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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

In 2005, under the editorial direction of Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz, the Academy for Jewish Religion (AJR) launched the first volume of *G'vanim: The Academic Journal of the Academy for Jewish Religion*. Rabbi Zlotowitz envisioned a forum for scholarly and popular articles, as well as more traditional compositions, that consider Judaism in all of its facets from a rigorous and sincere perspective. After nearly a decade of regular publication, the journal was temporarily suspended in order to dedicate effort to the creation of a book-length collection of articles revolving around pluralism. The fruits of this labor resulted in the publication of *Studies in Judaism and Pluralism: Honoring the 60th Anniversary of the Academy for Jewish Religion* in 2015, edited by AJR faculty member Dr. Len Levin.

It is with great excitement that AJR resumes production and dissemination of *G'vanim* as an online journal dedicated to academic engagement with the past, present, and future of Judaism. In order to provide a wide array of approaches, the journal seeks contributions from established scholars, graduate students, as well as knowledgeable religious leaders and laity. The diversity of voices represented speaks to the institutions foundational value of, and emphasis on, pluralism. Through this publication, AJR strives to further one of its core institutional goals of serving the Jewish community and providing knowledge of Jews and Judaism to the general community.

Following on the heels of the Academy for Jewish Religion's Fall Retreat, which focused on applying wisdom from Jewish tradition to gender inequality, the present

volume assembles a variety of articles that revolve around the intersections between gender, sexuality, and Judaism. The volume opens with a reflection by Noam Sienna on the recent publication of *A Rainbow Thread: An Anthology of Queer Jewish Texts from the First Century to 1969*. As the first major translated collection of Jewish sources on Judaism and queer identities throughout much of Jewish history, this valuable resource provides an unprecedented look at what has often been a hidden dimension of Jewish experience. Sienna's contribution to *G'vanim* provides insight into the nature of this anthology, the process of collecting materials, and his aspirations for the impact of this work. The second article, by Rebecca Epstein-Levi, turns to contemporary Jewish sexual ethics to pose the provocative question, "is Judaism 'sex positive'?" Distinguishing between cautious and expansive voices within current discourse, Epstein-Levi traces the ways in which we can understand modern Jewish thinkers' use of the rhetoric of sexuality as a distinctive marker of Judaism. Turning to the arena of Modern Orthodox education, Evyatar Marienberg examines a number of guides produced for parents and students to teach and learn about sexuality. Marienberg locates these works in their socio-religious context, surveying the major topics addressed and ignored by a few of the most comprehensive guides available. The fourth article in the present volume, by Rona Matlow, confronts the challenges faced by trans Jews when considering or undergoing transition surgery. Matlow highlights a range of traditional Jewish sources that can be employed to support transitioning and argues for the importance of removing impediments to individuals pursuing this process. A final piece in this year's volume, by Ira Sheskin and Harriet Hartman, provides a statistical profile of LGBTQ Jewish households in America. Drawing upon a number of recent

surveys and quantitative data, these authors paint a sociological portrait of the somewhat surprising demographics of this important population. As a whole, the articles in this volume of *G'vanim* explore a wide variety of issues from a broad spectrum of approaches, offering our readers new perspectives for thinking about the intersection between sexuality, gender, and Judaism throughout history and especially in the modern day.

Matthew S. Goldstone
July, 2019