

Rabbi Hershel Schachter
24 Bennett Avenue
New York, New York 10033
(212) 795-0630

הרה צבי שכטר
ראש ישיבה וראש כולל
ישיבת רבינו יצחק אלחנן

Proper and Improper Agunah Activism

We are obligated to make significant efforts to convince recalcitrant husbands to give a gett in order not to allow women to suffer the terrible fate of being an agunah. Such efforts include, but are not limited to, demonstrations in front of the home or place of employment, and applying significant social pressure.

It has come to my attention that some are suggesting that women should either refuse to go to the mikvah, or refuse to be intimate with their husbands, even organizing specific “strikes”, in order to encourage the rabbis to come up with a solution that frees all international agunos. It should go without saying that this is a terribly destructive idea for two primary reasons.

First, rabbis are meant to interpret halacha, not to make changes to the torah that Hashem has given us. Any rabbi who would issue a psak halacha based on societal pressure is not being loyal to the halachic process that Hashem has given us.

Second, the Gemara Nedarim 15b and later on 81b finds it problematic for the husband or the wife to make a vow that prohibits intimacy from one to another. It is the understanding of Chazal that intimacy between a husband and wife is an expected part of a healthy marriage. The idea that withholding intimacy from one’s spouse in order to coerce them into doing something, even for the most worthy of causes, is not something that should be taken lightly.

In rare circumstances, where a recalcitrant husband has belonged to a small tight knit community, it has sometimes proven to be a successful strategy for the women in that particular community to refuse to go to the mikvah until the agunah in their community has been provided with a gett. This has worked to encourage the men who interact with the recalcitrant husband to apply enormous pressure on the recalcitrant husband himself, and convince him to give his wife a gett.

To suggest such a tactic on a mass scale involving women and men who have no social relationship with the recalcitrant husband, is a recipe for disaster. Many more marriages would be affected negatively and רח”ל many serious halachic violations are likely to result. We cannot tear away at the very fabric of Jewish purity in an effort to save Jewish marriages.


צבי שכטר
ראש חדר אדר צ' תשפ"ד