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## January 4: To donate or not?

By JERUSALEM POST READERS  
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### To donate or not?

Sir, – It is truly a mitzva to want to be an organ donor, and it requires not just the potential donor, but awareness among members of his or her family as to positive religious rulings on the subject (“Protect organ donation,” Editorial, January 2).

The tragic and untimely death of soccer legend Avi Cohen is made even sadder by the negation of his clearly-expressed wish that his organs be used to save lives. But the intended generosity shown by this beloved and admired man can still motivate and encourage others to consider becoming donors themselves.

As the recipient of a living kidney from a family member, I can attest that the benefits of organ donation are not limited to the patient. For a potential donor to know that he or she has the remarkable power to save a life, and to make that commitment, is profoundly satisfying.

*TERRY BENSIMON*  
Ashdod

Sir, – Writing as a physician qualified by a special Ministry of Health course to diagnose brain-respiratory death, I support strongly your editorial. However, I would like to extend the discussion.

The law today recognizes the death of the brain and cessation of breathing as death for all purposes. But it also requires hospitals to continue to administer artificial ventilation if the family, its spiritual leaders or the dead person want this. This is a bizarre and wholly Israeli invention, not found in any other country in the world; it has led to terrible confusion, and not just to meddling by religious fanatics.

It must be clearly stated: When there is brain-respiratory death (as diagnosed by properly qualified physicians in accordance with full legal procedures), the person is dead, completely and irretrievably. This is the legal position in Israel, and the overwhelming medical consensus worldwide. It is also recognized by most religious authorities.

*DR. ANTHONY LUDER*  
Safed  
*The writer is head of pediatrics at Safed's Ziv Medical Center*

Sir, – The controversy surrounding the refusal of Avi Cohen's family to donate his organs is somewhat misplaced. The reason touted in the media – that his family came under undue pressure from rabbis – is a red herring. The fact is that Cohen's donor card did not serve its purpose, and that is the failure that must be addressed.

Either a donor card has meaning or it does not. If it does not, then the reason for ignoring the wishes of the deceased are irrelevant.

*ELLIE MORRIS*  
Asseret

**Here's my answer**

Sir, – Seth Farber (“We need an answer,” Comment & Opinion, January 2) writes the following:

- The moral obligation the State of Israel has to convert those individuals who came on aliya under the Law of Return should trump any political interests
- [T]he power to convert or support conversions should be taken away from any institution which cannot demonstrate a capacity to rise above politics
- The problem of conversion is an unprecedented national issue, and one that requires an audacious and national solution. If the rabbinate cannot provide an answer – and all indications are that it cannot – then someone else should.

I strongly disagree with the suggestion that matters of halachic significance like conversion should be taken away from the religious authorities and, as Farber implies, be handed to some puppet of the secular state.

A recently published study called “Megilat Gerut” conducted by Reuven Mass, who ostensibly intended to help the Israeli conversion programs by presenting real facts, includes extensive interviews conducted by a woman who has taught at the conversion institutes for 20 years, with female candidates from around the country who underwent government-sponsored conversions. The in-depth investigation reveals that only a small percentage described themselves as observant, while the vast majority admitted that they never intended to keep mitzvot and were “part of a system that has a whole lot of hypocrisy....”

In view of this, it would seem that most Israeli conversions are bogus, and these gerim geruim (dubious converts) only serve to raise doubts about the status of authentic converts.

The sole solution is for the State of Israel to cease interfering in Jewish religious affairs and to set up civil marriage registration for those who wish to avail themselves of it.

*MARTIN D. STERN*

Salford, England

Sir, – Being a convert myself, I just had to write in reference to Seth Farber's article.

I agree with Farber, that something has to be done in regard to the whole conversion situation, and I understand both sides of the political debate. But one thing the politicians and the rabbinate forget is that every conversion is unique, and one approach is not necessarily ideal for everyone wanting to convert.

I left my family in South Africa and came to Israel because I had Jewish friends who knew my situation and provided support for me. We approached the Ministry of Interior in all honesty, never lying as to why I wanted to convert, only to be given a letter of rejection and an order to leave Israel, even though I had opened a file at the beit din.

Due to bureaucracy and poor communication between the beit din and the ministry, I was thrown into prison for two weeks, told “Go be Jewish in your own country” by the ministry, got a good immigration lawyer and, baruch Hashem, was released. But I am still fighting the system.

If Seth Farber wants answers, maybe he should look to his own organization, as I did, where the answer was, “Well, if you were American or British we could help you, but your case is too complicated and we can't.” The only one who did help was the immigration lawyer, who had the passion and conviction to hear my case.

Take the power to convert away from the institutions that cannot demonstrate a capacity to rise above politics, and give it to the people who are prepared to.

*BRENDAN MCLAREN*

Jerusalem

**Lost and found**

Sir, – I was greatly relieved to see Yaakov Neeman, our minister of justice, in a photo with newly appointed judges (December 31, Page 4).

All during the lengthy strike of state prosecutors, Neeman was nowhere to be seen or heard. He should have been more actively involved in seeking a resolution to the strike, during which some potentially dangerous criminals were released for lack of an alternative. I can't recall a single instance where a government ministry failed to operate and its minister was not called to order.

Anyhow, now that others did your job, welcome back Mr. Minister.

*RAPHAEL ROSENBAUM*

Kiron

### **Listen to the other side**

Sir, – MK Tzipi Livni has some excellent ideas and seems willing to listen to the needs of many people ("For the sake of Jewish Israel," Editor's Notes, December 31). However, she seems entirely unwilling to hear, see or take note of what Palestinians say and write for consumption by other Palestinians.

Proof is her statement that she would have agreed to a two-month freeze on housing construction in the settlements. Did she not hear that PA President Mahmoud Abbas will not return to discussions without an extension of the freeze to the parts of Jerusalem that were under Jordanian rule from 1948 to 1967?

The Israeli public is not completely deaf and blind to what goes on under PLO rule. Palestinian television and radio are available to the average Israeli, and most know someone who can understand Arabic. Israeli politicians might wish to start taking note of this fact.

*DAVID LLOYD*

Jerusalem



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