, and escaped each time. The

Nazis never found out he was Jewish, an unawareness that contributed to his survival.

During one incident, my grandfather threw his dog tags on the battlefield with the dead, so in the event of capture the Nazis wouldn't be able to tell if he was Jewish. The US Army sent home a letter (which we have) listing him as missing in action, but not necessarily dead, since they had found his dog tags but not his body.

Another time the Nazis lined up the soldiers and began yelling at them in German to see if any of them showed signs of comprehension—a sure sign that they were Jewish and spoke Yiddish.

A third story my grandfather told was that one time the Nazis captured him with part of his unit and asked if there were any Jews. One Polish-American anti-Semitic soldier wanted to turn in my grandfather, but the other US soldiers threatened to rip him apart with their hands if he dared do that. It was very interesting to read similar stories and their halachic ramifications in the past issue of *Hakirah*.

Shlomo Flamer
Flushing, NY

Visiting the Cemetery

I READ WITH interest Rav Moshe Zuriel's article regarding the propriety of visiting a cemetery (*Hakirah*, Summer 2013). In the last footnote, Rav Zuriel cites the *Shulchan Aruch* and *Shach* (*Yoreh De'ah*, chap. 359) as

forbidding women to visit a cemetery. He expresses surprise that most orthodox women ignore this open and clear prohibition.

Perhaps they rely on the *Beit Lechem Yehuda* (loc. cit.) who quotes *Beit Ya'akov*, *she'ain limnoa hanashim lelech le'beit hakevarot*, that it is permissible for women to visit cemeteries.

This would explain the prevalent custom that women do, indeed, visit cemeteries.

Steven Oppenheimer, DMD
Miami Beach, Florida

Pittum ha-Ketoret

I FOUND THE ARTICLE in *Hakirah* about *Pittum ha-Ketoret* very interesting.

You might find this of interest <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V81v8L9Erjg>.

(The above-mentioned short video titled "African Rhythm: Sudanese Coffee Song" is an excellent illustration of a perhaps ancient example of rhythm being used in the process of hand-grinding. Ed.)

Dr. Mark S Symons
Melbourne, Victoria

Errata

In the first footnote in "A Yeshiva Curriculum in Western Literature," *Hakirah* vol. 15, the reference to "Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Friedrich von Schiller" should have been attributed to Dr. Marc Shapiro. We regret the error. Ed.

