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January 17: The wisdom to choose...

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, THE JERUSALEM POST

The wisdom to choose...

Sir, - The article "MKs decry Chief Rabbinate's attempts to discourage a woman's right to choose" (January 13) is another example of blind ignorance. Nobody - neither the rabbinate nor any free citizen - denies a woman's ethical right to do whatever she wants. It is her choice exclusively. However, it may very well be a wrong choice from a moral or legal or religious point of view. Choosing a path does not ipso facto make that a wise or moral choice.

In the State of Israel, the law forbids abortion. The same law makes five exceptions for circumstances where the law may be set aside, all of which are cited in the article. In order to implement her choice, a woman seeking an abortion appears before a committee of three: two physicians and a social worker, at least one of whom must be a woman. Hardly any more humiliating than appearing before a medical committee to discuss course of treatment.

The committee is not chosen by rabbis. It seeks to implement the secular law of the State of Israel in a democratic fashion. Halacha has fewer than five exceptions, though there are situations in which it permits and even mandates interrupting a pregnancy.

It is the task of rabbis to expound Jewish law and to urge people to follow it. MK Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz) may wish this were not so and prefer that rabbis remain silent on life-and-death issues, but they would then be betraying their calling and their conscience. True, they are paid by the state, but we have all paid doctors, lawyers and engineers to work for us, and we don't usually argue with their diagnoses or modus operandi even if they cost us a fortune. If we do take them to task, we seek the opinion of specialists. Anyone finding fault with a rabbinic decision can consult with a greater scholar or a higher rabbinic court.

This has nothing to do with feminism or democratic rights or ownership of one's body. It is simply a matter of whether abortion is a wise procedure - and the choice will be irreversible. Judaism has something to say in this regard. We should at least listen to it, even if one decides not to follow it.

RABBI MACY GORDON

Jerusalem

...and freedom to pray

Sir, - Rabbi Barry Schlesinger of the Masorti movement calls Robinson's Arch "the southern part of the Kotel" ("Don't be right, be smart!," January 12). However, although Robinson's Arch is made up of the

same stones as the Western Wall, it doesn't have the same history. The stones at Robinson's Arch are rough. At the Kotel, the stones are smooth and slippery from the millions of people who have touched and kissed them over the centuries.

Stones are not sacred, and Robinson's Arch is not in any sense a sacred space. It is an awesome archeological spot, and it is really moving to see the stones just as they were when they fell as the Temple was destroyed. But a place becomes sacred when people come there to approach their Creator. That's what Jews have done for 2,000 years at the Western Wall, and that is what makes it a special place to pray.

Aside from this, Rabbi Schlesinger makes the Orthodox members of Women of the Wall invisible. Some of us do not want to pray in a mixed environment! And although we know it was not his intent, he seems to agree that a woman praying with a *tallit* violates Halacha.

Last but not least, he is pushing toward separation, segregation, division, just as the haredim are. Women of the Wall have been coming to the Western Wall for 21 years. Occasionally, we are able to daven in peace. We would like to continue that way without having to move to Robinson's Arch or any other location in the middle of our *tefilla*.

Writing as Orthodox and Conservative members of Women of the Wall respectively, we welcome Rabbi Schlesinger's support and the support of all Masorti and Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist and other Jews.

DANIELLE BERNSTEIN and CHERYL BIRKNER MACK
Jerusalem

Sir, - Rabbi Schlesinger is to be commended for recognizing that certain battles are best won in the political arena and not at the Kotel Plaza. It is of course important that the Kotel not remain forever an Orthodox *shtiebl*. On the other hand, achieving this goal must be done politically and electorally. Readers will be interested to know that in old black-and-white photos during the Ottoman period of people praying at the wall, men and women stood side by side. I am not suggesting that Orthodox people who are uncomfortable with this be subjected to mixed services. However, arrangements can be made to make all worshipers comfortable.

JOSEPH WEISSMAN
Ra'anana

A Hasbara birthright exists

Sir, - Michael Freund's column "Time for a Hasbara birthright" (January 6) calls for developing a birthright equivalent "geared toward key decision-makers... in the US, Europe, and elsewhere." In fact, an extraordinarily successful program of this sort already exists.

Project Interchange, an institute of the American Jewish Committee, has brought more than 5,000 leaders to Israel from more than 60 countries to, exactly as Freund suggests, "see and experience Israel beyond the headlines." During their week-long seminars in Israel, participants receive an in-depth foundation for better understanding Israel's society, culture, security and strategic realities, and healthy democracy.

Freund proposes potential "programs aimed at clergymen and jurists, prominent doctors, lawyers and scientists... with each one tailored to their specific interests." In the last two years alone, the organization has developed seminars for influential figures ranging from America's most prominent

African-American and Latino clergy to Muslim leaders from Asia, journalists from Turkey and Latin America, senior advisors of Members of the European Parliament, and counter-terror and security experts from the US and Europe. American Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor has participated in two of the seminars. PI alumni author widely-read articles, give sermons, make speeches and more, all to the benefit of enhanced understanding between their audiences and Israel.

RICHARD SCHIFTER

Board member,

Project Inter change

Bethesda, Maryland

A hero in deed

Sir, - Miep Gies is indeed a hero ("'Righteous Gentile' who hid Anne Frank dies at 100," January 13). A short footnote worth mentioning about this memorable lady is that after the Franks had been found in their hiding place and arrested, she took a major risk - she could have been shot - by going to the Nazi headquarters to inquire as to their whereabouts, and was told they were on their way to Westerbork.

JOYCE KAHN

Petah Tikva

The wrong day of rest?

Sir, - I am amazed but not surprised by the degree of disinterest shown by our elected representatives in doing their jobs on Tuesdays ("Rivlin threatens to close Knesset on Tuesdays if more MKs don't show up," January 13). That the "recurring situation" seems to be that "MKs address an empty plenum floor" is reflective of much that is wrong with this country's governance, and why so many pleas seem to fall on deaf ears. Since when was Tuesday the Jewish state's day of rest?

RENA GINSBERG

Jerusalem

One man's trash...

Sir, - Uri Hirsch's idea not to take the Libyan trash ("Taking out the trash," Letters, January 14) may be a good idea, but the rest of the street would suffer from the stench and rats.

JUDY GOLDIN

Kiryat Ono

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