Civil Enforcement of Jewish Marriage and Divorce: Constitutional Accommodation of a Religious Mandate

Jodi M. Solovy

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/law-review

Recommended Citation


Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/law-review/vol45/iss2/7
CIVIL ENFORCEMENT OF JEWISH MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE: CONSTITUTIONAL ACCOMMODATION OF A RELIGIOUS MANDATE

INTRODUCTION

When a Jewish couple marries, both parties sign an ornate document known as a ketubah. In layman’s terms, the ketubah is the Jewish marriage license.¹ The majority of rabbis officiating a wedding will require the signing of a ketubah as part of the wedding ceremony.²

Legal and Jewish scholars have interpreted the ketubah as a legally binding contract which sets out the guidelines for a Jewish marriage and divorce.³ Using this interpretation, a number of courts have required that one party accommodate the other in following the specified divorce proceedings that are mandated by Jewish law.⁴ The Jewish law requirements for a valid divorce are strict and often difficult to enforce; namely, the law requires that a husband “voluntarily” give his wife a document called a get in order to dissolve the marriage according to traditional Jewish law.⁵

While the civil marriage contract alone binds the marriage in the eyes of the state, courts nonetheless have found the ketubah to be binding as well, and they have enforced both express and implied provisions of the ketubah in granting a civil dissolution of a marriage between a Jewish couple. This includes the requirement that a get be given.

This Comment opens with a discussion of the historical origins and religious significance of the ketubah and the get. Noting that enforcement of these two Jewish documents raises constitutional issues, this Comment will then provide a brief review of the First Amendment to

¹. See infra notes 10-27 and accompanying text (explaining that the ketubah is signed by the couple immediately before the wedding ceremony and that the ketubah sets forth the obligations of a husband towards his wife).

². However, in order for their marriage to be civilly binding, couples must also sign a civil marriage license, as required by the state in which they are married. See, e.g., CAL. FAM. CODE §§ 422-23, 307 (West 1994) (setting out the procedures for signing a civil marriage license, which is required whether or not the wedding is officiated by a clergyman).

³. See infra notes 140-42, 286 and accompanying text (noting the view that the ketubah is equivalent to a civil contract spelling out the obligations of the parties during the marriage).

⁴. See infra notes 177-180, 196-212 and accompanying text (noting cases which have upheld the get procedure based upon contract theory).

⁵. See infra notes 28-70 and accompanying text (discussing the get generally).
the United States Constitution and its accompanying doctrine. The discussion will show that it is constitutionally "kosher" for a civil court to order one party to grant the other a Jewish divorce since it does not violate the First Amendment.

In reaching its conclusion, this Comment uses the guidelines set forth in two landmark Supreme Court rulings. Specifically, this Comment purports that a court order enforcing the *get* procedure for marital dissolution does not violate the Establishment Clause since the order effectuates a number of secular goals, does not advance Judaism, and does not excessively entangle the civil court with religious dispute or doctrine. In addition, not only does the order accommodate one party's free exercise of religion, but the other party is essentially precluded from asserting a genuine free exercise claim since Jewish authority contends that the specific act of giving or receiving a *get* is not religious in nature. However, even if one's right to the free exercise of religion is burdened, compelling state interests may override any possible First Amendment challenge. This Comment discusses the right to contract, the right to remarry, and the right to equal protection of the law, and the role that each may play as a compelling state interest.

Next, this Comment examines a number of courts’ reasoning and techniques underlying orders which have enforced the *get* proceeding. In doing so, this Comment pays special attention to a recent Illinois case, *In re Marriage of Goldman*, which not only currently governs this area of the law in Illinois, but is in line with court orders of a number of other jurisdictions as well.

Noting that numerous courts have upheld the *get* requirement under general contract theory, this Comment nevertheless determines that the *ketubah* document should not be enforced as a civilly binding contract under the guise of a compelling state interest. Rather, this Comment contends that the *ketubah* is an ornamental and highly sentimental document with terms and obligations which lack validity in a modern and secular society. Moreover, the *get* requirement itself is not found in the original *ketubah* at all, but rather, has its origin in the Torah.

6. See infra notes 259-61 and accompanying text (referring to the view of many Jewish and legal scholars that the *get* procedure is secular in nature).
7. See infra notes 292-98 and accompanying text (discussing the compelling state interests, provided by the Fourteenth Amendment, that may overcome a Free Exercise claim).
9. See infra notes 176-80 and accompanying text (discussing the *get* cases).
Notwithstanding its invalidity as a contract, this Comment concludes that a court may enforce the *get* procedure. The Fourteenth Amendment provides the two compelling state interests for enforcing the *get* procedure: the equal protection of the law and the fundamental right to remarry.

I. BACKGROUND

A. The Ketubah

Under Jewish law, marriage is an oral, not written, contract which is effectuated by a religious ceremony.\(^\text{10}\) Immediately before the ceremony, the bride and groom sign a document known as a *ketubah* ("writing").\(^\text{11}\) The *ketubah* is usually written in Aramaic or Hebrew and may or may not be translated into English.\(^\text{12}\) Although the *ketubah* is publicly read at the wedding ceremony, most of the audience, including the couple being married, generally do not understand what they are hearing since the *ketubah* is usually left untranslated.\(^\text{13}\)

The *ketubah* is a standard document, traditionally signed by two witnesses; thereafter, it is presented to the wife remaining her property.\(^\text{14}\) The reason that the written document belongs exclusively to the wife, rather than the couple, is that its purpose was to discourage the husband from exercising what was his unilateral and unconditional power to divorce his wife.\(^\text{15}\) In order to protect women from being randomly dismissed, the authorities insisted on a formal marriage contract, the *ketubah*, in which the husband agrees to pay a predetermined sum of money to his wife in the event of a divorce.\(^\text{16}\) The authorities hoped that by making divorce costly, the *ketubah* would promote marital stability.\(^\text{17}\) Thus, the development of the institution of marriage in Jewish law has been said to be related directly to the


\(^{11}\) Feldman, *supra* note 10, at 141.

\(^{12}\) *Id.* Aramaic is a language similar to Hebrew in that it uses Hebrew script. *Id.* at 141 n.14. Aramaic was the Jewish vernacular in the time of the Talmud (the Jewish legal compilation), circa 500 C.E. *Id.* at 142 n.14. For a more intricate discussion of the Talmud, see *infra* note 35.


\(^{14}\) *Id.*

\(^{15}\) Solomon Zeitlin, *The Origin of the Ketubah: A Study in the Institution of Marriage*, 24 Jewish Q. Rev. 1, 4-6 (1933-34); see also Breitowitz, *supra* note 13, at 283, 287 (noting that the *ketubah*’s “original purpose” was to give financial security to widowed or divorced women by placing a lien on the husband’s property).

\(^{16}\) Breitowitz, *supra* note 13, at 287.

\(^{17}\) *Id.*
"continuous advancement in the status, freedom and dignity of women."\(^{18}\)

The *ketubah* does not in itself effectuate the marriage.\(^{19}\) Rather, it sets out the obligations of a husband toward his wife.\(^{20}\) In the *ketubah*, the husband agrees to provide such essentials as food, clothing, and sexual intercourse for his wife.\(^{21}\) The *ketubah* also provides the amount of money the husband, or his estate, must pay his wife not only upon divorce but also upon his death.\(^{22}\) However, the husband, in return, is entitled to use the property that his wife brings into the marriage, to use her earnings during the marriage, and to be an heir of her estate should she die before him.\(^{23}\)

The text of the *ketubah* has remained unchanged in all important aspects since the Middle Ages.\(^{24}\) The most significant alteration oc-

20. Id.
22. Id. Since the husband's monetary obligations set forth in the *ketubah* document are guaranteed by the husband's property, the *ketubah* essentially creates a lien on his estate. Id. (citing HAUT, supra note 10, at 9).
23. HAUT, supra note 10, at 6.
24. Feldman, supra note 10, at 141. The translation of a standard Orthodox *ketubah* is as follows:

On the ______ day of the week, the ______ day of the month of ______
in the year ______ since the creation of the world according to the manner of reckoning here in the ______, the groom — the son of ______ said to the virgin ______ daughter of ______:

Be thou my wife in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel and I will work, honor, support, and maintain thee in accordance with the practices of Jewish husbands who work, honor, support, and maintain their wives in faithfulness. And I will give thee 200 zuz as alimony for thy virginity which is due to thee under the law of the Torah as well as food, clothing, needs, and cohabitation according to the way of the world.

This virgin ______ daughter of ______ consented and became his wife. The dowry that she brought from her father's home in silver, gold, ornaments, clothing, household furnishings, and her clothes amounting in all to the value of ______, the groom has taken upon himself. The groom has also consented to match the above sum by adding the sum of ______ making a total in all of ______. Thus, did the groom ______ son of ______ declare:

I hereby accept upon myself and my heirs the responsibility of this ketubah document, the dowry, and the addition, that it shall be paid from all my property and possessions, wherever located, that I now possess or that I will acquire in the future. All my property, even the shirt on my shoulders, shall be security for and subject to this ketubah document, this dowry, and the addition in my lifetime and after my death, forever more. The responsibility of this ketubah document, the dowry, and the addition did the groom take upon himself with the full force and effect of all ketubah documents and their additions as is customarily practiced for the benefit of Jewish women and in accordance with the enactments of the Sages (may their memory be a blessing) not as a void penalty not as a mere form. And this groom has received in our presence
curred in 1954, when the Conservative branch of American Judaism\textsuperscript{25} added a clause to the \textit{ketubah}.\textsuperscript{26} While the Conservative movement has slightly modified the text of the Orthodox \textit{ketubah}, the Reform movement does not use a \textit{ketubah} at all unless the couple so desires.\textsuperscript{27}

\section*{B. The Get Proceeding}

As the \textit{ketubah} was intended to protect the wife in marriage, another device, the \textit{get}, was instituted to protect the wife in securing a divorce. Orthodox and Conservative Judaism impose strict requirements on a couple's ability to divorce beyond those imposed by the state.\textsuperscript{28} The parties must go through a divorce ceremony in accordance with Jewish law, in addition to obtaining a civil divorce.\textsuperscript{29} A

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
\textbf{good and valuable consideration to bind himself in accordance with all that is stated above and all is binding and irrevocable.}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
The words of \underline{_________}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
The words of \underline{_________}
\end{center}

\textbf{BREITOWITZ, supra note 13, at 283-85.}

25. There are three main branches of American Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Orthodox is the most observant of traditional Jewish law and Reform is the least observant. Feldman, \textit{supra} note 10, at 140 n.5. The problems discussed in this Comment are relevant only to Orthodox and Conservative Jews, since only those two branches, with some differences, recognize Jewish law as binding. The Reform Movement, on the other hand, abolished the requirement of a \textit{get} in 1869. J. David Bleich, \textit{Jewish Divorce: Judicial Misconceptions and Possible Means of Civil Enforcement}, 16 CONN. L. REV. 201. 232 n.96 (1984).

26. \textbf{BREITOWITZ, supra note 13, at 285.} The additional clause that was approved by the Rabbinical Assembly in 1954 for the Conservative \textit{ketubah} is as follows:

\begin{quote}
We, the bride and groom . . . hereby agree to recognize the \textit{bait} or \textit{Din} of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America or its duly appointed representatives as having authority to counsel us in the light of Jewish tradition which requires husband and wife to give each other complete love and devotion, and to summon either party at the request of the other, in order to enable the party so requesting to live in accordance with the standards of the Jewish law of marriage throughout his or her lifetime. We authorize the \textit{Bait} or \textit{Din} to impose such terms of compensation as it may see fit for failure to respond to its summons or to carry out its decision.
\end{quote}

\textit{Id.} at 285-86.

27. \textit{Id.} at 283; \textit{Haut, supra} note 10, at 64. The Orthodox movement has rejected the Conservative addition based on its strict interpretation of Jewish law. \textit{See MOSHE MEISELMAN, JEWISH WOMAN IN JEWISH LAW} 109-110 (Ktiv Publishing House, Inc. 1978) (stating that Orthodox scholars rejected the 1954 proposal principally because its compensation provision was indeterminate and in contradiction to Jewish law, which requires that the parties specifically know their obligations under a contract).


29. Breitowitz, \textit{supra} note 28, at 313. The religious ritual must be carried out in order for the parties' subsequent marriages to be recognized in the Jewish faith. \textit{Id. See infra} note 63 (discuss-
valid marriage may only be terminated through the death of a spouse or by the granting of a get.

1. History of the Get

Historical analysis sheds light on the modern-day requirement of the get. In Biblical times, unlike today, there was little concern about the recalcitrant husband, who refused to grant his wife a divorce in order to use his "get power" as leverage over her. Rather, the concern was over prolonged and unexplained periods of absence, usually due to war. Since "Jewish law does not require a presumption of death arising from prolonged absence," a wife would only be permitted to remarry after her husband's death could be clearly established.

According to the Talmud, King David required all fighting soldiers to write gittin and give them to their wives. This was required to allow a wife to remarry if her husband did not return home

Halachically valid marriage may only be terminated through the death of a spouse or by the granting of a get.

1. History of the Get

Historical analysis sheds light on the modern-day requirement of the get. In Biblical times, unlike today, there was little concern about the recalcitrant husband, who refused to grant his wife a divorce in order to use his "get power" as leverage over her. Rather, the concern was over prolonged and unexplained periods of absence, usually due to war. Since "Jewish law does not require a presumption of death arising from prolonged absence," a wife would only be permitted to remarry after her husband's death could be clearly established.

According to the Talmud, King David required all fighting soldiers to write gittin and give them to their wives. This was required to allow a wife to remarry if her husband did not return home

Halachically valid marriage may only be terminated through the death of a spouse or by the granting of a get.

1. History of the Get

Historical analysis sheds light on the modern-day requirement of the get. In Biblical times, unlike today, there was little concern about the recalcitrant husband, who refused to grant his wife a divorce in order to use his "get power" as leverage over her. Rather, the concern was over prolonged and unexplained periods of absence, usually due to war. Since "Jewish law does not require a presumption of death arising from prolonged absence," a wife would only be permitted to remarry after her husband's death could be clearly established.

According to the Talmud, King David required all fighting soldiers to write gittin and give them to their wives. This was required to allow a wife to remarry if her husband did not return home

Halachically valid marriage may only be terminated through the death of a spouse or by the granting of a get.

1. History of the Get

Historical analysis sheds light on the modern-day requirement of the get. In Biblical times, unlike today, there was little concern about the recalcitrant husband, who refused to grant his wife a divorce in order to use his "get power" as leverage over her. Rather, the concern was over prolonged and unexplained periods of absence, usually due to war. Since "Jewish law does not require a presumption of death arising from prolonged absence," a wife would only be permitted to remarry after her husband's death could be clearly established.

According to the Talmud, King David required all fighting soldiers to write gittin and give them to their wives. This was required to allow a wife to remarry if her husband did not return home

Halachically valid marriage may only be terminated through the death of a spouse or by the granting of a get.

1. History of the Get

Historical analysis sheds light on the modern-day requirement of the get. In Biblical times, unlike today, there was little concern about the recalcitrant husband, who refused to grant his wife a divorce in order to use his "get power" as leverage over her. Rather, the concern was over prolonged and unexplained periods of absence, usually due to war. Since "Jewish law does not require a presumption of death arising from prolonged absence," a wife would only be permitted to remarry after her husband's death could be clearly established.

According to the Talmud, King David required all fighting soldiers to write gittin and give them to their wives. This was required to allow a wife to remarry if her husband did not return home
from war. If, however, the soldier returned safely, the couple would be able to remarry each other. Needless to say, this procedure created new and complicated problems, such as the unfortunate risk that a soldier's wife would remarry another man before the soldier returned home, since nothing compelled the wife to await her husband's return. Jewish authorities considered the risk justified since the wife's anguish from waiting "in limbo" indefinitely would be avoided.

2. **Modern Application of the Get Requirement**

At the divorce ritual, the husband, or a designated agent, must physically hand to the wife, or her designated agent, the written document of the get. Traditionally, the get is given in the presence of two witnesses. While the get is Biblically mandated, it has been asserted that the get procedure is not religious in nature. The execution of a get is essentially a private act since "it does not require the participation of, or even the consent of, a rabbinical tribunal." However, due to the formalities surrounding the actual writing of the get, a rabbinical court of at least three is usually present to supervise.

---

38. Id.
39. Id.
40. Id.
41. Id.

42. Id. at 320-21. Unlike the ketubah, the entire get document must be handwritten for the particular divorce for which it is being used. Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 6. Like the ketubah, the get is written in Aramaic and Hebrew. Id. at 6, 283.


44. See Lawrence C. Marshall, Comment, *The Religion Clauses and Compelled Religious Divorces: A Study in Marital and Constitutional Separations*, 80 Nw. U. L. Rev. 204, 208 n.26 (1985) (stating that the requirement of a get is originally found in Chapter 24:104 of the Book of Deuteronomy of the Old Testament). Deuteronomy 24:104 provides that when a man takes a wife and marries her then it comes to pass, if she finds no favor in his eyes, because he has found some unseemly thing in her, that he writes her a bill of divorce, and gives it in her hand, and sends her out of his house . . . .

Id.

45. See, e.g., *In re Marriage of Goldman*, 554 N.E.2d 1016, 1020 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990) (relying on expert testimony that, according to Jewish law, marriage and divorce are secular, contractual undertakings which do not require the presence of a clergyman for validation); Minkin v. Minkin, 434 A.2d 665, 667-68 (N.J. Super. 1981) (holding that the get requirement is not a religious act and that an order to compel its obtaining would not violate the First Amendment, after its review of supporting expert testimony by Jewish clergymen). Similarly, Professor J. David Bleich argues that the get is not at all a religious act since "it involves no worship and it does not invoke the deity, a profession of creed, or confession of faith." Bleich, supra note 25, at 202. See also infra notes 107-10 and accompanying text (discussing the two components of Jewish law).

47. Id.
must be noted that the rabbis' role is only supervisory; they do not
effectuate the divorce since a husband is the only person who may
divorce his wife.48 The basic ceremony is quite simple and can usually
be accomplished in less than an hour.49

Notwithstanding developments to protect the woman in marriage
and divorce, the actual power to effectuate a divorce remains exclu-
sively with the husband, or his agent.50 In order for the procedure to
be accomplished, the husband must physically place the bill of di-

divorce, the get, into his wife's hands.51 Thus, according to Jewish law, it
is actually the husband who divorces his wife, as opposed to civil law,
which requires the state to dissolve the marriage.52

While a wife may be coerced into receiving or accepting a get, a
husband may be divorced only pursuant to "his free will."53 Although
the husband must willingly grant the divorce, under very limited cir-
cumstances the Jewish court, the beth din (or bait din),54 may impose
penalties on the husband if he refuses to freely comply with the di-

The coercive tactics used could range from fines or community ostracism to corporal punishment.56 However, com-
mentators have made special note of the fact that if the husband is
willing to suffer those penalties, the beth din is powerless to order the
divorce since the get ultimately must be authorized exclusively by the
husband.57 Thus, if the husband's "consent" cannot be obtained even

48. Id. See infra notes 50-62 and accompanying text (discussing the source of a husband's unilateral power to divorce his wife and idea of "coerced consent").


50. Horowitz, supra note 18, at 273-75.


52. Id. at 320.

53. Breitowitz, supra note 13, at 320 (citing BABYLONIAN TALMUD, Yebamos: 112b; Rambam, MISNAA TORAH, Ishu) (some citations omitted). In addition, if a husband produces a get out of compulsion, it is invalid for the reason that it was not a product of his free will. Id.

54. Beth Din is Hebrew for "House of Law," or the rabbinic tribunal, normally comprised of three rabbis. Id. at 14. While Biblical and Talmudic law gives extensive enforcement powers to the beth din, today in the United States it does not possess such authority. Id. Rather, the development of the separation of church and state in this country has created a situation where the beth din no longer has coercive power and "can decide only those disputes that the parties have voluntarily submitted to its jurisdiction." Id.

55. See Kahan, supra note 19, at 200-01 (explaining that under the legal fiction of "constructive consent" the Jewish court may apply coercive tactics in certain limited instances where the wife is recognized as having a right to divorce).

56. Id.; see also 4 ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA, Beth Din and Judges 719-27 (1973) (discussing the history, composition and jurisdiction of Jewish courts generally); Meiselman, supra note 27, at 101.

57. See MENACHEM ELON, THE PRINCIPLES OF JEWISH LAW 414-19 (1975) (noting that courts can only compel "constructive consent" when there is a basis for either party to assert his or her right to divorce (e.g., either is incapable of parenting a child or leads the other into "transgressing the law of Moses"); otherwise the compulsion is perceived as duress and the "consent"
with the application of coercive sanctions, the *beth din* has no power to terminate the marriage.58

Aside from the requirement that only a husband has the power to divorce his wife, another crucial limitation on the civil court’s power to compel a religious divorce is that only a *beth din* may apply coercive tactics.59 The reason for this is contained in classical written commentary of Jewish law.60 Therefore, if a civil court forces a husband to give a *get*, the divorce is presumptively invalid under Jewish law.61 Although a civil court may not itself execute a *get*, it may compel a husband to obey an order of the *beth din* once the *beth din* has decided that the divorce may be granted under Jewish law.62

If either party refuses to participate in the Jewish divorce ceremony, then the other party is prohibited from remarrying within the Jewish

---

58. BREITOWITZ, *supra* note 13, at 40.

59. Feldman, *supra* note 10, at 143. “When Jewish communities were self-contained and self-governing, as they were in the time of the Talmud,” coercive tactics by the *beth din* could be quite successful. *Id.* at 144. However, today in the United States, since all Jews live under secular law, the *beth din* has no civil enforcement powers outside moral and social pressures. *Id.* Moral persuasion, however, is only effective where the man is sensitive to traditional Jewish values since the *beth din* cannot force a man to appear before it any more than it can inflict punishment. *Id.*; Kahan, *supra* note 19, at 201. In Israel, rabbinic courts can impose fines and order a man to be placed in jail for refusing to deliver a *get* since the entire area of marriage and divorce in that country is still governed exclusively by Orthodox Jewish law. Haut, *supra* note 10, at 85-86; MEISELMAN, *supra* note 27, at 101.

60. The seemingly contradictory solution of coercing a husband to give his wife a *get* when it must only be given of his own free will has been explained by the ancient sage Rambam who stated as follows:

It is assumed that every Jew truly desires to comply with the dictates of religious law and any refusal to do so is merely the result of an “evil disposition” which temporarily overpowers or vanquishes his “free will.” Duress is therefore applied to overcome the husband’s exercise of will but to remove the impediment that prevents that “free will” from emerging.

BREITOWITZ, *supra* note 13, at 34-35.


62. See id. (asserting that while a secular court’s direct order would be tantamount to duress, a civil court may generally enforce a Jewish court’s doctrine, despite “some minority opinion to the contrary”); MEISELMAN, *supra* note 27, at 100 (“[A] woman may not initially approach a non-Jewish court to force her husband to grant her a Jewish divorce. However, if a beth-din orders a Jewish divorce and the non-Jewish court merely enforces the decision of the beth-din, the divorce is valid.”); Kahan, *supra* note 19, at 210, 215 (stating that a secular court may enforce the decision of a rabbinic court that a husband is required to give a *get*). As will become apparent later in this Comment, civil courts today may now compel a husband to appear before a *beth din* for the purpose of determining whether or not the marriage may be terminated under Jewish law as a condition of the civil dissolution. See infra notes 182-89 and accompanying text (discussing Avitzur v. Avitzur, 446 N.E. 2d 136 (N.Y. App. Ct.), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 817 (1983), the first case to hold that civil courts may compel a couple to appear before a *beth din*).
For a number of reasons the "victimized" spouse is most often the wife. A woman whose husband leaves her and refuses to grant a get is known as an agunah, meaning "bound woman." Courts have recognized that the husband's get power to bind his wife to the marriage "gives him enormous leverage over the wife in seeking favorable custody and/or property settlements."

A civil divorce is not valid under religious law, just as a religious divorce is not civilly recognized. Unlike marriage, where "almost all states now recognize the legitimacy of a ceremony officiated by an authorized minister of the faith of the parties," the power to divorce is exclusively that of the secular judiciary. Thus, the get requirement is completely separate from the granting or withholding of a civil marital dissolution. Nevertheless, it is clear that the get is essential to the divorce of a traditional Jewish adherent.

63. Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 313. Under most circumstances, Orthodox and Conservative rabbis will not officiate the marriage of a divorced person where a properly executed get has not been obtained from a recognized beth din dissolving the previous marriage. Horowitz, supra note 18, at 281.

64. See Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 313 ("[T]he consent principle of Jewish divorce law is not applied equally" since, if a husband refuses to consent to the divorce the wife is bound to the marriage and may not remarry.); Kahan, supra note 19, at 200 ("The remarriage of a Jewish woman without a get entails the most serious consequences: her remarriage will be considered an act of adultery, and children of such a union . . . will suffer religious disabilities including a prohibition against marriage to other Jews."); However, if the wife refuses to accept a get when her husband has proper grounds to divorce her, he is permitted to remarry. HaTu, supra note 10, at 56; Kahan, supra note 19, at 199. See infra notes 71-83 and accompanying text (discussing the different consequences for men and women when remarrying without having obtained a get).

65. Feldman, supra note 10, at 139. The term aguna is derived from the term agun, or anchor, and refers to women who are literally "chained" to their former spouses. Breitowitz, supra note 13, at 1 n.1.

66. Feldman, supra note 10, at 139. A few of the reasons for a husband's refusal to grant a get are spite, greed or leverage to extort other concessions from his wife, such as custody of children, favorable property divisions or maintenance agreements. See Barbara J. Redman, Jewish Divorce: What Can Be Done in Secular Courts to Aid the Jewish Woman, 19 GA. L. REV. 389, 392 (1985) (“The wife in this situation has two choices: she can refuse to impoverish herself and suffer the consequences of being an adulteress and raising bastards, or she can agree to an inequitable divorce contract which deprives her of all fair return from her contribution to the marriage and severely disadvantages her economically.”).


68. Id.

69. Id.

70. Kahan, supra note 19, at 201. Since a civil divorce is not recognized by Jewish law, parties who fail to comply with the get requirement are unable to remarry within the Jewish faith. Id. This is especially true of women, as will become evident from the discussion immediately following.
3. Consequences of the Get Requirement

Since a civil divorce is not recognized by Jewish law, any subsequent cohabitation or remarriage exercised in the absence of a *get* is considered adulterous.\textsuperscript{71} Jewish law, however, provides different consequences for men than for women regarding remarriage and subsequent children in the absence of a *get*.\textsuperscript{72} For example, children resulting from a wife’s remarriage, without a *get* from her previous marriage, are regarded as illegitimate.\textsuperscript{73} However, the husband’s subsequent children are not stamped with the same inferior status.\textsuperscript{74} This disparate treatment relates back to the Biblical allowance for men, but not women, to practice polygamy.\textsuperscript{75}

While Talmudic law officially banned the practice of polygamy, Jewish law regarding relations in general, and remarriage specifically, is still far more lenient for men than it is for women.\textsuperscript{76} For instance, the consequences of adultery for a married man are substantially more relaxed than those for a married woman.\textsuperscript{77} Additionally, if a woman whose marriage has not yet been dissolved by the receipt of a *get* cohabitates with another man, regardless of whether the man is married, she and the man are guilty of a capital offense according to Jewish law.\textsuperscript{78} Any children resulting from that union are considered illegitimate and are prohibited from marrying another Jew unless that person is also illegitimate or a convert.\textsuperscript{79} Moreover, subsequent to the wife’s divorce from her husband, she may not marry her lover.\textsuperscript{80}

On the other hand, if a married man commits adultery with an unmarried woman, “under Biblical law no crime has been committed.”\textsuperscript{81} “The husband is permitted to remain with his wife if she consents and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 323.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Id. at 323-25. These consequences will be significant to this Comment’s assertion that a court’s refusal to compel recalcitrant husbands to procure a *get* amounts to a denial of Equal Protection under the law for women.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 323-24.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Id. at 324.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Id. at 322-23.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Id. at 322-25.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Id. at 323.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Id. (citing Deuteronomy 23:22).
\item \textsuperscript{79} Id. at 324 n.48.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Id. (citing SHULCHAN ARUCH, Even Haezer 11:1). “The Shulchan Aruch … is regarded as the definitive code of Jewish law by Orthodox Jewry.” Id. at 318 n.15.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Id. at 324. This simply means that the husband has not committed adultery. Id. Under strict Biblical law, a married man cohabitating with an unmarried woman is no different than if both were unmarried. Id. “The marital status of the man is simply irrelevant.” Id. Moreover, the children of such a relationship are not stigmatized as illegitimate. Id.
\end{itemize}
even perhaps if she does not." While a woman can never remarry within her faith without a get, a man may marry again while remaining religiously married to the first spouse. Thus, according to traditional Jewish law, even if the man does not procure a valid get, his remarriage will not be condemned and his children will not be considered culturally inferior, while the same clearly does not hold true for his wife.

Recently, there have been a growing number of cases which grapple with issues of Jewish marriage and divorce. The question of the get requirement necessarily arises whenever a Jewish couple divorces and one party seeks an accompanying religious divorce while the other denies it. Not only is Jewish law pertinent in deciding these cases, but several First and Fourteenth Amendment issues are raised as well.

C. First Amendment Issues

The First Amendment mandates that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . . ." The first clause of the First Amendment is termed the "Establishment Clause." The second is the "Free Exercise Clause." There is a "natural antagonism between the two clauses of the First Amendment." Specifically, the Establishment Clause commands no establishment of religion and the Free Exercise Clause commands no inhibition of the practice of religion. Essentially, the First

82. Id. Further, should the husband subsequently divorce his wife, he is allowed to marry his lover. Id.
83. Id. at 325.
85. See, e.g., Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1020-24 (referring to expert testimony that a get is required to dissolve a Jewish marriage and addressing the enforceability of the same); Minkin, 434 A.2d at 665 (noting the wife's assertion that without a get she is restrained from remarrying within the Jewish faith and the husband's claim that he cannot be compelled to give a get because to do so would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment).
86. U.S. CONST. amend. I.
88. NOWAK & ROTUNDA, supra note 87, at 1157. See infra notes 111-26 and accompanying text (discussing the Free Exercise Clause). The First Amendment is applicable to the states by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. NOWAK & ROTUNDA, supra note 87, at 1157. The Free Exercise Clause was first held applicable to the states in Cantwell v. Connecticut, 310 U.S. 296 (1940). Id.
89. NOWAK & ROTUNDA, supra note 87, at 1157.
90. Id. (citing U.S. CONST. amend. I.).
Amendment prohibits the government from affording special treatment to any religion. At the same time, the First Amendment requires the government to reasonably accommodate religious practices. This tension between the clauses often requires courts to choose between competing values in religion cases.

Some legal scholars have read the First Amendment in its entirety to require that the government “act to achieve secular goals in a religiously neutral manner.” Inevitably, situations arise where the state helps or hinders religious groups, individuals, or practices although it proceeds with its secular goals in a neutral manner. Whether or not this situation is viewed as undesirable may depend upon whose rights, and what rights, are being protected or jeopardized.

91. Id.

92. See, e.g., Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. Amos, 483 U.S. 327, 338 (1987) (asserting that there is “ample room” for accommodation where the government acts with a proper purpose). Cf. Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 350-51 (stating that the Free Exercise Clause requires the government to “structure its programs” so as not to interfere with the practice of religion).


94. Nowak & Rotunda, supra note 87, at 1157.

95. Id.; see Amos, 483 U.S. at 327 (holding that the government may accommodate religious practices without violating the Establishment Clause even though a statute may “single out religious entities for benefit”); Hobbie v. Unemployment Appeals Comm'n, 480 U.S. 136 (1987) (holding that the state’s denial of unemployment compensation benefits to an individual who was discharged because she refused to work on her Sabbath constituted a violation of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment); Thomas v. Review Bd., 450 U.S. 707 (1981) (holding that the state’s denial of unemployment compensation benefits to an individual who terminated his job because his religious beliefs forbade him from participating in the production of armaments violated the First Amendment right to free exercise of religion); Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205 (1972) (holding that the First and Fourteenth Amendments prevented the state from compelling Amish parents to cause their children, who have graduated from eighth grade, to continue to receive formal education where their religious beliefs called for informal religious and vocational education); Sherbert v. Verner, 374 U.S. 398 (1963) (holding that the state may not deny unemployment compensation benefits to an individual who had refused alternative employment due to her religious beliefs, which forbade her to work on Saturday).

96. See Board of Educ. v. Grumet, Nos. 93-517, 93-527, 93-539, 1994 U.S. LEXIS 4830, at *58-65 (June 27, 1994) (O’Connor, J., concurring) (praising the plurality’s refusal to focus on the strict Establishment Clause test of Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971), because issues of the separation of church and state are highly contextual). Justice O’Connor asserted that “what makes accommodation permissible, even praiseworthy, is not that the government is making life easier for some particular religious group as such. Rather, it is that the government is accommodating a deeply held belief.” Id. at *54 (O’Connor, J., concurring).
1. Establishement Clause

"The essence of the Establishment Clause is that states must remain neutral and detached from religious activities." In *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the Supreme Court set forth a three-prong test for determining whether a state action constitutes a violation of the Establishment Clause. According to the test, the Establishment Clause requires that any governmental action, including a court order, (1) have a secular purpose; (2) have a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) not lead to excessive entanglement with religion.

In adhering to the stricures of the Establishment Clause, then, courts are prohibited from becoming involved in disagreements over religious doctrine or practice since such disputes necessarily "entangle" the government with religion. As a means of sidestepping the constraints of the excessive entanglement doctrine, courts have examined "undisputed points of religious doctrine." The Supreme

---

98. 403 U.S. 602 (1971).
99. *Id.* at 612.
100. *Id.* at 612-13. Although the *Lemon* test is still applied in Establishment Clause cases, there is doubt as to its continuing validity. See, *e.g.*, Grumet, Nos. 93-517, 93-527, 93-539, 1994 U.S. LEXIS 4830, at 459 (O'Connor, J., concurring) (suggesting that "setting forth a unitary test for a broad set of cases may sometimes do more harm than good"); Lynch v. Donnelly, 455 U.S. 668, 678 (1984) (stating that "[r]ather than mechanically invalidating all governmental conduct . . . that confer[s] benefits or give[s] special recognition to religion in general or to one faith . . . the Court has scrutinized challenged legislation or official conduct to determine whether, in reality, it establishes a religion or religious faith, or tends to do so").
101. A group of cases, known as the "church property cases," illustrates the nature of this prohibition against excessive entanglement. See *Jones v. Wolf*, 443 U.S. 595, 602-04 (1979) (holding that application of the "neutral principles of law" approach does not constitute excessive entanglement "since it relies exclusively on objective, well-established concepts of . . . law," even though it requires some examination of religious documents); Serbian Eastern Orthodox Diocese v. Milivojevich, 426 U.S. 696, 724-25 (1976) (holding that the First Amendment requires that civil courts defer to the decisions of the highest court of the hierarchical church organization in order to avoid entanglement in religious issues that ultimately rest on interpretation of religious doctrine for resolution); Presbyterian Church in the United States v. Mary Elizabeth Blue Hull Memorial Presbyterian Church, 393 U.S. 440, 449 (1969) (holding that the First Amendment prohibits civil courts from resolving church property disputes on the basis of religious doctrine and practice; such a resolution requires a court to become entangled in the interpretation of ecclesiastical doctrine).
102. Warmflash, *infra* note 93, at 245-48. For example, in *Schwartzman v. Schwartzman*, 388 N.Y.S.2d 993 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1976), a husband sought to enjoin his ex-wife from attempting to change the religion of their children from Judaism to Catholicism. *Id.* The court, in holding that the husband could not claim a Jewish birthright for his children, based its reasoning on an examination of Jewish law, which mandates that a child's religion is the same as that of its mother. *Id.* at 996 (citing TALMUD, *Order Nashim: Tractate Kiddushen* 66b); see also *Rubin v. Rubin*, 348 N.Y.S.2d 61 (N.Y. Fam. Ct. 1973) (holding that secular courts, in enforcing the religious rights of groups or individuals, must note religious requirements).
Court has held that courts may look to and apply religious doctrine as long as they “defer to the interpretation given by the religious authority [and] do not attempt to resolve any dispute within the church about the substance of the doctrine.”

Courts often justify their resort to religious doctrine with a compelling state interest. In determining whether the Establishment Clause has been violated, courts must first decide whether the act in question is religious in nature.

This may be answered by examining “whether the act has any rational justification other than the significance that some religion puts on it.”

According to many Jewish scholars, the get procedure is not religious in nature because it involves no act of prayer or worship. It concerns only the relationship between a married couple and is therefore considered secular. Numerous scholars maintain that Jewish law is divisible into two parts, one “strictly religious” because it involves the relationship between man and God, and the other “essentially secular” since it controls the relationship between man and man. According to such a classification, Jewish marriage and divorce laws would necessarily fall into the latter category.

Although there are arguments to the contrary, authority for the proposition that appearance before a beth din, for purposes of procuring a religious divorce, is not a religious act has been determinative in the courtroom.

2. Free Exercise Clause

The Free Exercise Clause requires that states accommodate religious beliefs so that there is no imposition of undue burdens on the


104. Warmflash, supra note 93, at 246 (stating that in Schwartzman, the court considered the general welfare of children as its overriding interest in validating its review of Jewish law).


106. Id. at 219.

107. See infra notes 208-09 and accompanying text (discussing the expert testimony of four rabbis in Minkin which recognized the secular nature of the get procedure).

108. See e.g., Bleich, supra note 25, at 202 (arguing that “the get is not at all a sacerdotal or religious act. It is not an act of worship; it does not invoke the deity; it involves neither profession of creed nor confession of faith”).

109. See Warmflash, supra note 93, at 243 (concluding that Jewish law concerning domestic relations is secular and not religious in nature); see also Stern v. Stern, N.Y. L.J., Aug. 8, 1979, at 13 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1979) (holding that the Jewish divorce procedure is not a religious act).

110. See Minkin v. Minkin, 434 A.2d 665, 667-68 (N.J. Super. Ct. 1981) (relying on rabbinic testimony in finding that procuring a get is not a religious act). But see Marshall, supra note 44, at 219 (“[I]t is clear that any appearance before a religious tribunal for the purpose of exercising a religious divorce is per se religious in nature. There is no secular justification for such a divorce since a civil divorce legally terminates the marriage.”).
free practice of religion. In order to claim a violation of the Free Exercise Clause, two requirements must be satisfied by the proponent of the claim: (1) a “sincere” religious belief or practice must have been violated; and (2) the violation must be the result of a governmental action. The Court in Yoder relied on four factors to determine whether a particular belief was, in fact, religious. Those four factors are as follows: (1) the belief must be shared by an organized group rather than a personal preference; (2) the belief must be related to certain theocratic principles and interpretations of religious literature; (3) the system of beliefs must pervade and regulate the believers’ daily lives; and (4) the system of beliefs and life style resulting therefrom must have been in existence for a substantial period of time.

The Supreme Court established a two-prong test in Sherbert v. Ver ner, for determining whether a governmental action, including a court order, constitutes a violation of an individual’s free exercise of religion. In order for an action to violate an individual’s free exercise rights, it must (1) impose a significant burden upon the individual’s free exercise of religion; and (2) not be overcome by a compelling interest.

Courts have allowed interference with a party’s religious beliefs if the interference was slight and based on a compelling state interest.

---


112. Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205, 215-16 (1972). The Free Exercise Clause protects only sincere religious beliefs. Id. at 215. The Yoder Court defined a “sincere” religious belief as a belief that is central to the faith and the continuing survival of the religion as it exists. Id. at 209-10.

114. Id. at 215-17.
115. Id.
117. Id. at 403; see also Marshall, supra note 44, at 214 (discussing the test applied in Sherbert).
118. Sherbert, 374 U.S. at 403.
119. There are a number of cases which have held that the state’s compelling interest in ending discrimination is sufficient to override an incidental burden on a party’s religious beliefs. See, e.g., Ohio Civil Rights Comm. v. Dayton Christian Schools, 477 U.S. 619 (1986) (holding that an incidental burden on religion is overridden by the compelling state interest in ending discrimination); Roberts v. United States Jaycees, 468 U.S. 609 (1984) (holding that the compel-
For example, in *In re Marriage of Tisckos*, the court upheld a judgment requiring a father to drive his daughter to Catholic services during visitation even though he was a Baptist, and driving his daughter to church would interfere with his activities at his Baptist church. The court decided that driving his daughter to church would only slightly interfere with the father's religious activity, and further held that the father had a duty to enable the daughter "to fulfill her religious obligation." Similarly, in *In re Marriage of Roberts*, the court rejected a father's attempt to deny visitation rights to his ex-wife on the ground that visitation would violate his free exercise rights. Here, the court found that continued visitation rights affected only the mother's rights, and any burden imposed on the father's free exercise of religion were slight and incidental. Thus, when the parties' free exercise rights are in conflict or when there is an overriding concern, the state will tolerate an incidental burden on one party's religious beliefs.

D. Burden on Free Exercise Rights In Religious Divorce Context

According to the first part of the Sherbert test, a court must examine whether, in compelling a religious divorce, the state is imposing a burden on the party's free exercise of religion. In order to clarify exactly what constitutes a burden on an individual's right to free exercise, one commentator has recognized four distinct categories of burdens on free exercise on religion. First, there is a burden where the

---

121. Id. at 529.
122. Id.
124. Id. at 364. The court held that "[t]he order is unrelated to the [the father's] freedom to practice his religion as he desires because the order is only directed at the rights of the [ex-wife]." Id.; see also Lane v. Lane, 340 N.E.2d 705, 709-10 (Ill. App. Ct. 1976) (rejecting the divorced husband's claim that continued provision of alimony payments to his ex-wife who had become a nun constituted an infringement on his free exercise rights and an establishment of religion); Smith v. Smith, 92 N.E.2d 358 (Ill. App. Ct. 1950) (affirming enforcement of a custody decree requiring the child to be reared Catholic).
125. Roberts, 503 N.E.2d at 364.
126. See Jehovah's Witnesses v. King County Hosp., 390 U.S. 598 (1968) (per curiam) (holding summarily that a parent could not, on religious grounds, withhold a blood transfusion that was necessary to save the child's life).
127. Sherbert v. Verner, 374 U.S. 398, 403 (1963); see also Marshall, supra note 44, at 214 (discussing the application of the Sherbert test).
state forces an individual to do something forbidden by his religion; second, the state imposes a burden when it prevents an individual from doing that which is required by his religion; third, where the state makes religious observance more difficult or expensive, it is burdening the individual's free exercise; and fourth, a burden exists where "the state forces an individual to do something 'religious' which he wishes not to do, although his opposition is not necessarily based on his religious beliefs." Often, in religious divorce cases, one spouse (most often, the husband) raises a free exercise claim that the state cannot force him to do something that he considers religious. Where the party seeks to remain "religiously neutral" the court must initially determine whether the act of giving a get is in fact "religious." While arguments exist both for and against the proposition that obtaining a get constitutes a "religious" act, the prevailing legal theory is that forcing a religious divorce is not forcing an act religious by nature. This Comment adopts the predominant view of the courts, and thus contends that any burden such an act imposes on an individual is not only incidental but disassociated from a genuine free exercise claim. If, however, the

---


132. Marshall, supra note 44, at 214; see also John H. Garvey, Freedom and Choice in Constitutional Law, 94 HARV. L. REV. 1756 (1981) (arguing that the Free Exercise Clause "guarantees that the state can no more command piety than it can forbid it").

133. Marshall, supra note 44, at 215. The cases in this area frequently address the husband's claim that the state cannot enforce the ketubah without violating the Free Exercise Clause. See e.g., In re Marriage of Goldman, 554 N.E.2d 1016, 1022-24 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990) (finding the husband's free exercise claim without merit).


135. For example, one commentator feverently argues that obtaining a get is a religious act. Marshall, supra note 44, at 219-223. Marshall asserts that since the act of procuring a get "has no rational secular justification," it must be considered a religious act. Id. at 219. He maintains that "any appearance before a religious tribunal for the purpose of securing a religious divorce is per se religious in nature," and there can be "no secular justification for such a divorce since a civil divorce legally terminates the marriage." Id. Marshall equates the "mundane" act of securing a religious divorce with taking communion or eating nonkosher food. Id. at 219. "While neither of those acts explicitly invokes the deity, a court is prohibited from ordering an individual to perform such acts which are considered religious by nature." Id.

136. See Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1024 (finding that the get procedure did not require any act of worship or any expression of religious beliefs); Minkin, 434 A.2d at 667-68 (determining that the get procedure is not religious in nature).

137. See infra notes 261-75 and accompanying text (discussing the get cases in light of the Free Exercise Clause).
proponent of the claim is able to convince the court that the state has imposed a real burden on his free exercise of religion, this claim may be readily overcome by more than one secular and compelling state interest.

E. Compelling State Interests

Authority supporting the theory that domestic relations should be governed by Jewish secular law is strong. Thus, a court order compelling the husband to provide his wife with a get often has not been considered as enforcing a "religious" act. However, assuming for the sake of argument, that such an order does infringe upon the husband's free exercise rights, it does so only incidentally and is overridden by a number of compelling state interests.138 While numerous scholars and courts have found the freedom to contract to be the overriding compelling interest,139 as will be duly discussed, this Comment rather favors equal protection of the law and the freedom to remarry as the more substantial and convincing state interests with which to counter a free exercise claim.

1. The Ketubah as a Contract

It has been argued quite successfully that the ketubah is an enforceable contract, and that in compelling husbands to grant their wives a get, courts are merely upholding a secular provision of a contract.140 In so ruling, a number of courts have equated the ketubah to other antenuptial agreements, which set out methods for resolving disputes in advance.141 In fact, one author has stated that the "only interest

138. See infra notes 233-45, 292-98 and accompanying text (discussing various state interests furthered by compelling a religious divorce proceeding).

139. See, e.g., Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023 (finding that the order at issue did not violate the Establishment Clause because it had the secular purpose of enforcing a contract between the parties); Avitzur, 446 N.E.2d at 138-39 (deciding the case at hand "solely upon the application of neutral principals of contract law"); see also Marshall, supra note 44, at 233 ("[I]t seems evident that the only potential compelling governmental interest in religious divorce cases is the enforcement of contractual obligations.").

140. See Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1018-22 (holding that the get procedure is secular in nature); Avitzur, 446 N.E.2d at 138-39 (concluding that the procurement of the get requires no religious affirmations).

141. See, e.g., Avitzur, 446 N.E.2d at 138-39 ("[T]he relief sought... is simply to compel [the husband] to perform a secular obligation...."). The Avitzurs did not use a traditional ketubah, which makes no mention of submission to the beth din. Id. Rather they signed an English translation containing a clause requiring the parties to appear before the beth din to solve marital problems, which Marshall argues serves to emphasize the document's secular, legal impact. Marshall, supra note 44, at 225 n.98.
sufficiently compelling to justify enforcing a religious divorce on unwilling parties is the state’s interest in enforcing valid contracts.”

While the notion of the ketubah as a legally valid contract is widely accepted, there is an equally convincing argument to the contrary. The opposing argument is that the ketubah may not be interpreted under traditional contract law because it fails to comply with basic contract principles. One author asserts that in most cases, the signing of the ketubah is part of a ritual that is “entered into out of respect for tradition and family expectations rather than an intent that its contents may be enforced in a secular court.” This is especially true since the vast majority of couples signing a ketubah do not even understand, or bother to have translated, the provisions therein. Thus, the ketubah may be differentiated from other antenuptial agreements in that it is neither negotiated nor bargained for at arms length.

2. Fourteenth Amendment

The Fourteenth Amendment commands that no state shall “deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” The Equal Protection Clause guarantees that all individuals similarly situated will be treated in a similar manner. This constitutional guarantee governs “all state actions which classify individuals for different benefits or burdens under the law.” The Supreme Court has used the notion of equal protection to guarantee that all individuals are “accorded fair treatment in the exercise of fundamental rights or in the elimination of distinctions based on impermissible criteria.”

142. Marshall, supra note 44, at 206, 233. Marshall looks to the Avitzur-type of ketubah to show that parties may exhibit a knowing intention to be bound by its terms. Id. at 225.
143. Kahan, supra note 19, at 216-19 (arguing that the intent to be contractually bound is absent when signing the ketubah).
144. Id.
145. Id.; see also Marshall, supra note 44, at 225 n.98 (recognizing that the parties infrequently understand the meaning of the ketubah in a literal sense). Even Marshall, who defends the notion that the ketubah is a binding legal contract, concedes that the typical ketubah, which is written in Hebrew and Aramaic, is more often viewed as a “liturgical rather than legal” document. Id.
146. Kahan, supra note 19, at 216.
147. U.S. Const. amend XIV.
148. See NOWAK & ROTUNDA, supra note 87, at 568 (discussing the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution).
149. Id.
150. Id.
Our nation's definition of "liberty" includes the freedom of choice to engage in, or refrain from, certain activities. When those activities are specifically recognized in the Constitution, the right to engage in them is protected by the Due Process guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court, however, will actively protect only those constitutional rights deemed to be "fundamental." "Fundamental rights are those with textual recognition in the Constitution, or its amendments, or values found to be implied because they are indispensable to our notion of freedom, as reflected by history and interpretation by the Supreme Court."

The Court recognized this concept of "fundamental rights" when it incorporated most of the guarantees of the Bill of Rights into the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and applied them to the states. Among those fundamental rights found to be implied in the Constitution, the most significant are the right to freedom of association, the right to interstate travel, the right to vote, and the right to privacy which includes freedom of choice in marital, familial, and sexual activities. The Due Process Clause provides that no state shall "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." U.S. CONST. amend. XIV.

The Supreme Court also guards those rights which do not have specific textual basis in the Constitution. In particular, the Court has used the Due Process Clause to advance the use of a "natural law analysis to select and protect those liberties which are essential in our society." In the early cases, the Court determined whether a specific right was so fundamental that it could be said to be "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty." Palko v. Connecticut, 302 U.S. 319, 325 (1937). Subsequently, the Court relaxed the test to ascertain whether the right was "fundamental to the American scheme of justice." Duncan v. Louisiana, 391 U.S. 145, 148-49 (1968). The modified test shows a "willingness on the Court's part to enforce those values which have a special importance in the development of individual liberty in American society, even if that value was not deemed to be absolutely necessary to the system of a democratic government."

The Supreme Court has recognized these rights as being "essential to individual liberty in our society." Id. at 388. The Court has recognized these rights as being "essential to individual liberty in our society." Id. at 388.

151. Id. at 505. The Court has recognized these rights as being "essential to individual liberty in our society." Id. at 388.

152. Id. The Due Process Clause provides that no state shall "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." U.S. CONST. amend. XIV.

153. Id.

154. Id. The Supreme Court also guards those rights which do not have specific textual basis in the Constitution. Id. at 388. In particular, the Court has used the Due Process Clause to advance the use of a "natural law analysis to select and protect those liberties which are essential in our society." Id.

155. Id. at 505. In the early cases, the Court determined whether a specific right was so fundamental that it could be said to be "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty." Palko v. Connecticut, 302 U.S. 319, 325 (1937). Subsequently, the Court relaxed the test to ascertain whether the right was "fundamental to the American scheme of justice." Duncan v. Louisiana, 391 U.S. 145, 148-49 (1968). The modified test shows a "willingness on the Court's part to enforce those values which have a special importance in the development of individual liberty in American society, even if that value was not deemed to be absolutely necessary to the system of a democratic government."

156. See NAACP v. Alabama, 357 U.S. 449 (1958) (recognizing the freedom to engage in association for the advancement of beliefs and ideas).

157. See U.S. v. Guest, 383 U.S. 745, 757 (1966) (holding that the right to travel from one State to another is a fundamental right).

158. See Reynolds v. Sims, 377 U.S. 533, 560 (1964) (holding that voting is a fundamental right protected under the Constitution).

159. NOWAK & ROTUNDA, supra note 87, at 385. The term "right to privacy" has come to mean a right to engage in certain highly personal activities. Id.

160. See, e.g., Zablocki v. Redhail, 434 U.S. 374, 384 (1978) (holding that individuals have a fundamental right to marry under the Fourteenth Amendment); Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1, 12 (1967) (striking down a statute prohibiting interracial marriage as a denial of due process); Skinner v. Oklahoma, 316 U.S. 535, 541 (1942) (finding that state interference with the fundamental rights of marriage and procreation requires a compelling government interest).
ily, sexual matters. Numerous Supreme Court decisions make clear that freedom of personal choice in matters of marriage and family life is one of the liberties protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

3. **Fundamental Right to Remarry**

The right to freedom of choice regarding matters of marriage and family relationships is "at the core of the right to privacy." The fundamental right to remarry may be inferred from the freedom of choice in marital matters. For example, in *Boddie v. Connecticut*, the Court held that the state could not refuse to grant a divorce to those persons who are unable to pay court filing fees since the Court has decided that the right to marry, and hence divorce, is a fundamental right under the Due Process Clause. In *Zablocki v. Redhail*, the Court took the right to privacy one step further by indirectly protecting the right to remarry. There, the Court struck down a state law which prevented persons from marrying if they failed to meet their financial obligations to pay alimony or child support arising from an earlier marriage and divorce. This ruling effectively extended the right to privacy to include the right to subsequent marriages as one of the fundamental rights that the Fourteenth Amendment seeks to protect.

States have a secular interest in enabling its citizens to remarry following a decree of dissolution, and in facilitating the removal of any barriers that prevent the exercise of this fundamental right. Some states have even enacted statutes in order to effectuate such goals.

161. See, e.g., *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399 (1923) (holding that the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees the right to marry, establish a home and raise children).
162. See, e.g., *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 405 U.S. 438 (1972) (holding that the right to contraception is a fundamental right).
163. *Webster v. Reproductive Health Servs.*, 492 U.S. 490, 564 (1989) (Stevens, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part); see also *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925) (holding that decisions regarding child rearing and education are matters of privacy properly protected by the Fourteenth Amendment).
166. Id. at 374.
168. See id. at 384-87 (extending the fundamental right to marry to include decisions related to marriage).
169. Id. at 383-86.
170. Id. at 384-87.
172. See, e.g., 750 ILCS 5/102 (West 1995) (providing statutory support for the right to remarry).
For example, in Illinois, the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act serves to "promote the amicable settlement of disputes that have arisen between parties to a marriage;" and to "mitigate the potential harm to the spouses and their children caused by the process of legal dissolution of marriage." By enforcing the get proceeding, courts are not only enforcing the state's secular goals as expressed by its statutes, but are also protecting the parties' constitutional rights.

E. Case Law Governing Enforcement of the Get Procedure

The current Illinois law governing Jewish divorces, as decided by In re Marriage of Goldman, follows the majority of courts in finding ways to civilly enforce the get procedure. Most courts dealing with the issue of enforcement of the get provision have upheld it against contentions that enforcement would infringe upon the constitutional separation of church and state since the court would, in effect, be forcing one of the parties to participate in a religious divorce proceeding against his/her will, or that it would promote divorce in contravention of public policy. Courts have been most successful in upholding the

---

173. Id.
174. See Breitowitz, supra note 28, at 354 (recognizing that enforcement of the get proceeding encourages marriage, stabilizes family life, and protects the fundamental right of privacy which encompasses the freedom to remarry).
176. See id. at 1024 (finding that the get procedure is essentially secular in nature, and therefore, the husband's constitutional rights were not infringed).
177. See Cook v. Cook, No. FA 90-0376937, 1992 Conn. Super. LEXIS 1589 (Conn. Super. Ct. May 26, 1992) (holding that the court could order both parties to cooperate in obtaining the get); In re Scholl v. Scholl, 621 A.2d 808 (Del. 1992) (holding that enforcement of the get provision was proper because the husband may be compelled to do that which he already agreed to do when he signed the ketubah); Fleischer v. Fleischer, 586 So. 2d 1253 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1991) (holding that the husband waived his First Amendment challenge to enforcement of the get provision by signing the ketubah and so the court order requiring him to deliver a get was proper); In re Marriage of Goldman, 554 N.E.2d 1016 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990); Burns v. Burns, 538 A.2d 438 (N.J. Super. Ct. Ch. Div. 1987) (holding that since the husband's refusal to grant the get was not based on genuine religious beliefs, the court order compelling him to submit to the jurisdiction of the beth din to initiate the procedure to secure a get would not violate the Establishment Clause); Megibow v. Megibow, 612 N.Y.S.2d 758 (N.Y. App. Div. 1994) (relying on § 253 in reaching its conclusion that the husband is required to cooperate in all phases of securing a get); Kaplinsky v. Kaplinsky, 603 N.Y.S.2d 574 (N.Y. App. Div. 1993) (holding that the court may hold the husband in contempt for failure to deliver a get to his wife); Perl v. Perl, 512 N.Y.S.2d 372 (N.Y. App. Div. 1987) (holding that once a party seeks the court's civil relief of divorce, the husband's misuse of his get power is subject to review and revision by the court); Waxstein v. Waxstein, 394 N.Y.S.2d 253 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1977) (granting specific performance of an agreement to give a get where it was incorporated into the written separation agreement); Shapiro v. Shapiro, 442 N.Y.S.2d 928 (Sp. Term. 1981) (holding an Israeli divorce decree as enforceable in the jurisdiction and so the court may force the husband to procure the get for his wife); Rubin v. Rubin, 348 N.Y.S.2d 61 (N.Y. Fam. Ct. 1973). But see Victor v. Victor, 866 P.2d 899 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1993) (holding that the court was without jurisdiction to order a husband to
get provision of the ketubah by construing the ketubah as a legally binding contract, with some courts equating it with any other antenuptial contract.\textsuperscript{178}

In so finding, courts have relied on the expert testimonies of Orthodox rabbis who contend that the acquisition of a get does not constitute a religious act, but rather is the "severance of a secular contractual relationship between the two parties."\textsuperscript{179} Thus, the majority of courts have determined that an order compelling a recalcitrant husband to secure a get has the secular purpose of completing a dissolution of a marriage since it does not require the husband to participate in a "religious" ceremony.\textsuperscript{180} As such, a court order enforcing the get provision effectively serves the state's interest in allowing parties to remarry without violating the First Amendment.

1. \textit{Pre-Goldman Cases}

A 1983 New York case involving enforcement of the ketubah set the current trend in this area of the law, and caused the enactment of a statute in New York.\textsuperscript{181} In \textit{Avitzur v. Avitzur},\textsuperscript{182} the court held that the provision in the ketubah which articulated the parties' intention to appear before the beth din in seeking marital advice or counseling was civilly enforceable and subject to specific performance under general contract principles.\textsuperscript{183} Rejecting the husband's argument that enforcement of the ketubah provision would necessarily intrude upon matters....

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Avitzur}, 446 N.E.2d at 138-39. See infra notes 196-203 and accompanying text (discussing pre-Avitzur cases which enforced the ketubah on general contract principles).

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Goldman}, 554 N.E.2d at 1022; \textit{Avitzur}, 446 N.E.2d at 138-39; \textit{Minkin}, 434 A.2d at 667-68.

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Goldman}, 554 N.E.2d at 1022; \textit{Avitzur}, 446 N.E.2d at 138-39; \textit{Minkin}, 434 A.2d at 667-68.

\textsuperscript{181} N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 253 (McKinney Supp. 1983). For a discussion of the New York statute, see infra notes 190-95 and accompanying text. One commentator has suggested that the \textit{Avitzur} decision is consistent with the current developments in family law, which includes increasing judicial enforcement of antenuptial agreements. Kahan, \textit{supra} note 19, at 194.


\textsuperscript{183} Id. at 139.
of religious doctrine and practice, the court said that it was not compelling a religious procedure arising out of religious law, but rather was enforcing a prenuptial agreement made by the parties to “appear before and accept the decision of a designated tribunal.” The court noted that the order only compelled the husband to appear before the beth din, not to actually obtain a get.

Viewed in this manner, the court found that the ketubah was “closely analogous to an antenuptial agreement by which parties agree in advance to resolution of disputes which may subsequently arise.” The court said that the ketubah should be entitled “no less dignity” than other civil contracts to submit a dispute to a nonjudicial forum, so long as its enforcement violates neither the law nor the public policy of the state. The Avitzur court decided that merely because the obligation to appear before the beth din, spelled out in the ketubah, was grounded in religious belief and practice, should not preclude enforcement of its secular terms.

The state of New York enacted a statute shortly after the Avitzur decision which was a clear attempt by the legislature to alleviate the problem created by Jewish law. The statute requires a spouse, upon divorce, to take all steps within his or her power to remove “any religious or conscientious restraints” on the other spouse’s remarriage. Since the statute essentially requires spouses either to give or to accept a get before a civil court will enter a final divorce decree, the statute has been appropriately labelled the “get statute.”

---

184. The court determined that the case could be decided solely upon the application of neutral principles of contract law without consideration of religious matters. Id. at 138 (citing Jones v. Wolf, 443 U.S. 595, 602-03 (1976)).
185. Id. at 138.
186. Id.
187. Id.
188. Id. In this case, the court found that the parties had agreed, by signing the ketubah, to arbitrate disputes in accordance with Jewish law and tradition. Id.
189. Id. at 139. The court noted that the relief sought by the wife was simply to compel her husband to appear before the beth din, a secular obligation to which he contractually bound himself. Id. The court reasoned that since “no doctrinal issue need be passed upon, no implementation of a religious duty is contemplated, and no interference with religious authority will result," the wife is entitled to the relief sought. Id.
190. Kahan, supra note 19, at 202 (citing N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 253 (McKinney Supp. 1983)).
192. Kahan, supra note 19, at 194. One commentator, who argues that the get statute is unconstitutional as violating the First Amendment, states that the statute is “nothing more than ‘religious gerrymandering’ since it turns the differences between the Catholic and Jewish divorce procedures on their heads.” Marshall, supra note 44, at 219 n.82. While the statute compels issuance of a Jewish divorce, it purposefully fails to compel participation in a Catholic annulment procedure. Id. The statute explicitly provides that it “shall not be constituted to include applica-
ponents of the get statute maintain that its purpose is secular and that it only requires parties to do "what they implicitly agreed to do when they initially signed the ketubah." By insisting that the parties remove all religious barriers to remarriage, the statute advances the secular purpose of divorce law and protects the fundamental right to remarry. Nonetheless, numerous commentators have criticized both the Avitzur decision and the get statute as being unconstitutional.

Even before Avitzur and the get statute, courts were finding ways to enforce the get proceeding. In these early cases, courts usually em-

---


3. See Feldman, supra note 10, at 140 (contending that the get procedure invokes religious freedoms); Madeline Kochen, Constitutional Implications of New York's Get Statute, N.Y. L.J., Oct. 27, 1983, at 1; Elizabeth R. Leiberman, Avitzur v. Avitzur: The Constitutional Implications of Judicially Enforcing Religious Agreements, 33 Cath. U. L. Rev. 219 (1983) (arguing that states are in need of Supreme Court direction to resolve religious disputes between individuals); Marshall, supra note 44 (arguing that the get statute is both an unconstitutional burden on the free exercise of religion and an unconstitutional establishment of religion); Nadel, supra note 177 (concluding that the get law presents serious problems under the First Amendment). But see Warmflash, supra note 93 (concluding that while the New York get statute is of questionable constitutionality and will most likely fail to accomplish its intended result, the approach taken by the Avitzur court is one that presents an appropriate and constitutionally adequate response to the issue of secular enforcement of Jewish legal obligations); Kahan, supra note 19 (arguing that the judicial approach taken by the Avitzur court is far superior to the solution crafted by the New York legislature); Tanina Rostain, Note, Permissible Accommodations of Religion: Reconsidering the New York Get Statute, 96 Yale L.J. 1147 (1987) (concluding that the get statute is a permissible accommodation of religion).

4. See Kahan, supra note 19, at 211-12 (discussing the application of general contract principles to enforce the get procedure). A number of pre-Avitzur cases involved a written separation agreement between the parties where one party was seeking to enforce one provision while refusing to comply with another, usually the get provision. See, e.g., B. v. B., N.Y. L.J., May 4, 1978, at 7 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1978) (holding that an agreement to give a get constituted a vital term of the settlement agreement); Waxstein v. Waxstein, 57 A.D.2d 863, (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1977) (granting specific performance of an agreement to give a get where it was incorporated into the written separation agreement); Rubin v. Rubin, 348 N.Y.S.2d 61 (N.Y. Fam. Ct. 1973) (upholding a separation agreement that required the wife to accept a get where the wife was seeking enforcement of the support provisions of the same agreement).
ployed general contract principles, not hesitating to force parties to adhere to agreements to give *gittin* when such parties wished to benefit from other terms of the agreement, such as rights to support and alimony.\(^{197}\) For instance, in *Rubin v. Rubin*,\(^ {198}\) the parties had executed a separation agreement that made support and alimony contingent upon the wife’s acceptance of a *get*.\(^ {199}\) When the wife sued for support under the separation agreement, the court refused to enforce the support provision until she accepted the *get*.\(^ {200}\) The court saw cooperation in a Jewish divorce as a condition precedent to enforcement of the separation agreement between the parties.\(^ {201}\) Thus, unlike *Avitzur* and subsequent cases, which concerned the *ketubah* itself, pre-*Avitzur* cases generally involved separation agreements that arguably were negotiated at arms length and reflected the parties’ real intentions.\(^ {202}\) In this setting, judges had little difficulty enforcing the *get* promise as only one of the many conditions of the entire separation agreement.\(^ {203}\)

Subsequently, some courts began to require a husband to deliver a *get* on the basis of the traditional *ketubah*.\(^ {204}\) For example, in *Minkin v. Minkin*,\(^ {205}\) the court found it proper to compel the husband to secure a *get* in accordance with the terms of the traditional *ketubah*.\(^ {206}\) The *ketubah* provides that the parties agree to abide by the “law of Moses and Israel,” laws which require the husband to give his wife a *get* upon dissolution of the marriage.\(^ {207}\) The court rejected the husband’s contention that the enforcement of the *ketubah* would violate his First Amendment right to freedom of religion since, based on the expert testimony of several distinguished rabbis, the court concluded

---

197. Kahan, *supra* note 19, at 211-12; see, e.g., Waxstein, 57 A.D. 863 (granting specific performance of a promise to give a *get* where such a promise was part of a separation agreement demanding that the wife vacate the marital residence and transfer title to the house and some stock to her husband, and the wife had complied with her part of the deal). The court noted the inherent unfairness of the husband’s receipt of the benefits of the agreement without complying with the “relatively-light burden” of giving a *get*. *Id.*

198. 348 N.Y.S.2d at 61.
199. *Id.* at 63-64.
200. *Id.* at 68.
201. *Id.* at 67.
203. One commentator has said that “a prenuptial or separation agreement conditioning various benefits on the execution of a *get* may well have the desired effect of indirectly inducing compliance.” Breitowitz, *supra* note 13, at 80 n.224. In this way, the court is able to enforce the *get* provision without having to touch upon the religious claim. *Id.*
204. Kahan, *supra* note 19, at 212.
206. *Id.* at 666.
207. *Id.* at 665.
that the ketubah document and get procedure were devoid of any religious connotation.\textsuperscript{208} Relying on the evidence of the rabbis' testimonies, the court held that an order compelling the husband to secure a get has the "clear secular purpose of completing a dissolution of the marriage."\textsuperscript{209}

Like Minkin and similar cases before it, Avitzur was predicated on neutral principles of contract law, which interpret the ketubah as any other secular marriage contract that delineates the procedure to be taken upon divorce.\textsuperscript{210} However, unlike Minkin, which required the delivery of a get, the Avitzur court merely ordered the parties to appear before the beth din.\textsuperscript{211} The Goldman court used the Minkin approach by extracting the get requirement from the text of the ketubah itself, rather than the Avitzur approach of granting specific performance of the beth din clause in the ketubah.\textsuperscript{212}

2. The Goldman Case

One of the most recent cases in this area, In re Marriage of Goldman,\textsuperscript{213} is the first case on the appellate level to construe the ketubah as an implied contract to give a get. Unlike the Avitzur court, which equated the ketubah with an antenuptial agreement allowing parties to agree in advance to methods of dispute resolutions,\textsuperscript{214} the Goldman court found that the ketubah document implicitly required

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{208}} Id. at 667-68. Two of the rabbis who testified stated that the ketubah is basically a civil contract which sets out the obligations of the parties during the marriage, under which the marriage may be dissolved only by the death of one of the parties or by the acquisition of a get. Id. at 667. The rabbis further testified that the get procedure does not involve a religious ceremony or require a rabbi's presence. Id. Moreover, the husband does not have to believe in the religious tenets, state any doctrine or creed, or even acknowledge his Jewishness. Id. Two other rabbis stated that Jewish law is not solely comprised of religious law, but instead is made up of two components — one regulating man's relationship with God and the other controlling the relationship between man and man. Id. at 668. The get procedure falls into the latter category since it contains no reference to God and only affects the relationship between the parties. Id. Therefore, according to the rabbis' testimony, the get procedure is a civil rather than religious matter. Id.
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{209}} Id.
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{210}} See Avitzur v. Avitzur, 446 N.E.2d 136, 138 (N.Y. App. Ct.), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 817 (1983) (using the neutral principles of law approach to permit judicial resolution of religious disputes to the extent that it can be accomplished without consideration of doctrinal matters).
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{211}} Id.
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{212}} BREITOWITZ, supra note 13, at 81. The reason that the Goldman court looked to the actual wording of the ketubah is that the ketubah signed by the Goldmans and Minkins did not contain the beth din clause found in the Avitzur ketubah. Id.
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{213}} In re Marriage of Goldman, 554 N.E.2d 1016 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990).
\item[id]{\textsuperscript{214}} See Avitzur, 446 N.E.2d at 138 (finding that the signing of the ketubah, with its provisions which resemble an antenuptial agreement, is valid and enforceable as a contractual obligation to refer the matter to a nonjudicial forum).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the husband to give his wife a get upon divorce. Goldman is the only recorded Illinois case in this area of the law.

In Goldman, the parties signed a ketubah prior to their wedding ceremony, which contained a provision stating: "[b]e thou my wife according to the law of Moses and Israel." Unlike the ketubah in Avitzur, the Goldmans' ketubah did not contain the provision which requires the parties to appear before a beth din. The court nonetheless found that the get requirement could be enforced by adhering to contract law. Interpreting the relevant provision, the court held that the ketubah was intended to be a contract which required that the "status and validity of the marriage would be governed by Orthodox Jewish law." Two Orthodox rabbis testified that termination of a marriage under Orthodox Jewish law requires the giving of a get. In this way, the court inferred the get provision from the traditional ketubah.

The court rejected the husband's contention that the ketubah is not a contract, but was rather more like "poetry or art." Instead, the court found that the ketubah is a contract with sufficiently certain terms, and that the parties did manifest an intention that it would be binding upon their marriage based upon the parties' request for an Orthodox Jewish ketubah prior to their marriage, and on the parties' conscious calculations that the ketubah would bind their marriage to the tenets of Orthodox Jewish law.

Finally, the court found that compelling the husband to secure a get for his wife would not violate his First Amendment rights. Applying the Lemon test, the court concluded that an order compelling the husband to obtain a get would not violate the Establishment

215. See Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1020-22 (concluding that the ketubah is an agreement between the parties that their marriage would be governed by Orthodox Jewish law which requires the delivery of a get upon dissolution of the marriage).
216. Id. at 1020.
217. Id.
218. See id. at 1022 (finding that because the terms of the ketubah were certain and definite, specific performance was appropriate).
219. Id.
220. See id. at 1020-1022 (finding that the expert testimony presented to the trial court established that Orthodox Jewish law requires the delivery of the get upon dissolution of the marriage).
221. Id. at 1021.
222. Id. at 1018-20.
223. Id. at 1022-24.
224. See Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602, 612-13 (1971) (creating the following test to determine whether a state statute violates the Establishment Clause: (1) whether the statute goes beyond a secular purpose; (2) whether its effect inhibits or advances religion; and (3) whether the statute creates an entanglement between government and religion).
Next, the court, using the guidelines set out in *Yoder*, held that the order satisfied the requirements of the Free Exercise Clause. Furthermore, the appellate court found that the lower court’s order required the husband to do nothing more than what he had promised when he signed the *ketubah*. Because the expert testimony by rabbis established that the *get* procedure is secular in nature and does not require the husband to engage in any act of worship or to express any religious belief, the court was satisfied that compelling the husband to obtain a *get* would not violate his First Amendment rights.

The dissenting opinion disagreed that a civil court has the authority to compel a party to perform terms of the *ketubah*. In dissent, Justice Johnson stated that the court’s order violated the husband’s constitutional rights under the First Amendment. He argued that “[a]ny order of the court which requires extensive investigation and evaluation of religious doctrines and tenets is prohibited by the First Amendment.

---

225. *Goldman*, 554 N.E.2d at 1023. First, the order had the secular purpose of enforcing a contract between the parties. *Id.* Two additional secular purposes were to promote a settlement of disputes between the parties to a marriage, and to mitigate potential harm to the spouses and their children caused by the process of a legal dissolution of marriage. *Id.* Second, the primary effect of the court order was to further the secular purposes stated above rather than to advance or inhibit religion. *Id.* The court based its finding on the testimonies of two expert witnesses to the effect that Jewish law contains both religious rules and secular laws, and that marriage and divorce are secular, contractual undertakings. *Id.* To the extent that the order advances Orthodox Judaism, it is an incidental effect of the enforcement of the parties’ contract. *Id.* Third, the order avoids excessive entanglement with religion since it was applying “objective, well-established principles of contract law which do not entail a consideration of doctrinal matters.” *Id.; see also* *Jones v. Wolf*, 443 U.S. 595, 602-03 (1979) (holding that the application of “neutral principles of law” does not constitute excessive entanglement); *Lemon*, 403 U.S. at 612-13 (holding that state payments to parochial schools violated the First Amendment because such payments created an excessive entanglement between government and religion).

226. *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 215-16 (1972). The *Goldman* court found that the husband’s dislike or disrespect for Orthodox Judaism did not rise to the level of a true religious belief. *Goldman*, 554 N.E.2d at 1023. According to *Yoder*, only religious, as opposed to personal or philosophical, beliefs are protected by the Free Exercise Clause. *Yoder*, 406 U.S. at 215. *See supra* note 112 (discussing the definition of a “sincere” religious belief).

227. *Id.* at 1024; *see also* *Avitzur v. Avitzur*, 446 N.E.2d 136, 139 (N.Y. App. Ct.), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 817 (1983) (holding that the husband only had to appear before the designated tribunal and accept the decision on the matter of dissolution as agreed upon by the parties when they signed the *ketubah*).

228. *Goldman*, 554 N.E.2d at 1024.

229. *Id.* at 1025 (Johnson, J., dissenting). The dissent claimed that while the trial court had the authority to make a ruling on the contract issue, the court could not compel the husband to perform a provision within the contract which requires interpretation of a religious doctrine. *Id.* at 1026 (Johnson, J., dissenting). The dissent further claimed that the terms of the *ketubah* were not “so definite and certain as to allow the court to require specific performance of the inferred *get* provision.” *Id.* (Johnson, J., dissenting).

230. *Id.* (Johnson, J., dissenting).
Amendment." 231 The dissent concluded that since a civil court does not have the authority to dictate one's religion or the form in which it is practiced, the court order was unconstitutional. 232 Since the dissenting opinion neglected prior Supreme Court rulings discussed herein, this Comment contends that the dissent lacks the merit of the majority opinion.

II. ANALYSIS

After thoroughly analyzing the various approaches of civil courts in solving the domestic problems caused by the Jewish divorce procedure, this Comment concludes that "specific performance" of the get provision is constitutional because it does not violate the Establishment Clause or the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Furthermore, enforcement of the get requirement advances several compelling state interests. However, courts should refrain from interpreting the ketubah as a contract since it fails to conform materially with contract law. Instead, courts would be wise to follow the dictates of the Fourteenth Amendment in accommodating what may be termed "a religious mandate."

A. Constitutional Analysis

Enforcement of the get procedure, which requires a husband to procure a get for his wife, or conversely, forcing a wife to accept her husband's get, does not violate the First Amendment because enforcement of the get procedure satisfies both the Lemon and Sherbert tests set forth by the Supreme Court. Moreover, requiring a husband to give a get advances several compelling state interests including equal protection and the fundamental right to remarry.

1. Get Cases Do Not Violate the Establishment Clause

Civil enforcement of the get procedure does not violate the Establishment Clause since enforcement satisfies all three prongs of the Lemon test. In the get cases, courts have recognized several secular purposes for compelling the husband to obtain a get. 233 First, a

231. Id. at 1026 (Johnson, J., dissenting).
232. Id. (Johnson, J., dissenting).
233. For examples of the secular purposes cited by the Goldman court which support an order compelling a Jewish husband to give his wife a get, see infra notes 234-45 and accompanying text. The Supreme Court has noted that the Establishment Clause is violated only where there is clearly no secular purpose for the state action. See, e.g., Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668, 680 (1984) ("The Court has invalidated legislation or governmental action on the ground that a secular purpose was lacking, but only when it has concluded that there was no question that the statute or activity was motivated wholly by religious considerations.").
number of courts have recognized the secular interest of enforcing contracts.\textsuperscript{234} The Goldman court held that the right to contract is a fundamental right recognized by both federal and state constitutions, and that states have a compelling interest in enforcing contractual obligations.\textsuperscript{235}

Second, in Goldman, the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act was identified as a secular interest supporting enforcement of the get requirement.\textsuperscript{236} The Illinois Act seeks "amicable settlement[s] of disputes that have arisen between parties to a marriage" and to lessen any harm which the divorce process may cause to the separating spouses and their children.\textsuperscript{237} The Goldman court stated that to leave the get issue unresolved by not enforcing the husband's obligation to release his wife from the marriage "would have a negative effect on both the spouses and their children."\textsuperscript{238}

Third, there is the secular interest of complete severance of the marriage in order to allow for remarriage.\textsuperscript{239} Several courts, including the Goldman court, have taken notice of the fact that without a valid get release, the wife would be forever bound to the husband to the extent that she can never remarry within her faith.\textsuperscript{240} The Goldman court relied on Minkin, which stated that an order compelling the husband to secure a get has "the clear secular purpose of completing a dissolution of the marriage,"\textsuperscript{241} in finding that the most effective way to guarantee the wife's fundamental right to remarry and have chil-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{235} Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Id. (citing 750 ILCS 5/102 (West 1995)).
\item \textsuperscript{238} Id. The court duly noted that without a get, the wife is prohibited by her religious beliefs from remarrying. \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{239} See, e.g., \textit{N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW} § 253 (McKinney Supp. 1983). Further, if the right to remarry is viewed as a constitutionally protected right, this secular state interest becomes sufficiently compelling to override any First Amendment challenges. See, e.g., Sherbert v. Verner, 374 U.S. 398 (1963) (finding that a burden imposed on an individual's free exercise of religion is valid if it is necessary to achieve a compelling state interest).
\item \textsuperscript{240} See \textit{In re Marriage of Goldman}, 554 N.E.2d 1016 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990) (noting that a wife who does not receive a get from her husband is precluded from remarrying according to Jewish law); Minkin v. Minkin, 434 A.2d 665 (N.J. Super. Ct. 1981) (ordering specific enforcement of a get on the rationale that without compliance with the contract, the wife could not remarry in accordance with her religious beliefs); Rubin v. Rubin, 348 N.Y.S.2d 61 (N.Y. Fam. Ct. 1973) (describing the get as an act of release freeing the wife so she may remarry).
\item \textsuperscript{241} Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023 (quoting Minkin, 434 A.2d at 667).
\end{itemize}
dren is by forcing the husband to give her a get upon the civil dissolution of the parties’ marriage.242

The primary effect of the cases requiring the husband to secure a get is to effectuate the secular purposes behind the order: to enforce a contract, to promote family harmony and to permit the wife to remarry.243 As the Goldman court held, “the primary effect of the court order was to further the secular purposes . . . and not to advance or inhibit religion.”244 That the order also touched upon a religious issue should not invalidate the court order altogether. This is especially true since the Supreme Court has held that even if a given state action incidentally infringes upon the freedom of religion, the Establishment Clause is violated only where there clearly is no secular purpose for the state action or where the action is motivated “wholly by religious considerations.”245

In reaching its conclusion, the Goldman court, like the Minkin and Avitzur courts, relied upon the abundant evidence which confirmed that the giving of a get is a secular act creating a contractual release that is effected by the parties themselves.246 The court was convinced by the expert testimony that “[i]t does not involve worship or an expression of faith; the procedure contains no divine reference; no one says any blessing or states any professions of faith or credos; and the husband and wife do not, and are not required to subscribe to any particular set of beliefs.”247 The court found that although many rules and details are associated with the get procedure, “this alone does not

242. See infra notes 294-98 and accompanying text (analyzing the get procedure in light of the Fourteenth Amendment right to remarry).

243. See supra notes 164-74 and accompanying text (discussing the fundamental right to remarry).

244. Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023. Similarly, the Minkin court concluded that the primary effect of requiring husbands to give a get “neither advances nor inhibits religion since it does not require the husband to participate in a religious ceremony or to do acts contrary to his religious beliefs.” Minkin, 434 A.2d at 668.

245. Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668, 680 (1984). Further, the Lynch court noted that the First Amendment “affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance, of all religions.” Id. at 673. This requires a policy of neutrality in applying general principles to the practices of a religious group even though it may “operate[] to afford an indirect” benefit to a religion. Walz v. Tax Comm'n of N.Y. City, 397 U.S. 664, 674 (1970).


transform the procedure into a religious act.”248 Thus, the primary effect of the courts’ orders in the get cases was to enforce the consensual terms of the agreement and to sever the relationship in accordance with Jewish law.

Finally, the Goldman court held that its order requiring the husband to obtain the get does not foster an excessive entanglement with religion.249 First, the court’s inquiry was not itself a prohibited entanglement since it is well established that a court “may apply objective, well-established principles of secular law, or ‘neutral principles of law,’ which do not entail a consideration of doctrinal matters.”250 The Goldman court only interpreted the procedures and requirements of the get, and the evidence clearly showed that these procedures and requirements could be interpreted by purely secular means.251

It is a well-settled principle that courts may look to and apply religious doctrine as long as they defer to the interpretation given by the religious authority and do not attempt to resolve any dispute within the church about religious doctrine.252 In Goldman, Avitzur, and Minkin, the courts recognized as evidence expert testimony as to the

248. Id.

249. See Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023 (basing its holding on the fact that the order “ha[d] the secular purpose of enforcing a contract between the parties”).

250. Id. (citing Jones v. Wolf, 443 U.S. 595, 602-03 (1976)). See supra notes 101-06 and accompanying text (discussing the prohibition against excessive entanglement under the Establishment Clause).

251. See supra note 228 and accompanying text (discussing the rabbis’ testimony that procuring a get has only secular purposes).

252. From the “church property” cases, it would appear at first glance that if there is a dispute within Judaism as to the obligations imposed by the ketubah, a court would be prohibited by the Establishment Clause from resolving the dispute. See, e.g., Jones v. Wolf, 443 U.S. 595, 602 (1976) (holding that state courts must examine religious documents in a strictly secular manner); see also Serbian Eastern Orthodox Diocese for the United States v. Milivojevich, 426 U.S. 696, 724-25 (1976) (holding that the First Amendment requires that civil courts defer to resolution of issues of religious doctrine by the highest court of the hierarchical church organization); Aglikim v. Kovachev, 516 N.E.2d 706 (Ill. App. Ct. 1987) (adopting the neutral principles analysis and noting that deference must be given on doctrinal issues). However, the get cases may be distinguished from the church property cases in two significant ways: (1) the requirement of the get is uncontested so the court is not resolving a dispute as to interpretation and (2) the get procedure is not religious by nature. Thus, enforcement of the get proceeding is not violative of the Establishment Clause. See Warmflash, supra note 93, at 242 (referring to the proposition that Jewish law is divisible into two parts: one strictly religious, because it concerns the relations between man and God, and the other essentially secular since it controls the relations between man and man). There is authority for the proposition that Jewish law regarding marriage and divorce is not considered religious within the meaning of the First Amendment since it affects only the relationship between a husband and wife and makes no reference to God. Bleich, supra note 25, at 202 (arguing that the get procedure is not at all religious because there is no confession of faith or worship).
nature of the get proceeding. Remaining clearly within the parameters of the law, the courts made only a cursory examination of Jewish law, accepting the rabbis' interpretation as to the meaning of the religious doctrine delineating the get procedure. In so acting, these courts did not attempt to resolve a religious dispute. Rather they merely applied the law as interpreted by the religious authorities in reaching their conclusions. As the court in County of Allegheny v. ACLU stated: "[a] prescription of ignorance obviously would bias [the court] according to the religious and cultural backgrounds of its members, a condition much more intolerable than any which results from the [c]ourt's efforts to become familiar with the relevant facts." Accordingly, if the Goldman court, as well as the others preceding it, had precluded evidence of the get procedure on the grounds that to do so would constitute excessive entanglement with religion, the courts would not have discovered the get's secular nature and most certainly would not have ordered the husband to give his wife the get, a policy which effectuates a number of secular and compelling interests. Thus, civil enforcement of the get procedure is not only sound policy, it is clearly within the bounds of the law.

Using the guidelines set forth in Lemon v. Kurtzman, courts have determined that civil enforcement of the get procedure avoids violating the Establishment Clause. First, enforcement advances several clear and convincing secular purposes; second, enforcement does not advance nor inhibit religion since, according to the proper authorities, the giving of a get does not constitute a religious act at all; and third, enforcement does not involve the courts in excessive entanglement with religion because the courts, by relying exclusively on the inter-

---

253. Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1022; Minkin v. Minkin, 434 A.2d 665, 667-68 (N.J. Super. Ct. 1981). The court is not interpreting Jewish law or resolving disputes over conflicting interpretation since it is uncontested that Orthodox Jewish law requires the giving of a get in order to dissolve a Jewish marriage; see also Avitzur v. Avitzur, 446 N.E.2d 136, 136 (N.Y. App. Ct.), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 817 (1983) (accepting the lower court's finding that the husband's giving of the get accomplished a Jewish divorce and refraining from making a determination as to the religious nature of the proceeding).

254. The Goldman, Minkin and Avitzur courts merely used Jewish law as a reference in resolving the issue of marital dissolution. This level of judicial involvement has been deemed appropriate to avoid entanglement with religion. See supra note 102 and accompanying text (discussing Schwartzman and the importance of examining "undisputed points of religious doctrine" when analyzing religious matters). See also Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205, 208-13 (1972) (taking notice of Amish religious doctrine and relying on expert opinion in reaching its conclusions).


256. Id. at 614 n.60.

257. See supra notes 98-100 and accompanying text (discussing the Lemon test).
pretation of religious authority, remain well within the legal boundaries previously set out by the Supreme Court.

2. Get Cases Do Not Violate the Free Exercise Clause

One commentator has asserted that the get cases “are more likely to run afoul of the Establishment Clause than of the Free Exercise Clause.” However, there is a potential free exercise problem which must be overcome as well. Since the Free Exercise Clause prohibits governmental interference with both an individual’s practice of and refusal to practice religion, it may be argued that a court order compelling a husband to obtain a get may be treading on the husband’s right to free exercise of religion.

The free exercise claim may be overcome by the accepted proposition that since the husband is not being compelled to practice his religion nor to profess his faith in God, the get procedure is not religious in nature. As such, neither mandatory appearance before a beth din nor the act of giving a get constitutes a burden on the husband’s free exercise of religion. Arguably, since the get proceeding is not religious in nature, the husband’s free exercise rights are not actually violated. However, any perceived incidental burden civil enforcement of the get procedure imposes on such rights have been deemed to be overridden by a number of compelling state interests.

Since, in many instances, the husband’s refusal to grant the get is not based on sincere religious beliefs at all, no valid free exercise claim is even invoked. For example, in Goldman, the court found that the husband never clearly stated how an adverse ruling would

258. Warmflash, supra note 93, at 242.
260. But see Warmflash, supra note 93, at 242 (arguing that although this proposition is tenable, it has been substantially refuted “because a decree of specific performance would merely require the defendant to do what he voluntarily agreed to do” upon signing the ketubah).
261. See supra notes 107-10 and accompanying text (discussing the two components of Jewish law and noting that Jewish and legal scholars place the get procedure in the secular category).
262. Marshall, supra note 44, at 233. Possible state interests which may justify compelling individuals to procure a religious divorce are (1) allowing divorced spouses to remarry freely, (2) eliminating opportunities of extortion or the intentional infliction of emotional suffering, and (3) the protection of the welfare of any children involved. Id. Marshall also found the enforcement of contractual obligations to be a compelling state interest, a proposition which this Comment refuses to espouse for reasons set forth infra notes 276-91 and accompanying text.
263. See In re Marriage of Goldman, 554 N.E.2d 1016, 1023 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990) (discussing the court’s finding that the husband’s “dislike” for Orthodox Judaism did not rise to the level of a religious belief and thus, his claim was not grounded in the First Amendment); see also Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205, 215-16 (1972) (holding that personal or philosophical beliefs are not protected by the Free Exercise Clause).
affect the exercise of his religion.264 He never articulated to his wife that he had any religious objections to giving the get.265 Instead, the court found that while the husband may have "abhorred the practices of Orthodox Jews, whom he characterized as discriminatory, repulsive and 'antimodern,'" he never actually attacked their religious beliefs.266 The court therefore found that the husband's free exercise claim failed to reach the minimum level required by the First Amendment.267

The Supreme Court has held that "purely secular views" are not afforded constitutional protection and that states are "clearly entitled to assume themselves that there is an ample predicate for invoking the Free Exercise Clause [by] distinguishing between religious and secular convictions and in determining whether a professed belief is sincerely held."268 Consequently, the Goldman court found that the husband’s professed hatred of Orthodox Jews combined with his efforts to "punish and extort" did not qualify for constitutional protection.269

Further, courts may assume that the husband’s participation in the Jewish wedding ceremony implies his agreement to conform to Jewish law until such time that a dissolution of the marriage occurs in accordance with Jewish law. In Goldman, one rabbi expert witness testified that there is "simply no doctrine in any branch of Judaism that says a husband ought not give his wife a get if they are divorced and she wants one in accordance with Orthodox procedure."270

264. See Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023 (finding that the trial court had simply applied principles of contract law to enforce the agreement and the terms of the order were limited to avoid any interference with religious doctrine).

265. Id. at 1019. In fact, the court-appointed attorney for the couple’s children testified that the husband told her that he "would not be adverse to giving his wife a Jewish divorce" if he got his custody terms. Id. at 1020. The husband never denied having made these comments. Id.

266. Id. at 1023.

267. Id. The Free Exercise Clause requires that an action actually violate or conflict with a sincerely held religious belief. See Yoder, 406 U.S. at 215-16 (holding that the state must actually deny an individual's free exercise of religion by its requirements). The Goldman court also duly noted that the husband had given his first wife a get and that there was testimonial evidence that he was withholding the get as a bargaining tool in the ensuing custody dispute. 554 N.E.2d at 1023-24.


269. Goldman, 554 N.E.2d at 1023-24. Similarly, the Yoder court stated that to have the protection of the Religion Clauses, the claims must be rooted in religious belief. Although a determination of what is a "religious" belief or practice entitled to constitutional protection may present a most delicate question, the very concept of ordered liberty precludes allowing every person to make his own standards on matters of conduct in which society as a whole has important interests. 406 U.S. at 215-16; see also Thomas v. Review Bd. of the Ind. Empl. Sec. Div., 450 U.S. 707, 713 (1981) ("Only beliefs rooted in religion are protected by the Free Exercise Clause. . .").

One commentator has stated that compelled religious divorces "bring into focus the inherent conflict in the Free Exercise Clause." This refers to the dilemma resulting from the court's obligation to choose to protect one party's free exercise rights at the expense of the other party's rights. The Free Exercise Clause mandates that the wife's religious beliefs, which require her to obtain a get before she may remarry, be accommodated by requiring the husband to cooperate in securing the get. According to the wife's religious beliefs, the get is the only way to effectuate the divorce and allow her the freedom to remarry. However, the Free Exercise Clause supposedly also protects the husband's right to refuse to participate in the ritual if the court is convinced that the act is religious in nature.

While it may be argued that the court is burdening the husband's right to free exercise in protecting that of the wife, this Comment provides an alternative explanation. Accepting the theory that the get procedure is not religious in nature, this Comment contends that courts are not forcing the husband to participate in a religious practice against his will. Also, numerous cases illustrate the Supreme Court's policy of accommodation. Accordingly, a court order which accommodates the wife's free exercise of religious beliefs by granting her a get not only fails to interfere with the husband's free exercise rights, but is firmly grounded in legal history.

Protecting the wife's free exercise rights also advances a number of compelling state interests, none of which would be served if the court favored the husband's free exercise claim. Further, protection of these interests greatly outweighs any minor burden incidentally imposed on the husband's free exercise rights.

### B. Compelling State Interest Analysis

This Comment contends that the ketubah should not be enforced as a binding contract for the various reasons discussed below. Instead of looking to the freedom to contract as the compelling state interest on

---

271. Warmflash, supra note 93, at 252.
272. But see Lewin, supra note 193, at 2 (suggesting that a husband's decision not to practice his religion should not be protected under the Free Exercise Clause when that decision impacts and interferes with his wife's decision to practice her religion).
273. See supra notes 92-96, 111 and accompanying text (discussing the Supreme Court's policy of accommodation).
274. See supra notes 111-26 and accompanying text (discussing the Free Exercise Clause).
275. See supra notes 236-43 and accompanying text (discussing several compelling state interests which the Goldman court recognized as being served by enforcing the get procedure). See also infra notes 292-96 and accompanying text (discussing the compelling state interests proposed by this Comment).
which to base a court order enforcing the get proceeding, this Comment proposes that enforcement of the get proceeding advances the compelling state interests of ensuring equal application of the law to both parties involved and protecting the fundamental right to remarry.

1. Contractual Analysis

There are numerous reasons for asserting that the ketubah is not analogous to other antenuptial agreements. Disregarding the fact that most antenuptial agreements are freely negotiated at arms length and are written in a language both parties understand, the primary problem lies with the parties' intent at the time of "contracting." Courts have recognized that in some situations, there is a presumption that no legal obligations will arise from the transaction, and so an unusual manifestation of intention is necessary to actually create a binding contract. Courts have recognized that there exist a few situations in which the typical intent is not to create an enforceable contract, such as in social, intra-family, and arguably, religious settings. Since the marital setting fits into these categories, the presumption that the parties did not intend the religious Hebrew document to be binding holds true.

While the most prominent reason to disregard the ketubah as a binding legal contract is the parties' lack of intention to be bound, there are numerous other reasons why the ketubah fails to stand up to standard contract requirements. First, most often the ketubah signifies nothing more than adherence to a religious tradition. Commenta-

---

276. In other areas as well, the ketubah has not been upheld as a contract that gives the parties recognizable legal rights. See, e.g., In re Estate of White, 356 N.Y.S.2d 208 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1974) (holding that a ketubah did not give a widow any inheritance rights because the ketubah had no binding effect on the property rights of signers).

277. See supra note 143-46 (noting Kahan's and Marshall's denial that the parties intend to be contractually bound to the terms of the ketubah upon their signing thereof).

278. See, e.g., Balfour v. Balfour, 2 K.B. 571 (1919) (holding that interspousal agreements generally are not viewed as "contracts"); see also 1 CORBIN ON CONTRACTS § 34 (1963) ("If the subject matter and terms are not such as customarily have affected legal relations, the transaction is not legally operative unless the expressions of the party indicate an intention to make it so."). Cf. RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF CONTRACTS § 21 (1981) ("Neither real nor apparent intention that a promise be legally binding is essential to the formation of a contract, but a manifestation of intention that a promise shall not affect legal relations may prevent the formation of a contract."). These authorities illustrate that different guidelines exist for marital and nonmarital situations.

279. Marshall, supra note 44, at 224 n.97; see, e.g., Mitzel v. Hauck, 105 N.W.2d 378 (1960) (holding that social agreements among friends are not binding).

280. See supra notes 144-45 and accompanying text (discussing the significance of the ketubah).
tors have argued that the ketubah does not necessarily reflect a "knowing intention to assume certain obligations, including that to arbitrate marital problems before a beth din or to procure a get upon divorce."\textsuperscript{281} A problem also arises in enforcing outmoded terms of the ketubah, such as the promise to pay the monetary sum of 200 zuzim\textsuperscript{282} in the event of a divorce or the husband's death.\textsuperscript{283}

Furthermore, the fact that the ketubah is usually an elaborately decorated document, similar to an “illuminated manuscript,” merely enhances the impression that the ketubah is more of a religious symbol than a legal document.\textsuperscript{284} In sum, the ketubah has been labeled as “no more than a set of ‘boilerplate’ clauses which cannot be assumed to capture the expectations and intentions of the parties.”\textsuperscript{285}

Finally, courts need not construe the ketubah as a binding contract in order to require the husband to perform his “contractual” obligation of securing the get.\textsuperscript{286} Not only is the get requirement absent from some ketuboth,\textsuperscript{287} it is not historically rooted in the ketubah document at all.\textsuperscript{288} The get requirement originated in the Bible, and is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{281}{Kahan, supra note 19, at 216-17. While the couple may associate the signing of the ketubah with the notion that they “are really being married in accordance with Jewish law, it is unlikely that their signatures manifest a knowing assent to the specific obligations enumerated in the ketubah.” Id. Indeed, usually no one even offers to explain that a clause included in the ketubah can require an appearance before a beth din in order to facilitate the dissolution of the marriage. Id.}

\footnote{282}{Zuzim is plural for zuz. A zuz was a small silver coin used in Palestine and Babylonia during the Talmudic period. Brettowitz, supra note 13, at 284 n.4. How 200 zuzim translates into dollars is uncertain. To determine an approximate dollar amount, the going market rate of the metallic content of the ancient zuz coin is quantified. Id. at 288. Since the zuz was a silver coin that contained approximately 0.2 ounces of pure silver, and 200 of those equals forty ounces of silver, depending on the current market value of silver, the alimony payment should be approximately $320 — hardly a significant sum in this day and age. Id. at 288-89. In terms of alimony, therefore, since the ketubah provides for only minimal recovery, it is usually not regarded as sufficient protection and its enforcement is rarely sought. Id.}

\footnote{283}{See supra note 24 (providing a translation of the ketubah).}

\footnote{284}{See Kahan, supra note 19, at 216 (concluding that the ketubah has no more than religious significance); see also E. Dorff & A. Rossett, A Living Tree: Materials on the Jewish Legal Tradition with Comparative Notes XIII-12 (3d prelim. ed. 1983) (unpublished manuscript).}

\footnote{285}{Kahan, supra note 19, at 216.}

\footnote{286}{Rabbis view the Jewish legal requirement of obtaining the get as contractual. See In re Marriage of Goldman, 554 N.E.2d 1016, 1022 (Ill. App. Ct. 1990) (noting that the ketubah requires the marriage to be governed by Jewish law, which mandates the giving of a get upon divorce); Minkin v. Minkin, 434 A.2d 665, 667 (N.J. Sup. Ct. 1981) (concluding that the ketubah provides that the parties agree to abide by Jewish law in matters regarding their marriage, and that Jewish law requires a husband to give his wife a get to terminate the marriage).}

\footnote{287}{Plural for ketubah.}

\footnote{288}{See supra note 44 and accompanying text (noting that the get requirement originated in the Torah).}
\end{footnotes}
therefore a Biblical mandate rather than a contractual provision. In fact, a number of courts have held the get obligation to be binding on the husband as a matter of Jewish law regardless of whether the ketubah is considered a contract. Since courts are able to enforce the get ritual based on a policy of accommodation, legal straining to fit the ketubah into the mold of a binding contract is simply unnecessary.

2. Fourteenth Amendment Analysis

States have a compelling interest in ensuring that all parties are afforded equal protection under the law as a constitutional guarantee. By definition, this right must also be guaranteed in the case of religious divorces. However, under Jewish law, a husband may refuse to grant his wife a get and effectively prevent her from ever again remarrying within the Jewish faith while he is free to do so without being faced with the same dire consequences.

By the very nature of this situation, then, the law is applied unequally if courts permit such a practice. To cure this inequity, the court may, as many already have, fashion a legal remedy and enforce the get provision of the ketubah to ensure equal application of the law. Not only does the court have the authority to do so, it has the moral obligation to the woman whose fundamental rights are being jeopardized by an antiquated rule.

Since remarriage has been deemed to be a fundamental right, and public policy favors remarriage, the state has a compelling in-

289. The Bible states that when a man divorces a woman "he writes her a bill of divorce, and gives it in her hand." Deuteronomy 24:104.

290. These courts have held that even without a ketubah, a court may use its equity powers to order a husband to give a get to protect the wife's civil liberties. See Burns v. Burns, 538 A.2d 438 (N.J. Super. Ct. Ch. Div. 1987) (holding that since the husband's refusal to grant a get was not based on genuine religious beliefs, the court order compelling him to submit to jurisdiction of the beth din to initiate the procedure to secure the get would not violate the Establishment Clause). But see Turner v. Turner, 192 So. 2d 787, cert. denied, 201 So. 2d 233 (Fla. 1966) (holding the get provision in the ketubah to be unenforceable by a civil court).

291. See supra notes 92-96, 111 and accompanying text (discussing the Supreme Court's policy of accommodation).

292. See supra notes 147-50 and accompanying text (discussing the Equal Protection Clause).

293. See supra notes 63-83 and accompanying text (discussing the husband's leverage over his wife in divorce proceedings and the differing religious consequences of remarriage for husbands and wives without a get).

294. See supra note 164-74 and accompanying text (discussing remarriage as a fundamental right).

295. See supra notes 171-73, 190-95 and accompanying text (discussing state statutes which have been enacted in order to foster "amicable" dissolutions and remove obstacles to remarriage).
terest in aiding a wife in obtaining a *get* when her religious adherence to the tenets of Orthodox Judaism prevents her from remarrying without one.\(^{296}\) Absent state intervention on the wife's behalf, there is the potential risk that a husband will abuse his unilateral power to grant the *get*.\(^{297}\) Clearly, such a practice is contrary to public policy, and state intervention in this situation is necessary to protect the wife's fundamental civil rights.\(^{298}\)

Jewish law unfortunately provides different consequences for remarriage on the basis of sex. The Equal Protection doctrine, however, provides the remedy to cure the inherent inequity imposed by Jewish law. The fundamental right in need of preservation in this case is that the wife be given the same opportunity as her husband to remarry. In sum, the state's compelling interest that all parties be treated equally under the law as well as that of protecting parties' fundamental civil rights requires courts to enforce the *get* proceeding upon civil dissolution of a marriage. Unlike prior court decisions, enforcement need not, and in fact should not, be grounded in contract law.

---

### III. Conclusion

When a Jewish couple signs a *ketubah* on their wedding day, they implicitly agree that their marriage will be governed by Jewish law in addition to the civil law of the state of their marriage. Although the vast majority of couples do not understand the content of the *ketubah*, they fathom the symbolic significance of their signatures upon the document. Jewish law is deemed to guide their marriage throughout their lifetimes or until the misfortune of divorce arises. Accordingly, both parties implicitly agree to comply with the religious divorce proceeding in order to dissolve their marriage under Jewish law and enable them both to remarry within the faith.

This Comment has fervently argued that civil enforcement of the *get* proceeding in divorce cases is proper, although it is improper to uphold the *ketubah* as a legally binding contract. Notwithstanding that the *get* proceeding is articulated in the modern adaptation of the Conservative *ketubah*, the original requirement of the *get* upon marital

---


297. Alternatively, the husband may condition his granting of the *get* on diminished alimony, maintenance, or support payments, thus employing the *get* as a bargaining chip. See *supra* note 66 and accompanying text (noting that many husbands use their "get power" as extreme leverage over their wives to extort favorable settlements or just to keep their wives bound to the marriage against their will).

298. The New York *get* statute recognized the state's interest in fostering a public policy that favors remarriage. Warmflash, *supra* note 93, at 250 (citing N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 253 (McKinney Supp. 1983)).
dissolution is found in the Torah, and is therefore not a contractually-based requirement. Rather, the act of giving and receiving a get is a command which finds its origin in the oldest work of literature and which has been fortified by an enduring and unique culture and legal tradition. That courts should find ways not to enforce such a mandate would be a great travesty of justice.

This Comment has presented a sound legal argument explaining that civil enforcement of the get procedure does not violate the First Amendment of the Constitution. Neither the Establishment Clause nor the Free Exercise Clause is breached by a court order requiring a husband to give his wife a get in accordance with Jewish law. This Comment has further shown that enforcement serves to protect vital constitutional rights of the wife. By forcing a husband to grant his wife a get upon civil dissolution of their marriage, the court is ensuring equal application of the law byremedying an inherently discriminatory situation, and enabling both parties to freely remarry on equal footing.

As this Comment has shown, even in the face of a religious issue, civil courts have the power to effectuate a just result. As such, it is clearly within the scope of the courts' authority to remove the chains of the "bound woman."

Jodi M. Solovy