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"LAW AND LOVE"

IV. Caution!!

These considerations afford us the opportunity to recall that very special care must be taken in any matter relating to marriage or any situation where there exists the possibility of *mamzerut*, illegitimacy. Too much depends upon this, and so every precaution must be taken in advance.

Hence, we must make sure that if, as often happens in the course of life, we are ever beset by a problem in this area, we always inquire of competent rabbinical authority — and the emphasis is on the word "competent." It is unfortunate that people are sometimes innocently misled and later discover that they are involved in horrendous problems. Orthodox Jews — and, for that matter, all other Jews — must remember that rabbinic functionaries in marital matters must be fully Orthodox, experts in the area, and ethical individuals. The disqualification of those who do not fully accept the authority of Jewish Law is not a matter of pique or institutional rivalry, but of principle and law as well as common sense. Unfortunately, there are some few "Orthodox" rabbis whose credentials are questionable, and one must therefore always check carefully in advance — no less than one solicits opinions about the reputation of a dentist or a surgeon. Happily, the Rabbinical Council of America has in recent years established a fully qualified and smoothly functioning Beth Din to which most Orthodox rabbis now refer questions of *ishut*.

These matters, about which very special care should be exercised, include divorce; remarriage or marriage of any person who has previously been married; proselytization or marrying a proselyte or a descendant of a proselyte; artificial insemination; the adoption of children, whether Jewish or non-Jewish. The problems that exist in such cases can be enormous; most of the unhappy consequences are avoidable if we are wise enough to inquire before proceeding impulsively.

The Torah is the center of our lives as individuals and as a people. Its *mitzvot* guide our conduct, its ideals define our destiny. It has served us well throughout our long history. Though we are naturally as flawed as others, subject to the ubiquitous blandishments of the *yetzer ha-ra* no less than others, prone to the same corruptions that afflict other human beings, yet the Torah has given us a family life more moral and more stable than any people has ever known. At the very least it has given us a guilt feeling which acts as a marvelous restraint on further degeneration and involvement. The Jewish tradition does not speak much overtly of love; yet its legal restraints and its duties have given it the greatest opportunity for expression.

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