

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Man of the laws, the ever-broken laws  
Governing wrong, wrong and right...

Joni Mitchell, *Shadows and Light*



The key is in His hand  
(not Hers)

### **A Demonstration in Borough Park**, by Viva Hammer (excerpted from an article on [MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com))

There was already a knot of people huddled at the demonstration on the corner of 15th Avenue and 46th Street in Borough Park, Brooklyn, by the time we arrived. It was sunny, 20 degrees below zero. The crowd grew quickly, and we moved out from 15th Avenue to the courtyard of a dirty grey apartment building. A woman out front took the megaphone and began her admonishment, "*Avraham Zvi Silverstein is in contempt of Jewish court. He refuses to give his wife a get (bill of divorce). He is an abomination amongst the people of Israel. The beit din (Jewish court) has asked us to do everything we can to help this woman. He is a shame to the whole community!*" The demonstrators trudged around the courtyard under this man's apartment, chanting "*Avraham Zvi Silverstein, give your wife a get!*" "*Free Esther Silverstein!*" Suddenly, a window in the target apartment shot up, a male head appeared, snapped a picture, and disappeared. It was the only time we raised a response from the object of this exercise.

The megaphone blared again, pointing its nose right into the window of the offending apartment, "*We demand a get for Esther and all the agunot like her! We want the beit dins to help women to get their gets, to examine the system that imprisons so many women in bad marriages! Set the agunot free!*" Then Esther came to the phone, a young woman with a beret over her wig, and very plain: "*I just want to ask Avraham Zvi to let me go, I want to lead a normal life...*" she started to cry and the demonstrators supported her. A black-garbed man walking past paused, listened, and started yelling, "*She's just a feminist, that lady with the megaphone, she doesn't care about Jewish law, just likes to make trouble! Why does Borough Park need a demonstration?*" But other, equally black-garbed men shouted him down, "*What's this got to do with feminism? Who said she was a feminist? Esther Silverstein's husband won't give her a get and the beit din told her friends to help her out; it's a mitzvah [commandment]!*" While they gesticulated and raised their voices at each other, we moved on. All through Borough Park we walked, handing out leaflets, slipping them onto cars and into mailboxes, chanting our refrain, "*Avraham Zvi Silverstein, give your wife a get!*"

When we reached 13th Avenue, the shopping mecca of Diaspora Jewry, our numbers had swelled. Mr. Silverstein would have his name defamed before the entire Sunday shopping crowd. "*You know what the Satmar Hasidim do with these men?*" one bystander said to me. "*They take him to a cemetery and break his bones. Why don't you do that?*" Another woman asked, "*And how long has Esther been waiting for her get?*" When I told her it was five years, she snorted, "*That's nothing, I've been chained to my ex for 15 years!*" Our final destination was the *shul* [synagogue] where Mr. Silverstein usually came for Afternoon Prayers. By then, every child in Borough Park had a leaflet to swap with friends, and the Yiddish chatter grew loud in our wake. The streets were littered with pictures of Avraham Zvi's stiff mustachioed face. Our petition had hundreds of signatures on it.

Esther was the last to sign. A rotund, long-coated Hasid hovered around her as the demonstration broke up. "*Why don't you call me any more?*" he asked her in his singsong Yiddish accent. "*You know,*" she answered, "*the telephone rings at both ends.*" How long will she wait? I wondered, as I took the subway home...