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Letters to the Editor

In the article entitled "If the heart is beating, it's murder" (March 27), Yair Ettinger and Yuval Azoulay reported that Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv just published an advertisement in the Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox newspaper Yated Ne'eman, ruling that a patient with a dead brain stem is alive as long as his heart continues to beat - contradicting the ruling of the Chief Rabbinate.

First, Rabbi Auerbach has been dead for more than 10 years. Second, this ruling was originally published in Yated Ne'eman in 1991. However, these rabbis reissued, modified and softened their ruling on August 7, 1992, as a result of the famous sheep experiment. This experiment showed that a sheep could be decapitated (which the Mishnah Ohalot 1:6 clearly defines as dead), while its heart could continue beating a long time after the decapitation with the aid of a respirator - as if nothing was wrong. As a result, the rabbis published their new ruling, stating their doubts about the status of a brain-stem dead patient.

Consequently, Rabbi Auerbach, with the help of Dr. Rabbi Avraham Steinberg, published an article in ASSIA - A Journal of Jewish Medical Ethics and Halacha, confirming that he accepted brain-stem death as halakhic death. (The second ruling, the ASSIA article, and video testimony from Dr. Rabbi Steinberg confirming these facts can be found at www.hods.org.)

In an attempt to mislead the public, Yated Ne'eman dishonestly chose not to publish the later modified version of the rabbis' ruling.

Michal Feldstein

Board Member, Halachic Organ Donor Society

As the U.S. lawyers for Jonathan Pollard, we write to correct a fundamental error in Amir Oren's opinion piece entitled "Oligarchy or anarchy" (April 1), which states that Mr. Pollard is "due for release on November 21, 2015."

Under U.S. law in effect at the time of Mr. Pollard's activities, any prisoner sentenced to life in prison is presumptively entitled to parole on the 30th anniversary of the date of incarceration. As a result, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons' computer automatically generates the 30th anniversary date as the "projected" release date, which is posted as