

# Editor's Introduction to *Elul* 5763 Edition

Welcome to the *Elul* 5763 edition of *The Edah Journal*. No articles published in the Journal have generated greater discussion than those in the *Sivan* 5761 edition authored by Rabbis Mendel Shapiro and Yehudah Herzl Henkin analysing the halakhic issues surrounding *qeri'at ha-Torah* for women. R. Shapiro argued for the halakhic legitimacy of the practice in selected communities, while R. Henkin argued against the implementation of this innovation. In this edition Professor Daniel Sperber, a world-renowned rabbi, writer and halakhic authority in Israel, makes an important contribution to that debate. His article, *Congregational Dignity and Human Dignity*, goes beyond R. Shapiro's thesis, claiming that *qeri'at ha-Torah* is not merely permissible, but halakhically *desirable* owing to the higher halakhic priority of *kevod ha-beriyot* (human dignity) over *kevod ha-tibbur* (communal dignity). Like R. Shapiro, R. Sperber limits his recommendation to those communities where women desire to be given *aliyot* and the denial of such an option causes hardship or embarrassment. As was the Journal's policy in publishing the original articles, it is important to state that R. Sperber's essay should not be construed as a binding halakhic decision taken either by the Journal or by Edah. We offer it as a basis for scholarly analysis and halakhic discourse only.

"The Book of Job is about the problem of evil?" So asked a young student after years of *yeshivah* education. In *Fear of the Forest*, Esther Orenstein Lopian, a master-teacher of *Tanakh* in Israel, discusses the issue of Orthodox Bible education avoiding "Meta-Themes" and overviews in its traditional pedagogic techniques. The author maintains that broad themes are critical both to effective teaching and understanding the Torah. *Yeshivah* and day school education too often focuses on individual

verses and commentary, at the expense of student interest in and deeper comprehension of the text. The essay offers a pedagogy of "extensive reading" to overcome this tendency and enumerates an inventory of skills for successful extensive reading of biblical literature.

Also in the arena of Jewish education, Professor David Ellenson, a well-known scholar of traditional responsa and President of Hebrew Union College, offers an introduction and translation of an interesting responsum by Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch. The rabbi was asked whether the elite financiers of Jewish communal institutions—including parochial schools educating the sons and daughters of the less wealthy—are obligated to enrol their own children in schools that provide intensive Jewish education. Not surprisingly, R. Hirsch responded that *noblesse oblige* offers no dispensation from the classic obligation of Jewish parents providing meaningful Torah education to their children. On the contrary argued R. Hirsch, the obligation to educate their own children in the depths of Torah precedes any obligation to provide such education to other Jewish children. The *teshuvah* is an interesting insight into the sociology and axiology of the 19th century German Jewish community of R. Hirsch's time, and also holds much practical wisdom for the communal practice of 21st century American Jewry. One can easily reflect on the salutary impact to Jewish life were the super-rich of the American Jewish community—many of whom have displayed great generosity in supporting Jewish education—to provide their children with serious Torah education.

Should the arts be an important part of Jewish day school education? Are they philosophically and halakhically

desirable, and if so is a serious arts program realistic given the demands of day school curriculum? Ed Codish, an experienced teacher in the graphic and literary arts, offers a case study of a substantive arts program in Jewish education. He argues that complex issues arise when a day school attempts to institute a rigorous arts program that is evaluated for excellence of artistic accomplishment. The selection of teacher and commitment to the extra-curriculum demands of such a program are the keys to the success of quality arts in a Jewish day school.

Freedom of speech and pluralistic disagreement are foundational values of American society, yet any Orthodox community must, by virtue of its ideological and halakhic commitments, accept constraints upon this liberal vision. Despite this fact, Professor Marc B. Shapiro maintains in *Of Books and Bans* that the recent controversial bans on The Making of a Gadol by Nathan Kaminetsky and The Dignity of Difference by Jonathan Sacks are unusual in contemporary Orthodox Jewish history. This essay evaluates the literary and scholarly merits of the first book, and examines rabbinic opinions as sources of support for R. Sacks' thesis of religious pluralism found in the second book. While religious pluralism—whether R. Sacks' version or other varieties—is a thesis that has received little explicit attention in Orthodox discourse, it is the "elephant in the room," an undeniable presence underlying the questions of many Modern Orthodox Jews as they participate in pluralistic American life. R. Sacks' raising of the issue, and Professor Shapiro's initial scholarly exploration rabbinic opinion are controversial yet welcomed developments in Orthodoxy's forthright attempt to come to grips with modern life and values.

In a related review essay, David Shasha examines R. Sacks' book and the pluralism thesis in the context of modern and post-modern intellectual trends. He outlines how R. Sacks understands the thesis' implications for contemporary globalization, intolerance, technology and philosophy, and how the concept of religious difference

has greater inherent legitimacy within Jewish values than within Platonic or Christian thought. Mr. Sasha finds R. Sacks' thesis to be a valuable guide to shaping a better future for both the Jewish people and humanity.

Departing from the Journal's standard policy, we have chosen to publish extended interchanges on articles in the last edition (*Tevet* 5763). The first set of communications is between Mr. Gil Student and Rabbi Reuven Singer, regarding R. Singer's article "*Halakhic Values: Pesaq or Persuasion*." Mr. Student takes issue with R. Singer's analysis of the positions of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (as described by Rabbi Meyer Twersky) and Rabbi Saul Berman regarding the enforceability of non-formal halakhic values. R. Singer parries with an insistence that the Rav's position on this complex matter is nuanced and open to disagreement, and that while the Rav is still an unrivaled authority within Modern Orthodoxy, it is well within legitimate halakhic methodology for R. Berman to offer a dissenting opinion in this matter. The second set of communications is between Professor Yehuda Gellman and Mr. Lippman Bodoff, regarding the latter's study of the roots and problematics of contemporary mysticism. Gellman asserts that Bodoff has committed the genetic fallacy in his understanding of contemporary hasidism and has overlooked the beneficial dimensions of that religious life. Bodoff responds that a careful reading of his essay meets Gellman's objections.

Once again, I invite you to join the discussion stimulated by *The Edah Journal* by communicating your thoughts on these and other published essays. Reader responses should be sent to [editor@edah.org](mailto:editor@edah.org).

*B'vrakhah,*