



Name Withheld

Dr. Yitzchok Levine

You see it quite frequently in publications that cater to the observant Jewish community: a letter to the editor or a short opinion piece “signed” Name Withheld by Request, or Anonymous, or C. M., Brooklyn, NY. Some of these submissions go so far as to omit any indication of who the writer is.

The question is, why are so many people reluctant to have their name at the end of something they wrote? I believe that there are at least two answers to this question.

First of all, there are matters that someone may write about that most certainly should be kept private. For example, if one has fallen for some sort of get-rich-quick scheme, he or she may want to let others know about the scam, but would not want the world to know that they fell for it. Or it may be that the issue one writes about is personal and very sensitive. In such cases the writer is indeed justified in concealing his or her identity.

However, one sees letters and comments expressing valid opinions and observations that do not reveal the writer. More often than not, these writings express *constructive criticism* about some issue. There are valid points that need to be made, despite the fact that some may disagree with them or prefer to ignore the issue.

We are not talking about submissions in

which the writer is simply out to bash this or that. In my opinion, such writings should not be published, because they do not contribute *anything* positive. As the famous saying goes (attributed to more than one *gadol*, “Not everything that is thought should be said; not everything that is said should be written; not everything that is written should be published.”

Recently I sent out an email to my distribution list about a certain issue. Someone on my list responded with a number of what I considered to be valid points. I emailed this person and asked if I could circulate his comments. The reply was, “Yes, but please do not use my name. Frankly, I still have unmarried children.”

This I believe is a key point in why many are reluctant to divulge their names after a letter or article that expresses their opinions. They feel, to perhaps be a bit too blunt, intimidated. And let us make no mistake; there are some people within our community who can make one’s life miserable.

In 1877, Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch wrote the following about anonymous writings.

“Various publications opposing our call for secession ... have already appeared under the cover of anonymity. Their contents only show that their authors are in no position whatsoever to voice any opinion worthy of note on this question....

Any replies written anonymously or signed with a fictitious name will not receive any consideration from me. One who lacks the courage to sign his true name to his views must be aware that what he is saying is meaningless, and that therefore he cannot expect others to take notice of it. Let the anonymous gnats buzz happily in the sunny meadows. I certainly do not want to spoil their pleasure.” (From page 168 of *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Architect of Torah for the Modern World*, by Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman.)

In light of this, it seems to me that all submissions to Orthodox publications should contain the name of the writer, unless, of course, they deal with very personal issues. For this to happen, our community must foster an atmosphere in which people can express valid opinions without fear of repercussions. Such an atmosphere would contribute much to the mutual respect that is a foundation stone of *Yahadus*.

Dr. Yitzchok Levine, Professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences, Stevens Institute of Technology.
e-mail: llevine@stevens.edu

