

Disgraceful Journalism

April 3, 2008

I stand by my story. I believe that much of what is alleged in the following is wrong. My readers can decide who they want to believe.

Gadi Pickholz, chair of the Israel Fathers Rights Advocacy Council, writes:

Luke We have been one of your few staunch supporters over the years, but you completely lost us with the recent hatchet jobs on Rabbis Arnall and Weil. Aside from the basic gross inaccuracies in your facts (which you obviously never even attempted to check –just print whatever motzei shem ra any anonymous blogger offers you?), you continue to bash the only major divorced rabbi on the west coast simply for being divorced — and then detract from Rabbi Arnall's smicha because it came from a Rav who was (horrors) divorced. Lucky nobody took that attitude with Rabbi Akiva or the Rambam, among a great many, in days of old. Another great Jewish leader of the ages who would be ostracized by the present community as beneath them and inappropriate for any position of leadership due to his "personal life scandals" no doubt. In terms of your comments about Rabbi Arnall's smicha, you are simply ignorant as a convert as to how smicha works or its gradations. I don't think I have ever said that bluntly to a ger before, but you need comprehend when you do not comprehend a thing. Rabbi Muskin is no more qualified than Rabbi Arnall (or the vast majority of other pulpit rabbis) to offer smicha at all. He never refused Arnall, it is preposterous to suggest he is remotely qualified in terms of his own smicha –and I respect him as a pulpit rabbi and community rabbi dearly. Virtually no smicha from YU REITS qualifies for the ability to ever confer smicha to another, let alone be a posek on anything but whether your chicken is kosher. They are schooled to deliver political sermons and indoctrination from the pulpit, and pastoral services to the community. That's basically it. Chabad smicha is even less. REITS has a full required course on psak halacha for non-poskim, teaching their new rabbis whom to call with what question rather than actually consider wading into the water of halacha itself. I can tell you from personal experience that Steven Weil, while an excellent orator, fundraiser and political macher literally cannot read the morning Hebrew newspaper nor comprehend a transcript from the Jerusalem Bet Din on his own without translation, and has no idea what the basic process of the Bet Din even is. Nor need he know that, technically, for his appointed role. He could take the time to learn Hebrew sufficiently to read a newspaper and successfully converse on the telephone with someone in Jerusalem without interpreter, but within the context of the rabbinate in the farthest throws of the galut both geographically and spiritually it really is not necessary.

BUT YOUR MOST EGREGIOUS SLOPPINESS WAS REGARDING RABBI WEISS. The Weiss divorced wen he accepted the position in London and she elected not to go. Nearly three years later he married a "long time congregant", in your terms, of the Marble Arch Synagogue in London, not Beth Jacob. Did you

forget that minor fact so that you could suggest a sleaze factor where none existed? His decision on giving up being a Cohen is controversial, but not without precedent, but in terms of intimating impropriety and infidelity in a Rabbi have you no shame when you intentionally delete the two year gap in events? Or more likely are you again the only person in LA who, not having been present, does not know the facts and reports as a purported insider muckraker when you have ZERO knowledge of actual events. Now where on your website is the retraction and error, as demanded by both the most basic journalistic and halachic standards??? The original posting is clearly alive and well via Google Search. Nice hatchet job. Fuel the fire of phobia within the community against divorced men. Quick — name one divorced pulpit rabbi in the US today other than Weiss? Head of any orthodox organization that is divorced? Even a basic member of the RCA or RCC? None. Thrown out at once. In the 21st century, despite all progress and in spite of (or because of) a now 17% divorce rate within the community. The only exception I could name WAS David Rue, but the recent negative events in his life certainly included "concerns" about a divorced man in a sensitive role with young people.

Sorry, you lost us because you have deteriorated into not simply hate mongering but have become simply an exceedingly lazy journalist.

I never said Rabbi Muskin gave Daniel Arnall smicha. Rabbi Muskin denied him for precisely that reason - he can't confer it! Rabbi Weiss returned from England and married his longtime Beth Jacob congregant after discovering he wasn't a Cohen and therefore could marry a divorcee. Rabbi Weiss's son asked a rav the question and still considers himself a Cohen. How do you think all the people Rabbi Abner Weiss redeemed as a Cohen feel about him deciding he's not a Cohen? This has nothing to do with Rabbi Weiss getting a divorce. That's not the issue. The issue is the havoc wreaked by his deciding he's not a Cohen. These people will need to be redeemed again at a later date by a real Cohen. During bar mitzvahs Rabbi Weiss would get up there and give the children the "priestly prayer" but later he decides he's not a Cohen so he can marry a divorcee.