

# Torah and cosmetic surgery

THE ARTICLE "Torah and Cosmetic Surgery" (AJN 17/3) was a vacuous and compromising contribution which seeks to justify cosmetic surgery on the basis of enhancing self esteem.

The cosmetic surgery proposed is directed largely, if not solely, at the effects of ageing. What does it mean, as the article suggests, that a person loses self esteem through the physical effects of ageing? To me it implies that self esteem is thus based on "something" called beauty. Are wrinkles something to be ashamed of, embarrassed, even humiliated by as we age? That we must seek surgery to reverse the inevitable? How fragile. Can we not accept with humility and wisdom, God's will?

Ageing in Jewish life has always been a source of respect, pride in life's achievements, a reflection of unshakeable faith in God, no matter what the trials and tribulations. Jew-

ish love of youth and beauty is as a foundation for the future, not an end in itself. Hence Rabbi Menashe Klein permitted cosmetic surgery if it helped a girl find a husband, a righteous aim — not (as was juxtaposed in the article), to permit surgery purely for self (esteem).

The quest for beauty justified? Is it meaningful? The Art Scroll Siddur (found at the Kollel Beth HaTalmud) comments on the line from Eshet Chayil: "False is Grace and Vain is Beauty" ... Grace and Beauty are not attributes worthy of serious praise for they have no real value ... They do not reflect the character and worth of a person. Only a woman's fear of God is deserving of praise."

Herein, I believe, lies the Jewish definition and source of self esteem. Which part of us fears our Maker? The soul. And what concern has the soul with wrinkles and adiposity?

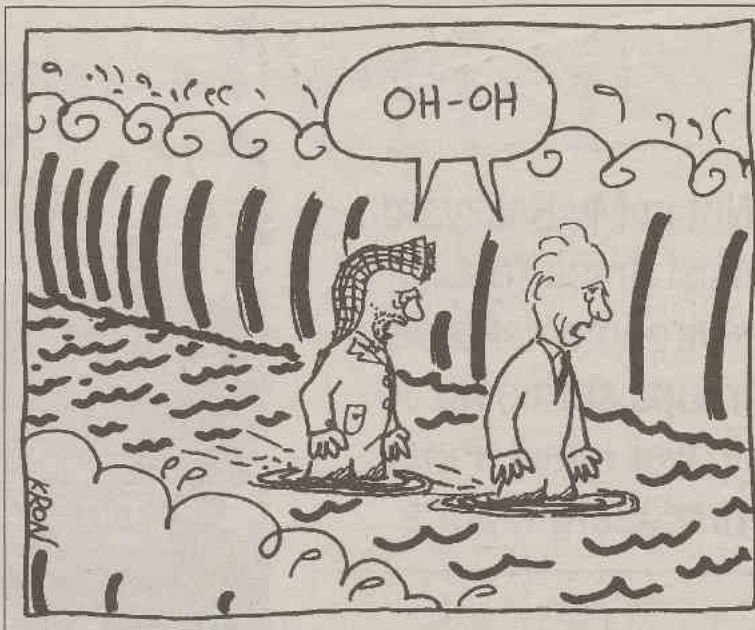
It is most disappointing, also, that

no suggestion was made to look for and treat the cause of the loss of self esteem. Surely the Kollel believes in the soul. In my view it would be obligatory for a rabbi or psychiatrist to speak with the prospective client ensuring that there is no spiritual ailment (other than vanity) before sanctioning surgery.

I wonder whether Rabbi Feinstein et al have been fairly represented in the article. Or have the authors crossed the not so fine line, from where Halachah permits surgery, to then proactively encouraging it?

Finally to the quaint parallelism in a doctor of the flesh combining with a doctor of the soul to write this curious article. Both kinds of doctors seemed to have missed the point. Either by innocently confusing cause and effect, or by hoping to justify a preconceived notion.

Simon Wein  
Stockholm, Sweden



## Needing each other

FOR MANY years his two wealthy brothers, with great devotion and duty, had provided him with much-needed help. They enjoyed a close and warm relationship. As a result of securing favourable loans his fortunes soared. Then he told his brothers that he no longer needed their charity. One brother felt offended, the other was happy to redirect his money to other charities.

The brothers now became estranged. Soon thereafter the loans were recalled, precipitating his bankruptcy. In the meantime one brother had lost his fortune, the other no longer felt inclined to help.

The call for a reassessment of our contributions to Israel and the Diaspora is based on Israel's assumed present and future prosperity. Yossi Beilin and Isi Leibler agree that priority should be given to Diaspora needs. UIA workers and Zionists insist on their right and need to continue participating in resettling immigrants. Mark Leibler (AJN 31/3) agrees with the UIA and asserts that fundraising would suffer if the status quo were changed.

But they all fail to emphasise that even if it were true that Israel no longer needed Diaspora funds such rejection would accentuate isolationism and the dichotomy of

Israel and Diaspora Jewry. Furthermore, should the assumption of Israel's financial strength and independence prove to be wrong, the new strategies would result in irreversible loss to both Israel and the Diaspora. It cannot be denied that, whilst Israel's economy is relatively strong, it presently has an annual budget deficit of three billion dollars and is carrying and servicing a US\$10 billion loan.

A loss of the current Diaspora contributions of around US\$500 million would increase the budget deficit. The projection of great prosperity in the future is based on the optimistic forecast of concluding a successful peace process. That, to say the least, is in great doubt.

Our sad historic experience should remind us that our fortunes wherever we live may change drastically and unexpectedly. Our security in the Diaspora will always be dependent on Israel's security, ability and willingness to absorb us.

Israel's future may equally depend on the Diaspora. It is therefore premature to presume that Israel and world Jewry can afford the luxury of each looking after their own needs.

Dr Eric Stock  
Melbourne

## No on lesbians

I BELIEVE I speak for the silent majority when I say that the various letters (AJN 7/4) regarding the Melbourne Jewish Lesbians Group make sickening reading.

It would seem that the *Jewish News* is no longer immune from the hijacking and manipulation of the media that has become a typical tactic of the gay lobby, in order to try and legitimise their so-called lifestyle.

From a Jewish perspective, there is no grey area as far as homosexuality is concerned, being clearly declared by the Torah to be "an abomination".

That is not to say that it does not exist, or that those who are unwilling or unable to suppress their tendencies are to be condemned or excommunicated. But it is absurd in the extreme for these women to use such emotive catchphrases as "we are daughters, sisters, aunts, mothers, even bubbas" or to threaten to "withdraw our creative

input until we are accepted" as some sort of emotional blackmail.

As far as Concert in the Park is concerned, the presence of this group at a Jewish family event would be on a par with a stall manned by the "Jewish Pork Appreciation Group" handing out free, ready-to-eat samples. I cannot imagine the community tolerating such a situation, no matter how loudly it might be argued that their members "are part of families in the community and therefore have a right to be openly represented at community events".

To those who are lesbians, by all means unite to find safety in numbers if this is the life you choose to lead. But please refrain from peddling your wares in front of our children.

Robert Weil  
East St Kilda

## Cook's tour

IN THE midst of the Stygian gloom that too often permeates the pages of your paper, let me shed a little ray of (culinary) light.

I have just purchased my third Australian Jewish community cookery book — *Lox, Stocks and Bagels* compiled by 'Women Caring for Women'. Without wishing to detract from their laudable mission, their cookbook (AJN 7/4) could also be titled, *Men Caring For Women* or, in my case, woman, singular, spouse.

I cook four nights a week. And love it — well, only since the publication of the above and its companions, the North-East Jewish Centre's *Cooking Our Way* and, the pioneer in this field of do-it-yourself, Bialik College's seminal work (1970s) *I Love To Eat Jewish*.

It would be foolhardy of me to rate them. Yet I lean toward *I Love To Eat Jewish* and *Lox, Stocks and Bagels*. Both of them attribute their recipes to real live cooks whereas the North Eastern's shows a regrettable anonymity.

On occasions, when stuck in mid-skillet, I have phoned the creator for help. One failure, it was gently pointed out to me, was because I had turned over two pages and blithely carried on.

This letter then, is by way of a tribute to the generous Jewish cooks of Australia — may they always be on the end of my telephone.

Hold everything, I've just found a male contributor: a Bob Machliss (wouldn't you know it) has a recipe for barbecued smoked salmon that is liberally soured in wine. Good on you Bob!

Alan Collins  
Elwood

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## LETTERS' POLICY

WE welcome letters to the editor. But we give preference to short letters of no more than 300 words. Letters may be cut for length, or edited for style and clarity. We only consider letters which include the sender's street address, day contact phone number, and full first name (not an initial) and surname. In common with standard newspaper practice we do not advise writers whose letters are not published.

# Mark Leibler is also right and wrong

WHAT a pity that Yossi Beilin's ground-breaking thoughts are so under-rated and the discussion about them is focusing purely on fund-raising. At that level the UIA and those arguing for Jewish educational interests in the Diaspora are both treating Beilin's ideas only as an issue of dollars and cents.

I expected more from Mark Leibler who, I am sure, understands the issues on a much deeper level than revealed in his remarks (AJN 31/3) at the UIA satellite hook-up with Israel.

I know he is completely sincere when he states that "there has never been a time in my life when Israel has not occupied centre stage". But today the majority of the Jewish people can identify with that view, even if they may not be able to express it with the same passionate and deeply held conviction.

Nor would anyone, in their right mind, question the role the UIA Keren Hayesod performed as the paramount vehicle through which world Jewry expressed its identification with the Zionist ideology prior to the creation of the state and its solidarity with Israel thereafter.

## VIEWPOINT

Israel Kipen

But as long as the security of the Jewish state enterprise was less than assured, nobody of Beilin's stature, either in Israel or the Diaspora, raised the fund-raising issue in the way that he has now touched upon. Still, Beilin was really on about something else.

He was touching the rawest of nerves in relations between Israel and the Diaspora. For Israel's deputy foreign minister has dared openly to question one of the underlying axioms on which the early Yishuv was built, namely the Herzlian proposition of negating the Diaspora and the fundamental importance of aliyah.

Of course, when a mere 600,000 Israelis had to fight for their survival and then develop a state, it was self-evident that they needed to increase their numbers significantly to succeed. But over the 40 years following Israel's

establishment it became obvious that prosperous Jews from the West were not going on aliyah en masse.

Instead, it was clear that Diaspora cohesiveness and particularism were eroding. In Israel, the thinking elites watched with apprehension. The historic resolution about the "centrality of Israel in the life of the Jewish people" adopted at the 27th Zionist Congress, nearly two decades ago, signalled the revision of the original attitude of Diaspora negation.

And yet, despite the "centrality of Israel" resolution and the subsequent deliberations over a further 15 years, Israel's president Ezer Weizman last year still told Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that there was no future for the Jewish people without aliyah, and in a manner reminiscent of the old negation of the Diaspora. This prompted the American Jewish leader Shoshana Cardin to tell the president that he was treating American Jewry as "aliyah fodder".

In that context Beilin's statement must primarily be understood as a philosophical break with the old shibboleth of negating the Diaspora. His views are of historic significance because they explicitly recognise the

reality of Jewish life throughout the world. As well they accentuate the intrinsic importance of these Jewries as vital components of the Jewish people and Israel's self-interest in their continuity and viability. And as if to reinforce my interpretation, we had the recent report (AJN 24/3) about the clash between President Weizman and Avraham Burg over the primacy of aliyah versus education as the rival claimants for the agenda for world Jewry.

This is what the Beilin controversy is about. It is not about money. It is about fundamentals. In this dialogue Weizman represents the past; Beilin, Burg and others the present and, hopefully, the future.

It is therefore essential that Diaspora leaders do not confuse the real issues. Instead they must seize an historic opportunity for a realignment of ideas and actions to move forward the ever-changing Zionist interpretation of Jewish history.

▲ Israel Kipen is a former president of the State Zionist Council of Victoria and a founder and long-serving president of Bialik College.

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