



## RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

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# A Match Made in Heaven

In his final days as leader of the nation, Moshe continued disseminating the Divine law and guiding his people. It may come as a surprise that it is at this stage that Moshe communicated the laws of divorce.

Interestingly, the relationship between the Jewish people and God has been described in terms of a number of human relationships, however inadequate those portrayals may be. One of those is the human bond of marriage, and its potential severability through divorce.

The covenant at Sinai is often viewed by the Sages as a marriage, with the Torah as the marital contract.<sup>1</sup> The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, observed that we refer to God commanding us the mitzvot in our blessings with the term *kideshanu*. On the face of it, the word means “sanctified us,” but on a deeper level it evokes the bond of *kidushin*, betrothal. When men wrap tefillin around their arm and fingers, they utter the words of the prophet Hoshea: “I have betrothed you to Me forever” (Hosea 2:20). The Jewish people are wed to God.

Can this marriage ever be terminated? The Talmud raises this very question:

Ten elders came and sat before [the prophet Yechezkel]. He said to them, “Repent!”

They said to him, “Does the master who sells his servant or the man who divorces his wife have any claim to them?”

The Holy One said to him, “Go tell them, ‘Where is your mother’s bill of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which creditor have I sold you? It is for your sins that you have been sold and for your iniquities that your mother was sent away’” (Isaiah 50:1).<sup>2</sup>

In other words, God might have separated from the Jewish people on account of their sins, but He did not do so completely or irrevocably. The proof is that we have no writ of divorce.

At times, it can feel like we have been divorced. Exilic existence has forced us into subjugation and into living under the thumb of foreigners. The Lubavitcher Rebbe observed, however, that these nations are only God’s messengers. The very first mishnah in *Gitin*, the tractate dedicated to divorce law, tells us, “One who brings a get from beyond the sea must declare, ‘It was written in my presence and signed in my presence.’”<sup>3</sup> The foreign powers that have defeated the Jewish people and ruled over her in exile are only God’s messengers, and they have brought no get. As agents, they

1. The following remarks are based on *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 9, *Ki Tetze* 2, 143–151.

2. *Sanhedrin* 105a.

3. Mishnah, *Gitin*, 1:1.

possess no real power and cannot effectuate a divorce between the Jewish people and God on their own. The bill of divorce has never been, and will never be, delivered.

This reality is reflected in the words of this week's *parashah*. "If a man married a woman... and he wrote her a bill of divorce (*sefer keritut*) (Deuteronomy 24:1). The Rebbe pointed out that *keritut* denotes absolute separation and sundering. The word *sefer*, however, calls to mind the *sefer Torah*, the Torah scroll "given to create peace in the world."<sup>4</sup> Halachah thickens this association by requiring that the get be written according to some of the rules for a *sefer Torah*, with ruled lines and length exceeding width.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Torah scroll, it must be written on a single sheet, but this too supports the idea of unity and wholeness. Why, then, does the Torah use a phrase that appears to be a contradiction in terms?

On the human plane, it instructs that the natural state of affairs between Jews is one of harmony. Holy matrimony sanctifies and deepens that connection. *Gitin* devotes its opening lengthy discussion to an unusual case, in which a get is being brought from abroad, rather than to the main body of relevant law. Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi organized the material this way, the Rebbe suggested, to signal that divorce has its origins in a "foreign place"—it does not come to us naturally. Although it is sometimes unavoidable and necessary, the existential bond remains in place.

Similarly, the metaphysical matrimony of God and the Jewish people is based on an

inextinguishable love. The exile we suffer under may conceal that love, but it continues to burn all the same. The Lubavitcher Rebbe boldly claimed that keeping our faith while scattered across the globe in hostile conditions actually reflects a more profound love. Even when the relationship seems severely strained, so much so that one might mistake the outward separation for divorce, neither husband nor wife have given up on it. Perhaps *Kidushin*, the tractate about marriage, follows *Gitin* as an adumbration of God's plan. *Gitin* is the spiritual exile that feels like divorce, and when God redeems us, the everlasting love represented by *Kidushin* will be manifest to all.

It is no accident that we learn about the laws of divorce at this time of year. The Rebbe observed that *Parashat Ki Tetze* is always read during the seven weeks of consolation following Tisha be-Av. Although the Temple is no more, the words *sefer keritut* remind us that God has not forsaken us. The flame of love yet burns. In addition, only our own unity and boundless love for one another will bring Him back in full glory to rebuild and inhabit His abode on earth once more. ■



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4. *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Megilah va-Chanukah*, 4:14.

5. *Shulchan Aruch, Even ha-Ezer*, 125:11–13.