

## LETTERS

(05/18/2007)

### Agunah Alternatives

The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance recently placed ads in Jewish newspapers calling on the community, its rabbis and leaders to resolve the agunah issue. The ad was signed by over 2,000 individuals and filled six pages. Afterwards, a fair amount of discussion arose as to whether it was an effective use of funds and whether the money should have been spent on a more tangible goal.

The agunah issue is not new. Many agree that misuse of halacha to cruelly chain women to loveless marriages or extract unfair financial and custody concessions is a perversion of the spirit of the law. Yet, the problem remains; as long as the community remains uninvolved, and dayanim (religious judges) resist using their full force, it will be business as usual.

What can be done? The community must become active in creating momentum for change, and the rabbis must take up the responsibility to institute these changes.

Social sanctions should be routinely applied against recalcitrant husbands, including denying memberships and aliyot.

The community should join agunah activists in their work, such as holding protest rallies to embarrass recalcitrant husbands.

A percentage of shul membership revenues should be earmarked for a superfund to help agunot and ensure that the Orthodox community takes responsibility for the problem. And a national database should be created with the names and addresses of any individual whose spouse has filed for civil divorce at least nine months earlier and whose religious divorce is being held up. All Jewish organizations should refuse membership and/or honors to those appearing on the list.

These and other suggestions are not new. Even though it should be clear what needs to be done, it is also clear that without strong communal pressure, our rabbis will not take the initiative to end this scourge for all time.

If our call to action is heeded by those with the power to implement change, then placing the ad will have been money well spent.

**Audrey Trachtman**  
*New Rochelle, N.Y.*

