

It has been my distinct privilege and honor to meet and befriend many *agunot* (women who cannot obtain a *get*, a Jewish divorce, either because their husbands are missing due to various circumstances or because their husbands refuse to grant them one, thus preventing them from remarrying). As a result, my life and the lives of the members of my family have been enriched and changed for the better.

# Tefilah L'Agunah

by Marilyn Mattie Klein

**O**VER THE YEARS, I HAVE WATCHED AGUNOT IN AWE AS I WITNESSED THEIR LEVEL OF EMUNAH (FAITH) AND SELFLESS DEDICATION TO OUR PEOPLE AND TO THE LAWS OF TORAH. THEIR PRIMARY CONCERN IS AND HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT OF PASSING DOWN TO THEIR CHILDREN A LOVE FOR AND BELIEF IN TORAH. THIS FOCUS COEXISTES WITH MY DEEP SENSE OF PAIN AND FRUSTRATION WITH THE APATHY, ACCEPTANCE, DISREGARD AND LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONSEQUENCES THAT THE AGUNAH PROBLEM CREATES FOR THE FUTURE OF *AM YISRAEL* (THE JEWISH PEOPLE).

## נוסח לתפילה ש'ירחם ה' יתברך על עגונות

מחובר ע"י הר' מרדכי טנדלר

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם, יצחק ויעקב, משה ואהרן, דוד ושלמה ואמותינו שרה, רבקה, רחל ולאה, הוא יתיר ויציל מחבלי עגון את כל העגונות:

תחת החופה על ידי הכלה בעבור שכעת תחת חופתי

אני מקבלת בלי נדר ליתן צדקה בעבורך והריני מתפללת בעבורך:

בשעת הדלקת נרות בעבור שבשעת הדלקת נרות אני מתפללת בעבורך:

בזכות תהילים שאומרים בזכות שאנו אומרים כעת תהילים:

בבית הכנסת שאנחנו מתפללים בעבורך:

בשכר זה הקב"ה ימלא רחמים עליהן, להחזיקן ולהצילן ולאפשרן להתחתן ולהכניס תחת חופתן ולבנות בתים נאמנים בישראל עם שאר נשי ישראל שמבקשות להתחתן ונזכה כלנו לגאולה השלימה השתא בעגלא ובזמן קריב.

אמן:

Marilyn Mattie Klein is a director of T'filah L'Aguna and is the founding director of a new organization, L'Maan Bros Yisrael dedicated to coordinate the efforts of individuals and existing organizations to help agunot (information 718-338-0833). Rabbi Mordecai Tendler is the rabbinical director of both organizations. [This article is copyrighted.]

## The message is powerful: The community does not support recalcitrant husbands

I felt that something constructive had to be done on behalf of these women. Throwing up our hands and accepting the intolerable is not and cannot be the Jewish way. That we do not have a clear-cut solution does not and cannot mean that the problem can be ignored. As Jews, we have learned that "evil triumphs when good people do nothing." Dare we be guilty of *Lo ta'amod al dam re'echa*, standing by and doing nothing when another Jew's life is imperiled? Dare we ignore the urgency directed by the Torah of *pidyon shivuyim*, redemption of prisoners? Dare we forget the most obvious lesson of *ve'ahavta le're'echa kamocho*, caring for others as you would want others to care for you?

*Kol Yisrael chaverim*, all Jews should feel as close as friends do. Thus, we have a moral obligation to care for each and every Jew as a cherished member of our family. Certainly, the word *kol*, all, includes all the daughters of Israel whose desire is to perpetuate Jewish family life. Agunot are being prevented from doing so, not only by their recalcitrant husbands, but by those who assist them actively—who support the spouses' cruelty and blasphemous activity—as well as those whose indifference enables and encourages this terrible social problem to grow.

### Under the Chupah

As is traditional, prior to my daughter's marriage we collected names of people who requested that the bride pray on their behalf. We made a list of agunot for her to pray for. To my dismay, the list was long and represented the unnecessary pain and anguish of

these women, their parents and children. Each woman's story was worse than the next. Each agunah refused to give up a Torah life even though the Torah could not protect her from her awful circumstances without the aid and support of the community. Clearly, these women were no doubt among the *tzidkaniyot* (righteous women) of our times, about whom it is written *b'zchut nashim tzidkaniyot niga'el* (because of the merit of righteous women we shall be redeemed).

One day, a mother of a young

stances of the case seemed hopeless. I added the daughter's name to the list of names being prepared, promising the mother that my daughter would pray for the girl under the *chupah* (wedding canopy). I also told her that as a mother, I would pray for her to have *naches* (joy) from her children. She proceeded to give me a beautiful blessing—two mothers, who were strangers, praying for each other's children to have good lives. How very special that conversation was for both of us.

### Translation of Tefilah L'Agunah

He Who Blessed our Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses, Aaron, David and Solomon, and our Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, may He release and deliver all the agunot from the bonds of their plight as deserted wives because, G-d willing, I now take it upon myself,

(by the kallah under the chupah)  
as I am standing under the chupah,  
to contribute to charity for their sake and I  
am also now praying for them.

(at candle-lighting time)  
at candle-lighting time I pray for them.

(in the merit of saying Psalms)  
as we now say Psalms.

(in the synagogue)  
as we now pray for them.

May the Holy One, blessed by He, have mercy on them; may He strengthen and deliver them; may He grant them the opportunity to marry, to stand under their own wedding canopy and to build trustworthy families within the nation of Israel, with all other Jewish women who wish to be married. May we all witness the complete Redemption now, swiftly and soon. Amen.

Transliteration on back; to keep, cut around edges.

woman called me to describe her daughter's desperate situation: Her daughter had just graduated from high school when she married. Now, her life was being jeopardized by her husband's abusive behavior. For years the family had tried to obtain a *get*, without any success and the circum-

stances of the case seemed hopeless. I added the daughter's name to the list of names being prepared, promising the mother that my daughter would pray for the girl under the *chupah* (wedding canopy). I also told her that as a mother, I would pray for her to have *naches* (joy) from her children. She proceeded to give me a beautiful blessing—two mothers, who were strangers, praying for each other's children to have good lives. How very special that conversation was for both of us.

### The Origin of the Tefilah L'Agunah

At that moment, I decided to make a fateful telephone call. I felt it imperative that a special prayer be written formally for my daughter to say on behalf of these suffering agunot. I hoped that in the future, other brides would be inspired to perform the same selfless deed.

My phone call was made to Rabbi Mordecai Tendler, rabbi of Kehillat New Hempstead, grandson of Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zt"l*, who himself had freed over 3,000 women. Rabbi Tendler has also been one of the most supportive and compassionate rabbis to agunot. I knew that many women have been blessed by his efforts on their behalf and, to those whom he could not help, he has always found a way to give them the *chizuk* (strength) to continue in their

struggles. We are taught that the prayers of a *tzadik* (righteous man), descended from a family of *tzadikim* (righteous people) are answered first. I had no doubt that he would be the appropriate Rav who would be compassionate enough to write a special prayer for these doomed women.

## For years the family had tried to obtain a *get*, without any success...

Rabbi Mordecai Tandler immediately agreed to write, in time for my daughter's wedding, a prayer for agunot that brides could recite. As he explained the prayer's rationale he clarified the special sanctity and efficacy of prayer on someone else's behalf being recited by a bride. Because of the holiness of the moment and the special connection the bride has with G-d, her prayers might have the power to alter the course of events and benefit those women whose names would be on the list. When my daughter and I read the prayer he composed, we wept. The beauty of his words captured the essence of the pain that these women experience and their sincere hopes for building a true Jewish home in the near future.

Although my daughter, Bracha, is fluent in Hebrew, she practiced reciting the prayer and pronouncing the names of the agunot for days before her wedding. As I watched her as a bride, utter and initiate the prayer for agunot to be free and to be able to build a *bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael* (a faithful and Torah-true household), I suddenly remembered holding her as a newborn in my arms. Looking at my husband lovingly I said, "Her name will be Bracha Malka. May she bring a *bracha* (blessing) to our people. Long live the queen (*malka*). May she be a leader for the good of our people."

Who could have predicted that Bracha as a *kallah* (a bride is considered a queen on her wedding day) would indeed bring a blessing to the world as the first bride to say this special prayer? In so doing a precedent was set, that of remembering the

plight of agunot and praying for them on the happiest day of a woman's life.

Subsequently, I began publicizing and distributing the prayer to other brides. Later, at women's requests, the prayer was adapted for saying after lighting Shabbat and Yom Tov (holiday) candles and before reciting psalms. Rabbi Kenneth Auman adapted it for praying in synagogues. The strength it gives agunot when they hear the prayer in public has moved them to tears. The message is powerful: It states that the community does not support those recalcitrant hus-

### **Transliteration of Tefilah L'Agunah**

Mi shebeirach Avoteinu Avraham, Yitzchak v'Yaakov u'Moshe, Aharon, David, u'Shlomo, v'Imoteinu Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel v'Leah, Hu yatir v'yatzil mei'chevlei igun et kol ha'agunot

(by the *kallah* under the chupah)

ba'avur sheka'et tachat chupati  
Ani mekabelet b'li neder litein tzedakah  
ba'avuran vehareini mitpalelet ba'avuran.

(at candle-lighting time)

ba'avur shebish'at hadlakat neivot ani  
mitpalelet ba'avuran.

(in the merit of saying Psalms)

bizchut she'anu omrim ka'et Tehillim.

(in the synagogue)

sheanachnu mitpalelim ba'avuran.

Bischar zeh Hakadosh Baruch Hu yimalei rachamim aleihen, lehachazikan u'Tafsheran l'hitchaten ulehikanes tachat chupatan v'livnot batim ne'emanim b'Yisrael im she'ar neshei Yisrael shemevakshot l'hitchaten ve'nizkeh kulanu l'geulah hashleima, hashta ba'agala ubizman kariv. Amen.

bands who refuse to give their wives religious divorces.

Rabbi Tandler has stated that publicizing this prayer is an important project in aiding agunot and reorienting people's minds toward a different approach, using *koach ha'tefilah* (the power of prayer) for a dual function. One, of course, is the power of the prayer and the strength that prayer

has to bring about positive change. The second is that it shows that G-d supervises everything and keeps the orientation in G-d's path. This encourages people to act in accordance with Torah and G-d and to think of solutions that lend themselves to help these women in a G-dly manner.

It has been close to two years now since this prayer was born. Thousands of copies of the prayer have been distributed, both in the United States and Israel, as well as in other countries.

In June, Rabbi Tandler's daughter stood under the wedding canopy and recited the prayer her father composed. Thus, she continued to fulfill a legacy of caring for and praying for those less fortunate than we are.

Won't you join us in our efforts to help these women in any way you can and pray for them. We need to restore the glory that once belonged to the people of Israel, who served as the role model for domestic felicity between husbands and wives: *Ma tovu ohalecha Yaakov mishkenotecha Yisrael*, How goodly are your tents, O Jacob (*Numbers 24:5*).

We know all too well the destructive effects of hatred and how hatred can alter the normal course of events.

Certainly, unconditional love of one Jew for another through the tremendous strength of prayer can, we hope, effect positive changes in the course of events. With the help of Hashem, nothing is impossible! **A** *The young woman whose plight was the catalyst for the prayer has since received her get through a series of extraordinary circumstances and hashgacha pratit (Divine Providence).*