

Shabbat Parashat Pekudei

ו' אדר ב' תשפ"ד • March 15-16, 2024

An ORA initiative



Agunah Awareness Shabbat

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

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LETTER FROM ORA'S CEO



At the same time, *agunot* continue to call for help, *beit din* and court hearings continue, and women continue to come together in our support groups for mutual encouragement.

While I haven't been in school for a while, I still think of time in terms of the academic calendar—the freshness of restarting school and work routines in the fall (after all, you never get too old to buy new office supplies!), **the endurance needed to overcome the long, cold stretch in the middle of the year, and the promise of freedom and sunshine as spring blossoms into summer.**

Needless to say, the 2023-2024 year is so far proving to be very different than expected. Like so many of you, I went into the *Simchas Torah* ready to savor the last days of *yom tov* before returning to “normal life”—**only to discover on October 7th that life would never be normal again.** At ORA, we have been watching the events in Israel unfold in shock, all the while balancing the trauma and sadness on the news with the difficult stories we hear every day.

In these strange times, I have been thinking a lot about what changes, and what stays the same. The war in Israel has presented a new challenge for our community, the scale of which I have not seen before in my lifetime. **At the same time, *agunot* continue to call for help, *beit din* and court hearings continue, and women continue to come together in our support groups for mutual encouragement.** In this very changed world, *agunot* still need our help. **The *agunah* issue continues to matter.**

I am often asked how I handle engaging with such a difficult topic, especially when the world outside feels equally foreboding. My honest answer is that I am still here, working with *agunot*, because I have learned that as much as things seem to stay the same, **change is possible and it is happening.** In the past decade alone, I have seen our community bravely grapple with *get*-refusal-taking strong stands on cases, normalizing the signing of *Halachic Prenups*, and defining *get*-refusal as the domestic abuse it is. ORA has now helped nearly 500 women receive their *gets*; women who are building new lives and new families, in joy and freedom.

Some things will never change—the pull of the seasons, the delight of school supply shopping, the challenges in the world around us. **But *get*-refusal can change.**

Can you imagine a world where the Jewish divorce is never used as a weapon? Where all of us hold the freedom and dignity we deserve? **We can. Join us in building that world—because some things never change, but some things must.**

Sincerely,

Keshet Starr



Keshet Starr, Esq.
CEO, ORA

ORA has been here through it all. Even as our hearts rise and fall with the news from Israel, ORA's caseload, outreach, education and prevention programs and support has increased and grown. We assure our clients that we will always stand with them – and ORA and its remarkable staff has kept that promise, often under difficult personal circumstances – and addressed new issues. Whether those are threats that *agunot* receive on social media, or attacks and bullying designed to make us retreat from our advocacy, we are constantly developing new strategies and achieving new success.

ORA has successfully liberated 489 *agunot*.

We always remember that our *Neviim* (Prophets) tell us that our community is judged by how we treat the most vulnerable among us.

Every day, ORA reaffirms anew our commitment to protect and support those who refused their freedom. Join us. Stand up, stand proud and stand with us as we protect *agunot* around the world in the diaspora and in Israel.



Michelle Greenberg-Kobrin, Esq.
Chair of the Board, ORA

Since ORA's founding in 2002, we're proud to report:

489 resolved cases	75 current <i>agunah</i> cases	31,000 people educated
905 Halachic Prenups	1000+ annual helpline calls	113 college fellows

THE PLIGHT OF AGUNOT: OUR COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY



Rabbi Jonathan Muskat

Rabbi of the Young Israel of Oceanside
Executive Committee Member, RCA.

Our holy Torah believes in the beauty of marriage. At the dawn of creation, the Torah states, "על-כן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת-אָבִיו, וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ, וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לִבְשָׁר אֶחָד" or "therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife so that they become one flesh". The process of marriage begins with קידושין, which literally means "sanctity." **The bond that husband and wife create in the institution of marriage is a holy bond.** Naturally, in the context of marriage, a couple will face challenges and the Torah advocates that a couple rise to face these challenges and try to overcome them, to use them as opportunities to further strengthen their relationship.

That being said, there is a *halachic* institution called גירושין, or divorce. **The Torah understands that under some circumstances, it is not healthy for a couple to remain together** and we recognize the separation between husband and wife with a legal document called a גט. This document will allow each party to move forward with his or her personal life and perhaps start a relationship with a new partner.

Unfortunately, sometimes one spouse is unwilling to deliver or receive a גט, sometimes as an act of spite and sometimes as an act of extortion to achieve a more favorable divorce agreement. **Halacha believes that this refusal is a form of abuse.** The Jewish community has a *halachic* obligation of לא תעמוד על דם רעך, of not standing idly by when a friend is in pain. When the marriage is functionally over, we must do whatever we can to help facilitate the delivery of a גט when one spouse refuses to deliver or receive a גט.

What does this responsibility of לא תעמוד על דם רעך look like in practice? First, it means that every community must encourage every couple before they get married to **sign a halachic prenup**. If they didn't sign a halachic prenup then they should sign a **halachic postnup**. In fact, a few years ago, our community had a "postnup party." We invited Rav Mordechai Willig to deliver a shiur to our community and he shared with us the history of how he gained broad *halachic* consensus to the *halachic* prenup. After the shiur, many couples who hadn't signed a *halachic* prenup when they got married signed a *halachic* postnup.

If a couple did not sign a *halachic* prenup, and one spouse does not want to deliver or receive a גט, then the community must get involved if doing so will be helpful. It is important that the spouse seeking the גט go through the process of going to a reputable *Beit Din*, like the *Beit Din of America*, and having the *Beit Din* summon the recalcitrant spouse to come to court. **The Beit Din will rule on whether the husband should deliver the גט.** The *Beit Din* will need to clarify that the marriage is functionally over and it will need to provide both parties the opportunity to appear in court to facilitate the delivery of the גט.

In Eastern Europe over one hundred years ago, the גט was signed after all the terms of the divorce were finalized. Therefore, a *Beit Din* today may often order the delivery of a גט at the time when the divorce agreement is finalized if it looks like that will happen in the short term. If the *Beit Din* goes through the process of clarifying and concluding that the marriage is functionally over and the sides are not planning to sign a divorce agreement in the short term, the *Beit Din* should order the husband to deliver and the wife to receive the גט. If a spouse refuses to comply with the order of the *Beit Din*, the ***Beit Din* will publish a seruv**, which is a document asserting that the spouse refuses to either deliver or receive a גט.

What is the next step? Should communities publish the *seruv* and use communal pressure to convince the spouse to comply? The answer is maybe. When I have been faced with this situation, I told the wife in each case who was trying to secure a גט that I will do what ORA tells me to do. I am not an expert in how to leverage communal pressure to convince a recalcitrant spouse to deliver or receive a גט. ORA is an organization that knows best practices in how to most effectively use the *seruv* to help pressure a spouse to deliver or receive a גט, as the case may be. For example, is it better to publicize the *seruv* and create an adversarial situation immediately or is it better to use the threat of publicizing the *seruv* as a means to pressure a spouse to deliver or receive a גט? **I would rather that the experts at ORA answer that question in each particular case.**

I remember one time when I had informed my shul's executive board about a *seruv* against an individual. I wanted to inform the members of the board that I planned on publicizing the *seruv* and the implications of doing that. The entire executive board was very supportive. At the last minute, a representative from ORA advised me not to publicize the *seruv* as she believed that there would be a more effective way to secure the גט. Indeed, a few days later, the גט was delivered.

The plight of agunot is nothing short of heartbreaking. As communities, we should do all that we can to alleviate that plight, including creating a culture that every married couple in our community sign either a *halachic* prenup or postnup agreement. We should encourage couples going through a divorce to have a reputable *Beit Din* facilitate the delivery of a גט. We must understand that just like with secular court proceedings, the process in securing a גט or, unfortunately at times, a *seruv*, may take some time. At the end of the day, communities must be prepared to lean on wonderful organizations like ORA and **leverage the power of the community** to apply pressure when necessary and advisable to hopefully alleviate suffering of *agunot* in our community.

Rabbi Muskat received his *semicha*, a Masters degree in Medieval Jewish History and an undergraduate degree in Jewish Studies and Speech and Drama, from Yeshiva University. Rabbi Muskat also received a law degree from New York University School of Law and served as a corporate attorney in a New York law firm for four and a half years. Rabbi Muskat is married to Dr. Yael Muskat and they are blessed with five children and five adorable grandchildren.

SIX CONVERSATIONS THAT COULD HELP PREVENT DIVORCE

Rachel Tuchman, LMHC

@rachel_tuchman_lmhc
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When you plan to spend the rest of your life with someone it is important to make sure you are compatible. It is helpful and necessary to know where your partner stands on both the big and small issues. **While you don't have to agree on every little thing it is important that the big things are aligned and that you have the skills to talk about any challenges that can arise.** Even if you happen to agree on everything now, it may not always be that way and you want to set the foundation for healthy discussion and communication. Exploring where you and your partner stand on issues before you get married can help prevent issues down the road that could contribute to marital dissatisfaction or divorce. Research indicates that people who share the same values communicate effectively and have a good friendship are more likely to **enjoy their romantic relationship and build a marriage that lasts.**

Some of the important topics I suggest to couples to consider initially covering are finances, family, relationship, spirituality and religion, sexuality and intimacy and kids. **Addressing these topics with your partner** (not their teacher or the matchmaker) can help you decide if you really want to marry this person. It can also help you identify any red flags and green flags (those are important too!). Pay attention to the process of communication between you and your partner, not just the conclusion. **How these conversations go can speak volumes of the other person.**

Below are some suggestions of questions to ask for each of the categories listed above. Note that this list is not comprehensive. There are many more topics that can be covered but these are a good start. As much as you can cover before getting engaged or married, the better. **Additionally, before you ask your partner these questions, consider first asking yourself.** If we cannot identify our own values and needs it becomes very difficult for our significant other to know us and meet our needs. It is possible that you may not be able to answer some of these questions pre-marriage but it is still important to become aware of these talking points as you begin to build the foundation of your relationship. These questions are not all or nothing and can be asked in a variety of ways that are still constructive.

Finances:

- What are your attitudes and beliefs about money?
- How was money handled in your home?
- Who will handle the bills?
- How do you feel about saving/investing?
- How do you want to handle any wedding money you receive?
- What will the structure of your bank account(s) be? Joint or separate?
- What are your expectations about each of you working?
- What are your feelings about having debt?
- How do you feel about spending money?
- What are your current spending habits?

Family:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about your respective families of origin?
- How do you feel about your partner's family?
- Is it important for either of you to live near family?
- What do you see your relationship with your family of origin looking like once you are married?
- What are some healthy boundaries you want to have in place?
- What are some things that should stay between you as a couple vs. things that are okay to be open with family about?

Relationship:

- Why is marriage important to you?
- Will you sign a halachic prenup?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- What does a healthy marriage look like to you?
- How do you expect to interact with friends as a couple?
- What are your expectations about relationships outside of the marriage like friendships, coworkers?
- What is your communication style?
- How will you include your partner in decision making?
- Do you accept your partner's current lifestyle choices?

Spirituality/ Religion:

- How do you feel about religion?
- How important are your religious beliefs or spiritual beliefs to you?
- What, if any, spirituality or religion do you want to practice in your home?
- Discuss specific rituals of religion and how you'll be observing them (like laws of family purity)
- Will you have a spiritual/religious mentor? Do you agree on who this person is?
- Are you comfortable with your partner's current level of observance?
- Are you expecting/hoping for change?

Sexuality and intimacy:

- What makes you feel loved and safe?
- What does intimacy mean to you?
- How do you want your partner to show love and affection?
- What are your attitudes and expectations about intimacy?
- Can you discuss physical intimacy openly with each other?
- If you have issues, who will you seek help from?
- What are your feelings about birth control methods? Is there someone you will be speaking to about this?

Kids:

- Do you want to have children?
- What size family would you ideally like to have? (barring any issues)
- How soon do you want to start a family?
- How will you prioritize your career in relation to your family?
- Do you want to be working parents or will one of you stay home?
- How do you envision your role with your child/children?
- What are your views on the division of labor in your home?
- What kind of parent do you want to be?
- How will you raise/educate your children?

Continued on the next page →

There are many more topics that can and should be covered and ideally with a licensed therapist. As a mental health provider working in the Jewish community, I firmly believe this should become the standard in our communities.

Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz, Director of *semicha* at Yeshiva University's RIETS program and Rabbi at Beis Knesses of North Woodmere, has been vocal about his belief in the value of **pre-marital counseling**. In discussion with me he said that he believes that pre-marital counseling can help a couple discuss these important topics in a constructive way. At the same time, it establishes a relationship with a therapist in the event that a couple finds that they need therapeutic support. **This is important because a couple is more likely to seek help sooner when they have a connection with a therapist versus a couple who doesn't and instead allow things to fester.**

If you have children who are getting married, encourage them to set up a few sessions with a therapist for pre-marital counseling where they can discuss these topics and gain skills to start their marriage off on the right foot. If you are thinking about engagement, currently engaged or even in the first few months of your marriage, you can and should consider this for yourself and your partner.

Some great reading on this topic is *I Want This To Work: An inclusive guide to navigating the most difficult relationship issues we face in the modern age* by Elizabeth Earnshaw, any books by Drs. John and Julie Gottman and *Hold Me Tight* by Dr. Sue Johnson. If you are on Instagram a wonderful account to follow is @thesecurerelationship (Julie Menanno).

We can lay the groundwork for healthy and fulfilling marriages and families and literally change generations to come. It can start with you.

Rachel Tuchman is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) with over ten years of experience. She has worked with many diverse populations including incarcerated women at Riker's Island Correctional Facility, kids and adults with developmental delays, kids with behavior issues, overwhelmed parents looking for skills and support, teens struggling with the pressures of adolescence and life in general, adults going through difficult life circumstances (divorce, infidelity, phase of life challenges), individuals struggling with their relationship with food and their bodies and women experiencing infertility.

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 everyone deserves a healthy and safe relationship!"



We believe that no **matter what stage** you, your friend, your co-worker, or your loved one is in- **they don't have to go through it alone.**

Our support offerings include: art therapy workshops, financial literacy classes, crash courses in divorce, multiple support groups and more.

We also understand that contentious divorces can impact family members as well. If your loved one is going through this, we are here to support you, and connect you with others who can relate.

Reach out to
supportgroup@getora.org
for more information

ORA אורה
FREEDOM AGUNOT. PREVENTING ABUSE.

Virtual Support Groups

Divorce often leads to a profound sense of loneliness, stemming from the emotional, social, and lifestyle changes it brings. Navigating get-refusal along with all the other challenges can feel helplessly overwhelming.

You don't have to go through this alone.

Support groups play a crucial role, providing a safe and understanding space where individuals can share their experiences, gain valuable insights, and forge connections with others facing similar challenges.

Early Stages Support Group

This remarkable community is designed for women who are **contemplating divorce** or find themselves in the **early stages** of the Jewish divorce process.

Agunah Support Group

This intimate group is tailored for women **currently** dealing with get-refusal and navigating the Beth Din process.

We kindly ask all members participating in this group to fully commit to attending every session.

Post-Get Support Group

Processing the experience of Get-refusal can be overwhelming. **This group provides a safe space** for women who are dealing with the unique challenges that may come up.

We kindly ask all members participating in this group to fully commit to attending every session.



What are support group members saying?

"This ORA support group is the first place where I feel like I really relate to the other women and I feel like I'm connected to something."

"This group was very informative and done with sensitivity."

"I am so grateful for the support I received and couldn't have imagined weathering the storm without ORA."



There is a unique bond that exists with women in our support groups. True friendships have developed, and **the support that members provide each other outside of our groups is invaluable.** If you are interested in being matched with someone in a similar situation as you, please reach out.

PAINTING BY A WOMAN WAITING FOR HER GET



BREAKING FREE

Holding onto hope- holding a bird representing peace and letting a butterfly go, representing new beginnings.

I'M HERE FOR RAV NOTA



Rivka Gross
ORA Board Member

This year, I was honored to join the board of ORA. After following the organization's growth for a while, and deeply supporting its mission and approach, there was no question that when I got the call, I would answer. Having known Keshet Starr for a while, I was excited by the opportunity to learn from her leadership. The timing was good, too- for the first time in my adult life, the pressures of a full time career and raising children had evolved; I finally had the time to focus on what mattered to me, and an organization like ORA felt like a great fit.

There is another layer to this story, though. Just under two years ago, my grandfather, Rav Nota Greenblatt Zt'l passed away. Rav Nota was the spiritual leader of Memphis, Tennessee. Having arrived there at the tender age of 23, he helped to build the community, started the Hebrew Day School, and saw to the broader spiritual needs of the community, in both formal and informal Rabbinic roles. Outside of his work locally, my grandfather also took upon himself to provide religious and spiritual support to American Jewish communities. Known as 'The Rabbi of the South', Rav Nota spent 4 days a week on the road for most of his adult life and well into his elder years; building *mikvaot*, stringing *eruvim*, supervising food production plants, performing circumcisions, and providing personal and *halachic* guidance to rabbis and community leaders in large and small cities across the great plains.

If there was one thing that defined Rav Nota, it was his personal commitment to preserving the sanctity of Jewish marriage. Widely regarded as the halachic leader of our generation with regard to the laws of *Gittin* (divorce), **Rav Nota took upon himself to ensure that any Jewish woman that needed a *halachic* divorce could obtain one. There is no count of the number of *gittin* that he wrote, or the miles he traveled (free of charge, mostly) in search of recalcitrant husbands who hadn't prioritized giving a *get* to their ex-wife.** Outside of the hundreds of *gittin* written in rabbi's studies across the country, there were *gittin* written in prison (more than one), in a room full of Columbian drug cartel members, in a mafia-owned warehouse, and in a non-kosher diner. Rav Nota gave his life to ensuring that every Jewish woman that needed to move forward from her marriage had the opportunity to do so. His *gittin* were so prevalent, and reached so many corners of the Jewish world, that twice while I was in seminary in Israel, random strangers at my table at shabbat dinners, when hearing that my last name was Greenblatt, asked me if I was related to the man that wrote their divorce. I couldn't think of any better way to honor this holy man's legacy than by doing my part to support the work of ORA.

Nervously, I joined my first board meeting. There were eight of us present, and we were asked to start by introducing ourselves for the benefit of the new members, and sharing our impetus for joining the board. I dutifully announced myself and gave my speech about honoring my grandfather's legacy, and we settled into the agenda. A few minutes later, a late arriving board member jumped onto our zoom call. We interrupted to get acquainted, and Keshet asked him to share his impetus for doing this work. "Well," he said, "I'm from Memphis, Tennessee originally, and my rabbi's name was Rav Nota Greenblatt...." Zaidy, your legacy is strong. We are here; standing for the sanctity of Jewish marriage, for the rights of Jewish women, and for you. May your memory be a blessing to us all.

Rivka Gross is a board member at ORA. A former SVP at Optum and startup founder, she currently advises early and mid-stage healthcare technology startups and accelerators. She lives in Woodmere, NY with her family.



ONE STEP FORWARD: A JEWISH DIVORCE HELPLINE

We're here to help.
**You can call us at ANY stage of the
divorce process.**

844-OSF-LINE (673-5463)
onestepforward@getora.org

Do I need to be an Agunah to call ORA for help?

"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 the 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.



חירות

CHEIRUT SPOTLIGHT: CHEIRUT CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU!



I co-founded Go Getters due to a personal connection. Nearly 30 years ago, during my two-year stay in Cape Town, I formed a close bond with a couple. Eventually, the husband found a girlfriend, Christie, who fell pregnant just before she married someone else. The wife identified that the baby looked like her own children and demanded a paternity test. Legal disputes ensued, leading to a civil divorce and court-ordered child maintenance.

Despite court directives, **the husband refused to grant his wife a get.** Learning of his plans for a civil marriage with the other woman, I enlisted Balu Nivison, co-founder of Go Getters, to address the situation. **Together, we collaborated with the Union of Jewish Women to establish Go Getters – the SA Gett Network.** As the husband demanded a hefty sum for the *get* due to his wife's affluent background, the *Beth Din* acted swiftly, excommunicating him (*cherem*) in South Africa. Leveraging my role as a publicist, I ensured the story gained widespread attention in both social and traditional media, becoming the most-read article in our national Jewish newspaper. Facing infamy, the couple emigrated to the UK. **We alerted the London Beth Din and collaborated with them and the South African Beth Din to apply pressure.** After lengthy negotiations, the London Beth Din imposed a 24-hour deadline, **leading the husband to relent after two years of resistance- the get was given!**

Collaboration played a pivotal role in the resolution of this case. This partnership with the London Beth Din and every individual who participated in the *cherem* underscores the significance of individuals pooling their strengths, resources, and expertise to address the multifaceted challenges associated with *get* refusal.

Finally, I feel compelled on behalf of the Jewish community of South Africa to apologize for our ANC government. Their behavior at the International Court of Justice and their welcoming of Hamas and their warm relationship with Iran is simply surreal. They are a disgrace and I wish them nothing but failure in all their endeavors. In October last year, our chief rabbi, Rabbi Warren Goldstein ordered that shuls may no longer pray for our government on Shabbos mornings. We now pray for our country and the people of South Africa, but not for our government.

Michelle K Blumenau, co-founder of Go Getters, the South African Gett Network



I'M AN AGUNAH.
I'VE BEEN WAITING
FOR A GET FOR OVER
4.5 YEARS.
MOSTLY IN SILENCE.

I do my *hishtadlus*, with no expectation that it will free me or help me in any way. I am completely dependent on *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for my salvation.

My name is Sara. I'm your neighbor, your child's teacher, I'm in your carpool, I see you at the market and at school events. **I look like you, dress like you, and act like you.** My kids look like yours, act like yours, and do the same extracurricular activities as yours do. **But, we're very different.**

I'm an agunah. I've been waiting for a get for over 4.5 years. Mostly in silence. My story was very public years ago when things "erupted", but it's been pretty quiet since then. Most people assume things worked themselves out, that I got a *get*, and we're quietly moving on with our lives. In actuality, each day we're fighting new battles, trying desperately to secure my freedom.

The challenge of an agunah is bitachon (trust). It appears that a man holds the key to my freedom. That He alone has the power to release me from this marriage and from this fate. Until he frees me, I will be chained to this dead marriage. My husband and I haven't spoken to each other face to face in over 4.5 years, and yet according to halacha we're 100% married and I'm unable to move on with my life, unable to have companionship, unable to have a partner to live my life with and raise my family with. **This man appears to have all the power in the world, over my life at least.**

Several years ago when this story began my teacher, Sara Yoheved Rigler, told me **"this isn't coming FROM your husband, it is from Hashem and it is coming THROUGH your husband."** Those words were truly a gift that have served me each and every day since she uttered them.

Each day it is my job to acknowledge that the situation I'm in is from Hashem, and that only He can change things for me. Each day, I must remember that my life isn't the way it is because of what happened yesterday or last week or last year, but rather that in this moment, Hashem decided that this is what is best for me. It says in *birchos kriyas shema* "וְבִטּוּבוֹ מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל יוֹם תְּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית" and in His goodness, He renews every day perpetually the work of creation. Just like the sun rose this morning because this morning Hashem decided it would be good for the sun to rise again today, so too, **the challenge I'm experiencing right now is the challenge Hashem feels is best for me, for whatever reason, in this moment.**

While we don't ask for challenges, I know that our challenges shape us and strengthen us, and in fact they catapult us to the highest levels of our being. I joke that I'm in a PhD program for *bitachon*, and as soon as Hashem decides that I have passed the course, I will graduate. Where I am is exactly where I'm supposed to be, because Hashem, my loving caring all powerful G-d, decided this is **the best thing for me right now in this moment.**

What's my role and what's your role in this *agunah* crisis? My job is twofold:

1. **I need to do everything I can to get myself out of this situation.** *Hishtadlus* (Effort). That means I'm in touch with lawyers and Rabbis and *Bais Din* and advocates. Not a week goes by that I'm not speaking to someone about what we can do now.

2. While I do this, I need to remember that while there may be a correlation between my actions and results we may see, there is no causation. **Meaning, I'm completely aware that my yeshua (salvation) will come only from Hashem, at exactly the right moment.** I do my *hishtadlus*, with no expectation that it will free me or help me in any way. **I am completely dependent on Hakadosh Baruch Hu for my salvation.**

4.5 years ago I was fortunate enough to have a session with Rabbi Efim Svirsky, a spiritual therapist in Eretz Yisroel. My teacher had suggested I reach out to him to discuss aspects of my marriage. Somehow the session shifted seemingly off topic and Rabbi Svirsky taught me the fundamentals of *emunah* which changed my life forever. He taught me:

1. **Hashem is all powerful.**

2. **Hashem loves me unconditionally**

3. **Hashem is with me at every moment**

It seems so simple, so basic, but when you think about it—these concepts are life changing. Hashem can do absolutely anything. Not only that, but **He loves me so much**, He actually would do absolutely anything. And, Hashem is with me at every moment, even now in my sadness, in my pain, in my suffering. **He sees it all.** If He can change things, He loves me enough to do it, and He sees my current suffering—why isn't He working His magic and miraculously changing my life? **It must mean that how things are right now are what Hashem knows is best for me, even though I may not like it.**

What can you do to help me?

I got a call earlier this week from a woman in my community. Our children go to the same school, we smile at each other when we see each other. We don't speak often, but she is very kind and I like her. This is what she said:

Years ago we put together a shiur by a local *rebbe* to inspire women to increase their levels of *tznius* (modesty) when you were in court. Women took *kabbalos* (religious commitments) upon themselves in the area of *tznius*, and it is my understanding that you got a big *yeshua* from it. **I don't even know what *yeshua* you need in this moment-** but what do you think about putting together another event like this?"

Tears rolled down my face as she spoke. 4.5 years later, she remembered me, she remembered my suffering, she remembered. I still have those *kabbalos* that women wrote down on index cards, I brought them with me to court years ago, and I cherish them still. I told this incredibly kind woman that I would absolutely love it, and that I would be honored if they could put together another event of this kind.

So what can you do for women suffering alone in silence from the fate of agunah-hood?

1. **Call her!** Even if you barely speak to her, pick up the phone! Tell her you're thinking about her, that you want to help in any way you can.

2. **Get the community involved** in a positive way. We are a growth-oriented community. We are always learning or davening for someone. Add your community's *agunah* to your list, and make an event to increase her *zechuyos*.

What if my small efforts won't change anything for her? **Should I bother?**

For years I've spoken about my situation in fairytale-like terms. **It felt like I was this princess trapped in a tower with no way out.** Everybody knows there's no way out, so why bother trying?

The princess is in the tower. day number 1,642. She isn't going anywhere. She feels worn down, weighed down, and just plain down. And then she hears a loud noise. She looks out her barred window and notices 5 people standing outside the tower. One person is holding a jackhammer, drilling into the stone ground. Another has a hammer and is banging against the tower walls.

Someone else is attempting to throw a rope to her window. Another 2 are just calling her name and saying "We're with you!"

While they may not be able to free her from the tower, these people can make her feel like she's not alone in this struggle, that they care for her, and that they are trying everything they can to help her. That is the greatest gift that you can give an agunah.

I recently told this *mashal* (parable) over to a friend and she told me that is exactly the Purim story. Esther was trapped in her palace, seemingly alone in her suffering. Nobody could help her. Nonetheless, Mordechai *hatzadik* (the righteous) sat outside the palace each and every day to show Esther that he was there with her, supporting her, davening for her.

Don't look at outcomes. "What can I practically do to change her life?" you may ask yourself. That's all Hashem. Just be there for her, support her, show her you are trying, and you will be giving her the strength to endure another day.

I've spoken to many *agunahs* over the last few years. Each one shared my feeling of isolation. **Many of us feel alone, forgotten about, and overlooked.** *Shabbos* and *yamim tovim* are the hardest. Reach out, invite these women and their families over, make them feel wanted and cared about.

There is a *tzadik* in my neighborhood who calls me every erev *shabbos* and asks if he can bring my son to *shul*. Not only do I appreciate this amazing act of caring, of taking my son to *shul*, the phone call itself is so meaningful and we look forward to it every week.

If you're reading this article, I know that the agunah crisis touches you in some way. Maybe the agunah you know is your neighbor, your child's teacher, or you see her at the market or school events. **I encourage you to reach out to her, connect with her, and show her you care. I'm certain that everyone's lives will be enriched as a result.**



DYNAMICS OF MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Men and women enter relationships with people they find attractive and share the same or similar aspirations and values. The majority of these are healthy relationships that develop with communication, caring and mutual respect. Each partner gives to the other to encourage and support one another's success as an individual as well as for the couple. Both parties feel their emotional, social, financial and physical needs are addressed. They feel safe and loved; even when they have differences of opinions they are able to express them and find when and how to resolve them.

Some relationships bring happiness, great times and memories. However, some become the cause of heartache and sorrow. Dysfunctional relationships do a great deal in causing emotional havoc to both partners. They add unhealthy challenges and instability rather than fulfillment into the relationship. In order to stay in a committed relationship, most intimate partners adapt to many disappointments and disillusionments, during the time they're together. Even when there are mental health challenges emanating from one partner, if there is enough good in the relationship to compensate, they weather those distresses and make a commitment to maintain the family system.

Domestic Violence, or Intimate Partner Violence(IPV) is an on-going pattern of power and control of one partner over the other. Abuse can be manifested in various aspects of the relationship beyond the most obvious of physical harm. Emotional violence includes humiliation, insults, or criticism and can cause harm to one's self-worth. Similarly, psychological violence is another less observable example of IPV that involves intimidation, threats, and causes fear in the partner who is being abused. Sexual violence is far more common in relationships than people realize. This can range from unwanted touching and sexual harassment to sexual assault and rape, even within the parameters of a marriage. Another form of IPV is financial violence that exhibits as financial control of the partner's money or requiring them to be totally dependent on them to access marital funds.

IPV does not discriminate. It can happen to anyone and in all settings, regardless of gender, class, socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, race or cultural groups.

At Met Council our clients and their abusers include women and men; people with very limited educations and doctors, hedge-funders, lawyers and many in between; dangerously violent abuse; destructive verbal and emotional abuse; while couples live together and unfortunately, even after they've separated.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) does not discriminate.

It can happen to anyone and in all settings, regardless of gender, class, socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, race or cultural groups.

There is no perfect relationship. It requires continuous healthy communication for conflict management. No matter how good a relationship is, no one should ever sacrifice their security, happiness and mental peace for the illusion of an intact family.

Once a couple starts divorce proceedings, everyone must be aware that it is a long tedious process with challenges throughout the years it takes to resolve. If there has been a pattern of IPV it is likely that the Courts will be another venue for the abuse to be perpetrated. Oftentimes, community members make an already contentious situation worse by being persuaded to believe the charming, moneyed person. The victim is oftentimes traumatized by the years of IPV and is left with low self-esteem and a shadow of herself.

Listen, believe and validate what is being said. Use the community and its pressure to accelerate healthy, safe resolutions for the sake of the victims and their children. Support them in the next chapters of their lives: re-integrating in the religious community, and assisting to move toward self-sufficiency and a safe, healthy life.

Channah Ginsburg, M.S. works on Community Outreach & Clinician at Met Council

If you or someone you know needs help know you are not alone, and Met Council is here to help. For free confidential services please call our helpline at 212-453-9618 or text 917-540-0225.

I'm an ORA Volunteer!

My first genuine involvement with ORA was during my junior year at the University of Michigan when I arranged for ORA's CEO, Keshet Starr, to speak with members of our Jewish community; it was a major success. From there, I set out to learn more about the *Agunah* crisis, which led me to become a Campus Fellow in my senior year. **I am inspired to stay connected with ORA because of my belief in its objective of preventing abuse both of women chained to a dead marriage and of our Torah.** This is not only a noble endeavor with which I wish to assist but one that requires my support, along with everyone else's, to ultimately be a success. **Moreover, this conviction--that we must all do our part to protect ourselves and those around us from get-refusal--motivates me to go out of my way to help Agunot.** I sincerely hope this year's Agunah Awareness Shabbat and International Agunah Day will inspire others to help usher in the end of *get-refusal* among the Jewish people.

-David Zwick, ORA volunteer & former fellow

THE COMMUNITY HAS POWER



Dr. Shoshannah Frydman

CEO of Shalom Task Force

As we join as a community for the annual Agunah Awareness Shabbat, it's a meaningful time to think about how we, as a community and as individual community members, can help **prevent future Agunot and support those that are currently trapped.** Much of what we can do as a community returns to our ability to provide support, spread awareness and be present to those in pain.

Part of showing up is becoming aware and more knowledgeable and combatting denial and decreasing stigma. *Get-refusal* can be closely connected to domestic violence, as it is often used as a form of control and manipulation within a marriage. Although our community shifted to accept that abuse does exist, we still often think about it as a problem of others. We will say, "Of course, there is domestic violence in the Jewish community, but it's the "other" Jewish community (fill in your blank)."

As a social worker that has worked with survivors of domestic violence for over twenty years, **I have assisted survivors from EVERY Jewish community.** We know that one in four women and one in seven men will experience abuse in their lifetime and as a community we must continue to acknowledge and combat this pervasive trauma.

During the summer of COVID, I facilitated an online support group for Jewish survivors of domestic violence. During one session, I asked the group what they wished their community, and families knew about their experience of domestic violence. There were a few common themes that surfaced—**one was that they wanted to bring greater awareness to the unique dynamics of being a survivor of domestic violence in the Jewish community.**

Survivors wanted people to know that domestic violence is much broader than physical abuse- and in the communities we serve, it is more often non-physical, coercive control. **Abuse is not only about black and blue marks.** Domestic violence is defined as a **pattern of behaviors** that one partner uses to obtain **power and control** over the other person- and instills a sense of fear. The abuse can take many forms including sexual, financial, technological, emotional, verbal and spiritual.

The issue of Agunah is closely related to the field of domestic violence. In his seminal and groundbreaking work, *A Shame Borne in Silence*, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, z'l stated that "Without exception, every case of an *agunah*, every case of a husband's refusal to give a *get*, will reveal a history of a woman being abused during the marriage. This last and perhaps greatest abuse of power, the refusal to give a *get*, is used only by individuals who were abusers and who had been either batterers or tyrannical controllers of their wives."

Survivors also wanted their friends and family to stop asking, "Why don't you just leave?" **They want others to understand that the decision to leave a relationship is very complex and dangerous.** They do not want to be judged for staying, but **respected and supported during their journey.**

Most importantly survivors wanted us to know that the community has power, and there is power in the community.

The Community has Power.

One of the most significant barriers to accessing help is the deep **shame** associated with being a victim of domestic violence. The pain survivors experience at "failing at marriage" in our Jewish communities can be immobilizing. **Survivors cannot imagine what life after a marriage could look like.** There is also great fear that their children will be negatively impacted by separation and divorce, and they will be left without a sense of belonging and community.

Community can have tremendous power over the individuals and their choices.

In more insular cultures, there is great importance placed on **tradition** and individual's role as **part of the community.** This dynamic is not always related to ritual practice but is interconnected and usually informs individuals' lives. Insular communities are that — they are insular. They are close knit, with strong ascribed roles and often have rigid gender roles. We know that being part of an insular community certainly does not cause abuse, but it can allow for it, camouflage it, and reinforce it.

This dynamic remains true in more progressive and modern communities as well. Survivors may not come forward because of their **communal status, emphasis on perceived family success, socioeconomic considerations,** and sense of **belonging.** Others feel trapped because they do not think they will be believed that their community will support the abuser and they will be forced to uproot their lives. **We need to honor how people from all segments of Jewish life understand their trauma and the role of the community in that experience.** While some may experience communal life as hurtful, there are others that find great support in the community, and it is a source of hope and comfort.

The Power of Community.

A little over 3 years ago, we lost a great soul, a leader in thought and morality – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, OBM. There are so many ways that his thinking has informed my life and work. Of his many quotes- "God does not want us to understand the suffering of the innocent, but to fight for a world in which the innocent no longer suffer." ***Get-refusal and family violence is a deeply intimate experience of trauma— our role is to fight for and support those that are suffering.***

Community has great power and potential to make positive change. When we as a community acknowledge these issues, **we are part of the solution.** We allow for choice by maintaining a non-judgmental stance. When we are inclusive of all families, we create space for survivors to envision a safer alternative. By supporting community-based programs, survivors are given the opportunity to come forward and get the help they need. We often think as individuals we cannot really make a difference, but if we can each spread awareness, be upstanders, and help surface critical discussion about healthy relationships; **we are the ambassadors needed to make this change.** It in this way, we can fight for the innocent and use the power of community for the good.

Dr. Shoshannah D. Frydman, CEO of Shalom Task Force, holds degrees from the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York/Hunter College School of Social Work. With over 20 years of experience working with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in the Jewish community, Dr. Frydman has written and lectured frequently on intimate partner abuse and has been honored for her work by the Jewish Communal Service Association and the New York Board of Rabbis. If you or a loved one is in an abusive or unhealthy relationship, please call, text, WhatsApp Shalom Task Force's confidential hotline/chatline at (888) 883-2323

THE AGUNAH, THE RABBINICAL COURT AND THE COMMUNITY



Dr. Rachel Levmore

Rabbinical Court advocate &
Cheirut member

There is a vulnerability shared by all Rabbinical Courts – whether in Israel or in the Diaspora. In essence, a Jewish writ of divorce is valid only when it is given from the husband's will. Coercion to divorce, with a few exceptions, invalidates the *get*. In other words, **according to Jewish law the power to dissolve a marriage lies in the hands of the husband.** This halachic (Jewish law) tenet not only gives the husband unlimited power over the chained wife – it gives the husband power over the very court that supposedly holds sway over him! For as halacha stands today, unlike a civil court, a Rabbinical Court cannot issue a divorce decree changing the spouses' personal status from married to re-marriageable. **The husband holds the power to divorce his wife**, while the Rabbinical Court holds no such power.

In the twelfth century, the renowned French Tosafist, Rabbeinu Yaakov Tam (the grandson of Rashi) essentially eliminated any possibility of coercion or excommunication directed at a recalcitrant husband himself. However, he did leave a way out – that of directives to the community surrounding the *get*-refuser. **The rabbis can order the community to put distance between itself and the man disobeying their ruling, hence the title *Harchakot d'Rabbeinu Tam*.** The rationale behind the enactment is that society can abstain from granting privileges to an individual, privileges usually afforded to its upstanding citizens. In the case where an individual has proven to be anything but upstanding, the group should relate to him in kind. **There is no law that one has to be nice to someone who is not nice.** One generally does not befriend a person one dislikes. If you will—as we refrain from applying the stick, we refrain from extending the carrot. Rabbeinu Tam included desisting from speaking with the recalcitrant husband, doing business with him, hosting him, visiting him when he is ill or providing him with food or drink. Over the centuries, such luminaries as Rabbi Moses Isserles (sixteenth century Poland) added other means of cutting off contact with the *get*-refuser (Code of Jewish Law, EHE 154:21), even not circumcising his son or burying him in a Jewish burial.

A community should first publicly call upon a *get*-refuser to give his wife a *get*. Barring that, in addition to the original edicts of suspending contact, there are present day means which manifest *Harchakot d'Rabbeinu Tam* which should be announced: all synagogues should suspend his membership; all Jewish organizations should remove the *get*-refuser from any committees or positions of honor; **the entire community** should refrain from giving him any recognition, including calling him to the Torah in any synagogue. Rabbis should continue to remind their membership periodically that the *get*-refuser is in violation of the order of the Rabbinic Court. All those who have contact or influence over him should be urged to persuade him to promptly give his wife the required *get*. Until that time, all these announcements shall remain in effect.

When the *get* will be delivered, an announcement can be made that these steps shall be removed and that the ex-husband is restored to a normal status within the community.

There is power in the hands of the community. Use it.

Dr. Rachel Levmore is a Rabbinical Court advocate licensed by Israel's Chief Rabbinate, the director of the Agunah and Get-Refusal Prevention Project of Young Israel - Israel Region and the Jewish Agency, one of the authors of The Agreement for Mutual Respect for the prevention of get-refusal and the author of the halachic book "Min'ee Einayich Medim'a".

I'm an ORA Volunteer!

I grew up in a neighborhood where a well-known *get*-refuser lived. Being in that community, I learned about the responsibility of each person, or "one," to take action; as well as the messaging that a community must send when it comes to our communal reaction to get abuse. The rallies that took place in my neighborhood would not have been successful without the commitment of each individual to be the "one" to show up. The *seruv* (order of contempt) circulated throughout my community was only as effective as those who committed to be "one" to enforce and follow it. And on the other hand - this abuser was able to perpetuate his wrongdoing from each "one" supporter that came his way.

I tried hard to be that "one" for good. As a high-schooler, I emailed ORA when I heard of a case of *get*-refusal in an area with a smaller Jewish community. I wondered if my community could mobilize a group of people to travel and rally- each committed to be the "one."

In college, I joined the ORA fellowship - with hopes of educating my lifelong communities on the *Halachic* Prenup. I've had the opportunity to facilitate numerous pre-nup signings. **All it takes is "one." As a young professional, my interest in the work that ORA does has mostly taken the shape of staying informed on cases that have gone public, providing support where I can, and *tefillot*.**

Lots of *tefillot*. When requests came in last year to help an *agunah* travel to *beit din* to receive her *get*, **I thought about how many "one"s have done their part to get her to this point** - and all of that was relying on just one more "one" to seal the deal. Baruch Hashem, another woman became free through the accumulated efforts of so many "one"s.

-Shoshi Trombka, ORA volunteer & former fellow

HASHIVA SHOFTEINU: RESTORE OUR JUDGES



Jared Scharf

ORA Staff Member

The mitzva to establish *batei din* (rabbinical courts) comes from a verse in Parshas Shoftim, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך בכל "שעריך" "You shall establish judges and enforcement officers for yourself in all your cities." The Ohr Hachaim (ad loc) comments, based on a medrash, that the mitzva to establish *batei din* only exists when there are שוטרים **who can enforce the rulings** of the שופטים. **What use is a *beis din* (singular for *batei din*) if the rulings of its judges cannot be enforced?**

Historically, this question has not posed too many issues. In the times of the Temple, *batei din* maintained legal authority to carry out their rulings. Rambam explains the setup of the *batei din* during the times of the Temple in the first chapter of *Hilkhos Sanhedrin*. Even when Jews began living among the nations of the world, *batei din* maintained their ability to enforce their rulings. The reasoning for this was twofold:

1. Oftentimes, the civil authorities of the *beis din*'s host country viewed the ***batei din* as politically autonomous entities** and conferred the *batei din* the legal authority to carry out their rulings. For example, in 1873, when a *beis din* in England ruled that people may not bang too loudly on the drums when booing for Haman. The *beis din* went as far as to file their ruling to the secular authorities to ensure that it was kept.
2. As Jews lived in tight-knit communities, there was a certain degree of **communal cohesiveness** which was conducive toward community members abiding by the rulings of the *beis din*.

Because of these two factors, ***batei din* exercised a certain level of authority over *gittin* cases**, from the times of Temple until the French Revolution.

The *gemora* in *Kesuvus* (folio 77a) cites Rabbi Elazar quoting Rav, saying that **a husband who does not financially support his wife must divorce her and give her alimony**. Shmuel responds by asserting the absurdity of this statement—instead of obligating the husband to divorce his wife and pay her alimony, he should be forced to financially support her whilst staying married. **Rav then responds that such a union would be toxic, like a person and a snake living in a basket**. Nonetheless, the *Shulhan Arukh* (Even Hoezer 154:3) rules that a husband should first be forced to support his wife, and only if he refuses to or is unable to comply does the *beis din* obligate him to divorce his wife.

Batei din in Europe had the autonomy to enforce this ruling, and if a husband would refuse to grant his wife a *get*, the *beis din* would prosecute him to financially support his wife; this served as a disincentive for *get-refusal*. Such a notion is articulated by the Lissa Rav and in the *Nachalas Shiva*. **Moreover, the communal cohesiveness contributed toward a husband following the ruling of a *beis din* to give his wife a *get*; not complying would be going against communal norms**. *Get-refusal* did occur, but given these historical realities, it was not too common.

The advent of the French Revolution brought major changes to the structure of Jewish communities throughout Europe. With the concomitant and subsequent Jewish Emancipation,

Jews were granted greater social mobility and consequently were **not constrained to live in the Jewish community and within the rabbinic structure**. Furthermore, with the popularization of separation of church and state, *batei din* began to lose their power to enforce their rulings, as had previously been afforded to them by their respective host country. The *beis din*'s rulings became less legally enforceable, and the social conditions did not necessarily compel people to comply with their rulings either.

This dilemma has been transplanted to the **United States**, where ***batei din* have limited legal authority** and there exists no organized, unitary communal structure. **In the context of *agunot*, there is no incentive for a husband to grant his wife a *get* other than his own volition** to do so and according to his own desire to live within the rabbinic framework and corresponding communal structure.

One way to solve this issue is via signing the *Halachic Prenup*. Signing the *Halachic* prenup legally binds the signees to rabbinic arbitration and **grants the *beis din* the legal authority to carry out its rulings**. If a husband refuses to give his wife a *get*, the *beis din* has the legal authority to force the husband to financially support his wife, as the Lissa Rav and the *Nachalas Shiva* suggest. This is not a penalty—this is a support obligation, as agreed upon in the *Kesuva*. **The *Halachic Prenup* merely brings back the power the *batei din* originally had**. To borrow a parcel of a quote by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchok Kook, "הישן יתחדש" ("Make the old new.")

It is appropriate that International Agunah Day is marked on Taanis Esther, the day preceding *Purim*. The *gemora* in *Shabbos* (folio 88a) teaches that at *Har Sinai*, the Jews were forced to accept the Torah, "כפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כגיגית," "Hashem placed a mountain over their head, like a tub", while by the story of *Purim*, we accepted the Torah willingly, as the *posik* in Esther writes, "קימו וקבלו היהודים," "The Jews accepted and took upon themselves". At *Purim*, we accepted that which we were previously forced to accept, as the *gemora* states, "קימו מה שקבלו כבר."

For thousands of years, Jews abided by the rulings of *batei din*, not necessarily because they actively chose to do so, but rather because of the social reality and historical circumstances which impelled them to, willy-nilly. Today, we live in a unique historical reality, where there is no default construct inducing us toward following the *beis din*, "ההר כגיגית." **Rather, our own desire to conform to the rabbinic institutional framework and our volition serve as the impetus for us to**.

Signing the *Halachic Prenup* is opting to abide by the rabbinic framework and choosing to **accept upon ourselves the rulings of *beis din***, "קימו וקבלו היהודים." **It is a symbol and affirmation that we are choosing to follow *beis din***, "קימו מה שקבלו כבר." To complete the parcel of a quote by Rabbi Kook, "הישן יתחדש והחדש יתקדש" "make the old new and the new holy." *Hashiva Shofetinu KiVarishona*- **We have returned to the שופטים their שוטרים**.

Jared Scharf is the Assistant Director of Community Outreach at ORA. He holds a BA in Jewish History and is a member of the Koznitz Kolel in Manhattan.

TEHILLIM: PRAYING FOR THE FREEDOM OF ALL AGUNOT

ORA אורה
FREEING AGUNOT. PREVENTING ABUSE.

Aviva bat Esther
Aviva Rivka bat Tzivvia Dina
Baila Yiska bas Miriam Zissel
Batya Ruchama bat Sarah Nina
Chana Ahuva bat Sora Nena
Chana bat Esther
Chana bat Penina
Chana bat Rachel
Chana bat Sarah
Chana bat Shifra
Chana bat Tzivvia Miriam
Chana Nagila bat Bracha Leah
Charna bat Sarah Tzirel
Charna Reizel bat Rochel Leah
Chava bat Chaya Sarah
Chava Rus bat Rochel
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
Elena bat Rachel
Elana Sara bat Miriam Yaffa
Elisheva bat Gisya Basya
Esther bat Garis
Esther bat Perel
Esther Leah bat Chaya
Fruma Miriam bat Gittel
Hadassa Yata Pesha bat Malka Basha
Haya Sara Rivkah bat Tirza Rachel
Hemda bat Ruhama
Ilana Daniella bat Golda
Leah bat Nuzhah
Leah bat Rita Teresa Frieda
Leah bat Sarah
Louna bat Rivka Chaya
Margalit bat Lillian
Marganit bat Chana
Mazal bat Ifrada
Mazal Sarah bat Shoshana
Michal Gabriella bat Rivka
Miriam bat Chana

Miriam bat Ester Malka
Nachuma bat Zissy
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 Miriam
Rachel bat Yona
Raizel bat Sarah Reva
Rivka Dina bat Shaindel Shifra
Rochel bat Leah Basya
Roset Vered bat Yehudit Oddet
Sahar bat Sara
Sara Baila bat Rivka
Sara bat Elka
Sara bat Esther
Sara Chana bat Esther Rivka
Sara Rivka bat Bluma
Sara Rivka bat Yaffa Nechoma
Sarah bat Judith
Sarah Tania Perla Sultana bat Kochava
Sarit bat Yehudit
Sharon bat Rivka
Shayna bat Sarah
Sheindel Golda bat Sarah
Shoshana bat Devorah
Shoshana bat Sara
Shterna Sara bat Yehudit
Sima bat Esther
Sofy bat Sarah
Tamara bat Magda
Toibe bat Bluma
Tova Rachel bat Matte Chana
Tzipora Leah bat Chaya Leebe
Tzivvia Sarah bat Gedula
Tzivyah bat Chana
Yael bat Simcha
Yaffa bat Miriam
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



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*Agunah Awareness
Shabbat*