

Introduction

During the 2021-23 academic years, a cohort of Maharat alumnae participated in a unique fellowship program called “Halakha in Action.” As the first initiative launched by Maharat’s Center for Lived Torah, Halakha in Action was designed by Rabba Sara Hurwitz and Rabbi Jeff Fox to give alumnae halakhic and pastoral expertise in life cycle events and exposure to the individuals and organizations engaged in advocacy work in these areas. Rav Herzl Hefter was the primary teacher and cornerstone of the program, teaching ten ~~Halakha~~ to the cohort each year.

This first cohort engaged in a deep study of halakhic, pastoral, and advocacy issues in Jewish marriage and divorce to help individuals navigating these life cycle events as well as to contribute to our communal effort to establish greater protections for individuals at these vulnerable times. Participants engaged in weekly *chevrutah* learning and *shiurim*, and produced a writing or advocacy project at the end of the two-year commitment.

Halakha in Action 2021-23 fellows were Rabba Wendy Amsellem, Rabba Yaffa Epstein, Rabbanit Adina Fredman, Maharat Miriam Gon-czarska, Rabbanit Amalia Haas, Rabba Claudia Marbach, Rabbanit Gloria Nusbacher, Rabbanit Lisa Schlaff, Rabba Dr. Anat Sharbat, Rabbanit Liz Shayne, Rabbanit Aliza Sperling, Rabbi Alana Suskin, Maharat Victoria Sutton, and Rabbanit Dr. Agi Veto.

In its first year, the Halakha in Action fellowship focused on Jewish marriage, including the following sessions:

- Rav Herzl Hefter on topics including the nature and requirements of *kiddushin*, alternatives to *kiddushin*, *chuppah*, having a witness who is not halakhically observant, *ketubah*, *mamzerut*, and whether a woman can give a ring to the groom under the *chuppah*;
- Rabbi Jeff Fox on women and *birkat erusin* (the betrothal blessing), women and *sheva brachot*, and issues in filling out a *ketubah*;

Keren 5

- Rav Avi Weiss on premarital counseling and Dr. Esther Altmann on premarital red-flags;
- Rav Yoel bin Nun on his approach to *kiddushin* and the alternative *ketubah* that he has crafted;
- Dr. Irit Koren on her sociological research about Israeli families' approach to *kiddushin* and possible alternatives;
- Rabbi Jeff Fox on lesbian partnerships;
- Rabbi Zev Farber on *nedarim* as an alternative to *kiddushin*;
- Rabbi Mike Moskowitz on same-sex ceremonies and the use of *nedarim*;
- Rabbi Seth Farber, of Itim, on marriage in the State of Israel and Rabbanit Avital Engelberg, of Huppot, on issues and initiatives regarding marriage in Israel;
- Professor Yedidah Koren on *mamzerut*.

In its second year, the Halakha in Action fellowship focused on divorce and *aginut*, including the following sessions:

- Rav Hefter on the nature of *gerushin* (divorce), writing *lishma*, *eidei mesirah* and *eidei chatimah* (types of witnesses), *netinat haget* (the transfer of the *get*), *shlichut*, *bitul*, *zechiya*, and grounds for divorce;
- Multiple sessions on the issue of using *tenai b'kiddushin* to prevent *aginut* with Rav Hefter, Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rabba Yaffa Epstein, and Rabbi Lila Kagedan;
- Rabba Ramie Smith on her work on GetOutUK, her work with *batei din* in England, and the important new tool of coercive control laws in the United Kingdom;
- Six sessions with the International Beit Din, where we heard from *agunot* about their experiences; learned about the reality of Jewish divorce in *batei din* today with Rabbi Barry Dolinger; studied *bitul kiddushin* with Rav Yoni Rosenzweig and Rav Dovid Bigman; and explored the extent to which secular law courts can be used to address *aginut* with Rabbi Zach Truboff.

- Blu Greenberg on her long advocacy for *agunot* and her vision for the future.

At the conclusion of the program, fellows created projects and curricula and authored articles to share what they had learned with their congregations, students, and communities. Among the projects created were marriage, divorce, and *agunut* curricula for high school and rabbinical school; articles, social media, and classes on aspects of marriage and divorce; direct aid to *agunot* within the *beit din* system; and halakhic articles exploring the nature of *kiddushin* and alternatives, marriage in the State of Israel, *bitul kiddushin* (nullifying a marriage), and other mechanisms to protect *agunot*. Some of these articles appear in this journal.

Thank you to Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Co-Founder and President of Maharat, and Rabbi Jeff Fox, Rosh HaYeshiva and Dean of Faculty at Maharat, for conceiving of the Halakha in Action program, and to Rabbi Dr. Erin Leib Smokler for editing this important journal. Thank you to Halakha in Action's central teacher Rav Herzl Hefter, whose love for halakhic analysis is accompanied by a clear understanding of the impacts it can have in the real world. And finally, thank you to the 2021-23 fellows, whose love for Torah and their fellow human beings shined through in every *shiur*. May our learning, writing, and advocacy lead to a world of complete peace in our interpersonal relationships and for all of *Am Yisrael*.

Rabbanit Aliza Sperling
Director of Halakha in Action
9 Tamuz 5784