

They shall not marry a woman who has been divorced by her husband. (21:7)

In the *Talmud Gittin* 90a, a debate ensues between *Bais Shammai* and *Bais Hillel* concerning when it is “appropriate” to give one’s wife a bill of divorce. *Bais Shammai*, who is usually more stringent in his approach to rendering a *Halachic* ruling, says that one may divorce his wife only under such circumstances in which she has acted immorally. *Bais Hillel*, who is typically lenient, declares that one may divorce his wife for any inappropriate behavior – even if she has burnt his soup! While the position of *Bais Shammai* is understandable, we wonder how we can permit one to divorce his wife simply because she has ruined dinner. Furthermore, what kind of person would act in this manner?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, explains that burning the soup – happens. One cannot go through a marriage without burning the soup once in a while. It all depends on how one’s wife reacts to this challenge concerning her dinner, and its consequences *vis-à-vis* her matrimonial harmony. A good woman, who cares about her husband, skims off the top half of the soup for herself. If she is a *kachah-kachah*, “so-so” wife, she will split the burnt soup, taking part for herself and giving the other part to her husband. If she is not a good woman, and thus not much of a wife, she will give her husband the burnt portion and retain the top portion, which was not harmed – for herself. *Bais Hillel* feel that if she burnt his soup – in other words, she gave him the burnt portion-- it is grounds for divorce. Obviously, she is not much of a wife.

From an opposite perspective, I think it was *Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl*, who said that any man who would divorce his wife over some burnt soup does not have much of a marriage. His wife would be better off without him.

Along the line of reasoning presented by the *Maggid*, *Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, recalls an incident which took place a number of years ago, during a world food crisis. A large annual banquet for the support of a distinguished *yeshivah* was set to be held during its usual time. Well aware of the economic crisis that had hit the entire country, the *Rosh Yeshivah* was not surprised, although he was concerned, that contributors toward the annual gala had dropped considerably. As a result, he felt it prudent not to hold the dinner that year. People simply did not have the money.

One of the *yeshivah*’s wealthy supporters did not agree with the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s decision to cancel the dinner. Turning to the *Rosh Yeshivah*, he said, “Specifically, it is this year that I feel the dinner is especially crucial. It would be wrong to cancel. Please do not cancel. In fact, I take full responsibility for all the contributions that would normally result from this evening. I ask only one favor: Please allow me to speak!”

The dinner was held. The speaker ascended to the podium to deliver his speech. He began with the previous exposition, explaining the meaning of *Bais Hillel*’s ruling to allow the divorce of a woman who burns her husband’s soup. He explained that, certainly, *Chazal* were not so callous as

to permit breaking a marriage over a bowl of soup. After emphasizing that there are three possible relationships in a marriage, he made an analogy between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem.

“There is a similar manner of describing our possible relationship with Hashem. We too seem to have issues about how we relate to Hashem when circumstances do not go as we would like. At the first juncture when life does not go our way, we offer the burnt contributions to Hashem. This means that when we take an economic loss, the first ones to suffer are the *yeshivos*, *shuls*, organizations that require our support to function properly. A second possibility would be for us to make an even split – cut back on the Orlando vacation, one less trip to *Eretz Yisrael*, one less suit, dress, and give less to the *yeshivos* and *klei kodesh* who look to us for sustenance. The third option is, of course, the most optimum, but demands tremendous strength of character and commitment. We assume the responsibility of the burnt contributors. We take the loss. We cut back on our precious lifestyles, but we never diminish our spiritual obligation. The burnt soup is not for Hashem!”

A powerful demand. How many of us can say that we are not guilty of ameliorating our economic woes at the expense of those who need it most?