Make 5754 the Year of FREEDOM FOR AGUNOT

Each of these stories is an actual case history

*The bet din, though they were convinced that my husband sexually molested my daughter, insisted that I drop criminal charges against him in order to secure my get. The rabbi said that the mother of the next child he molested can press charges.* Received get after 3 years as an agunah.

-Suzy

*My husband who has been estranged from me for 15 years still refuses to give me a get because he wants shidduchim (family harmony). My children have told him they won’t say haddafah for him if he doesn’t give me a get.* Still an agunah after 15 years.

-Esther

*My family had to mortgage their home to obtain $120,000 to pay my husband for my get. The deal was arranged with the full knowledge and cooperation of the bet din. We were appalled.* Received get after 2 years as an agunah.

-Barbara

*The bet din granted my husband unsupervised visitation with my children despite the fact that he had broken my son’s arm in a fit of anger.* Still an agunah after 4 years.

-Steve

*I was hospitalized with a concussion after my husband beat me with a baseball bat. The bet din refuses to sit in a room with my husband because of his violent outbursts, yet they ruled that I must go on a vacation with him for shidduchim. Received get after 5 years as an agunah.*

-Rockie

*I am in love with another woman. He is living openly with his mistress. I hear he will never return to me.*

-Miriam

**THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!**

If you want to put a stop to:

I. The flagrant abuse of Jewish law
II. The degradation of Jewish women
III. The excuse that balakhab provides no solution

IV. Rabbinic inaction masquerading as helplessness
V. The *bat mitzvah* that the dysfunction of many *batei din* forces Jewish women to go to civil courts

Courts should punish blackmailers – not reward them

Our Proposals for

1 A committee of respected halakhic scholars must be established to seriously study the problem of agunot and to explore and utilise halakhic remedies so that there will no longer be agunot.

2 Establish a grievance committee. There is no court of appeals from a beit din (Jewish court). Litigants who believe that they have been treated unjustly should have a means of being heard. There should be an impartial committee, made up of rabbis and lay people, including women, to investigate serious complaints.

For the sins which we have committed before You:

לעlenaו By advising battered wives to return to their husbands in the name of sholom bayis...

לעlenaו By permitting extortions to be used in nasoiming a get...

לעlenaו By closing our eyes to the sexual abuse of children...

לעlenaו By allowing children to be used as bargaining chips in get proceedings...

לעlenaו By presenting the birth of Jewish children because agunot are unable to marry...

לעlenaו By threatening women and children with eviction from their homes at the price of a get...

לעlenaו By not condemning those dayanim who charge exorbitant fees in get cases...

לעlenaו By permitting basit din that are corrupt to continue to exist...

לעlenaו By refusing to use all available halakhic remedies against recalcitrant spouses...

3 Address corruption in bet din. Dayanim (judges of the Jewish court) who indulge in unethical behavior should be removed from their positions. Fees should be regulated.

4 End extortion. Recalcitrant spouses should not profit from abusing halakhah. Rabbis should forbid this practice. Bet din should ensure that the get not be used as a bargaining chip by directing that it be given at the beginning of the process and separating it from any other issues pertaining to the termination of the marriage.

WE CALL FOR:

The establishment of a beit din for every major metropolitan area in which:

Dayanim are:
• Scholars who are respected for their integrity and knowledge of Jewish law
• Paid by the community, not the litigants.
• Well paid commensurate with their stature.

The beit din should:
• Strictly adhere to halakhic guidelines as belles the conduct of a court.
• Meet at regular sessions known to the community.
• Meet in a dignified location provided by the community.

When the Orthodox community establishes such a court, it will have its own inherent dignity and its decisions will be respected and adhered to. Once again, Jewish law will be accorded the respect that it deserves. Can anyone say we are asking for too much?

A CALL TO ORTHODOX RABBIS:

We ask you to provide rabbinic leadership. Help us to establish a committee for beit din improvement. Help find halakhic solutions to the agunah tragedy. Join us in beginning to repair the damage suffered by the entire Jewish world by this miscarriage of justice. Help us to make this New Year the year of Freedom for Agunot.

Rabbis: We need more than your sympathy. We need your action – now!

community action

To safeguard *beit din* (modesty), a wife should always bring another woman with her to the *beit din*. This is especially important to alleviate embarrassment when intimate sexual matters are discussed.

*Standardize *beit din* procedure so that all *beit din* function in basically the same way. All *beit din* must make use of all available halakhic remedies, such as issuing *garurim* (contempt citations). Each litigant should fully understand the process at the beginning and should read and understand every word of every document signed.

**Prayer for Agunot**

*Creator of heaven and earth, may it be Your will to free the captive wives of Jerud who love and would love the home but their husbands bind them in the snares of their *beit din*. Remove the bitter burden from their agonies and suffer the hearts of their misguided captors. Likewise Your faithful daughters from their anguish. Enable them to establish new homes and raise up children in peace.*

*Grant wisdom to the judges of Jerud that they will recognize oppression and rule against it before our rabbis act upon the power for good alone.*

*Hallowed are You, Creator of heaven and earth, who frees the captives.*

**URGE YOUR RABBI TO:**

1. Bar recalcitrant spouses from holding office and receiving honors in your synagogue.
2. Use pre-nuptial agreements when performing marriages.
3. Include the prayer for *agunot* during the *Zos ha-shana* services.
4. Join with our committee to study and improve *beit din* proceedings.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT...**

In the rare instance when the wife refuses to accept a *get* (Jewish divorce decree), the husband can be released from the marriage by obtaining the signatures of 100 rabbis (*beter meah rabbanaim*).

If a man remarries without granting his wife a *get*, his children from the second marriage are legitimate. Should a woman remarry without receiving a *get*, her children from the second marriage are branded *maamarim*, bastards, unable to marry another Jew except another *maamar* for ten generations.

A Get is only a woman's issue if men have no daughters, sisters or mothers.

Why now?

1. 500 Rabbis were invited to a conference on agunot, 5 came.
2. Metropolitan hatei din report that 20% of divorce cases that come before them go unresolved, creating hundreds of additional agunot each year.
3. The shame of Orthodox Jewish courts is being increasingly exposed in the secular media.
4. Fifteen years of meetings, appeals to conscience, picketing and demonstrations have not worked.

Your actions will make a difference—so will your inaction

- Let us know if the prayer was recited in your synagogue.
- Call our committee for a speaker to educate your congregation or community group about this issue.
- Establish a gemilut chesed fund earmarked for agunot or send contributions to the Agunah or GET organizations.
- Volunteer your help by contacting us.

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GET (Getting Equitable Treatment), P.O. Box 131, Brooklyn, NY 11230 • 718-455-1510

WHO WE ARE

Agunah is a volunteer organization founded and directed by Orthodox women. Its primary goals are pursuing halakhic remedies for agunot and improvement of beti din proceedings. No fees of any kind are required.

GET is a volunteer organization of Orthodox men and women who work with individuals who are having difficulty obtaining a get. It has the additional function of educating the public, by its speakers' bureau and programs, about the problems endemic to the get process and the need for prenuptial agreements. No fees of any kind are required.

We seek redress of a condition which can no longer be tolerated (doran she'ainu betzibbur yachol le'amod be). Justice, concern for the less fortunate and equity are the foundations of Jewish law. The dignity of the law suffers when Jewish families are victimized by those, male or female, who abuse it.

Jewish law, in all its humane aspects, must be respected.

AGUNOT: We need your input. In order to gather even more data we ask that you contact us so that our research will be more complete. Your experiences are important to us because you are important to us.

God said, “I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to her outcry that has come to Me” (Bereishit 18:21).

Rashi's comment makes the point that God was willing to destroy an entire city – Sodom – because of the unjust suffering of one righteous woman.

Even one agunah is too many.

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We are in crisis
We must act