

Shabbat Parashat Vayikra

ט' אדר תשפ"ב

An ORA initiative



Agunah Awareness Shabbat

Ahead of International Agunah Day on Ta'anit Esther, we
dedicate this Shabbat to agunot around the world.

ORA | אורה

FREEING AGUNOT. PREVENTING ABUSE.

LETTER FROM ORA'S CEO

"With each agunah freed and each community reached, we are working to create a Jewish community where abuse is intolerable..."



Dear ORA Family,

There's no question about it: since the Covid-19 pandemic began, this has been a challenging time for all of us. It has now been more than two years since our lives have been profoundly disrupted, and as time marches on, maintaining our optimism is increasingly challenging.

Interestingly, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks offers a powerful differentiation between optimism and hope: "Optimism is the belief that things are going to get better. **Hope is the belief that we can make things better.**" At ORA, our team has worked to find new ways to operate as an organization, maintaining our staff culture from a distance and finding creative workarounds for the many situations complicated by the pandemic. From the women who are quarantined at home with abusers to those trying to leave with nowhere to go, to the agunot whose pursuit of a get has been disrupted, Covid-19 has deeply impacted the population we serve at ORA. As we move forward from the pandemic, let's make sure we don't forget those that are still isolated and struggling.

Agunot have always been vulnerable; now, they need our support more than ever. Despite these many challenges, there is hope, and we also have numerous accomplishments to celebrate.

ORA by numbers...

440 resolved cases	75 current cases	20,000 educated
732 Halachic Prenups	1000+ Helpline calls	96 College fellows

We have now resolved 350 agunah cases, in addition to helping another 90 people receive a get through our helpline. Our educational team has taught more than 29,000 students, attorneys, rabbis and community members about the abusive nature of get refusal and the importance of signing a Halachic Prenuptial Agreement.

With each agunah freed and each community reached, we are working to create a Jewish community where abuse is intolerable and where the respect and dignity of all are deeply valued.

We could not make this change without you: our supporters, donors, rally-goers, Facebook-commenters, event-hosters, community rabbis, and more. **Your courage in bringing this critical issue to the fore makes these changes possible.**

With your help, we can respond to this current challenge with more than mere optimism, but with hope for a better future. Here's to making a better world, together--one case at a time.

Sincerely,

Keshet A. Starr
Keshet



Keshet Starr, Esq.
CEO, ORA

LETTER FROM ORA'S ADVOCACY TEAM

"While we confront a terrible abuse of halacha daily, we are blessed to witness profound humanity at the same time."



Dear Friend,

As case advocates at ORA, we assist 75 agunot at any given time, tailoring a unique approach for every situation with a commitment to halacha, civil law, and professionalism. Collaborating with the husband, local rabbis, and community at large, we work with all parties to ensure the issuance of an unconditional get.

In our line of work, no two days are exactly alike.

One day we may be in communication with attorneys, speaking with rabbanim and making referrals, while another may entail publicizing a husband's refusal to give a get after amicable efforts have failed. **We are listening ears, sounding boards, and creative thinkers** during a trying time and handle every situation with discretion and care.

We have seen the devastating effects of get-refusal firsthand. A woman trapped in a dead marriage feels uncertain about her future-- will she ever be able to build a life for herself free from her abuser? Can she have children, or additional children, in a new relationship before her biological window closes? How will she support herself if she spends her savings on mounting legal bills?

In addition, she struggles to find her place in our family-centered society; she cannot relate to being married, but is certainly not divorced, either.

While we confront a terrible abuse of halacha daily, **we are blessed to witness profound humanity at the same time.** From the attorney who offers pro bono services to a struggling agunah, to the dayan who spent 18 hours straight negotiating a kosher get with a husband who just would not budge. And even more simply, the woman who once found herself in a bitter divorce and now volunteers her time to provide emotional support to some of ORA's agunot.

There are so many ways to make an impact and help further our work: sign a Halachic Prenup or Postnup, host an educational event in your community, support ORA's programming or offer professional services. We are inspired by the dedication to others and invite you to partner with us to help make get-refusal a thing of the past.

With Gratitude,
The ORA Advocacy Team

How I advocate...

"When I am on the brink of a breakdown from exhaustion from the unyielding discomfort that some seem to have with religious women, having different ideas and speaking about them, confidently-- I turn to our ancient texts for solace. It's what I was taught to do.

And today, proverbs saved me, held me up and embraced me. 'Speak up for the mute, for the rights of all unfortunate. Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.'

Interestingly, these are the verses that immediately precede Eishet Chayil, the Woman of Valor. To my mind, that juxtaposition is no coincidence."



Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt

@avitalrachel

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: A PERSONAL JOURNEY



"Truthfully, the mere fact that I am writing this story as a free woman is a miracle."

Trapped, chained and helpless: all words that surmise the Agunah Pandemic, and the emotional and spiritual bondage that I experienced in my search for a get. I remember entering Pesach, year after year – ironically the holiday of salvation and freedom – being chained. I remember celebrating birthdays and knowing I may never celebrate another one with a loving spouse. I remember worrying that I would never have the chance to have another child. And this is only a small part of my journey to freedom. While I waited for a get, many Rabbonim described my story as one of the worst get-refusal situations they had ever seen.

Truthfully, the mere fact that I am writing this story as a free woman is a miracle. "You are not going to get your get," and "I don't know how to help you" were sentences I heard repeatedly. I started to wonder if I would ever be free, or if being an agunah was a situation I would just have to live with. My case involved a multitude of intense and difficult factors including the fact that my former spouse chose a different religious path in which a get did not fit into his belief system.

This did not stop him from attempting monetary extortion of an exorbitant amount; somehow, there was room for this in his belief system. ORA came to fight for my freedom, along with numerous Rabbonim and many caring friends and supporters. It was not an easy process--and even today, my former husband falsely claims that my get is not kosher and that we are still connected.

ORA encouraged me to take action and stand up for my basic human right of freedom. The ORA staff and their contacts were with me every step of the way, including my advocate, Yonatan Klayman, and attorney, Eytan Kobre. Through our efforts, I won my fight for a get.

Today, nearly six years after I obtained my get, I am remarried with a second child. **Even now, ORA is a presence in my life and checks in as much as a family member would.** I am forever grateful to everyone who has facilitated my freedom, both those who I worked with directly and the many who labored behind the scenes. **My new husband and I chose to sign a Halachic Prenup** prior to marriage in 2018, in gratitude and respect to ORA. We chose to sign it out of love for each other and a devotion to the goal of preventing get-refusal worldwide. ORA was, once again, there to facilitate.

I am writing this letter to you standing in the light at the end of the tunnel-and every single person deserves that right.

Yakira Leah Dorfman



Yakira Leah, former agunah, mother of two, education enthusiast and passionate about motherhood.

DVAR TORAH: LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

CJ Glicksman,
Case Advocate



The Torah begins its discussion of the rituals of sacrificial atonement by focusing on the required procedure of the Kohen HaMashiach, the High Priest, upon his transgression of G-d's command.

אִם הִכְהִין הַמִּשְׁחִיחַ יִחַטֵּא לְאַשְׁמַת הָעָם וְהִקְרִיב עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֶשֶׁר חָטָא פֶּר בְּרִבְקָה תַּמִּים לַיהוָה לְחַטָּאת:

The Kohen Gadol is charged with offering an unblemished bullock upon sinning "לאשמת העם," for the guilt of the people. Unsurprisingly, many commentaries feel that the phrase "לאשמת העם" begs further explication. Why, in this verse, is the guilt of the nation being mentioned in relation to the sin offering of the Kohen? **What does the guilt of Bnei Yisrael have to do with the Kohen Gadol's transgression?** Of particular note are the explanations of Sforno and Rashbam, who describe these words in ways that seem to be diametrically opposed.

Rashbam claims that according to its simple understanding, the phrase "לאשמת העם" refers to the sins of Bnei Yisrael that most certainly will result from this transgression of the Kohen Gadol. **The Kohen Gadol is responsible not only for his own transgression, but also for the transgressions of those who look towards him as an exemplar of what is right.** As an ethical teacher and leader, the Kohen Gadol is responsible for the sins of his people; they learn from him and follow his example.

Sforno, however, claims that "לאשמת העם" emphasizes the guilt of Bnei Yisrael when the Kohen Gadol sins. He supports this claim by quoting Brachot, chapter 5 mishna 5, which states that a blunder on the part of the leader of communal prayer, highlights the iniquities of his congregants. In the same way, the sin of the Kohen Gadol, whose transgressions should be few and far between, must indicate a lacking in Bnei Yisrael. According to this explanation, **it is not the leader who is responsible for the iniquity of his congregation, but the congregation who is responsible for the iniquity of its leader.**

These two explanations of the phrase "לאשמת העם" are paradigms for the ways in which the agunah crisis has shifted as Jewish communal life in the Diaspora has become less centralized and the modern world has made travel and communication easier and safer. When orthodox Jewish life revolved primarily around small communities and shtetls, it was the Jewish leadership who was responsible for solving the problem of get-refusal.

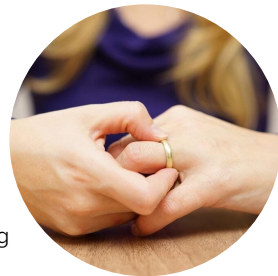
Nowadays, outside of the state of Israel, the Beth Din system has much less legal and social clout. Get-refusers can ignore a given Beth Din and move to a community that has either never heard of them or that disregards their get-refusal. **They can find refuge in shuls that support their get-refusal and build online communities with fellow abusers.** Batei Din do not have the ability to enforce their rulings, leaving agunot with very little recourse. Often, the only way to increase an agunah's chances of being freed is for her to turn to members of her community for help. No longer is the upholding of communal standards solely dependent on the community's leadership; **the responsibility of solving the agunah crisis in the modern Diaspora falls heavily on the community itself.**

Fortunately, there are practical ways in which the community can make a tangible difference to help the agunah crisis. Most obvious are ways **the community can intervene in situations of get-refusal is by clearly expressing unequivocal nonacceptance of get-refusal and domestic abuse,** staying informed of any situations of get-refusal in the community, and supporting those whose gets are being withheld.

Just as important are preventative measures, such as standardizing prenuptial agreements and promoting education about get-refusal and domestic abuse more generally, particularly within young communities. The Sforno's affirmation of communal responsibility is not a hollow platitude but an indirect call for action. The sin of the Kohen Gadol beseeches introspection and calls for action on the part of his people. In the same way, **when we see the plight of those who are shackled to dead marriages with no simple means of escape, we must examine what we are doing to help them** and, as a community, make sure that we do anything in our power to remedy the crisis.

ONE STEP FORWARD: A JEWISH DIVORCE HELPLINE

We're here to help:
844-OSF-LINE (673-5463)
onestepforward@getora.org



What are my options? Where should I go? How do I proceed at this point in time?

Questions like these are among the many that individuals ask themselves when contemplating divorce or navigating the Jewish divorce process. Through ORA's helpline, we offer a **safe and supportive space** for individuals to ask and address these questions. We're here for men and women at any stage of the process- if they're just starting to think about divorce or already separated for years. We empower our callers to move ahead in their journey and feel validated with regards to their many concerns and frustrations that they may be experiencing.

One Step Forward helps **more than three hundred women and men each year** who reach out for information, guidance, and support. Well over 90% of our callers report that they experienced some form of domestic abuse and unfortunately that abuse often continues into the divorce process in various forms, including get-refusal.

Through our helpline, callers receive critical information about the Beth Din process and what to expect as they proceed forward in whichever direction they wish to move. Callers can also receive information about local resources that might be helpful to them, including legal aid, social services, peer support opportunities, and more. And, of course, callers have the unique opportunity to speak with a professional in an environment suffused with **validation, care, and compassion**.

The divorce process, and especially situations of get-refusal, can be very difficult and isolating. You shouldn't have to go through this alone. Reach out to us and let us support you through this journey.

Don't Forget:

...fighting for a get is time consuming:

Between Beit Din and civil court, juggling work and childcare, things like cooking dinner and arranging play dates can feel near impossible. Every person's needs are different, but for many agunot, offering to cook dinner or babysit can be incredibly helpful and supportive.

...it's not about taking sides; it's about advocating for what's right:

It can be tricky when friends go through a divorce. How many times have we heard, "there are two sides to every story." But when it comes to get refusal, the get is openly turned into a weapon for control and abuse. Just as we wouldn't turn a blind eye to other forms of domestic violence, we must treat get refusal for what it is-- a form of abuse.

...when you're planning your next Shabbat/Chag meal:

For many families, Shabbat is a respite from the hustle and bustle of the week, and a chance to reconnect with loved ones and community. But for many agunot, Shabbat can be quite isolating. Extending an invitation for a meal can go a long way.

...when organizing community events and programs:

Agunot don't fit into the stark boxes that we often construct of married, divorced, or single community members. Make sure events are inclusive regardless of relationship status.

WHAT CAN I DO TODAY TO PREVENT FUTURE GET REFUSAL?



Sign a Halachic Prenup or Postnup!

The Halachic prenup or postnup is a contract that couples should sign in order to prevent get refusal.

It has two primary elements:

1. **Binding arbitration:** Each spouse agrees to appear before a specific, predetermined beit din and abide by its decision with respect to the get.
2. **Spousal support obligation:** The prenup or postnup contains a financial disincentive to get-refusal, amounting to \$54,750 per year, which is enforceable in civil court.

A **reciprocal version** of the prenup or postnup helps ensure that both men and women are protected from abuse of the get.

How does signing a prenup or postnup help prevent get-refusal?

When the Jewish community makes the signing of the Halachic Prenup a community norm, then everyone who needs it will have it. No one signs the prenup because they think they will need it in the future, but by signing a prenup, **you are normalizing it and make it a standard practice in our community.**

What does signing a Prenup express?

- "I would never take advantage of you by using the get as a weapon."
- "I will not manipulate halacha to my advantage."
- "No matter what happens between us, the get will NOT be an issue for us."
- "I respect you."

Prevention through Education: Q&A for Youth

What is an Agunah? I've heard my friends talking about it, they said they've seen it on social media.

An agunah is literally a "chained woman," and refers to a woman who is stuck in her Jewish marriage. There are generally 2 types of agunot:

- 1) A classical agunah situation is when a husband is missing and therefore he can't give his wife a get.
- 2) The other type is what you probably heard circulating on social media- where we know where a husband is, but he's refusing to give his wife a get- a document of Jewish divorce.

What does it mean that a husband is refusing to give his wife a get?

There are 2 ways a woman can get divorced by Jewish Law:

- 1) If she becomes a widow.
- 2) If her husband gives her a divorce document, called a get.

Therefore, if a husband refuses to give his wife a get, she is still halachically married to him.

Why does this matter?

If a man or woman wants to move on with their life, but is stuck in a marriage, it can be very difficult- religiously, emotionally, and socially.

What can we do if someone won't give a get?

In these situations, rabbinic courts ask the Jewish community not to associate with someone who is refusing to give a get. For example, a "get refuser" shouldn't be counted in a minyan, receive an aliyah, or be invited for Shabbat meals. The goal is to help convince them to free their wives.



“I am an **ORA Campus Fellow** because I want to help educate.”
-Penina

TEHILLIM:
PRAYING FOR THE
FREEDOM OF ALL AGUNOT

ORA אורא
FREEING AGUNOT. PREVENTING ABUSE.

Aviva bat Esther
Aviva Rivka bat Tzivia Dina
Batya Ruchama bat Sarah Nina
Chana Ahuva bat Sora Nena
Chana bat Chava Breindel
Chana bat Esther
Chana bat Shifra
Chana bat Tzivia Miriam
Chana Nagila bat Bracha Leah
Charna bat Sarah Tzirel
Charna Reizel bat Rochel Leah
Chava bat Chaya Sarah
Chaya Lonna bat Rivka Shulamit Menucha
Chaya Rachel bat Hadassa Esther Leah
Devorah bat Sol Elkabetz
Devorah Leah bat Yocheved
Devorah Rivka bat Yitta
Dina Miriam bat Penina
Esther bat Perel
Esther Leah bat Chaya
Ettel bat Chava
Hadassa Yata Pesha bat Malka Basha
Haya Sara Rivkah bat Tirza Rachel
Jaya bat Nechama
Leah bat Nuzhah
Leah bat Rita Teresa Frieda
Margalit bat Lillian
Marganit bat Chana
Mazal bat Ifrada
Michal Gabriella bat Rivka
Miriam bat Chana
Miriam Bat Ester Malka
Nechama Devorah bat Esther Malka

Nuphar bat Yael
Orah Bina bat Adina Esther
Pessel Gittel bat Rivka
Pnina Fanny bat Chana
Rachel Bat Elena
Rachel bat Yona
Raizel bat Sarah Reva
Rivka Dina bat Shaindel Shifra
Rochel bat Leah Basya
Rochel Golda bat Feiga Esther
Sahar bat Sara
Sara bat Elka
Sara bat Esther
Sara Rivka bat Bluma
Sara Rivka bat Yaffa Nechoma
Sarah bat Judith
Sarah Tania Perla Sultana bat Kochava
Sheindel Golda bat Sarah
Sarit bat Yehudit
Sharon bat Malca
Sharon bat Rivka
Shira Yaffa bat Rachel Miriam
Shoshana bat Sara
Shterna Sara bat Yehudit
Sima bat Esther
Sofy bat Sarah
Tamara bat Magda
Toibe bat Bluma
Tova Rachel bat Matte Chana
Tzivia Sarah bat Gedula
Yael bat Simcha
Yaffa Yovla bat Leah Miriam
Yafit bat Shahin
Yehudit bat Iska

Want to learn more about ORA's work or get involved?

Please reach out, we'd love to hear from you!

Email us at info@getora.org or visit our website: www.getora.org



@oraagunot



@get.ora

An ORA Initiative



Agunah Awareness
Shabbat