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"LAW AND LOVE"

V. What Hath Reform Wrought?

Regretfully, no matter how liberal or moderate an Orthodox Rabbi wants to be, no matter how he wishes to keep up good relations with Jews of differing convictions, he can only view with the deepest sorrow the havoc wrought by Reform when it abandoned Jewish marriage law. This was probably the most historically irresponsible act in the recent annals of our people. Based on a piece of spurious scholarship, Reform proclaimed that a civil divorce is adequate, and that a *get* is unnecessary for remarriage. It overlooked the glaring inconsistency of insisting that marriage should be a religious ceremony, while divorce may be a civil ceremony. As a result, it cavalierly dismissed the consideration that the Halakhah considers the previous marital bond still in full force. Therefore, the person who remarries without a religious divorce is considered as living in adultery, and the children of such a union are illegitimate.

Now, illegitimacy, *mamzerut*, imposes a terrible burden on such children: they are forbidden to marry any others save those in the same category. Too much human tragedy has resulted from this irresponsibility for us to remain silent about it. That is why, with all our concern with religious freedom in Israel, we must draw the line at matters of *gittin* and *kiddushin*. It is bad enough that Reform has destroyed the happiness of so many Jews and Jewesses in this country, often forcing a young couple to make a tragic choice between love for each other or loyalty to the basic tenets and laws of their faith; we do not need this to destroy the unity of the Jewish community of the State of Israel as well. One can only hope that enlightened Reform leaders will themselves come to this realization and attempt to correct the situation — or at least not endeavor to impose it on Israeli Jews.

These matters are not always pleasant to discuss. Yet without them there is no Judaism. They are too important and too dangerous for us to pass over them in polite silence. It is our duty as responsible Jews to apprise our fellow Jews of these facts, lest we be implicated in the guilt of encouraging human misery. Any Jew or Jewess may ignore Jewish law if he or she so wishes. But it is an unspeakable cruelty to impose the burden of illegitimacy upon an innocent child who never chose the way of life adopted by his parents, and who may want to return to a life of Torah either out of conviction or first by marrying an observant Jew or Jewess. To educate our fellow Jews in these facts is therefore to perform an ethical act.

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