

B"H

I met Zev in a Betar youth camp when I was about 17 years old. Where we connected through our mutual love of Zionsim and Israel. I got married to Zev at 18 years old, we were both secular at the time. Our goal was always to move to Israel and raise a family there. We planned to finish our undergraduate degrees and move to Israel. At 18, I started to become observant through the Chabad on campus. We moved to Florida, where Zev's family lives with a promise that after spending the last 2 years of our undergraduate degrees there and getting some quality time in with Zev's family we will move to Israel. I became fully observant and tagged Zev along. I wanted to have an Orthodox ketubah. Zev made a surprise for me and we had a secret orthodox ketubah done two years after our conservative wedding, where it was just us, the Rabbi and a friend. Zev's promises to move to Israel kept being delayed and justified for one reason or another. Life moved on, I had KIYH 6 children, and became a lawyer. Around 2006, while I was finishing up law school, Zev started growing out his hair with a commitment to donate his hair. At the time, he had a stable job in an administrative position at HBO Latin America. However, once his hair got longer one day he came home with dreadlocks. He refused to explain to me or anyone else why he was doing it and always said that "if it is important to me, then it should be enough reason for you." Once he started to look like that he stopped being promoted at work. He looked around for other jobs, but no one would hire him for a position equal to or better than what he had as he looked unprofessional. Even when he was told by his

colleagues and friends in his industry that he needs to clean himself up to switch positions, he refused to listen.

In 2017, Zev was fired from HBO where he was for about 15 years. It didn't come as a shock as he knew it was coming and he has not been promoted since 2006. By this time, his dreadlocks were past his behind. Since, 2017, I was the sole provider for our 8 people family with 6 children going to private Jewish schools. I was under a lot of pressure and bent over backwards to keep the family happy and maintained. All the while, doing car pool, shopping, cleaning , cooking, working etc.. I hosted guests almost every Shabbat so that Zev would feel like the man of the house. In general, it was constant walking on eggshells with him because he was in a depressive state and whatever suggestions or recommendations were given or pleas for him to get psychological help were always turned around on me and I was constantly accused of being unsupportive.

In 2019, after unsuccessfully pleading with Zev to get help and get any job, and with Zev's brothers, parents, and our Rabbi to push Zev to clean himself up, get therapy and start working at any job, I came to a breaking point, and upon advice of our Rabbi gave Zev an ultimatum that he needs to 1) get therapy, 2) cut his hair/clean himself up, and 3) get any type of job or that he cannot stay in the house. Zev was very upset, he threw our large framed picture towards me almost hitting me in the head and left the house. Despite the fact that he had brothers, parents and friends to stay with, he intentionally slept in his car to make me feel guilty and

bad. Unfortunately, as usual, I caved in. And unfortunately, as usual, he convinced me that I was in the wrong for giving him an ultimatum and wrongly putting “conditions” on our relationship and that again I was not supportive wife. After several months, I ended up apologizing to him and asking him to move back in. He moved back in and acted as if he was doing me a favor. In 2019, our eldest son, Yakov, was in Israel in his first year of yeshiva. In 2020, he transferred to a hesder yeshiva so that he can draft in the army. Also, in the school year 2019-2020, our oldest daughter, Michal, was in seminary in Israel. While there, she told us that she has gotten herself into Sherut Leumi and that she has made the decision to make Aliyah with or without us. In the fall of 2020, we started discussing aliayah again (it was always the subject of discussion), because our oldest was going to be in the army, second oldest in Sherut Leumi and making aliayah, third was finishing up middle school and didn't like the local high school options, fourth would be finishing up elementary school, and sixth would be finishing kindergarten. Thus, it was the best time to go for the children as each were in a transitional stage and all the children were onboard. Also, Zev has not worked for years and had nothing to lose and would instead be on equal footing with all other new olim looking for jobs and would have a new market and new opportunities. And due to Covid I would be able to continue working remotely until I found something locally. Zev agreed that it is the best time and best for the children. We started the paperwork in the October of 2020 and it took about a year to get everything ready. Zev flew to Israel in April of 2021 for Yakov's tekes and to check out communities for us to live.

We made Aliyah on August 3, 2021. From the first day of arrival, Zev refused to share our bedroom and did not sleep a single night there. He stopped singing Eshet Chail on Friday nights. He continuously told me that I'm not loving and supportive, because if I was I would just pack everyone up and go back. I would plead for him to give it a chance, to start Ulpan, to meet with friends who wanted to introduce him to people in his industry to get a job. He refused and instead left the Whatsapp chats our friends set up to help. He refused to allow our children to go out and play with new neighbors and friends, he did everything to stop them from adapting to their new life. In September he announced to me that he bought tickets to go back to Florida for 10 weeks. But that he would be back in December for 2 weeks for our kids' December birthdays and that after those 2 weeks he would return back to Florida indefinitely. I asked him what will you be doing in Florida for 10 weeks? Why are you saying that you will leave indefinitely? There was no answer.

Zev left on October 7, 2021, the day of my and my son Yosef's secular birthdays. I was pleading and crying for him not to leave while he told me that I was not a supportive and loving wife. The sad thing, is despite working so hard physically, emotionally, and psychologically to keep the family together and maintained all these years while walking on eggshells with him I again believed him and was apologizing while crying for him not to leave.

The day after he left, it all struck me really hard. Zev left us again.

This time he left me in a country where we had just moved by

myself with all the kids. I didn't even know how to fill up the car

with gas. I finally understood that he has abandoned us, and that

it is not the first time. I understood that I have been being gas

lighted, manipulated and psychologically and emotionally abused

for years, that I was a co-dependent. I retroactively saw all the red

flags that I had missed and the years of gas lighting that I

succumbed to. I told him via text message that I needed space.

When he arrived in Florida he threatened to cancel the contract we

had with tenants for the rent of our Florida home, despite knowing

that we need that money to supplement my income to and to help

us live. I called his mother crying saying I don't know how I will

feed the kids without the rental income and her response was "he

is just desperate to get the kids back to the house." I understood

that there was no one to talk to.

Although Zev was supposed to be gone for 10 weeks, he abruptly

showed up 2 weeks later a couple of hours before Shabbat with

my two eldest kids behind him. He disallowed them to warn me

that he is coming. He knocked on the door and said "what are you

going to do? Call the police?" I was in shock, precisely as he

wanted me to be, of course the younger kids were happy to see

their father and I had to let him in. My oldest son convinced Zev to

go to a therapy session with me. Zev has always refused to go in

the past. He agreed. At the therapy session his compromise was

to "take the kids out of school, travel them around Israel and go

back to US to work on our marriage.” When asked why can’t you work on the marriage without taking the children out of school and while here, he refused to hear of it. It was clear that he just

wanted to force me to move back to U.S. and that he was not interested in making the marriage work. When he came back his mental and emotional behavior was even more abusive constantly telling me “you are not my wife,” and bringing up divorce. Finally, on November 4, 2021, I asked him for a get. He ignored me. He searched the entire house for the children’s passports. When he couldn’t find them he screamed and demanded that I hand them over. When I asked why would you need them? We just got here, the only reason you would demand them is to try to take the kids away. He didn’t respond. He followed me to the Misrad HaPanim when I was getting the Israeli passports for the children and while I was passing the American passports to the agent he grabbed them from my hands and was taking photos of them. He also promised our youngest son, Alexander, that Alexander would be in Florida to celebrate his birthday in December. I became suspicious and very fearful he would take the children. I started to search the court dockets in Florida. I discovered that while in Israel, he filed for divorce in Florida, seeking child support, alimony and partition of the house. He did this while simultaneously telling the children that he loves me and does not want to get divorced. Even when I confronted him and showed the computer screen with his divorce filing, he denied it.

Scared that he would take the children out of the country, I contacted and hired a lawyer to file a stop order on the children's passports and to start a divorce proceeding in Israel. Thankfully, Zev was served with the Israeli divorce right before he left again in November. A few days after he left, on Channukah, I was served

with a Hague Child Abduction Case. The absurdity and the backstabbing was unreal. Zev accused me of conspiring to take the children away from him when we made aliyah together after a year of preparation (not to mention the 25 years of wait). The petition was full of horrible lies. To add salt to the wound, he claimed that he has not been able to work for all these years because he was the primary caretaker of the children. More painful, was that his parents, who have known me since I was 17 and whom I loved as my own and hosted almost weekly paid for these vicious lies. B"H, after spending all the money I saved to get us on our feet in Israel, and after several months of not sleeping and constant stress, this case was dismissed and Zev was sanctioned for bringing this frivolous lawsuit (of course he didn't pay for these sanctions). He also abruptly showed up for hearings during this case, and I had no choice but to allow him to stay in the house while he accused me of abducting my own children when he was here. He came and went 3 times since our Aliyah. The last time he left was on December 21, 2021, on our youngest son's birthday. He has not been back since, not even for his son Yosef's (second son) bar mitzva as he knows that if he comes back he will be forced to give me and get and pay child support.

You never think it will happen to you. It has been a real test of Emunah for me. My secular family and friends cannot believe that despite everything that he did, abandoning his family, failing to support his family in any way for years, filing a frivolous abduction case and a divorce in Florida, that the Beit Din has not given a default ruling of a get. Clearly he does not want to stay married, clearly he is perverting the Jewish law and using the get to manipulate, coerce and continue his abuse. In truth, for the first time since becoming baal teshuva, where I have always been in the position of explaining and defending observant Judaism, I have no answer. I have no answer for myself or anyone. There is no answer or justification, for why any woman's life should be placed on hold for any amount of time for her freedom. Why should anyone's freedom be dependent on someone else, especially someone who does not want to be with her and is abusive? Why haven't our Rabbis who are so brilliant and have come up with ways to use Shabbat elevators, lights and switches, who have come up with solutions for all other issues that life presents, why do they allow systematic abuse of women to go on without end and recourse? Surely there are tools in the Halacha to give women default gets and their freedom back when the men are being recalcitrant. Clearly, no psychologically balanced individual would abuse the system and women the way these men do. Why aren't the Rabbis employing tools in their halachic toolbox and their authority to finally put a stop to this? Why are they not providing default gets in circumstances where the facts are clear like here? Instead, in my experience, they give these abusers chance after chance, delay after delay despite seeing a pattern of



noncompliance and recalcitrance. This only encourages further abuse.

My Chiuu get was finally issued in October, 2022. I'm still waiting for my Get. In the meantime, Zev has refused our tenants to stay in the Florida house. He has also refused their generous offer to buy. Instead, he moved in the house with 6 bedrooms by himself so that I no longer receive rental income. Every day, I'm reminded that I'm lucky to be working. I think to myself, how do other agunahs survive when it takes months if not years to get freedom, where it takes months to receive any assistance, when officially you are married but in truth you are not (I have not been able to receive any assistance yet.) Where our brilliant Rabbis? Where is the outrage and courage to give our Jewish sisters freedom and allow them to live their lives?

I don't believe that Hashem and his infinite Torah intended for women to suffer indefinitely under abuse, not to be free and be slaves to their insane and abusive husbands. Indeed, especially in this time we are reminded that our Torah was given to bring us freedom to worship only Hashem. I hope that our Rabbis find the wisdom and Torah tools to deal with this issue from the core root and once and for all take away the abusers' ability to continue to abuse and pervert our beautiful laws.