

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:34 pm

PARSHAT KEE TETZE
THE MUSICAL SIX AND DIVORCE

“A man takes a woman [into his household] and becomes her husband. She fails to please him because he finds something obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house.” (Deuteronomy 24:1)

With my love of Broadway musicals, I went to see the filmed version of the stage show *Six*, filmed in London. I had already seen the show on the stage and often listened to the cast album, so I was familiar with the show. I wish they would film more of these shows for those of us who do not live in New York or London. I recently saw the filmed version of one of my favorite shows, *Hadestown*, also filmed in London with the original cast.

But returning to *Six* which won multiple Tony's, it is the story of the six wives of King Henry VIII. Each wife has a signature song about how awful her life was married to the king. It is a kind of contest to decide who has the worst marriage. But let me turn to the first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Henry wants to divorce her or at least annul the marriage for not giving him a male heir, so he can marry the young Anne Boleyn (whom he eventually beheaded). In the play, Catherine sings “No Way.” The Pope also tells King Henry, “No way.” The Church followed the New Testament teaching, “What the Lord has joined together, let no man rend asunder” (Matthew 19:6). Divorce was forbidden by the Church. Even today, the Church does not allow divorce but allows annulment only in certain limited cases.

Henry was not going to live with that. To oversimplify a complex story, he broke with the Church in Rome and founded a new religion, the Church of England. One could say that the Anglican Church was founded so that Henry VIII could divorce his first wife.

Judaism has no such tradition. The Torah allows divorce, not simply for serious charges like adultery or desertion but even minor differences. The Talmud teaches that a man can divorce his wife even if she burns his breakfast (*Mishnah Gittin* 9:10). If the marriage has so broken down that a couple is fighting over burnt

food, they are not forced to stay in an unhappy marriage.

Having said that, Jewish tradition tries very hard to discourage divorce. It is considered a sad last resort to a broken marriage. The Talmud teaches, "If a man divorces the wife of his youth, even the altar of God cries tears" (*Gittin* 90b). The ideal is a marriage that lasts a lifetime, not a series of serial marriages and relationships. I feel very privileged to have been married to Evelyn over 46 years. May our marriage continue.

How can we make marriages that work? I have given that a good deal of thought as couples have come to me over the years for counseling. The first important insight is to believe in marriage. It is not about you and me, but us, as a couple. When I stand under the *chuppah* (marriage canopy) with a bride and groom, I speak to them about true love. Each must look into the eyes of the other and ask the question, what can I do to meet your needs. Love is about serving the needs of the other.

Having said that, I am aware that many marriages break down. Some people have said that lifelong monogamy is not a realistic goal. Humans are meant to have multiple partners over the course of a lifetime. Obviously, from my own experience, I do not agree. I believe in marriage. But I also respect the fact that not every marriage is able to succeed. Sometimes people are better off letting a marriage go.

The musical *Six* tells the story of the six wives of King Henry VIII. He divorced twice, beheaded two of his wives, outlived one wife, and in the end, his final wife outlived him. I imagine that he was not the easiest husband to live with. Perhaps he could have used some serious marriage counseling from the beginning. He needed someone to speak with who believed in marriage.