

עשה למען
אמיתך ..
עשה למען
בריתך

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Recently, the Jewish Observer, published an article on the Metzizah B'peh controversy. In this pamphlet, we are sharing with you some of the comments and letters sent to the editor. We are compelled to do so in order that the broader Tzibbur have a better understanding of the issues and the Daas Torah of the Gedolei Hador.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GEDOLEI YISROEL

Recently, certain individuals have attempted to abolish the sacred practice of *metzitzah b'peh*, which was transmitted to us through our Sages, originating from Moshe Rabbeinu, of blessed memory. They made false claims and erroneous statements regarding the propriety of metzitzah b'peh, to the point that they falsely accused a world-renowned expert and highly professional mohel, involving the authorities!

After a thorough investigation, we have come to the following conclusions:

1) The accused mohel is entirely innocent and beyond suspicion. He underwent testing by accredited medical professionals, who have attested to his clean bill of health in writing.

2) The above-mentioned individuals are proceeding with their evil plans, G-d forbid! And their ultimate intent is that all aspects of bris milah should be regulated by the secular authorities. As is well-known, the government has never meddled with religious practice in the past, and they would not involve themselves now, were it not for the pressure placed by these individuals!

Therefore, we hereby proclaim Da'as Torah in this matter: No one should, G-d forbid, alter a single detail of any of the procedures entailed in the mitzvah of bris milah (chituch, pri'ah and metzitzah), as they were received from our holy ancestors and teachers.

May their evil plan never come to fruition!!! And with G-d's help, may it never come to pass!!! In the merit of the bris of Avrohom Avinu, may Ha-Shem send us Moshiach speedily in our days. Amen.

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Rabbi Menachem Dov Berk
Rav Cong. Zichron Avraham D'vash Monsey
Rabbi Mendel Berk

Rav Kahlias Yosef, Rav Yeshiva Tiferes Noshe
Rabbi Ch. Yehuda Bock
Rav Emet Tishl Monsey
Rabbi Yisrael Rebbi
Rosh Yeshiva Torah V'Das
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יוסף טליו אלטושוב
ברוחלטם

הרב ש. ג. נסימ קראליין

תְּרֵי אַ-סָּמִים
בְּזָבֵד בְּ-אַ-
לְ-סָמִים

על דבר ונשפט שיש הורזים לחשיל שיטות במצוות מילא והופרר, ולכבל את הזרה מהסורה לנו מחד דוד וככבל מענה בפיהם כי אין ימי שיטותם נכון.

וכבר נזכר ע"י רופאים מומחים שאין שום ממש כדבריהם ואין
פונטייתם מושגנית בולוק עד שעה.

הביבה נגד מוחלט ריש של קר והוא חביבה נגד שמות מלאה.
חביב ביא אשר ביכלו לעשׂר נגד פריצה זו.

RABBI FEIVEL COHEN
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פִּזְבָּחַ

לכל טאן דבאי למידע

אנחנו והחומר מטה – שרגא פיזול בון ויעקב שרגא הורוויץ – מוצאים לנו לנו להודיעו שלפי דעתנו אין חשש סכנה במצויה בפה המתבצעת על ידי הטהלה המוטה הרב ר' יצחק אהרון פישער שיזוי, ואידך ליה בתחילת ליטענד זיין.

והוננו מאהלים לו שחפץ ה' בידו יצליח להמשיך במלאת שפטים שלו להבניהם את נערי בני ישראל בבריתו של אברהם אבינו ולהרבות קדושה בתוך עטמו.

יעיל זה באננו על החתום ביום ט"ז סיון תשס"ה.

יעקב שרגא אדורוביץ
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מרדכי חיים אורבאך
ר"מ ואבדי"ק שעריו תפלה
פארישוי, נ"ז

Between DAAS BAALEI BATIM and DAAS TORAH

Dear Editor,

Your recent issue (April/Nissan, 5766) concerning *Metzista B'Peh* was a most enlightening and frustrating read. It would have been too easy to ignore this affront on our *Mesorah*, but a minimal sense of responsibility to the *Klal* allows me no such liberty.

Never before have I so clearly seen and understood the dictum "Daas Baalei Batim Hu Hepech Daas Torah", than was obvious in the contrast between your "insider's account" and the scholarly article of Rabbi Reisman.

While Rabbi Reisman crudely clarified a Torah perspective on this issue, the prolix essay was a mixture of self-congratulatory posturing and a subtle outcry of a "sour grapes" attitude. To an outsider, it would seem that this essay was primarily about asserting Agudath Israel's lay leaders' monopoly on politically correct *shtadlanus* while the topic of our cherished *Mesorah* was deftly used as camouflage. The author implores the readership for recognition and credit for his efforts, (the first-person pronoun, (*i.e.* I, we, our etc.) was used no less than 41 times in his vainglorious narrative).

Many of your constituency's *Rabbonim* and *askonim* believe that the Agudah may be doing more harm than good in this campaign. To paraphrase the words of an American president, "What is good for the Adudah, is no longer necessarily good for the Jews".

While Rabbi Reisman's "A Call to Reason" deplored intellectual dishonesty, Mr. Zweibel quotes Harav Elyashiv "Shlit'a" and others of our *Gedolei Yisroel* in passing, but adroitly fails to mention that they were and are the architects of what was maliciously labeled as "*shtadlanus* folly of the highest order".

When these "misguided *rabbonim* and *askonim*" valiantly convened a Rabbinical meeting (February 23/06 in Ateres Chaya, Brooklyn) to discuss ideas for *shtadlanus* in this matter, over 250 *Rabbonim* from across the *Chareidi* spectrum showed up en-masse to show their confidence in them. Meanwhile, Agudath Israel's *askonim* seem to be on the wrong side of Daas Torah, in the view of many, if not most, of the *Rabbonim* that occupy the dais at Agudah functions.

When the acclaimed leader of pre-war Lithuanian Jewry, Harav Chaim Oizer Grozhensky, was approached for his opinion on establishing Agudas Yisroel, his (unfortunately, prophetic) concern was that it will eventually be governed by the "secretarin" (bureaucrats), and not by its Torah leadership.

As someone who has been close to this issue from the very start, it seems that the lay leaders of Agudas Israel tidied their affectation "arrows" early on in this campaign and only then painted their rationalism "target" based on what they desired the *Daas Torah* to be.

To parse the entire article with its many errors of omission and commission would be too painful and time-consuming. Suffice it to say, that slowly but surely, the Agudah is becoming an irrelevant relic of our past, that no longer represents the *Bnei Torah* world and its *Rabbonim*.

Hachosheim B'dema.

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שרגא פ'יבל הלוי ז'מערמאן
כהל בני אשכנז
מאנסי נוא יארק

Shtadlanus Folly

Dear Editor,

The classic shtadlan throughout the ages had two characteristics. The first is his complete loyalty to Daas Torah without imposing his own opinions. In addition is operation in total secrecy without looking for glorification.

In the past issue of the Jewish Observer, an Agudah 'shtadlan' writes about the "Public Health & Mesoras Avos". The issue of whether there is a danger in Metzitzah B'Peh to public health has already been decided by the Gedolei Yisrael of our generation. The permissibility of the "Mohel in question" to continue Metzitzah B'Peh has been established by a noteworthy Bais Din of Members of Agudas Israel presidium. His innocence is attested to in a signed proclamation of over 100 Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshivos, including the Rosh Yeshivos of Mir, Lakewood, Bais HaTalmud, Philadelphia, South Fallsburg and Torah Vodaas. Rav Chaim Kanievsky and Rav Nissim Karelitz wrote that "the false allegation which has been made against a Mohel who is a Yarei Shomayim, is an attack against the mitzvah of Milah itself." Rav Feivel Cohen who ruled on both these matters is in constant consultation with Rav Elyashiv. As such the general matter of Metzitzah B'Peh and specifically about this Mohel has been decided by Daas Torah. Reasonable people may disagree on which tactic to use in dealing with the city's Heath Department. However, by labeling it as an issue of "Public Health & Mesoras Avos," as if there is validity to the city Health Department's claim, and by balancing He said/ They said – giving equality to each is truly a shtadlan's folly of the highest order and reeks of the dictum "Daas Baaleh Batim Hepech Daas Torah."

The tone of this article is one of self-glorification and begging for applause. There are over forty uses of the personal pronouns of "I, we, our" in one article. This is not the trademark of a shtadlan working behind the scenes L'Shem Shomayim. Furthermore the negative depiction of other groups' accomplishments about this matter is tasteless and beyond the norms of communal decency.

Inaccuracies in the articles narrative are numerous and will probably be chronicled by others. However, the distortion of Daas Torah and the constant self-glorification is the root cause of this folly. Shtadlanus folly indeed!

HaChosem L'Chvod Shomayim,



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ר"מ ואבלק"ק שערוי תפלה
פארשי, נ"ז

Iyar, 5766

Dear Rabbi Wolpin,

I am in receipt of your letter and I thank you for the opportunity to clarify my earlier assertions. My original letter, which was intended to guide my *Kehila* in the proper *Torah Hashkafa* on this issue, was, much to my surprise, distributed electronically and thus generated a relentless amount of laudatory response. I received acclamatory expressions of appreciation from numerous *Roshei Yeshivos*, *Rabbonim*, and *Bnei Torah* from around the globe, many of whom I have never met. Apparently, my words touched the hearts and minds of many, many that felt that I had expressed their deep-seated feelings.

Last week I attended the wedding of the son of a dear friend. The *choson on the way down from the chupa* thanked me for expressing my outrage that mirrored his precise feelings. A noted *Agudah askan* (mentioned in the original article) contacted me and thanked me profusely for putting font to paper and questioning the *Agudah's* position and tactics. I was indeed surprised by the groundswell of passion that your article has provoked.

So now it is my turn to be puzzled. You question "the tone and substance" of my letter. Why is it that a mere few in the "Ivory tower on Broadway" are perplexed at the fury that the *Yeshiva* world has so overwhelmingly expressed?

I can only explain it as follows. *Rashi* (*Taanis*, 4a) teaches us that toiling in *Torah* sensitizes the heart so that it takes offense to malfeasance that others might not even detect. Hence the title to my previous letter, which left you so bewildered. Perhaps you have another explanation.

You claim to be "distressed and shocked". I can well understand your distress but your surprise seems a bit disingenuous. A pre-publication draft of the original article was circulated amongst many *Rabbonim*. Fearing that it would have a deleterious effect on the entire cause, the author and your editorial board were beseeched by *Gedolei Rabbonim* to inhum or fundamentally rewrite it. They forewarned that if the stated purpose of the article, as claimed, was to convince the masses that the *Agudah* has not been slothful on this issue, that such a PR tactic would backfire. You obviously decided otherwise, but surely you cannot now profess to be "truly taken aback" at the umbrage taken.

And now to solve the last piece of your puzzle. You seem to be sincere when you claim that R' Chaim Dovid has **followed** the directives of the *Moetzes* in this matter. I was convinced otherwise. I have therefore rechecked with several members of the *Moetzes* who remember issuing no directive in regard to sacrificing an individual *Mohel* for the larger good. As one member put it "we would never have disagreed with the *Gedolei Eretz Yisroel* on this". They also claimed that *Metztza B'Peh* poses no public health risk, period. R' Chaim Dovid has steadfastly voiced his opinion otherwise, on both counts (see enclosed)

At a meeting of many Monsey Rabbonim at the very beginning of this saga (Teves, 5765), R' Chaim Dovid was called upon to use his standing as a dedicated *shliach tzibbur* to help this *Mohel*. He assertively voiced his personal opinion, to the dismay and alarm of the *Rabbonim* present, that we should focus our efforts on the general MBP cause, and that defending this *Mohel* was not in the Agudah's interest. Since then he has engaged in an aggressive and unrelenting crusade, both pre and post-publication of the article, to so mold the *Daas* of the *Moetzes*. Indeed, there has been some very mysterious *shtadlonus* sabotage machinations undermining the activism endeavors of Agudah Presidium and *Moetzes Rabbonim* who disagree with his sagacity. Clearly, I have not closed my eyes or mind to their involvement.

But now to the larger issue, the one alluded to by the "tears" denotation in my closing. The Jewish Observer has published a major article that has offended many, if not most, *Rabbonim* and *Bnei Torah* who have read it. The Agudah can ignore or doubt the validity of these sentiments and further alienate this *tzibbur*. Or they can do a *mea culpa* and start to heal the festering rift that is growing with time.

As *shluchei tzibbur*, an organizational *cheshbon hanefesh* is long overdue. Who is the Agudah's constituency? Who is the JO's intended readership? As an eminent Lakewood Torah leader once commented to me "The Agudah no longer represents us" (Lakewood). To today's *Ben Torah* the Agudah is irrelevant at best. Should the Agudah ever conduct a survey in major Yeshiva communities and ask the question, "Do you feel represented by the Agudah?" the replies would fall somewhere between "somewhat" and "not at all".

Perhaps it is not the Agudah that has purposefully mutated its constituency, rather that the Torah community has matured and outgrown the Agudah. The membership of Agudah *Shuls* in major Jewish communities is a good illustration. Tactfully speaking, it is no longer the *Yeshivish minyan* on the block. A much better one, though, would be the fact that the *Roshei Yeshivas* and *Morei Derech* of the current generation of *Talmidei Yeshivos* steadfastly refuse to join the *Moetzes*.

The Agudah can underestimate this rift and ultimately this *tzibbur* may establish its own umbrella organization, just as *Bnei Torah* in *Eretz Yisroel*, led by their Torah leaders, did two decades ago. Or it can actively try to bridge this gap. At a minimum, being mindful not to antagonize them would delay this chasm from widening.

A public apology takes courage. Does the Agudah lay leadership have it?

Yours sincerely,
Mordechai Orbach

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שרגא פיבל הלוי זימערמאן
קהל בני אשכנז
מאנסי נוא יארק

Dear Rabbi Wolpin,

Thank you once again for taking time to acknowledge and respond to my letter. I will respond to your most recent assertions after the final chapter of this story is written. Meanwhile, I'd like to clarify the points that are deeply offending the Torah world and this will serve to ease your puzzlement.

The anti-MBP-lobby has existed and publicized their propaganda for a long while. Historically it has been a recurring battle, which the Gedolei Hador of nearly every generation have waged. This lobby currently consists of an unholy alliance of NYC Health Dept. officials, certain members of the medical profession and the Rabbi Dr. who would like to reform Jewish Practice. In fact, approximately seven years ago, the City started to investigate MBP and talked about wanting to regulate it. The efforts of Rabbi Yaakov Spitzer (finalized in the home of Rav D. Feinstien) prevented it then. At the end of 2004 when twin boys were stricken with HSV 1 and one was niftar, this lobby jumped upon this incident and an alleged one in Staten Island and claimed that the Mohel Rabbi Y. A. F. (one of Klal Yisroel's most prolific Mohellim) is responsible, in accordance with their deep-seated belief that MBP is dangerous. This was trumpeted in all the media at the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005.

Klal Yisroel was in a state of confusion and as taught by their forefathers they turned to the Gedolei Hador to answer three questions:

1. Are the studies citing the dangers of MBP true?
2. Should Rabbi F. continue to perform MBP?
3. How should we confront the attack on MBP and how should we react to the charges against Rabbi F.?

The Klal promptly received clear directives in the form of open letters.

The reply to question 1 is:

- from Rav Elyashiv, "The studies are hollow and empty - MBP poses no medical risk"
- from Rav Wosner, "No harm can befall Mohel or baby from doing a Dvar Mitzvah"
- from Rav Y. T. Weiss, "The statement that MBP is dangerous is absolutely false"
- from Rav Karelitz and Rav Kanievsky, "There is no validity to their words"

In response to question 2:

A Bais Din was set up comprised of members of Agudath Yisroel's presidium, led by one of America's preeminent Poskim, Harav Feivel Cohen. After lengthy deliberations they publicized a psak to the public stating, "There is no danger to Rabbi F. doing MBP even LeChatchilah," and exhorts him to continue. Rav Cohen is a close confidante of Rav Elyashiv and consulted him on this matter numerous times. This determination is also confirmed in a proclamation issued by hundreds of Rabbonim, led by the Rosh Hayeshivos of Mir, Lakewood, Philadelphia, Torah Vodaas, Beth Hatalmud, South Fallsburg, and Shaarie Yosher among others representing the Bnei Torah of America.

In reply to question 3:

Rav Elyashiv wrote that the matter is not merely a local issue, instead it is of extreme importance to world Jewry, and therefore must be opposed forcefully. An open letter to the public was written by Rav N. Karelitz and also signed by Rav C. Kanievsky and Rav A. L.

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Shteinman declaring a course of action, "The claim against Rabbi F. is a claim against the Mitzvah of Milah, therefore everyone is obligated to stand up against this breach of Mesorah."

- In brief, 1) The studies are false and MBP poses no risk.
- 2) The MBP of Rabbi F. is safe and should be continued.
- 3) The case of Rabbi F. as an attack against Bris Milah, which should be resisted.

The public led by its Rabbonim and askonim mobilized to implement these directives.

Agudas Yisroel of America (A.I.A.) chose to travel along a different path. First they chose to ignore these proclamations. Astoundingly, A. I. A.'s media organs, official and unofficial, refused to acknowledge and publicize them (with one exception). Seemingly, the Daas Torah of the Gedolei Hador is considered to be neither noteworthy nor newsworthy. Then Rabbi C. D. Zwiebel representing Agudas Yisroel of America chose to defy these directives by: 1. Conceding that the studies confirmed that MBP poses a risk (albeit a very minimal one) and that the Health Dept. is entitled to their position. 2. Conceding to the distinction between the individual Mohel and the general issue of MBP.

He then chose to flaunt this course of action by publishing a long article about it. A close reading of the article will reveal minimal accomplishment other than receiving a verbal, legally non-binding, election-year-promise from the Mayor, which was duplicated by others. A recitation of letters written – meetings attended – press releases issued doesn't constitute accomplishment in the **real world**. Nor does excusing yourself by blaming others for the lack of results, demonstrate achievement. This is not surprising for success can't come by straying from the directives of the Gedolei Hador. Future efforts in this vein are also guaranteed to fail.

Hisachdus Harabonim (CRC) and other various communal Rabbonim and activists characterized negatively in the article have been following the directives of the Gedolei Hador. They have steadfastly maintained that MBP presents no risk and that Rabbi F. is innocent. They too have primarily engaged in behind the scenes shtadlanus. Even when they felt that it was necessary to publicly protest, it was with the guidance of their Rabbinic leaders and notable universally accepted Torah authorities as the Sekulener Rebbe, Rav Yisroel Belsky, Rav Moshe Green, Rav Mattisyahu Solomon, and Rav Eliyahu Dov Wachtfogel among others.

Their efforts to date have produced tangible results. Among them: 1) At the state level, the Health Dept. rescinded its injunction against Rabbi F. and appointed the CRC as the oversight committee. 2) In Rockland County (after meetings between Rabbonim affiliated with Vaad Mishmeres Bris Kodesh and government officials) the injunction was rescinded and all talk of regulating MBP stopped. 3) At the City level they reconfirmed the Mayor's pledge but more significantly the city ceded the authority of investigating Rabbi F. to the CRC.

The city's Health Dept. issuance of a health alert and related letters is an ominous sign on its own, and an indication of future intent; other jurisdictions are emulating NYC in attempting to regulate MBP. It is only the continued efforts of groups loyal to the directives of the Gedolei Hador that will guarantee current and future success. In the words of Rav Elyashiv to Rabbi F., "Gzeiri Avidi Debatli"

May we be speedily zoche to see the fruits of the efforts to protect our Mesorah (Lishmor) and have the peace of mind to engage in Lilmod Ulelamed.

בָּרוּךְ הוּא פֶּרֶשׁ בְּרִיסָה וְבְרִיסָה
יְהוָה יְהוָה בְּרִיסָה וְבְרִיסָה

1

Dear Editor,

I read your piece in *The Jewish Observer, Between Public Health and Mesores Avos*, with interest and then with a mixture of disbelief, horror, and utter revulsion. While it is understandable that you would seek to defend yourself and your seeming inaction in the face of growing mistrust and questions from the wide spectrum of Orthodox and Yeshiva Jewry and their *rabbonim*, you seem to have hopelessly misread the view and the people you are trying to win over. Empty platitudes, smug assurances, and outright dishonesty will do little at this point to further your view or discredit the view of others.

Allow me, as a layman and simple member of *Klal Yisroel*, to make a few points. From the start, your piece has an enormous void in it which begs explanation: Nowhere is there a single statement in support of the *mohel* in question. Again, empty platitudes, such as writing what a great *mohel* he is and how he was *moser nefesh* over the years, will just not cut it. You present both the *mohel*'s view and that of the New York City Health Department, giving them equal credence. To this end, in your obvious desire to be politically correct and seem impartial, there is even the subtitle, "He Said, They Said" in your article, equating both sides in this issue.

There are two problems with this. Let us ignore for a moment who the *mohel* is, what the Agudah is, and whether the Agudah should be unstintingly supporting the *mohel*'s view. Even according to the American mood of understanding and objectiveness you are clearly trying so hard to appeal to, the founding fathers of our great country have taught us that one must be considered innocent until proven guilty. As such, there is no reason not to be able to say that we fully support the *mohel*'s version of events until such a time that he would be proven wrong.

Secondly, the Agudah is after all an organization which was in fact supposed to be a Jewish organization with Judaism as its goal, not an organization of Jews with 'organization' as its goal. One wonders at the deafening silence in your article of a simple statement to the effect that being that the *mohel* in question is well-known to us and has served with distinction for many years, we fully support his version of events until such a time as the Health Department can convince us otherwise. The absence of such a statement does little to support your assertion that your lack of *askanus* on behalf of the *mohel* was due to a difficult decision that the need to benefit the *Klal* contraindicated any further *askanus* to benefit the *mohel*.

A bit further in your piece, where you try to explain why the view of the Agudah supersedes the view of the rest of Torah Jewry, I was left perplexed and dismayed. Perplexed, because rationality seems to have been replaced by fanciful flights of the imagination. Dismayed, because what I was reading seems to contradict what I have learned from the Agudah and *The Jewish Observer* ever since I was a child. Let me explain:

Although the issue is quite complicated, the main thrust of your argument is as follows. The Agudah was able to do *shtadlanus* for *metzitzah b'peh*, but worried that further *shtadlanus* to benefit the specific *mohel* in question would only complicate matters and perhaps forfeit the very *shtadlanus* done for *metzitzah b'peh*. The rest of Torah Jewry believed that allowing the *mohel* to remain under health department regulations was anyway a forfeiture of any *shtadlanus* done for *metzitzah b'peh* and therefore further *shtadlanus* for the *mohel* in question was surely necessary. It is clear from your piece that even you agree that if the premise of the rest of Torah Jewry would be correct - that indeed the health department's fight is against all of *metzitzah b'peh*, and maybe more, and not just one specific *mohel* - then the Agudah falls far short of the required *shtadlanus*.

So on what basis did the Agudah decide otherwise? I don't know, but the answer is nowhere in your piece. One is left with the impression that the Agudah decision is based on nothing more than wishful fantasy. You write that indeed the *mohel* was cleared by a *hora'ah* of prominent *rabbanim*. You agree that the State Health Department seems to have reached the same conclusion. One can "fairly assume that the State Health Department would not have lifted its injunction...had it remained seriously concerned" about this *mohel*, according to your piece. In addition, the city's investigation, and its purported evidence, is being kept from any public (or even private) scrutiny. This is most troubling, in your own words, and it is an almost universal sign of someone trying to hide something and not being honest.

So again I ask, on what basis did the Agudah decide that the city did have a case against this *mohel* and did not in any way wish to attack the practice of *metzitza b'peh*? In your words, even though there is "considerable reason to be skeptical" the "bottom line remained that Commissioner Frieden and his staff felt differently," and they "claimed...all clinical evidence pointed toward the *mohel*."

In other words, although they are acting like people hiding something, and although there is not one shred of evidence they or anyone else can point to, and although the State Health Department seems to vindicate the *mohel*, and although they are acting irrationally and basing themselves on an irrational piece of shoddy research in *Pediatrics*, still the Agudah wishes us to believe that "Commissioner Frieden felt" that "all clinical evidence pointed towards the *mohel*," and has no other agenda against the practice of *metzitza b'peh*. One must wonder if this was a rational decision of the Agudah or a desperate daydream.

What I found dismaying was that aside from the rationality issue with the above belief, there is an additional problem. And that is that the question has already been decided for us by *da'as Torah*. Growing up, I have read countless articles in the pages of The Jewish Observer proudly proclaiming the preeminence of *da'as Torah* and our total reliance on, and subservience to, it. Perhaps I am naïve, but I actually believed that this was what I was supposed to believe and what all Torah Jews in fact believe.

In the current sad saga of the city's mixing into our hallowed way of life, I have seen letter after letter, signed by virtually every *rav* esteemed by Torah Jewry, affirming the point of view that the city's fight against this specific *mohel* is a fight against *metzitza b'peh* and *milah* in general. I do not have all these letters before me, but I think even one will suffice.

In a letter signed by Rav Nissim Karelitz *shlit'a*, Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlit'a*, and Rav Ahron Leib Steinman *shlit'a*, it states: "And the accusation against this *mohel*...is an accusation against the *mitzvah* of *milah* (emphasis mine). And it is incumbent upon anyone who can, to stand up against this breach." In other words, these three *rabbonim* have clearly and unequivocally stated that the fight against the *mohel* is a fight against Bris Milah.

Da'as Torah has spoken. Are we to believe that anyone who considers themselves a Torah Jew would question their opinion, their *da'as Torah*? I don't believe a single active member of the *Moetzes* of the Agudath Israel of America would tell us that they would disagree with the *da'as Torah* of the above *rabbonim*. And this is but one letter. Virtually every Torah *rav* in America and Eretz Yisroel has similarly written in support of this opinion.

What then are we to make of the statement that “we felt that it would be *shtadlanus* folly of the highest order to reject the city’s willingness to draw a line between *mohalim* with a suspected history of transmission and those without.” The *gedolei Eretz Yisroel* tell us that “the accusation against this *mohel*... is an accusation against the *mitzvah* of *milah*.” They do not agree to draw any line between this *mohel* and all others. Further, they tell us it is “incumbent upon anyone who can, to stand up against this breach,” and not “*shtadlanus* folly of the highest order.” Are my eyes deceiving me that I read in the very pages of The Jewish Observer words in direct contradiction with clear, stated *da’as Torah*?

If I thought this was bad, nothing could have prepared me for the utter revulsion I felt upon reaching the article’s end. Not having sufficed with trumpeting your own views, you made the tasteless and demeaning decision to attack the rest of Torah Jewry which did not conform to your views. After all the smug put-downs and your condescending portrayals of those outside Agudah - including the hundreds of *rabbonim* at their helm, I assume - as wild, boorish, unsophisticated and simple-minded mobs and masses, you go for the *coup de grace*:

“By now, unfortunately, the battle over *metzitza b’peh* has exploded on the public scene and captured... the general media. As the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* had warned from the outset, publicity has proven extremely harmful to the cause. They correctly understood that the imagery of oral suction of blood... would never elicit any sympathy... and that the only way to possibly win a public relations battle over this issue would be to avoid it. This is no longer feasible (emphasis mine).”

After some choice editorials, you go on to state that “It goes without saying that this type of editorializing in the media is extremely harmful to the cause of *metzitza b’peh*. But the damage extends far beyond that relatively narrow issue. The flap... has revived talk... that *bris mila* itself... should come under governmental regulation. It has given ammunition to the notorious “No Circ” movement, whose goal is to outlaw all circumcision; it has created a difficult problem for *kiruv* workers... and it has even... caused parents from a non-observant background to forgo *bris mila* for their newborn child. Add to all that the more general damage to the Torah community’s image... and one can begin to understand the magnitude of the negative fallout prompted by the strident public campaign to protect *metzitza b’peh* (emphasis mine).”

Forgive me if here I take on a bit less forgiving manner, but the above statements are *motzi shem ra* and *motzi laz* of the worst possible kind! True, revisionist history is ‘in’ these days, but at least most people try to rewrite history that is somewhat old and foggy in our collective memories. Is it even necessary for me to remind anyone that this sad debacle against *metzitza b’peh* started with a massive, orchestrated media blitz? One must think we’ve all gone senile to have the audacity to write that “By now” – meaning after the strident campaign to protect *metzitza b’peh* – “the battle has exploded on the public scene.” Or that it is “no longer feasible” to avoid publicity, as if the publicity is something new. And then to state that the whole long list of sad realities was “prompted by the strident public campaign to protect *metzitza b’peh*.” Forgetting for a moment that these are hundreds of respected and eminent *rabbonim*, *roshei yeshivos*, and *admorim* whom are being maliciously libeled, the entire harangue is purely fabricated!

Who does not remember how the whole thing started? It was in the media before the *rabbonim* and ‘masses’ even knew about it. The story first broke in the media with tens, if not

hundreds, of articles worldwide including all the choice “imagery of oral suction of blood” which so captured the world’s attention. At the first report that a child died and a *mohel* was being held responsible, the story was all over the media. As a matter of fact, I wonder if the very negative news exposure which “caused parents from a non-observant background to forgo *bris mila* for their newborn child” was not the negative media at the *outset* of the story. I happened to have heard just such a story at that point, before Torah Jewry even had a chance to mobilize. Whether quiet *shtadlanus* would have quieted the storm somewhat or not is debatable; the media is not quick to give up such a provocative story. But to say that the negative media attention was “prompted” by the detractors of the Agudah is, as I said, *motzi shem ra* of the worst kind.

For this, which is not a question of opinion but of facts, the Agudah, The Jewish Observer, and the article’s author owe an apology to each and every Jew individually, and to the organization the article so tastelessly names. Beyond that only Hashem knows what can atone for such a grievous statement.

This is not even the end. If memory serves me correctly, not only did the anti-*metzitzah b’peh* campaign start in the media, it featured a prominent “rabbi”, one of the authors of the amateurish *Pediatrics* piece, running around and being interviewed by every news outlet available. This man was only too happy to provide all the “imagery of oral suction of blood” he knew the media would pounce upon. If this negative media exposure is so bad - and it is – as chronicled in your above statements, why did we not see a single sentence, not in this piece and not in any Agudah statement ever, calling this man to task for his unpardonable sin? Does the Agudah not have the courage to do so? Or is it that much easier to just blame and denounce your fellow Torah Jews?

This brings us full circle, because the sad ending to your piece sheds light on why the article, from the very first sentence, began on a wrong note. “On October 26, 2004,” you begin, “an 18-day-old baby boy died.” That is the beginning of the story as far as you can see. The health department “became aware” of the death, investigated, blamed the *mohel*, and so your story goes. But is that where the story began? Was not the *Pediatrics* piece written *before* the death? Was not the agenda there (and you admit the authors of the piece do have an agenda) even *before the death even occurred?* As we just illustrated, the **facts**, the simple facts, are that the story began long before the Agudah seems capable of realizing. From the agenda, up until the terrible reporting to the media, the Agudah seems to have the whole story wrong. Perhaps that’s why Torah Jewry sees the whole thing differently than you do.

Who does not remember the countless times *Maran HaRav Mordechai Gifter zt”l* spoke from the podium of Agudath Israel conventions and elsewhere, proclaiming with dignity, “I am not an Orthodox Jew, I am a proud, Torah Jew.” This must be our objective, the objective of *Klal Yisroel*, and the objective of any organization intending to represent *Klal Yisroel*. If not, one wonders if Agudath Israel of America would be headed for the same sad fate we see happened to the United Nations: Complete and total irrelevance.

Sincerely,
Yossi Rosenberg