



Update from the Beit Din



Message from the Menahel

Dear Friends,
Every time we visit communities and speak about the crisis of *iggun*, the same heartfelt question arises: **How can we help?**

For many years, the common assumption was that *iggun* was primarily a “divorce problem”: that it begins only when a man extorts or refuses to grant a *gett*, and that it arises from inequities in Jewish law. But our research and collaborations with legal, rabbinic,

and mental health partners have shown us something different, something deeper.

Iggun is, at its core, an expression of coercive control—patterns of grooming, isolation, and dominance throughout a marriage. It does not begin when the marriage ends. Rather, it intensifies when the woman finally seeks freedom, often escalating into frightening, sometimes violent,

(continued on page 2)



Rav Barry Dolinger, Esq.

Executive Director and
Menahel
of the Beit Din

165

CASES RESOLVED
WITH GITTIN

80

OPEN CASES

115

CASES RESOLVED WITH
HALACHIC DISSOLUTION OF
MARRIAGE



Message from the Menahel-
continued from page 1.

efforts to maintain control. Experts call this “post separation abuse.”

This is not primarily a problem with *halakha*. In fact, Jewish law itself recognizes coercive control as abuse and provides tools to respond effectively. Rabbi Zach Truboff and our Institute team have shown that the mishnah in Ketubot (7th chapter) already treats behavior we now identify as coercive control as clear grounds for a *gett*—perhaps even for *kefiyyat gett*, where a *beit din* forces a husband to divorce. From the *Rishonim* until the modern Rabbanut in Israel, halakhic authorities consistently ruled that abuse—physical or psychological—is grounds to end a marriage.”

But here is the next important truth we must confront: even once a *gett* is given, the trauma does not end.

Judith Herman writes in her classic *Trauma and Recovery*:

“Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community... They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.”

If all trauma undermines attachment and meaning, how much more so the trauma of coercive control, where the abuse itself is enforced isolation. Women are slowly cut off from friends, community, and even family. And then, tragically, attempts at

In this season of teshuvah, as we reflect on our communal responsibilities, the answer is clear: we must help heal those broken attachments. Every one of us can play a role.

intervention are often ineffective—or worse, abusive themselves. **With shocking frequency we hear of rabbis who exploit the vulnerable, extorting women for their very freedom.** Leaders and teachers—supposed to be *k’malach Hashem Tzeva’kot*, like emissaries of God—become sources of betrayal and desecration. This is the very definition of *chilul Hashem*. **The wounds to faith, to community, and to God run deep.**

So what can we do? In this season of *teshuvah*, as we reflect on our communal responsibilities, the answer is clear: we must help heal those broken attachments. Every one of us can play a role.

Professionals and rabbinic courts have a part to play, yes—but it is not theirs alone. It is all of ours.

Invite women who have gone through abusive relationships to your Shabbat table. Call them for coffee. Include their children in playdates. Celebrate together at *semachot*. Welcome them into shul leadership and board service. Recognize that the trauma they carry is real and profound.

By reintegrating survivors into the fabric of Jewish communal life, we turn *chilul Hashem* into *kiddush Hashem*. We restore dignity, belonging, and faith. And in so doing, we take part in the most sacred of High Holiday work: rebuilding life, community, and covenant, together.

With blessings for a year of freedom, justice, and renewal,
Rabbi Barry Dolinger



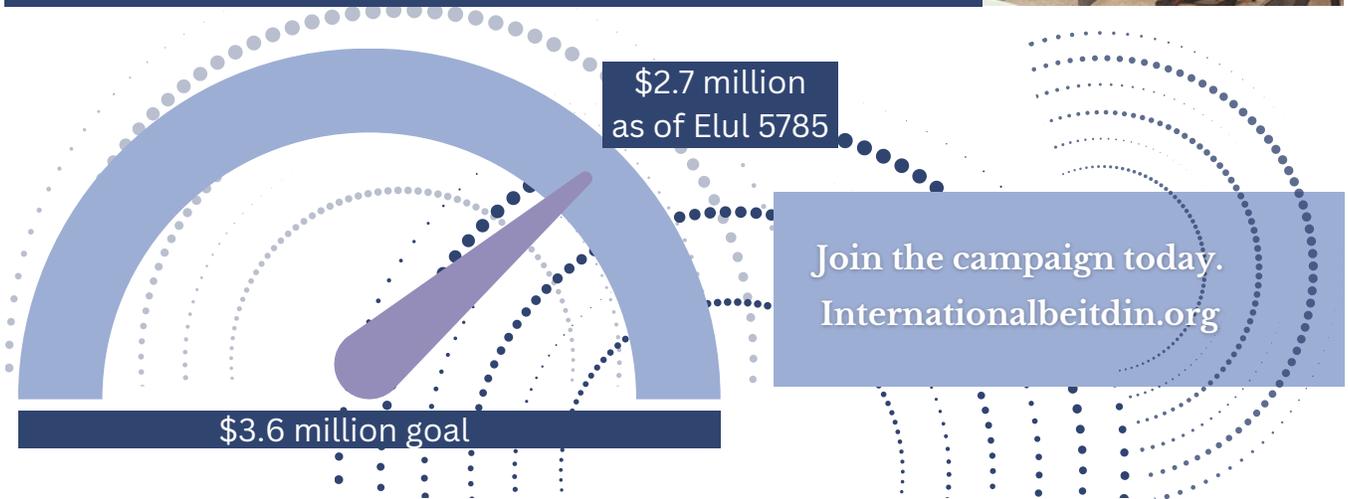
Breakout Session - Redefining Freedom Conference May 21, 2025



On May 21, 2025 we gathered with 500 supporters to celebrate the first decade of our work and launch into our future. The Campaign to End Iggun is a \$3.6 million initiative to **expand our impact and fundamentally reshape the landscape of Jewish divorce.**



Missed the conference? Video recordings are up on our website!



What is One's Ethical Responsibility to a Former Spouse?

By: Rav Zachary Truboff

According to the Torah, a marriage comes to an end through a *gett kritut*, a “document of separation,” which the husband gives to the wife and severs the bond created by *kiddushin* [1]. After this is done, the two appear to have no formal halakhic relationship. But what, if anything, should remain between them? Does the Torah offer guidance about how they should treat one another? And what about cases where the marriage was unhappy and bitterness remains?

As a general rule, *halakha* discourages intimate ties between a husband and wife after divorce due to the fear that it might lead to sexual relations outside of marriage [2]. However, that doesn't mean they should remain indifferent to each other. Divorce may open the



Rav Zachary Truboff

Director, IBD Institute for Agunah Research and Education

door to a fresh start, but the Torah and rabbinic tradition still suggest that a bond of responsibility endures—even when there are no children, and even when the marriage was painful. This is fleshed out in one of the most striking rabbinic stories about divorce that can serve as a model for how we should think about the relationship between a husband and wife after divorce [3]. The midrash begins with a famous verse from Isaiah, read as part of the Yom Kippur *haftara*. There, the prophet condemns empty fasts marked by outward piety alongside continued

injustice. Instead, Isaiah declares, what God truly desires is “to let the oppressed go free, to break off every yoke,” [4] and to practice simple acts of compassion: feeding the hungry, sheltering the poor, clothing the naked, and “**not disregarding your own flesh**” [5].

The rabbis interpret this last injunction not as a legal commandment but as a moral charge—an exhortation to compassion that extends even to one's ex-spouse. This even gets mentioned by the Rema, who writes: “It is permitted for a man to provide sustenance for his divorcee, and it is an even greater mitzvah than [providing for] other poor people” [6]. From this perspective, divorce may dissolve the marriage covenant, but it does not erase the bond entirely. Something remains—not legal or romantic, but ethical. In modern terms, we often imagine divorce as a clean break, the chance to cut ties and move on. The midrash, however, resists that fantasy and insists that a residue of kinship is unavoidable, one that must be met not with denial but **(continued on page 8)**

Get Help

718-543-1471
info@internationalbeitdin.org
internationalbeitdin.org

225 Dyer Street, Floor 2
Providence, Rhode Island
02903



Follow Us On Social Media

@Internationalbeitdin on Instagram

International Beit Din on Facebook



Donate to the International Beit Din

Support our work today.

When Gett Refusers Blow Shofar

By: Dr. Barbara Gochberg

No one ever really knows what goes on inside a marriage. That is especially true when marriages unravel towards divorce. Divorce is never easy; it almost invariably involves friends, family and community members taking sides, aligning with one spouse and resulting in a diminished or absent relationship with the other. There are at least two, usually more, narrative versions in circulation about every failed relationship.

When a marriage devolves into halachic *gett* refusal, something essentially private is released into the public arena. It signals that the dissolution of this marriage is not just complicated or that the painful process of hammering out a divorce settlement is hard. The refusal to give a *gett* signals the weaponization of *halakha* to exact a price, whether through outright financial extortion, attempts to win custody arrangements or, as is often the case, as a means of revenge, immediately removing it from the category of "just" a difficult divorce. When *halakha* is used as a tool of coercive control, and in most cases an extension of an abusive relationship, by definition we are no longer talking about a typical, albeit tough, divorce.

Meanwhile, back in the world of Jewish communal life, few people



Dr. Barbara Gochberg

Intake Specialist

really know "the story" about what happened in the otherwise private realm of a failed marriage. There are serious ramifications for the opacity. The overwhelming majority of people whose spouses refuse to give a *gett* are women and these women have and continue to endure failed relationships that are, at least temporarily, inescapable. No one enters a marriage expecting to get divorced and absolutely no one expects their divorce to become a prison constructed by *gett* refusal. The decision to leave a failing or failed marriage often comes after attempts to absorb the difficulties, even abuse, and after trying often one-sidedly to "fix" the problems that may have developed over many years. Many women remain quiet in public, afraid of the recalcitrant spouse, fearful for their children and families, rendered silent by their own feelings including embarrassment, shame, anger, sadness and frustration about winding up and staying in toxic and/or dangerous relationships. Women grapple with

why they didn't see the warning signs, and what they could have done differently.

Communal institutions such as shuls and schools, and their leaders and constituents naturally speculate about what the "truth" is and whether there is "more to the story" behind the dissolution of a marriage involving *gett* refusal. These wonderings are correct in a sense; there is always more to the story. And at the same time, once *gett* refusal is inappropriately introduced as a bargaining tool in a divorce negotiation or a means to continue the coercive control that likely defined the marriage, the "two sides of the story" argument is no longer relevant or applicable.

Communal acceptance of recalcitrant husbands deepens the isolation that *agunot* feel and increases their silence. After the painful process of extricating herself, watching the recalcitrant husband receive an *aliyah*, blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, or see his donation lauded deepens the fear that she will never be free. The feelings of being abandoned, alone, blamed and overwhelmed are all too familiar for women trapped in failed relationships. These feelings are not just imaginings; communal normalization of recalcitrant spouses is de facto taking a side and sending a message, intended or not, that *gett* refusal does not disqualify you from keeping your role in Jewish communal life. For some women, the recalcitrant husband's ability to retain a

(continued on page 6)



When gett refusers retain positions of acceptance within their shuls and schools, the community, wittingly or unwittingly, winds up reinforcing the abuse of a gett as a means of coercive control.

When Gett Refusers Blow Shofar - continued from page 5

position of belonging in the community stands in contrast to their own reduced status, often silently or not so silently judged by others for failing to make their marriages work.

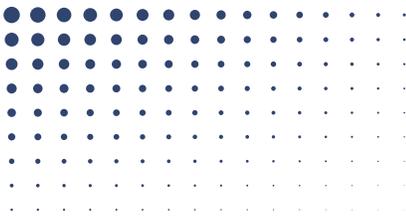
What is it like to psychologically and physically extricate yourself from a failed or even abusive marriage only to find yourself not actually able to do so? The inability to build a new life, possibly even start a new family, continues the pain that drove the marriage to its end. Over and over, women express the feelings of being trapped, unable to move on, in some cases scared, and ultimately powerless. It

is a testament to their deep faith that *agunot* are looking for a halakhic solution at all.

The paths that women who are *agunot* travel to reach that point are complicated and painful. The community is not privy to the details, and they are often harrowing. On a communal level, we see what is presented to us and we tend to look no further or deeper. Nevertheless, the recalcitrant husband's refusal to give a *gett* reflects his inability to accept that a marriage is over. With that sometimes comes a desire to punish by exacting a price, a signal that the marriage was never built on solid and safe ground.

When *gett* refusers retain positions of acceptance within their shuls and schools, the community, wittingly or unwittingly, winds up reinforcing the abuse of a *gett* as a means of coercive control. The valence of public communal Jewish life is weighted towards men. This fact lends itself to the possibility of the Jewish community using itself as a potent tool in the fight to free *agunot* and to eliminate the subversion of *halakha* in the process of Jewish divorce. A *gett* was meant as a legal tool of responsibility towards women upon the dissolution of marriage; communal responsibility must redirect and focus on refusing to sanction the subversion of *halakha*.

Watching the recalcitrant husband receive an aliyah, blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, or see his donation lauded deepens the fear that she will never be free.



Listen to the pilot episode of **Getting Free** on Spotify, Apple, or wherever you get your podcasts.



Media Spotlight

The International Beit Din's work, as well as our trip to England this summer, was featured in Britain's The Jewish Chronicle, where we were described as a Beit Din that is "leading the way."

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

Wednesday, 30 July, 2025 | 5 Av 5785



Did You Know?



This year we supported *agunot* in six European countries.



In England, coercive control is criminal, and a *gett* refusal can be included as evidence to prove criminally abusive behavior.



The Torah and rabbinic tradition still suggest that a bond of responsibility endures—even when there are no children, and even when the marriage was painful.

Ethical Responsibility to a Former Spouse - continued from page 4

with responsibility. It tells the story of Rabbi Yossi Ha-Gelili and his wife, who had a difficult marriage and later became divorced.

Rabbi Yossi Ha-Gelili had an evil wife and she would demean him before his disciples. His disciples said to him: ‘Our teacher, leave this woman, as she does not accord you the appropriate honor.’ He said to them: ‘Her marriage contract is too much for me, and I do not have enough to give her.’

The marriage in this story does not appear to have been a happy one. Rabbi Yossi’s wife demeaned him publicly before his students. They urged him to leave her, but he could not afford to pay the *ketubah*, despite his desire to do so. In many ways, Rabbi Yossi’s situation mirrors that of many modern-day *agunot*, who long to leave a marriage with a spouse who mistreats them but are unable to do so.

The turning point comes when Rabbi Yossi invites his colleague, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, to his home after a day of study in the *beit midrash*. Upon entering, Rabbi Elazar notices a pot on the stove and asks what it contains. His wife replies that it is only vegetables, but when Rabbi Yossi uncovers it,

he finds chicken inside. Realizing the deception, Rabbi Elazar concludes that the marriage is troubled and urges Rabbi Yossi to divorce her. When Rabbi Yossi replies that he cannot afford the *ketubah*, Rabbi Elazar offers to cover the cost.

After the divorce, Rabbi Yossi is said to have married a better woman, while his ex-wife married the town watchman. Eventually, he goes blind and is unable to provide for her, forcing her to lead him through the streets in humiliation, begging for *tzedakah*. Her husband noticed that there was one neighborhood she refused to enter and asked her, “Why do you not lead me to the neighborhood of Rabbi Yossi HaGelili, as I hear that he performs mitzvot?” She answered, “I am his divorcee and I cannot bring myself to see his face.”

Nevertheless, on one occasion, they found themselves in Rabbi Yossi’s neighborhood. For reasons the midrash does not specify, her husband began to strike her, “and their disgraced voices spread throughout the city.” When Rabbi Yossi saw this, **“He took them and situated them in a house that belonged to him, and he supported them all the days of their lives, due to ‘do not disregard your own flesh.’”**

Several important details emerge from this story about how a couple should relate to each other after divorce. First, it should be clear that the rabbis of the midrash were under no illusions about the difficulties of marriage or the pain of separation, yet they still insisted that an ethical relationship persists even afterward. While there is no halakhic requirement for former spouses to support each other financially, the rabbis regard such support as desirable and praiseworthy. Rabbi Yossi is presented as an ethical model, showing a compassion that surpasses what most of us would likely feel possible.

What is particularly striking is that Rabbi Yossi acted compassionately toward his ex-wife despite how she had treated him during the marriage. The midrash highlights how she had humiliated him by mocking him before his students and deceiving him, and in doing so, it shows how humiliation corrodes relationships. Yet when Rabbi Yossi encounters her suffering, he acts to restore her dignity. It would have been very easy for him to ignore her plight or even take satisfaction in it; he could have seen her downfall as deserved. Instead, he refuses to let vengeance have the final word. He does not reconcile with her or welcome her back into his home, but he does provide her with support. The compassion he shows is not to be confused with intimacy, which can be problematic after divorce, but rather a minimal recognition of dignity. If there is an ethical remainder of marriage, it

(Continued on Page 9)



must be the refusal to dehumanize the other.

Although Rabbi Yossi's actions may seem fit only for the truly righteous, the rabbis clearly intend for all to learn from his example. This is underscored by the teaching of Bar Kappara, placed just before the story: "There is no one who does not come to this condition [of being in great financial need]; if not him, his son, if not his son, his grandson." Divorce inevitably exposes both partners to financial, social, and emotional vulnerability. In recognizing the suffering of a former spouse, we acknowledge our own fragility and admit that their misfortune could just as easily have been ours. Such an awareness nurtures humility and helps resist the temptation to see the other as a stranger or enemy.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the rabbinic story is its insistence that compassion must be extended even to someone who acted cruelly. Modern sensibilities, by contrast, emphasize the importance of boundaries, especially in cases of abuse. Contemporary guidance is clear: survivors of abusive marriages do not owe their abuser continued care or contact. Safety and healing come first, supported by legal protections, parallel parenting arrangements, and limited communication. Compassion, if it appears at all, must never come at the cost of re-entering harm.

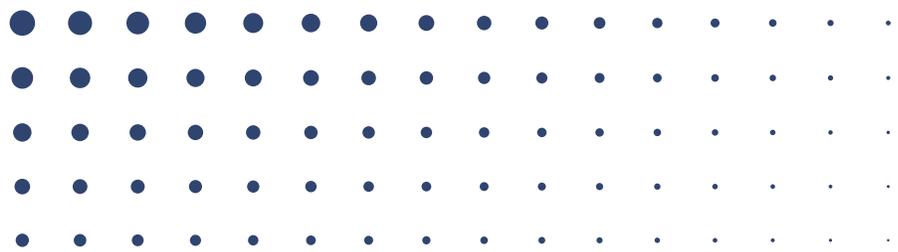
Yet a closer look at the story suggests that it already accounts for this. Rabbi Yossi does not seek

out his ex-wife, nor does he maintain ongoing ties. In this case, Rabbi Yossi's compassion is triggered only when he witnesses her public humiliation. Here, ethical responsibility is situational rather than constant. Confronted with her suffering, he refuses to gloat or ignore it and instead chooses to act with decency. For today, this might be reinterpreted as follows: one does not owe continuous care to a former spouse—certainly not to an abusive one—but when faced directly with their suffering, one still confronts the human choice of how to respond.

Although the rabbinic story does not mention children, they can be read implicitly into the background of the phrase "flesh of your flesh." Divorce inevitably shapes children's lives, and the way parents treat one another—even in estrangement—can profoundly affect their children's sense of dignity and security. To weaponize

children against a former spouse is to disregard one's own flesh in the most literal sense.

In the end, the rabbis do not imagine divorce as a clean break where the past can simply be erased. They recognize that even after separation, a trace of responsibility endures. This may mean nothing more than refusing to gloat when a former spouse stumbles or even extending help in a moment of disgrace, even if we are uncertain that they would do so for us. For us today, especially where there has been harm or we feel deeply wronged by a former spouse, we must be careful about re-entering into dangerous dynamics. **But we should strive not to let vengeance have the last word, and remember that even in brokenness, the other remains human, vulnerable, and bound to us in some small way by a shared history.**



[1] Devarim 24:1

[2] For example, see Ketubot 27a and Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Issurei Biah 21:27, which make clear they are not to live in close proximity after divorce. For this and other halachot, see Shulchan Aruch, Even ha-Ezer 119:7-11.

[3] Vayikra Rabbah 34:14. For an alternative version of the story, see Yerushalmi Ketubot 11:3.

[4] Isaiah 58:6

[5] Isaiah 58:7

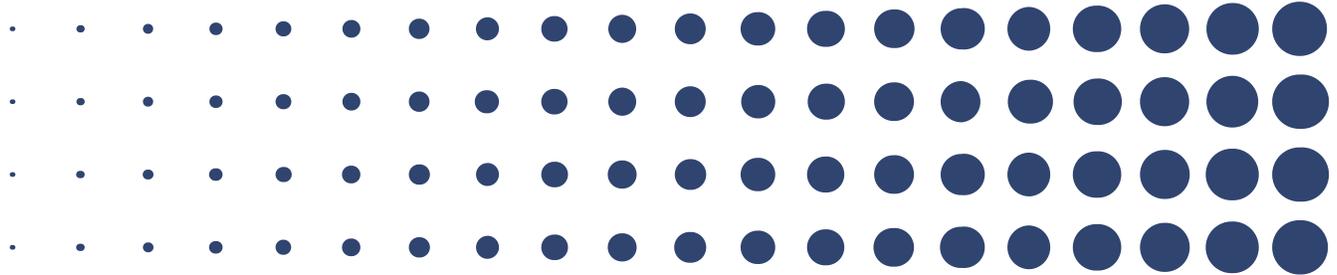
[6] Rema, Even ha-Ezer 119:8. This position is rooted in the Hagahot Maimoniyot (Hilchot Issurei Biah 21:27), who cites Yerushalmi Ketubot 11:3. While these halachic sources are typically seen as only placing an ethical responsibility on the husband after divorce, there is no reason to see why it would not also apply to the wife as well, as the verse from Isaiah that it is based on makes no obvious distinction regarding gender.

Read About Our Work in the latest edition of the JOFA Journal

- The International Beit Din: A Trauma-Informed Beit Din
- Coercive Control: Defining Get Abuse in Secular Legal Terms



And more about *iggun* by our partners!



With prayers of freedom for all who are chained.



Stay up to date on messages from the International Beit Din.
Join our mailing list today!

