

Brit mila – time to cut the debate

• By SHIMON GLICK

I am saddened and frustrated at the periodic attacks on the practice of brit mila, which produce unwarranted and inappropriate distress among parents of Jewish newborn boys about whether or not to circumcise their sons. These anxieties are based largely upon distortion of data and on misinformation on the part of a small but vocal group of opponents of infant circumcision. The recent article “The heated debate surrounding circumcision,” which appeared in the December 22 issue of the *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, is a typical example of this literature.

Lest there be no misleading of the readers, I am an Orthodox Jewish physician who supports infant circumcision of Jewish boys because it is an important biblical command, and not for medical reasons. Nevertheless we Jews are fortunate that this biblical injunction is accompanied by clear medical advantages, and the data supporting these advantages are currently increasingly supported by ongoing medical research.

Just in the past two months there have appeared several review articles confirming dramatically the health benefits of male circumcision. The authors in the most recent issue of *British Journal of Urology International* reviewed 49 studies on the effect of male circumcision for the prevention of HIV with the conclusion of the remarkable effectiveness of the procedure. The World Health Organization is deeply involved in promoting the procedure in countries with high prevalence of HIV infection. The average reduction in infections is about 60%. In heterosexual males the reduction reported in the latest summary of research reports is 72%.

Opponents of circumcision often assert that many of these studies took place in Africa, and have limited relevance for Western countries. But nothing could be further from the truth. In this day of globalization, and remarkable mobility of individ-



A MAN prepares the items needed for a circumcision. (Reuters)

uals and populations, we now live in one world, and diseases are not geographically confined.

Another major publication appeared in the November issue of *Lancet Global Health*, systematically reviewing the association between male circumcision and women's health outcomes. The studies were not restricted to Africa. They reviewed some 60 publications. High-consistency data showed that male circumcision protected women against cervical cancer, cervical dysplasia, herpes simplex virus type 2, chlamydia and syphilis. There were also positive data, but of lower consistency, regarding the protective

effect for other sexually transmitted diseases.

With respect to penile cancer the *Post* article quoted Ronit Tamir stating that this was a minor consideration because “the treatment of that kind of cancer is circumcision anyway, so what's the point of doing it in advance?” Unfortunately her information is misleading. Penile cancer, while rare, can affect 1 in 400 to 1 in 1,000 uncircumcised men and has a remarkably high mortality, not prevented by circumcision after the disease has appeared. Its incidence is virtually zero in those men who have undergone infant circumcision.

There are numerous other benefits

to infant circumcision, but I will not elaborate. The detailed documents by the American Association of Pediatrics, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control all agree that the medical benefits of the procedure outweigh the risks.

The article in the *Post* uses the pejorative word “mutilation” and describes the suffering of the baby as a result of the procedure. As a sensitive physician I have always advocated palliative medicine even before it became popular. As a father, grandfather and great-grandfather to over 70 progeny in whose circumcisions I have participated closely, I would certainly not wish to impose any suffer-

ing on any infants. But in watching experienced mohalim perform their procedure, I continue to be amazed and impressed at the rapidity of the procedure and at the relatively short period of infant crying as a result of the procedure.

If one thinks for the moment of the total number of hours the average infant cries during the first month of life, the addition of a few minutes should hardly be considered a form of torture. And think of how many painful injuries the average normal active boy sustains in his youth. The “traumatic” circumcision pales by comparison.

In addition the bit of wine admin-

istered pre- and post-procedure, plus the anesthetic cream used, reduce the “suffering” to a real minimum. Obviously a new mother justifiably would like to eliminate any and all pain and suffering of her newborn, but let us not exaggerate the negative aspects of the procedure.

The opponents then throw in a few more attacks. They cite the oral suction by the mohel, a procedure performed indirectly using a sterile glass tube by most mohalim today. Then they add the “criminality” aspect, “the assault on a helpless minor and with a weapon no less.” With this kind of rhetoric it is no wonder that anxious and ill-informed parents begin to hesitate to welcome their newborn boy into the historic covenant of Judaism.

As I indicated in the beginning of my article I advocate brit mila as a biblical imperative, whose performance Jews have undertaken for millennia often at great sacrifice, and at great personal risk. But what about the secular Jew, the atheist? One may ask – what does this “primitive” ritual mean to them? Well, the non-religious Jew will assert that he/she are Jews by culture, by historical experience. If so, there is no question that for better or worse ritual circumcision has been a hallmark of Jewish identification for millennia, in Warsaw and in Yemen, in Berlin and in Tangier.

Rejection of infant circumcision represents a major severance of the child from the continuity of his culture. When one of the hesitators quoted the in *Post* article states that her grandmother would turn in her grave if she heard that her descendant would be denied circumcision, she expressed the tragedy of cutting off her progeny from their Jewish heritage. In the words of the Bible, “Ask your elders and they will tell you” (Deuteronomy 32:7).

The time has come to “cut the debate.”

The author is a professor (emeritus-active) and MD at the Jakobovits Center for Jewish Medical Ethics, Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

Walking provocation that deserves hate and abuse globally

• By HEN MAZZIG

In the past year, two top IDF generals visited University College London (UCL). In January 2017 Maj.-Gen. Elazar Stern visited the campus, followed by Maj.-Gen. Amos Yadlin in November 2017. Both have vast military experience, both are trained in combat and both fought in wars to defend Israel. Both spoke at events at the university that were open to the public, promoted online and had no push-back to cancel. Dozens of students gathered to hear their stories and insights. Both of the generals left the school after the events through the front gates, took a taxi to their hotel and had uneventful nights in London.

However, my own event, in October 2016, was nothing but chaos. Unlike the Israeli generals, I faced 150 students protesting my talk, trying to shut me down. “Intifada, intifada!” “Where is Hen? Where is Hen? War criminal! Murderer! Shame!” they chanted as they banged on the

doors of the classroom where I was speaking.

Later, several of the protesters broke in through the window and assaulted Jewish students who were in the room with me. I was escorted off campus under police protection. This horrific event sparked a debate between policy makers in the UK Parliament, leading to the adoption of a new definition of antisemitism to include anti-Israel activity as a hate crime.

It also led the provost of UCL to invite me to return to the campus, in what is now less than a week from today, to share my story in a better, safer setting than the last event, which was arranged by Jewish students and CAMERA on Campus UK (the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting). However, UCL failed to open the event to the public and insisted that it will be a closed event for UCL students and staff only, denying many of the Jewish students from other London-based universities, who

arranged the previous event, the ability to participate.

In recent weeks, the anti-Israel student group UCL Friends of Palestine launched an online campaign against my talk, yet again. Facebook was flooded with post after post calling me terrible names, urging the university to disinvite me. Later, an article bashing me was published in the notorious anti-Israel website Electronic Intifada, branding me as the “Israeli Guru of Grotesque Behavior.”

This makes me wonder – why are IDF generals not targets for protest, while I am? I am a 28-year-old Israeli sharing my personal story about overcoming countless personal challenges, discussing my Iraqi and Tunisian (Berber) family history, the journey to Israel to escape persecution in Muslim countries. I share my story of how I was almost killed in a terrorist attack when I was 12, and yet decided to join the IDF humanitarian unit, promoting peace between Israel and the Pales-

tinians through cooperation. And I talk about my struggle to come out as an openly gay IDF officer.

So why is that so controversial? Because my whole life story shatters the propaganda – the desperate smear campaign to delegitimize the State of Israel.

This isn't the first time students have protested against me sharing my story – from London to Toronto and from there to Los Angeles, to New York, to Seattle. I have been harassed on college campuses by students with one agenda: to prevent me from sharing the truth. My story terrifies them because it doesn't fit into their narrative that Israelis are child-killing war criminals – and suggests that maybe, just maybe, we are also human beings with the right to freedom and self-determination.

As is always the case when governments, groups, or even individuals unite against freedom and equality, they can't win the argument truthfully, so they resort to protests to shut their “opposition” up. In this

case, me.

Should these same protests occur against another individual like me – be it a gay man or an Arab, North African or a Haitian, it would rightfully be labeled racist, homophobic or bigoted. Yet the protests against me are perceived by some as legitimate, simply because of the nationality I was born into. How on earth is that legitimate?

Facing the hateful comments and untrue statements about me takes a tremendous toll and it's challenging to deal with the attacks against me on campuses. At times I ask myself if it's really worth it fighting a battle that has been going on for ages against the same old hatred of my people. But then I remember that that is what the concept of Israel is all about. It is a country that rose from the ashes of the gas chambers and the anti-Jewish pogroms and bloodied streets of Baghdad – a people rising up and saying “no more – we too have a right to self determination in the homeland which we were

expelled from by colonialist forces repeatedly, throughout history.”

Time will show that the extremists who speak out against me are on the wrong side of history – for all peoples, and whatever protests may come from my talk, I will not be silenced by regressive voices who deny the right of any person to speak.

Free speech is one of the most important basic rights in any society, a value which was instilled in me as an Israeli citizen, a right which, by the way, the Palestinian government denies its citizens. Those who silence dissenting voices are simply cowards, denying basic human rights, whether on a college campus or in a government. I will arrive in London this week and I will proudly share my story for all those open to having a genuine respectful dialogue for all peoples. Nothing will change that.

The author is a writer, public speaker and strategic communications consultant from Tel Aviv. www.HenMazzig.com.

The US should stop funding UNRWA

• By BARRY WERNER

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) runs the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. If you visit the West Bank or Jordan (Gaza, Lebanon and Syria are pretty much off-limits these days), it's not at all difficult to recognize the Palestine refugee camps. They are the ugly slums that lie just beyond the reasonably livable neighborhoods where most people live. Palestinians are bribed to live in them with subsidies. The refugee camps are reverse-Potemkin villages intended to photogenically immortalize the suffering of the Palestinian people.

UNRWA does not help refugees return to living a normal life; instead, UNRWA is in the business of perpetuating their refugee status and the refugee status of all their future generations on the premise that they will all be allowed to return to Israel someday. There are various estimates of how many Arab refugees there were in 1948, but UNRWA claims the highest number, 750,000. Today, UNRWA claims there are about 5.3 million Palestine refugees eligible for its services, presumably waiting to claim their right of return to Israel, a country whose total population is 8.8 million.

UNRWA is the willing captive of Arab extremists. UNRWA claims it is forced to work with extremists or it won't be allowed to operate at all, but history shows that



BOXES FROM UNRWA await transfer to Gaza from Israel. (Reuters)

UNRWA is only too willing to cooperate. Does UNRWA provide education? You can be sure it does. But who does it hire to provide that education? That's right, Arab extremists teach the children to hate Jews and to take back Israel, and they train the children in warfare. UNRWA facilitates Arab extremists weaponizing the suffering of the Palestinian refugees against Israel (turning ploughshares

into swords).

The world should rescue the Palestinian refugees from UNRWA. UNRWA abuses them by casting them in the role of perpetual victims. They are not “refugees” in the way the word is normally understood. UNRWA's inflated budgets and fiscal irregularities are also disturbing, and there are credible reports that UNRWA works directly

with terrorist groups in Gaza.

What would happen if the US, UNRWA's most significant funding source, stops supporting UNRWA? If the US manages to put UNRWA out of business, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) could take over its functions. Then instead of trapping the Palestinians in everlasting refugee status they would finally be allowed

to live normal lives, and the tension their growing refugee presence causes in the Middle East will be eased.

Interestingly, Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said US President Donald Trump threatened “to starve Palestinian children” by threatening to cut US funding to UNRWA. That is a revealing statement because it gets to the heart of the problem.

The PA/PLO is trying to morally blackmail the West. The message is that unless the West supports UNRWA the PA won't spend any of its own money on feeding its own children and it will be the fault of the West if these children starve. With that kind of logic, they can take over the world. They can say unless you give me everything I want, I will allow my children to starve and I will tell everyone that you are responsible for it.

The truth is that even if the PA/PLO won't feed its own children, the Western world, if not the Arab world, should and certainly would make sure there would be a transition program to keep Palestinian children from starving and to avoid any other catastrophic changes. In contrast with UNRWA, the Western world, and probably also the rest of the Arab world, does not want to make hostages of Palestinian children.

There are those who describe how UNRWA could be reformed. Personally, I think the best thing to do would be to put the present administrators of UNRWA out of a job.

The author made aliya at the end of 2009 and is passionately interested in Israel and its relations with its neighbors.