
What You Need to Know About a Get

by Rabbi Phil Lieberman

What Is A *Get*?

A *Get* is a Jewish writ of divorce. As the Torah explains (Deuteronomy 24:1), Jewish divorce is effected when the husband orders the writing of a “decree of divorce” (the *Get*), and this decree is placed in the hands of the wife. The *Get* plays a critical role in the life cycle of a couple whose marriage has come to an end.

Do I Really Need A *Get*?

Jewish law requires that couples divorcing in civil proceedings also execute a *Get* to dissolve their Jewish marriage. At times, a *Get* may be required even for couples who have lived together as domestic partners without a formal marriage. Until a *Get* is completed (barring the death of a partner to the marriage) the marriage remains intact, and any subsequent marriage to another partner is precluded, for both husband and wife. When a marriage has irreparably broken down, it is a sacred obligation of Jewish men and women to dissolve their marriage by means of a *Get*, even if many years have elapsed since their civil divorce. It is best for the *Get* to be executed as soon as possible after the civil divorce.

What Do I Do to Obtain A *Get*?

Your local rabbi can be a first point of contact to help you through the process of obtaining a *Get*. However, *Gittin* (plural of *Get*) are only prepared by certified experts called *Mesadderei Gittin*. The Joint Bet Din of the Conservative Movement (a nine member rabbinic court) certifies such professionals. You or your rabbi can find a list of *Mesadderei Gittin* [here](#).

What Is Involved In The *Get* Process?

Your local rabbi or a *Mesadder Gittin* will guide you through the process. The *Mesadder Gittin* will work to make the *Get* process as uncomplicated as possible, defining a plan that best meets your individual situation and the applicable demands of Jewish Law. As the central element of this process, a handwritten *Get* (writ of divorce) will be prepared and personalized for both parties. This document is delivered to the woman (whether in person or through an agent), and a document (“*Ptor*”) certifying that the *Get* was properly executed and delivered will be issued to each divorcing party. The *Get* itself is returned to the *Mesadder Gittin* for permanent safekeeping.

How Much Does It Cost?

Fees are set by each *Mesadder Gittin* independently.

How Long Does It Take?

The length of the process required to obtain a *Get* depends on individual circumstances and the course of action identified together with your *Mesadder Gittin*. If all the parties are in the same geographical location, they might assemble at a mutually-acceptable time, at which point the remaining process can take as little as an hour. This in person option is called *Seder Get Rishon*. However, when the parties are geographically distant from one another, or the *Mesadder Gittin* lives far afield from them, the process can be handled via the mail. In this case, the process can take longer, ranging from a few weeks to a few months, depending on the workload of the *Mesadder*

Gittin and the availability of the parties. The process can be delayed when it is difficult to locate one of the parties, or when one of the parties is unwilling to participate in the process.

Do I Need To Be In The Same Room As My Wife/Husband?

If divorcing couples prefer, they may opt to discharge their respective roles in the divorce process entirely separately, with the man signing the original authorization and the woman alone appearing at the delivery of the Get. The Mesadder Gittin will serve as an intermediary and the parties need not communicate directly with one another.

My Husband Doesn't Want To Give A Get. What Do I Do?

Most of the time, husbands voluntarily participate in the writing of a Get without a hitch. When they don't, the Mesadder Gittin, together with the local rabbi, will make personal contact and expend every effort to secure his cooperation. The rabbis and Mesadderei Gittin alike may remind him that the Get, in addition to discharging a critical religious and moral obligation, is an important step in regaining a sense of security and independence.

My Wife Doesn't Want To ACCEPT A Get. What Do I Do?

Most of the time, wives voluntarily participate in receiving a Get without a hitch. However, they also might refuse to participate in the Get process. If for any reason the woman is not ready to accept the Get, a Bet Din (Rabbinic Court) can under many circumstances accept it on her behalf.

My Wife/Husband Lives Far Away. What Do I Do?

Don't worry. In such circumstances, Mesadderei Gittin can obtain permission to write a Get through the mail or other means, and they routinely appoint "secondary agents" who deliver Gittin in a timely fashion, allowing divorcing parties properly to discharge their religious obligations. If this is to no avail, see "Other Options as a Last Resort."

What If One of the Parties Cannot Be Reached?

Your Mesadder Gittin will make every effort to locate the missing party. Should this prove impossible, the Mesadder Gittin will explain what options are nevertheless available to you to effect the dissolution of your Jewish marriage.

What If We Are Not Yet Civilly Divorced?

In general, Mesadderei Gittin will wait until the civil divorce has been completed to write the Get. However, the Get process may be initiated as soon as a couple determines that they are intent on becoming divorced, have discontinued marital relations, and are no longer sharing a domicile. It may be advisable to expedite the Get if a contentious civil divorce process is anticipated. In such cases, the *ptor* will be issued only after the civil divorce is complete.

What If We Are Not Sure?

The Get should only be initiated when a couple has firmly determined that their marriage is to be dissolved.

Other Options as a Last Resort

It is the strong preference of the Conservative Movement that a Get be issued when any marriage is dissolved. However, when the usual process will not work, the Joint Bet Din of the Conservative Movement can help the parties through other means. At times, the Joint Bet Din will conclude that

the marriage was contracted under erroneous pretenses, nullifying the union. Other times, the Joint Bet Din will exercise the historic rabbinic authority to dissolve a marriage. Dissolving a marriage is called *Hafqa'at Qiddushin*. This process terminates the marriage, allowing the parties to remarry, but it in no way affects the status of children from that marriage. Hafqa'ah is authorized by the Joint Bet Din only in cases of extreme and persistent recalcitrance, attempted extortion, and other extraordinary circumstances. A certified Mesadder Gittin is uniquely authorized as an intermediary between the parties and the Joint Bet Din to facilitate this process where it is necessary.

What If I Used A T'nai be-Kiddushin Or There Is A Lieberman Clause In My Ketubbah?

Speak with a Mesadder Gittin who will explain how that agreement impacts the dissolution of your marriage. It is always preferable that termination of a Jewish marriage be achieved by means of a Get, even if such an ante-nuptial agreement was signed.

What Happens If I Lose My Ptor?

The Ptor is your documentary proof that a Get has been written and delivered. If you lose your Ptor, you should contact the Mesadder Gittin who took charge of the process. The Mesadder Gittin should be able to provide you with a replacement Ptor. The Joint Bet Din of the Conservative Movement also maintains a database of Gittin written by its Mesadderei Gittin, providing further proof of your Jewish divorce. If you lose the contact information for your Mesadder Gittin, the Joint Bet Din should be able to put you in touch with him or her.

Who Can Answer Other Questions I Have?

Your local rabbi will always be a good first point of contact for questions related to the divorce process. A Mesadder Gittin can help as well, and (under parameters set by the Joint Bet Din) will make all final determinations about the Get. Although emotions will often run high during this process, these rabbis are there to help you through it in a way which meets the requirements of Jewish Law while also showing concern and sensitivity to your personal circumstances and emotional needs.