

## Editor's Introduction The Edah Journal *Sivan 5761*

Eugene Korn

Welcome to the second volume of *The Edah Journal*. All of us at Edah look forward to your participation in this publication as a reader, contributor and commentator.

As our statement of purpose indicates, the objectives of the journal are to inform and to stimulate ongoing discussion of issues vital to Modern Orthodox life. Torah discourse has always been the lifeblood of *kelal yisrael*, nurturing our religious and communal life in our quest for *qedushah*. It is our hope that *The Edah Journal* contributes to this enduring spiritual process.

*The Edah Journal* publishes three editions per year. In addition, the journal posts reader responses and interchanges weekly throughout the year to promote sustained discussion of the ideas the journal raises.

I personally welcome Joel Linsider to our editorial board. Joel joins us as the journal's text editor.

I invite you to join *The Edah Journal*

community by sending me your comments at [journal@edah.org](mailto:journal@edah.org).

### **The *Sivan 5761* Edition**

One less conspicuous task of an editor is to decide issues of language and nomenclature. This is no trivial matter. We all are aware of the political implications of "East Jerusalem" vs "east Jerusalem" or the theological import of "Old" vs. "New" Testaments. Contemporary thinkers from diverse fields have taught us that language does more than describe the objective universe around us: Words shape our understanding of reality and how we relate to the world. The *logos* creates, as it were, our universe. The Torah considers names crucial, expressing and perhaps determining the character and destiny of their bearers. If this is true about persons in space and time, it is true *a fortiori* about how we understand God, who has no independent empirical character. Halakhah's insistence on the careful use of the divine Name reflects this philosophic awareness. That sanctifying God is con-



ceived of as ‘*qiddush Ha-Shem*’—sanctifying God’s *Name*—is no coincidence.

Halakhic strictures attach formally only to the pronounced Tetragrammaton and to seven specific “names” of God when written with Hebrew letters, yet religious Jews have developed a variety of customs regarding other references to God, both Hebrew and English. How, then, does a journal of and for a religious community that seeks to sanctify God above the level of pedestrian things refer to The Holy One: “God” or “G-d”? “*Hashem*” or “*Hash-m*” or “*Ha-Shem*”? “*Elohim*” or “*Eloqim*”? Professor B. Barry Levy analyzes this question, providing us with the relevant historical, linguistic and halakhic considerations. In accordance with his clarification, *The Edah Journal* has decided on “God,” “*Ha-Shem*” and “*Elohim*.”

The changing status, education, and prominence of women in modern society pose fundamental challenges for any group wishing to maintain strong continuity with its past. Many regard the acceptance of this emerging status of women as the fault line separating moderns from non-moderns. It is easy for Jews to think about the phenomenon of feminism as a monolith: Some consider it a blanket evil imported from non-Jewish culture that requires rejection on every level; others regard it as an expression of justice long denied, whose every manifestation is warranted by egalitarian ethics.

Modern Orthodox Jews can ill afford either simplistic extreme view of feminism. As Norma Baumel Joseph points out, the ‘F’ word should be neither an epithet nor an idol. Rational Orthodox policy toward feminism should resemble our policy toward modernity: We should regard it as a set of complex phenomena, whose discrete claims require individual judgment before the bar of halakhic principles and values. Some will merit life; others will be found wanting. This is not the end of the matter, merely a complicated beginning. As many of the discussions in this edition show, varying conceptions of *halakhah* and the valence each accords to prevalent social

patterns (‘*minhag*’) frequently yield opposite conclusions.

Professors Joseph and Sylvia Barack Fishman demonstrate in their respective halakhic and sociological surveys that feminist change has been an historical reality in religious communities for the past 100 years. Women’s education outside the home was the cutting edge of feminist innovation at the end of the nineteenth century. As the controversy in Erets Yisrael from 1917-1925 (articulated in the writings of Rav Kook and Rav Uziel) testifies, the question of women’s suffrage rocked the religious community in that era. Even non-Modern Orthodox communities came to accept those “feminist” innovations. In the 1950’s Modern Orthodox rabbis debated the legitimacy of women’s careers outside the home, and later the debate shifted to the permissibility of women learning classical talmudic texts. Today, those feminist questions have been settled affirmatively in nearly all Modern Orthodox communities and many non-Modern Orthodox as well.

Some might question the relevance of the 1920 debate between Rav Kook and Rav Uziel over women’s suffrage to a discussion of contemporary challenges. Though the specific question has long since been decided, it is clear that something much more generic occupied these two Torah authorities. Whether *halakhah* allows women to participate fully in public life, to exercise authority over males by holding public office, or to represent the Jewish community, are questions Orthodox communities have yet to settle, either theoretically or through their contemporary politics. The suffrage debate also exemplifies the widely divergent conceptions of *halakhah* employed by the two rabbis: For Rav Kook, the voice of Torah was a mixture of philosophy, values, existing social patterns and formal law. Rav Uziel decided these questions by first applying a more rigorous consideration of formal halakhic principles, which determined these innovations to be legitimate. Ethical considerations grounded in the recognition that women are created *b’tzelem Elohim* (in the image of God), in human dignity and in fairness, dic-

tated for Rav Uziel that the legally permitted be transformed to absolute rights. Rav Uziel was hardly a strict formalist, as Professor Zvi Zohar shows in his review of Rabbi Marc Angel's biography of Rav Uziel, a book that opens us to the halakhic worldview of the former *Rishon Le-Tsiyyon*

Rav Uziel analyzes many of the classical halakhic sources (most importantly Rambam's innovation in *Hilkhot Melakhim* 1:5 prohibiting the appointment of women to public office or communal representation) that militate against feminist equality and innovation. These sources still form the basis for many today who reject the incursion of feminism into the halakhically committed community. Indeed, some of those same sources quoted by Rav Uziel reappear 80 years later in the discussion between Rabbi Mendel Shapiro and Rav Yehuda Herzl Henkin over the permissibility of *qeri'at ha-Torah* and *aliyyot* for women.

The editors experienced much soul-searching before publishing Rabbi Shapiro's essay on *qeri'at ha-Torah* for women. Its controversial nature is certain to raise passions and disagreement in the community. Neither Edah nor *The Edah Journal* necessarily advocates the position espoused in this paper, yet we found little intellectual justification for refusing to make public Shapiro's comprehensive and powerful halakhic argument that is advanced with great integrity. Whether or not the community takes up this position for practical implementation, the paper goes far in clarifying the real *halakhic* issues—and non-issues—swirling around this contentious question. Rav Henkin, a noted halakhic authority, evaluates Shapiro's arguments. Crucial to both Shapiro and Rav Henkin is

the issue of the relationship of *halakhah* to the prevailing sociology of the Torah-observant community. Is the present denial of women's *aliyyot* a matter of permanent legal prohibition or shifting communal consensus? What is the normative weight accorded to the latter? And as Shapiro queries, "How are we to regard those who act to change that consensus?"

In conclusion, it is important to note that there is often an irrepressibly powerful moral impulse to feminist challenges to halakhic life. This is evidenced in the arguments of Rav Uziel, Professors Joseph and Fishman, and Rabbi Shapiro. On its deepest level, the feminist critique of traditional life is neither political nor sociological, but normative. All Jews committed to Torah—whether they reject or accept the claims of feminism—must recognize this. To be oblivious to this fact would be to sacrifice the moral high ground of the Torah and its *halakhah*.

We trust that the discussions presented in these pages will promote sustained and sober consideration of these issues, thus contributing "*lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah*"—to the greatness and glory of Torah.

*B'vrakha,*



Eugene Korn  
Editor