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Unbelievable

How does the Yad L'achim organization fight Messianic Jews? Hint: all means are justified

Written by Yuval Azoulay

The orthodox organization Yad L'achim locates "Messianic Jews" (who have accepted Jesus as messiah), gathers information on them and transfers it to the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry staff summons them for an inquiry and turns their lives into a bureaucratic hell. In addition to this there are incidents of harassment, rumor spreading and damage to businesses, like in the case of Pnina Comforti, who woke up one morning to find this poster hanging outside her bakery. "God doesn't allow? Oh, yes he does"

In Zimbabwe, T, an Israeli citizen from the Jerusalem area, noticed that his passport had expired. He reported to the Ministry of Interior, requested that his passport be renewed and paid the 250 NIS fee. He assumed that his new passport will be valid for the next five years. However, the clerk in the ministry limited the validity of the new passport for one year only. "When I asked her why, she asked me if I've received a summons for questioning in the main headquarters", says T. "I answered that I haven't and she said I would be receiving it by mail".

Upon returning from his trip to Africa he found a summons for questioning in his mailbox, to be held in one of the following days. "I can guess what they want to ask me and what they wish to know", he says. "I know this procedure from other cases in which activists in the Messianic Jewish community are required to tell the Ministry of Interior about their religious faith".

Y, a Kfar Saba citizen, went through this questioning two years ago, and following the advice of his attorney, even recorded the conversation. An embarrassed clerk asked him what he did in the HaMaayan Congregation and required explanations for the information gathered on him in the Jerusalem headquarters. "I was surprised", says Y, "on the clerk's desk I saw a thick file, entirely composed of my private life and religious beliefs. I wondered why it was the Ministry of Interior's business, why it was anyone's business at all".

"So this is what's written here", the clerk told him, "this is the part I need to focus on, that you've become a community 'elder', like a very important person in the community or something". After that she confronted him with details of information and he was asked to comment on them: "you participate in committees and teachings of Holy Scripture", "you teach and work in an organization helping people who are in need of food and clothing" ("I volunteer. I don't work there", he commented), "besides, you support animal

rights" ("that's new", he commented), "you and your wife manage family life groups, helping people and couples preserve their relationships". Y confirmed the last detail, adding "but I don't want to give any information on people". The clerk quickly clarified: "no, no, no. I need to ask you only about yourself. Based on the things I just told you, I need to form an inquiry".

"Although I was upset, I preferred to bottle my anger and rage inside", says Y, "Because at the time I really needed the Ministry of Interior and was dependent upon it. Deep inside I felt like a suspect held by the KGB or the Thought Police". Y and his wife, the parents of three sons born in Israel, were hoping at the time for the Ministry of Interior to decide to grant his wife citizenship after living here for a decade. "I couldn't do much", he explains why he didn't place a complaint on the invasion of his privacy during the questioning. "The clerks in the Ministry of Interior in Kfar Saba know me well due to my many visits there in the past, and they always treated me nicely. The clerk who questioned me also felt bad about that situation and I could see it on her face. I preferred to answer the questions because I really had no choice".

But the answers he provided did not improve his wife's chances. She received her Israeli citizenship only several months ago, and only after the Ministry of Interior was ordered to grant it by the High Court of Justice. This wasn't the couple's only encounter with the Ministry. When they moved, says Y, he was refused when asking to update his new address in the civil registry. "Only after turning to a lawyer, who sent them a letter threatening to take to legal proceedings, did the clerks agree to update my address", he says.

Computerized Tracking

Barbara Ludwig, a 33 year old student from Germany, has already found herself on the verge of being deported from the country, after the Ministry of Interior refused to issue her an A2 visa – the type that any foreign student must possess. The Ministry explained the refusal by arguing that Ludwig, who is a Jewish studies graduate student at Hebrew University, is a "missionary". "It's disturbing to think that people I don't even know in the Ministry of Interior know so many personal details about me", she says. "Not just about me, but even about my parents, who live in Germany".

Her explanation, that she wishes to convert to Judaism and conduct a Jewish lifestyle and in the future raise her children as Jews – did not work in her favor. In the hearing conducted about a year ago in the Court for Illegal Aliens, before her deportation to Germany, she was asked about her lifestyle and beliefs:

The court: I want to know once and for all – what is the religion of truth, Judaism or Christianity?

Ludwig: in my opinion the truth is G_d, and not Judaism or Christianity.

The court: is Christianity idolatry?

Ludwig: there are elements of idolatry in Christianity.

The court: and who are you in this story – a Jew, a Christian, or something in between?

Ludwig: in my eyes I am a Jew. I live as a Jew and handle the responsibility involved in it.

The court: what is the weekly Torah portion?

Ludwig: since we're past Passover, it's either "Ahrey Mot" or "Kedoshim". But what does that have to do with my student visa?

The conversion procedures she began were disrupted by the intervention of one body. The Yad L'achim activists claimed that it was a fictitious procedure, meant to allow her to remain in the country and work for the conversion of Jews to Christianity. "The computerized tracking performed by Yad L'achim exposed Missionary Ludwig's request to the Chief Rabbinate to convert to Judaism", Yad L'achim members boasted, "and our discovery caused the Ministry of Interior to refuse to register her as an Israeli citizen".

Ludwig: "False and heinous things were attributed to me. People who introduced themselves as Yad L'achim activists approached my friends, my teachers and rabbis with whom I've stayed during the conversion process, and claimed that I was receiving money from entities abroad in order to operate a large missionary website on the internet. Some people broke contact with me because of these lies. Others demanded explanations. They wore me out".

In the meantime, Ludwig is in Israel thanks to procedures for the delay of her deportation, commenced by attorneys she had hired. Students from the Hebrew University also joined her struggle, signing people on a petition for her benefit, demanding to stop her persecution, which was sent to senior factors in the Ministry of Interior.

One Hand Washes the Other

In most cases the people hurt are Israelis, country citizens for all matters: they perform military service; educate their children on their country's values and Zionism and send them to regular schools; celebrate the nation's holidays and observe its commemorative dates, work for a living, usually in free professions, and pay taxes. They love the country, swear to their loyalty and devotion, become emotional with the raising of the flag and the singing of the anthem, and still feel like a persecuted minority.

About 20 communities of Messianic Jews are active around the country, and the number of their members is estimated at several thousands. They believe in G_d and consider themselves as Jews, refer to the Bible and the New Testament as their holy scriptures, are

convinced that Jesus is the messiah and don't understand how it's any of the country authorities' business.

The battle against them is led by the orthodox organization Yad L'achim. Rabbi Shalom Dov Lipchitz, the founder and chairperson of the organization, claims that Messianic Jews "abuse Israeli democracy in order to convert innocent Jews and encourage them to cross over to Christianity". The organization's members are proud of their activity and promise to continue in it. In their words, they fight against the mission, absorption, assimilation and what they define as "cults". They go so far as distributing posters and brochures against the activists in these communities "in an attempt to warn the public".

Documents received by Haaretz point to the possibility that cooperative relations exist between the organization and clerks in two branches of the Ministry of Interior. In another case, a similarity can be found between the terminology used by the head of the civil registry office in Tel Aviv, Amos Arbel, and that used by Rabbi Lipchitz. Arbel was recorded in a questioning he performed on a young woman who is part of the Messianic Jewish community, teaching the entire theory in a few words: "whoever takes part in messianic activity acts against the Jewish people. This activity doesn't exactly match the interests and trends of the state of Israel and the Jewish state. Messianic activity means taking Jews and turning them into Christians. If any exist, the state of Israel does not respect them".

The M family of Netanya, who is part of the Beit Asaph congregation in the city, alerted the attention of Ministry of Interior clerks a few years ago. They wanted to know everything about this family: who they believe in and who they pray to; how their belief is expressed in action; what is the lifestyle of the family members, and more. From a letter sent via fax from the Yad L'achim department against mission to Sima the clerk, it can be deduced that she was so curious as to turn to Yad L'achim and ask to receive details on the family. The department boasts the actions taken by its personnel in order to expose the objectives of Messianic Jews: tracking, gathering personal information and using it.

In the case of the M family from Netanya, the personnel and the department against mission were already well-equipped. In a letter they sent to the clerk Sima, whose title was "following your application", the Yad L'achim people were able to tell her which street the M family from Netanya lived on, what their phone number was, and many additional details: "they appear in the cult's publications and aren't just regular members, but hold lessons in Hebrew and Russian in their home on Wednesday nights. We assume that such a central role would not be given to common people, but to those who engage in daily missionary and persuasion activity". They further added: "in order to confirm these facts, we called said family and their daughter confirmed that they are members of this community and that they've also attended class last Saturday".

The Haaretz supplement has at its disposal an inside memo from another branch of the Ministry of Interior, regarding a different family. The memo is signed by a clerk named

Ilana, who writes that "the lady's file was transferred for inspection to Yad L'achim, in order to find out if she is indeed messianic. I never received the file back".

Adv. Calev Myers, legal adviser of the Jerusalem Institute of Justice, represents citizens whose rights were deprived by the Ministry of Interior because of their beliefs. Myers himself is part of one of the Messianic Jewish congregations in Jerusalem, and testifies that during the last five years he handled several cases in which "the Ministry of Interior made the lives of these citizens miserable". He also identifies the long arm of orthodox opposers behind this harassment. "Organizations calling themselves 'anti missionary' provide the Ministry of Interior with false and instigating information regarding activists and members of the messianic Jewish community", he says. "This is the origin of most of the problems community members face due to their religious belief alone".

The Ministry of Interior was requested to answer general, as well as specific questions on this matter, which were submitted in advance. Its efficient spokesperson, Sabin Hadad, who usually replies to media applications within a few hours, took no less than three weeks to give her reply. At first her office explained the uncharacteristic delay by claiming that "the person in charge is on vacation". When the person in charge returned from his vacation, the office said that he was late in submitting his answers. Finally the following answer arrived:

"Any persons suspected of Messianic missionary activity – their entrance to Israel is refused in the Ben Gurion Airport border or by consulates abroad upon submitting the application. There are few cases of people entitled to exercise the Law of Return who arrived in Israel and later on participated in Messianic missionary activity, when in all cases information on them was not at our disposal beforehand. The Ministry of Interior does not participate in any kind of activity in order to locate or receive information regarding Messianic missionary activity. All information accepted by us is received from organizations in Israel or private entities".

By the way, the "person in charge", for whose answers the spokesperson waited for about three weeks is the same Amos Arbel, who claimed in the recorded conversation that "whoever takes part in Messianic activity acts against the Jewish people".

Hidden Secrets

T from Jerusalem, who is summoned for questioning in the Ministry of Interior, says he "isn't worried about anything": he's been an Israeli citizen for 36 years, served in a combat unit in the IDF, and attests that he has already gone through several wars in his life time and has been hit by quite a few rocks in the Palestinian Kasbahs in two intifadas. His children also served and are still serving in elite units in the IDF. "These clerks don't know who they're dealing with this time", he says. "They don't scare me, they won't turn me into a deprived person because I'm a citizen of this country no less than they are, but it is definitely annoying and disturbing. It takes up precious time and energy. Still, it's not the most pleasant thing in the world when my country goes to war against me without me doing anything to hurt it".

Despite his proud declaration he asked to remain anonymous in name and picture, and also requested not to reveal his exact residence and the congregation in which he is a member. Y from Kfar Saba also deliberated for a long time whether to reveal his identity. He asked his wife, consulted friends and finally decided to maintain his anonymity. According to him, he doesn't want to leave the house in the morning and find out that the road to his children's school was covered with visible ads warning against him and bearing his picture, personal details and address. "I have friends who are part of HaMaayan Congregation here in Kfar Saba who've already faced that sort of thing. They woke up one morning and found their entire street full of posters warning against them. Some had to move because of persecutions from orthodox circles, claiming they were dangerous missionaries trying to spread the gospel of Jesus at any cost".

He is 43 years old, a native of Lithuania who migrated to Israel in the early 90s and became a citizen due to his Jewish first wife. "A few months after coming here I began to feel closer to Judaism and believe in G_d", he says, "but in addition, I believe that the messiah is Jesus". He has an undergraduate degree in bible studies, teaches bible lessons in a school in the Sharon area, and for extra income he conducts personal training for people who are overweight and have trouble losing weight. "I enjoy what I do very much", he says.

Y claims that his activity in HaMaayan Congregation amounts to a weekly session, which usually takes place in the home of a host family which is a member of the congregation. There, he says, they have a Torah class, sing along with a piano, guitar or violin and after two or three hours separate and continue their lives each according to his own conscience. "Sometimes, when we come to our weekly gatherings, we meet Yad L'achim activists under the house", he says. "They hand out written information against Messianic Jews to passersby. One time activists approached me and said 'we know everything about you'. I'm not surprised the file the clerk in the Ministry of Interior had was so thick".

T serves as "shepherd" in his congregation in the Jerusalem area. According to him, the shepherd's duty is parallel in its essence to that of a Gabbai, or manager in a synagogue: he's mainly responsible for the congregation's administrative issues and organizes its weekly gatherings. Yad L'achim activists claim that the position of the "shepherd" is more like that of a priest in a catholic church. "Members of the congregation confess to him, like to a priest", claims a central activist in Yad L'achim, who only identifies himself as Benjamin. "They tell him their deepest secrets, even sexually related secrets. I know what goes on there. I've been in the mission, ran away from it, converted and arrived at the path of the Torah".

Classified Actions

The headquarters of the orthodox organization is situated on Jerusalem Avenue in Bney Brak, in the basement of a residence building, in which ritual articles and cheap clothing can also be acquired. The battle against "cults" in general and Messianic Jews in particular isn't the organization's only activity. In the Yad L'achim website are reports on

an intensive activity whose goal is to separate mixed couples, especially Jewish women living with Muslim men in Israel and the Palestinian territories. "Part of the activity is secret and classified", Rabbi Lipchitz gives little detail.

A narrow hallway lit by pale neon lights leads to a row of rooms. Women gathered in the first room answering phone calls stare curiously at the secular Jew coming to visit. In the other rooms are the organization's activists, bearded men. The chairperson, Rabbi Lipchitz, sits in a spacious room. He's an amiable and courteous man who fears the current "situation": "It's terrible. Thousands and thousands of Jews were lost to assimilation and missionaries. We are few and they are many. Why do the Christians take them away from us?"

In his eyes, this is war. It is held in city centers, in malls, inside IDF tanks and APCs and even in Park HaYarkon, when Madonna performs there. "I won't settle and give up a single Jew", he declares. He's been questioned before by the police due to remarks against Arabs; activists of his organization were arrested after being suspected of taking the law into their own hands when handling a "severe case of assimilation" – an action which included, according to suspicion, the abduction of an Arab. In another incident, activists identified with the organization were convicted after abducting a young Arab who had a romantic involvement with a Jewish girl, without hesitating to impersonate border police officers for this purpose.

Lipchitz and his people define Messianic Jews as cult members. They have academically analyzed the conduct of cults around the world, and are convinced of the symmetry in this case. When they decide to make the life of a person who they have determined to be a "missionary" miserable, few means would be unacceptable. They almost ruined the livelihood of Pnina Comforti, owner of Pnina Pie bakeries. After years of running a successful bakery in the shopping center in Gan Yavne, she decided to make her dream of expanding her business come true. She knew she would have to work harder, but told herself that no craft was happier than baking cakes.

"In February 2006 I opened the bakery in Ashdod and the business progressed beautifully", she says. "I saw that it was being accepted, that the customers were responding well, it took off. What a pleasure". She comes from a religious family, and joined the Messianic Jews about 15 years ago, while staying in the United States and working in an evangelist church. "For a very long time I couldn't make my peace with Jesus being the messiah, and I didn't feel right about it", she says. "I learned and studied, and after eighteen months I came to this conclusion. Our bible and the New Testament are one and the same, in our theory. The Christians love the Jewish people, and sometimes I get the feeling that they love the idea of the Greater Israel more than right-wingers themselves".

She is married and a mother of five. "My children are in combat units in the army", she says proudly. The trouble began in the summer of 2007, when Comforti received a summons for inquiry in the local rabbinate in Ashdod. "I realized that Yad L'achim have renewed their activity against me", she says. "I know their activities back from the days

when I operated my bakery in Gan Yavne. The municipal rabbi, as if it was any of his business, asked me what I believed in. I told him I believed in the Bible and the New Testament. He didn't hesitate and said: 'people like you don't deserve a kosher certificate'. To this day I can't understand the connection between my religious beliefs and my bakery's kosher certificate. Until then a kosher supervisor on behalf of the Ashdod rabbinate would come everyday and find nothing wrong. If that's not persecution than what is?"

Through Adv. Eliad Shraga, Comforti petitioned to the High Court of Justice, and the judges ordered the rabbis in Ashdod to give her back her kosher certificate three months ago. But the Chief Rabbinate requested further discussion, and in the meantime nothing has changed. "To this day I don't have my kosher certificate", says Comforti. "So I work without it, because I have no choice. The business has to operate". She has a hard time stifling the wave of emotions flooding her: "it's like the way a groom feels when he arrives at his wedding and the bride runs away. Everything went as planned, even better than I expected, and then they turned against me".

After the ruling of the High Court of Justice, the Yad L'achim people went to the efforts of making her religious belief public. "The entire City area in Ashdod was covered with posters against me", she says. "The name of my bakery was published in large print. They publicly announced that people should be careful around me. They turned me into a monster".

"Keepers of their soul shall refrain from purchasing any products in the business owned by the missionary", the Yad L'achim poster stated, "The kosher certificate was given to it as a result of the court's coercion of the rabbinate". The customers made their decision by staying away. "Most customers didn't show their faces anymore", she says. "Customers who used to kiss me every morning and tell me how much they've enjoyed the cake they bought passed through here and didn't even look in my direction. When many French people came French posters were put up and then they stopped coming too. Later on they did the same thing with the Russians. They dried out my business. I used to sit here and cry my eyes out for whole days. You try baking cakes in that sort of emotional state".

Comforti decided to ride out the storm. "I guess the years of handling their wild inciting have made me stronger", she says. "And still, it's hard. They've managed to disrupt my life and ruin my plans. I've been thinking for a long time now that it's time to make a brand of my business, develop it, because it's a good business and people love my cakes. I want to print the bakery's logo on bags, wrapping papers, on napkins for the tables outside, and I can't. When people call me and order a cake, some tell me 'please, make sure there isn't a logo or a sticker on the package'. For the meantime, I've put aside my entire branding plan".

A Good Soldier

Raphael Mirelshvili's case can provide some clues as to the Yad L'achim working methods. About a month and a half ago, when the country was brewing with violence and

murder, a man's body was found in a deserted building in the Beit Dagan industrial zone, and was identified as the body of Mirelshvili, a 25 year old from Lod. He had left his parents' house in the Habad Neighborhood in the beginning of July, got into a taxi and disappeared. In their efforts to track him down, his family revealed to the press that a year earlier he had completed a year of imprisonment, after being convicted of the abduction of a young Arab man, while impersonating a border policeman.

Mirelshvili, who was active in Yad L'achim, listened to a show on an orthodox radio station, in which a Jewish mother mourned over the falling of her young daughter into the arms of an Arab guy, and over her intention to marry him. She asked for the listeners' help in thwarting the plan and returning her daughter "to the right track", in her words. Her emotional words were heard by Mirelshvili's open ears: he called the radio station, requested the mother's phone number, called her and offered his help. She gave him details on her daughter's Arab love, he recruited two of his friends for the mission and late at night the three knocked on his door in one of the central cities.

After confirming his identity, the three demanded him to come with them for questioning in the police station. He agreed, got into their car and only when he realized that they were not headed for the police station but to an unknown destination, he began to fear that he might have stepped into a trap. While the car was driving fast down the highway he opened the door and leaped out. He rolled on the asphalt, was wounded and needed medical attention, and from his bed in the hospital he provided police investigators with a detailed testimony of all that happened. Mirelshvili and his friends were arrested, convicted and sent to prison.

"He was a good soldier", said Rabbi Lipchitz shortly after Mirelshvili's body was identified in the Legal Medicine Institute in Abu Kabir. "We handle hundreds of cases of assimilation and absorption, and the deceased handled one of them. My heart aches for this guy. I prayed for him everyday, I was in touch with his family, and I hoped he would be found safe and sound".

Last week Rabbi Lipchitz already sounded differently: "he wasn't our activist. It just appeared as if he linked himself to us. Why, we follow the law". The circumstances of Mirelshvili's death are not yet clear. "We heard claims by different orthodox circles that this was revenge on behalf of the Arabs for what he did", a police officer said a few days ago. "That direction has been rejected. We've checked this matter with defense factors, and the inspection didn't raise any unusual findings".

In the middle of December 2006, police officers raided a mikveh in the Kiryat Nordau Neighborhood in Netanya and arrested one of the senior members of Yad L'achim, Rabbi Alex Artovsky, who some define as the organization's "chief of operations". The surprised Artovsky was led to questioning in the Shomron and Yehuda region headquarters. The same morning more Yad L'achim activists were brought into the headquarters' investigation room, one by one, suspected to have abducted an Arab man who had an affair with a Jewish woman, and kept him in their custody for a few hours.

The wave of arrests was reported by the Yad L'achim website, which also quoted a response from the chairperson, Rabbi Lipchitz: "the police are completely ignorant of its own actions. On the one hand it turns to us in a request to receive professional help in handling severe assimilations, and on the other hand it sends its cops to arrest our finest activists. No one can stop our activity: not the hostile Arabs who'd do anything to lead Israel's daughters astray, and not the police, that on one cloudy day decided to be their representative under false complaints".

The "chief of operations", Rabbi Artovsky, was quoted on the website in referring to his own arrest: "all the actions done as part of Yad L'achim were meant only for saving lives, and no one can slander my activity and the activity of other organization activists". And the organization's legal advisor, Adv. Moshe Morgenstern, clarified at the time: "any activity performed by the organization's activists – is completely legal". The arrested members, by the way, were released several hours later.

Leave Us Alone

"They come to this country with the excuse of the Law of Return and claim to be Jewish", Rabbi Lipchitz accuses Messianic Jews. "They should be ashamed of it. Others come here and supposedly convert to Judaism, but they believe in Jesus and admit to it. If they act against the law, how is it that I'm in the wrong and how is it that they complain against me? On what grounds, that we expose them as frauds? There's no such thing as 'Messianic Jews'. A person who believes in Jesus is a Christian, period".

Do Messianic Jews in fact act against the law? The law, called "the Mission Law", prohibits "giving or promising a person money, the equivalent of money or any other material benefit in order to entice them to convert their religion or to entice another to convert theirs". According to Adv. Calev Myers, community activists spread brochures and propaganda materials on their beliefs, and that is entirely legal activity. "The community's activists are very aware of what is allowed and what isn't, and they make sure not to go against the law", he says. "Since the establishment of this state, not one member of the Messianic Jewish community was put on trial for these actions".

"We don't fight Christians or Arabs and don't have a war against any religion", says Rabbi Lipchitz. "But the Jews are few and they are many. How many do we have? Half a million Jews have assimilated, and in the end there will be no more left, G_d forbid. We're a small people and that's why Jews must remain Jews and Christians must remain Christians. They don't need to convert, they just need to leave us alone, not influence others and not perform their propaganda here, heaven forbid".

Yad L'achim claim that they have clear evidence of the Messianic Jews' missionary activity, and present propaganda material handed out during Madonna's concert in Israel, calling out to "know Jesus": "they handed out these materials along with the New Testament", Rabbi Lipchitz protests.

"They act like a cult", claims Benjamin, an activist in the department against cults, called by Lipchitz in order to explain. "It begins with a gradual exposure, they don't pressure you, just bring you closer. It happens in their gathering houses and also in IDF tanks. They're activity doesn't amount to listening to music once a week. They do much more than they tell. They go from house to house and hand out propaganda materials".

Habad people also hand out propaganda and set stations on the streets for laying tefillin. If you don't want it – you don't take it.

"But the Messianic Jews make false presentations. They claim to be Jewish for all matters, but to come from a different current. If they knock on a Jewish person's door and say 'hello, we are Christians and want to bring you closer to Jesus', they'll be pushed down the stairs. They manipulate, they use a different concept world, in order not to deter: instead of church they say congregation and instead of priest they say shepherd".

Yad L'achim activists and Messianic Jews have been placing complaints against each other with the police for years. Nevertheless, it appears that the enforcement authorities prefer not to interfere in the religious war, and both sides protest what seems to them as a disregard of their complaints. Yad L'achim members even deny all connection between them and the Ministry of Interior. "I wish we had that connection", says Rabbi Lipchitz. "The state of Israel doesn't fight the mission, because Christians are its supporters against the Arabs".

How do you explain the correspondence between your organization and the Ministry of Interior regarding the M family from Netanya?

"Legally speaking, if we have information it is our duty to inform whoever needs to be informed. A man makes a felony against the state and we are citizens of this state. We only expose these people, who come here to deceive the country. They say they want to convert to Judaism, but let the mission in through the backdoor. 30 percent of the country's citizens are not Jewish, G_d forbid the two parts mix, and what will be left? We perform no mischief with the government or the police".

What do the personal beliefs of Pnina Comforti from Ashdod have to do with her bakery?

"We advertised against her because many Jews in Ashdod have become Messianic. It's a restaurant, she has nice food, maybe she gives someone some good cheese and says 'sweetheart, it's a good deed to come to the mission'. That's why the rabbinate wants the key to her restaurant, to know what goes on there, and now it's in the hands of the High Court of Justice. A kosher certificate isn't just a technical thing. Many restaurants are run by Arabs and we don't act against them, because they don't try to convert Jews".

If you are so observant of the law, how do you explain the arrest of organization activists by the police?

"We act according to the law. I personally was involved in police investigations regarding racism many times, because somewhere in Jerusalem they wanted to start a Jewish and Arab mixed school and I said it should be separated. I'm against assimilation. I asked the investigator: do you want your daughter to marry an Arab? He laughed and closed the file".