

## PART III: BEST PRACTICES

### *a. For Rabbis*

As a rabbi, having a former student, congregant, bride and groom, or community member go through divorce can be challenging. Rabbis may feel concerned about “choosing sides” and struggle to determine the best way to be involved. From a pastoral perspective, this is also an important time to show support to someone who will need spiritual and communal support now, more than ever.

On a logistical level, divorce comes with many challenges, including shifting childcare patterns, experiencing financial loss, going through the stressful process of the civil and religious divorce systems, and reshaping the person’s identity as an individual and member of a community. In some cases, a person may also be moving homes and navigating other challenges. Offering logistical support such as meals, carpool rides, and other items, can be very important at this time. Often, our communities rally around those who are sick or experiencing loss, but do not know what to do when a divorce arises. However, this can be yet another opportunity to show care and compassion in the form of something as simple as a hot meal. For rabbis seeking the best way to offer support, a direct conversation can be very valuable. Many divorcees have shared with us that being asked how the community can help and what role they would like the rabbi to play was meaningful and helpful.

In addition, getting a Jewish divorce involves navigating a complex system that most people have very limited familiarity with until they are in the position to use it. As the community rabbi, you can be an invaluable resource in explaining how the system works and guiding congregants to appropriate *batei din* and other resources, including the OSF helpline. You should explain the *get* process to community members before they enter *beit din* so that they can feel more comfortable going in. It is important that you know the *halachot* and process well so that you can provide them with the necessary information. Programs like OSF exist to help support rabbis as well, who face many difficult and complex issues throughout their communal service.

If you have served as the *mesader kiddushin* (the wedding officiant) for a couple, you have a unique opportunity to make an impact. While we hope that all marriages are healthy and lasting, when this is not the case, the officiating rabbi can play a powerful role in shepherding the marriage to its end. Sharing with both parties what Jewish law and basic *menschlichkeit* (good behavior) require can go a long way in encouraging couples to resolve their differences ethically.

Navigating divorces in community contexts is no easy task. It is important that you act and advise in a way that is best for the couple and their families, and not just one individual. You

should also be sure to only help in areas that you are able to, and not be afraid to suggest that someone go elsewhere for help when necessary.

Even after a divorce is completed, the divorcee will likely still need your support; being clear that you are still available to assist them as they navigate their post-divorce life will be helpful and comforting for them.

Managing these emotionally stressful and challenging cases may be difficult. It is important that at every stage of the process, you are clear and patient with whomever you are guiding. The person you are guiding may feel emotionally vulnerable and distressed, so it is important to be sensitive to this when explaining the various aspects of the divorce process.

*b. For Community Leaders and Members*

Divorcees often feel isolated from the Jewish community, since a significant amount of Jewish life and identity revolves around being married. It is important that you, as a community leader or member, are aware of this and make an effort to alleviate at least some of the isolation divorcees may feel. Refraining from gossiping about divorcees and making efforts to include them in communal spaces and in Shabbat and holiday meals is a great way to ensure that a divorcee can still feel that they are a part of the community.

Divorcees may also need financial, child-rearing, or other logistical support, and it is essential that these needs are met. Checking in with them and ensuring that they are not carrying too much weight on their own will be helpful for them; it will also send the message to them that although they are divorced, they are not alone and there are people there for them.

Lastly, if a divorcee has children of the opposite sex, offer to take them to shul and other communal or religious events. It is important that the children do not miss out on basic or significant components of a normative Jewish upbringing because of their parent's divorce. It is essential that they can experience as much of a normal childhood as possible, and community leaders and members can ensure that this need is met by taking action.

*c. For Batei Din*

*Dayanim* (rabbinic judges) and *eidim* (witnesses, plural for *eid*) play a profoundly meaningful role in guiding individuals through the *get* process. Many couples have shared that entering a *beit din* for the first time can feel unfamiliar, overwhelming, or even a bit intimidating. When the *dayanim* take a moment to outline the steps of the ceremony and its *halachic* framework, it often brings them a sense of steadiness and confidence. Several *batei din* have

commented that a brief explanation helps orient the couple and allows the experience to feel more approachable.

Although *dayanim* and *mesadrei gittin* are deeply experienced in this area, couples often arrive carrying a wide range of emotions. *Batei din* that strive to maintain a calm and focused atmosphere contribute significantly to the comfort of the divorcing individuals. Even small gestures — a patient tone, a quiet room, a clear explanation — can reassure individuals who may already feel vulnerable at this stage of their journey.

Many *dayanim* have shared that being mindful of the emotional dynamics present in the room helps them better support the couple as they navigate the sensitive moment of ending a marriage. The *halachot* and procedures provide a strong structure, and pairing that structure with thoughtful presence can help individuals feel that both the legal and human dimensions of the process are respected.

Those who adjudicate Jewish divorce carry meaningful responsibility, and many *dayanim* have found it valuable to broaden their familiarity with the range of issues that may arise in these cases. Areas such as domestic violence dynamics, *get*-refusal, child-safety considerations, financial abuse, and addiction can influence how a couple experiences the process. Organizations such as Shalom Task Force offer specialized training for rabbinic leadership and *batei din*.

Because Jewish and civil systems sometimes intersect during divorce, *batei din* may also find it helpful to develop a basic working awareness of key civil law considerations in their region, particularly those related to arbitration and family law. This familiarity can contribute to a smoother, more coordinated experience for the individuals involved.

For *dayanim* and rabbinic courts seeking additional support or resources, ORA's OSF helpline — along with the resources listed in the next section — is available as a collaborative partner. ORA deeply appreciates the essential role that *batei din* play in upholding the integrity of the *get* process, and hopes that these optional resources can help further strengthen and support the important work that you already do.