

KOL: VOICING A SINGLE ISSUE

A PROJECT OF THE ORTHODOX CAUCUS WWW.OCWEB.ORG

Orthodox. Single. Oy Vey.

by Rabbi Shmuel Goldin and Rabbi Josh Joseph

All the lonely people,
where do they all come from?

All the lonely people,
where do they all belong?

— THE BEATLES —

Why are there so many single Orthodox Jews? Perhaps we can point to the amplified tension surrounding courtship and marriage or to the disappearance of normal, natural ways for people to meet. Some people delay marriage due to concerns about career, education or finances. Others find that the new “rules and regulations” which have emerged on the dating scene limit their possibilities.

Whatever the causes, one thing is certain: we as a community have not done enough to address the root issues that contribute to and surround the “Singles Phenomenon.” To be fair, we have also added to the loneliness of single people – through lack of acceptance, implicit or explicit.

These are concerns not only for singles, but also for the entire Jewish community. We are dealing with our future, with the health of a generation of observant Jews. Whether we personally are married or not, we should be concerned.

At the Orthodox Caucus our goal is to move the community towards action on these issues. To that end, we offer the following essays as a glimpse of the complex mosaic that comprises the Singles Phenomenon. In an attempt to reflect the diverse, growing singles population we have called upon a **variety of people** to share their insights. The authors presented here are a microcosm of our community. They are rabbis, teachers, parents, social workers, mental health professionals and people who have dedicated their lives to this issue. They also include singles from all walks of life- not only people in their 20's or 30's, but single parents who are widowed or divorced, or older people who have never been married.

The goal of this compilation is to make each of us think – and **think differently** – about a situation that touches all of our lives either directly or tangentially. Our objective is to implement a **change in attitude** among synagogues, organizations, schools, and families which will enable single people of all ages to feel included in the Orthodox community, and to pursue courtship in a natural, friendly, less tension-filled way.

And while there appears to be sharp disagreement among the essayists, striking **themes** emerge in the pages before you. Many singles have not been able to get married despite their wishes otherwise. Some feel alienated by the Orthodox community, sometimes losing the will to

live an observant life. Others are tired of being pitied; instead, they would prefer people's acceptance, encouragement and maybe even a thoughtful effort to set them up on a date.

We urge you to spend some time with these essays. Many of the authors have courageously shared their stories and have offered ways for us to improve – in concrete fashion – upon circumstances which are troubling to so many. Think about these words and share them with your friends and family.

This publication, however, is only a first step. Instead of worrying about what someone else can do, each of us needs to get involved. Our shared challenge is to implement **practical, concrete changes**. Your thoughts and ideas can help us turn these words into real change: change that will improve individual people's lives; change that will strengthen the fabric of our community now and into the future.

On the last page you will find some ideas for moving forward. We hope you will also visit our website, www.orthosingles.org and join in the discussion. Together we can let all Jews know that though they may be lonely, they are not alone. ■

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Survey Says:

The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey conducted by the United Jewish Communities reveals that:

- More than one-half of Jewish men and more than one-third of Jewish women among American Jews ages 25-34 are not married.
- While Orthodox Jews marry somewhat earlier than non-Orthodox Jews, numbers of unmarried Orthodox adults today are far higher than they were several decades ago.
- Proportionally fewer Jews than Americans have ever been married.
- Jews tend to marry later than Americans.
- Proportionally more Jewish women than US women remain childless in every age group.
- Fertility is lower among Jewish women than among US women.
- 42% of the Jewish adult population is single.
- 30% of Jewish households are single-dwellings.
- Rates of intermarriage have increased from 13% in 1970 to 47% in 2001.

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The Israel Bureau of Statistics released figures in August 2004 showing a dramatic increase in the percentage of single Israelis:

- In 2002, 90% of Israeli men 20-24 years old were single compared to 77% in the 1970's.
- The percentage of single 25-29 year-old men grew from 28 in the 1970's to 58 in 2002.
- In the 1970's, 46% of 20-24 year old women were single as opposed to 75% in 2002. For women aged 25-29, the figures rose from 15% to 37%.

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Not Just Someone Else's Business

by Rabbi Paysach Krohn

What are we doing about the thousands of unmarried people across the globe that cannot find their *shidduch*?

Parents who have married children should especially feel the pain of others who do not.

I will share with you a story about a father who was having a very difficult time finding a *shidduch* for his daughter. She went on lots of dates, but there was no connection and both daughter and father felt much frustration. Finally, the father wondered if *Hashem* was trying to tell him something: “Why am I so selfish that I only think of myself and my daughter?”

So he made a list of every single man and single woman he could think of – there were about thirty of each. And then, every time he made a call on behalf of his daughter, he made a call on behalf of someone else on the list. Within five weeks, his daughter met the person she was going to marry!

And I know for a fact that every word of this story is true, because I am that father. It occurred to me that I had a responsibility to families beyond my own family. What about someone else's kids? If I am sensitive to others, maybe *Hashem* will help me.



This lesson has to be applied in all situations. Find someone in a similar situation to your own and try to help them and then maybe *Hashem* will help you. *Daven* for these people during *Shemoneh Esrei* where all the language is plural – *refaenu, barech aleinu*, (heal us, bless us) and so on. If you are in financial trouble, *daven* for someone in the same situation. Feel the pain of another Jew – make their business your business, their burden, your burden. And then surely *Hashem* will call out to us and embrace us. ■

Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, a fifth-generation mohel, is the author of *Bris Milah*, as well as several other books. He is a renowned speaker well-known for his tapes around the world.

Opting Out of Orthodoxy: I'd Rather Be Adored Than Ignored by Anonymous

I'm a failure. At least that's what my parent's friends might say. With hushed voices and quizzical looks, I am viewed as only half of a person because, "nebach" I am still single. We singles were reared to do as our parents and grandparents had done, to move from our parents' home to our own home. But the movers stopped on the Upper West Side (UWS) and many of us are still here.

Many of us have made a nice life for ourselves. At first the UWS, was just a transient place. An apartment that we rented with a few friends for a year or two until we got married was by no means a real home. And then, a percentage of our friends did wed and purportedly do live "happily ever after" in the 'burbs.

But the remaining singles are left to make new friends and find new people to sit next to in *shul* and chat with at *kiddush*. The number of *shabbos* meal invitations decreases and with it, the beauty and comfort of the *shabbos* environment subsides.

Failing in one arena, we flourish in others. We build successful futures for ourselves by

committing to our careers. We build new lives with our work colleagues who provide us with a level of comfort and accept us for who we are. We are viewed as intelligent, ambitious, whole individuals who are making an impact in the world. At work, it is okay that we are single and we begin to embrace that world.

With our newfound acceptance, we integrate fully into society. We have non-observant Jewish associates and non-Jewish friends whom we join for Thursday night happy hour and sushi. Unattended to by the Orthodox community and with no parental or rabbinic supervision, sushi becomes salmon and before you know it, our year in Israel has gone out the window and we are officially "eating dairy out." Friday nights are long and lonely and who will know if we flick on a light switch or even watch TV? Thursday night happy hour is so much fun and *shul* is such a drag, it is only a matter of time before we join our new friends at Friday night happy hour and we wonder to ourselves, "what *shul*?"

It's a slippery slope and it is years in the making. Our parents wonder/worry if we'll

ever get married but somehow they deny our religious dissension. Our religious convictions fall to the wayside. Maybe, it was the Day-school system that failed us and never instilled within us a true belief system. Maybe, Judaism was not meant for singles. Without community pressure to keep us in line or report cards from our school *rebbe*, it can be hard for some individuals to remain observant.

Religion is challenging
in the best of times
and perhaps insurmountable
in the single times.

It is not that people consciously decide that they don't want to be religious. But religion is challenging in the best of times and perhaps insurmountable in the single times. For most of us, it is not that we intend to deny

the Orthodox lifestyle forever; it is just that we have temporarily shelved it because until we wed, we do not know how to integrate our single life with our religious life. Unless of course we fall in love with a non-observant Jew or a non-Jew in which case, it is possible that we will be lost forever.

And so, with life expectancy on the rise, women being financially independent and people delaying marriage for their real "princess" or "prince charming", many of us have 10+ years of independent living without a community structure.

It is a delicate balance between becoming too comfortable with our single status that we no longer yearn for our *basheret* and too uncomfortable to remain a part of the community. Social advances and outside influences have continuously impacted Jewish life but as a people we have historically been able to simultaneously integrate and separate from mainstream society. The growing single population that is "opting out" of Orthodoxy should be viewed as a "crisis" not because we are "failing" to get married but because we are "failing" to uphold our religious convictions and are thereby threatening the future of Jewish Orthodoxy. ■



to your kids. Someone once asked Rav Moshe Feinstein if it would be better not to be involved with *balei teshuvah* because the children were most likely conceived without the mother going to the *mikveh*. He answered that surely the mother went swimming that week, so it is possible that they are fine; we need more of these kinds of *teshuvah* in the world we live.

Who should you turn to for help and advice on *shidduchim*? Your family – which does not necessarily include your teacher. A *rebbe*, a *yeshiva* can act in *locus parentis* for educational purposes, but personal issues such as *shidduchim* should be discussed with parents. Advice given by *Roshei Yeshiva* need not be honored to the same degree as their explanation of a *gemara*, or how they teach a *halacha*. They may not be expert to advise in all areas of human concern, something that is reserved for the *gadol hador*; and sadly, there is no such person today.

When should you discuss family medical histories and potential genetic problems? On the question of integrity, the only issue is when to tell, not whether to tell. Today people have a greater openness about serious things, and are right to share problems and issues with their future spouses. However, these need not be discussed on the first date.

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Ten Questions for Rabbi Moshe Tendler

adapted from End The Madness Symposium February 28, 2004

At what age should children begin learning about dating, relationships and marriage? Unfortunately our school curricula do not stress the importance of getting married. The concept of marriage has to be taught in kindergarten, just like eating kosher – one has to be taught the necessity of living kosher. That is not to say that you need co-ed events when boys & girls are 14 or 15. Nevertheless, our educational institutions must stress the importance of marriage as a Jewish lifestyle value even at an early age.

How do you find the proper person? There exist metaphysical ways to do so: one example is that of R. Nachman of Breslav who writes that one may uncover his *zivug* (coupling) through concentration on the recitation of "Oz *yoshir Moshe*," which speaks of the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. A skeptical woman asked: "now that creation is finished what does Hashem do?" Chazal answer that Hashem makes *shidduchim*, but add that it is as difficult as the splitting of the sea.

More to the point, one gets married based upon merit, based on wanting to be married and not setting standards that are too high to meet. You may have criteria to follow, but 50 items on your list is neither appropriate nor realistic; you just need a few.

What, then, are the important things to look for? The chief concern in *shidduchim* is to seek out *baalei chessed*, people whose priority is to help and take care of others. In marriage it is critical that the spouses take care of each other and at some point their children. I can't say enough about summer

programs that care for the sick, like Camp HASC and the like where young people can meet others who are *baalei chessed*.

Everything else is just details that usually don't make sense. Don't ask whether he wears shoelaces or loafers; or what kind of gefilte fish they eat; or what sort of tablecloths they use. The process can deteriorate to the point of stupid questions that are asked because no one knows what to look for anymore.

Important decisions in life
should not be dependent
on externals.

What criteria are less important, or not important at all? A *shidduch* is generally made first by physical attraction – appearance and dress – more than personality traits. A wife is for eternity, a size 8 is not and should not be a factor for a marriage that will last forever: her shape will change, as will yours. Essentials are what you're looking for – not that which is variable, changeable.

Moreover, dress is just a flag that you fly: it determines the group with which you identify, but it is not as important as people make it in terms of a personal or individual indication of character. In the world that we live in today people ask, "how long should the dress be?" Above the knee? Below? This is all personal style. Unlike a boy who wears a backward baseball cap on the first date who is

clearly trying to make a rebellious statement, most of our dress codes are learned behavior patterns and therefore sociological phenomena. The way someone dresses is not necessarily a statement about personal piety or religiosity.

True, there exist certain *halachic* issues such as hair covering and wearing pants that ultimately have to be discussed; still, opinions – verbal, or physical – expressed during a date are usually not the opinion of the person expressing them, but rather amount to a mouthing of something they heard or learned from their community. Young people are not yet the people they will become. Important decisions in life should not be dependent on externals that are constantly in flux and are likely to change.

One can even here apply the concept of *tinok shenishbah*, a child who grew up outside the community. Someone who grows up in a more modern community has different influences, cultural codes and social groups. Thus, one must endeavor to make a "benefit burden analysis" to determine where your date may be flexible: she can wear a little longer dress, he can learn a little more *Torah*, etc. These issues can be taken care of in the developmental phase; one should not declare people unsuitable because of a behavior pattern that doesn't speak to the individual person but to the society in which they grew up.

What should be considered in terms of the potential date's family? You should try to find a family that is committed to a *halachic* lifestyle; you need to know that the family is willing to present a *halachic* household

The Challenges of Online Dating

by Nancy Karan, C.S.W.

Today there are several Jewish websites where singles around the world can connect with one another. Whether one is unaffiliated or *yeshiva* educated, he or she now has immediate access to singles with similar religious ideologies and practices. *Frumster*, *FutureSimchas*, *JDate* and *SawYouAtSinai*, offer Jewish singles an opportunity to “shop” for a mate and empower them to choose who they want to date. More significantly, they no longer have to wait for their friends or mothers to set them up.

Nevertheless, the sites are not perfect. While it may seem that one’s *bashert* is just a mouse click away, online dating may be even more complex than offline dating. As the opportunities to meet people increase, so too may the opportunities for rejection. When one is choosing from such a large pool it can seem daunting and therefore cause one to feel disinclined to go through the weeding process. One woman, Erica, shared that when her profile was “aired” for the first time on one of the sites, she received 70 responses on the first day. One of the pitfalls of having so many singles available is that committing

to one when there could be someone better becomes symptomatic of the epidemic.

Another issue that arises in internet dating is that individuals may misrepresent both how they really appear in person and what their motivations are. When dealing with a website where no one is officially doing the setting up, pictures are not always accurate or honest. One can feel disappointed and even angry when meeting someone who looks nothing like their online photo.

When relying on a profile, there is always room for embellishment and therefore, heightened expectations. It is somewhat paradoxical that one would have a profile on a dating website, and yet not really be ready to settle down. A person who is not calling right away, or who prefers to exchange emails regularly for weeks before making a date may actually be ambivalent about meeting someone. It may be more important for him or her to know singles are out there than to actually take themselves out of the single pool by settling down. The internet, then, becomes a vehicle in which to meet people, but not necessarily for the purpose of marriage.

One needs to have a good sense of self when dating via the internet. There is more rejection than not, much of which comes in the way of no response. Whether initiated by man, woman, or matchmaker, there is no guarantee that an individual will be interested in the person writing to them, or even that they will answer your email.

Singles need to realize that finding one’s *beshert* does not mean finding a perfect partner.

There are many reasons why this happens. One man I spoke with said that although he wanted to get together with someone he liked, he held onto her phone number until it was too late. He had been waiting for things to slow down at work and they never did. Too much time had passed and she met someone else. Individuals need to know that if people aren’t calling, it may have nothing to do with them. Some people are also trying to meet someone through other means and may not check or

respond to messages for weeks at a time. Individuals who have difficulty with rejection may find that internet dating is not for them.

For those who have not yet had success on Jewish dating websites, sometimes patience is a virtue. Hundreds of singles have met their life partners on the internet, while others have given up after a few months without success.

Singles need to realize that finding one’s *beshert* does not mean finding a perfect partner. A relationship is about giving of oneself and helping the other to be a better person. Despite the challenges, sites that introduce an intermediary may help by assessing one’s level of commitment and/or providing coaching. Internet dating is simply a way to meet someone, a mere introduction. It takes risk, vulnerability and communication to take that introduction to another level and as of yet there is no website for that. ■

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Ten Questions *continued*

What would constitute a serious genetic problem that should be discussed? This question is not necessarily for rabbis to answer: we do not get medical advice from *rabbanim*. My suggestion would be to have the family doctors of the couple talk to each other in professional confidence to determine basic health and illness essentials and compatibility. This way, if there is a problem it will be faced right away; and if it is not a serious medical or health issue, it will not eliminate someone as a potential *shidduch*. Doctors alone will decide whether the person is unmarriageable due to a medical condition.

Any dating suggestions for those of us who have yet to get married? Today dating is a game; I don’t have much experience with it. I was introduced to my wife at a Young Israel lecture and then met her occasionally at the local public library where people went to study or learn *Torah* when their Lower East Side apartments became too cramped! I say it’s a game because you do not reveal your true personality until later. Dates provide little opportunity to do more than get a general impression that things are okay, to get a sense of the other person. You can’t know who they really are until you’re married for some time.

Today the *shidduch* system does not seem to be working. What can we do about it? The *shidduch* system does add some rigidity to the process though that is not necessarily the fault of the *shadchan* who has only one job – to get the boy and girl together; the rest is up to you.

Some of the new “rules” that the system has generated are not helpful. For example, the idea that you can only go out with one boy or girl at a time is nonsense; after the wed-

ding, it’s a different story! Also, the idea that everything goes through the *shadchan* is crazy. The matchmaker can be helpful at certain stages to help things advance, but if a boy likes a girl he should tell her so, and not have to tell his parents who tell the *shadchan* and so on.

One of the advantages of the *shidduch* system though is that facilitating the first meeting is always difficult without third-party involvement. We certainly need more events like the ones run by *End The Madness* for single men and women to meet and have opportunities to socialize. People don’t meet in the library anymore and when they do, they don’t know how or if to speak to each other. How can boys and girls meet in appropriate settings? It shouldn’t take much ingenuity to work out the problem; men and women sat together at my wedding, singles sat six to a table and my wife and I tried to think of who should sit with whom. We can’t deny every opportunity for social mixing, so this problem shouldn’t be too difficult to fix – our *yeshiva* has a prime responsibility to fix it.

Any last thoughts or advice? My father-in-law, Rav Moshe Feinstein, z”l was once asked for advice on dating, and his answer was that you shouldn’t try to be too smart. Don’t “test your date” because it won’t help. Your only guarantee of success is “*Tamim tihiyeh im Hashem Elokecha*,” have faith in *Hashem* that He will advise you. ■

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A Mother’s Prayer *by Anonymous*

When my daughter was born, I prayed for her. I prayed for her health and happiness. Happiness that included her future marriage and children. How could I not? I wanted her to be happy and I understood that in terms of my own life, culture and context. So now that she remains single, what do I do? How do I show my love and concern without repudiating her life? How do I deal with my pain and not overshadow or assume hers? How do I implement our relationship? So many questions and no easy answers.

I live in a world of marriage and children. As far as I am concerned this is the good life, a life of companionship and creativity. It is not the only life, but it surely has been good to me and to my understanding of our civilization. It is clearly a Jewish value: a biblical blessing. If *Hashem* blesses us with this potential, how can we accommodate to its absence? I have worked with many divorce cases and I know full well that the system and the people in that system do not always live up to these ideals. But the potential for human happiness seems to me to be bound up with the companionship of marriage. And now my daughter is not married. So how do we as a family and a community deal with that? Specifically, how do I as a mother handle it?

Additionally, how do I/we deal with the absence of children/grandchildren. The goal of procreation is not simply about numbers or population growth. Having children is also a blessing from God. In the biblical stories of infertile women, the women themselves saw

their infertility as a punishment or abandonment from *Hashem*. So if having children is this great gift, what do we say to those who are single and childless? Should we encourage them to entertain single parenthood? I want my daughter to feel the complex joys of birth and nursing, of holding a tiny trusting hand, of lunch boxes and car pools, of a child’s first dates and love.

So, like many of my friends, I am in a quandary. I want to stay close with her, but our experiences are so different now. I do not want to nudge her, or appear too concerned. I do not want to open her own wounds by asking about her loneliness. But I do wonder how she feels. I want to be there for her but have no cartography of how to accomplish that. When my other children come home with their families, how can I/we make her feel comfortable?

Questions can be so invasive: Who are you seeing? Do you want to go out with a friend of a friend? Why aren’t you married? What do you do by yourself? Yet not asking questions might seem insensitive or uncaring. We care and love her.

Most importantly, I want her to want to come home to be with the family. I want her to feel accepted and part of the family. *Pesach* and *Shabbat* are times for intensive family get-together and family life is stressed. I never want her to feel ostracized or marginalized. I want her to be happy. I pray for it even if I no longer know what will make her happy. ■



Home for the (Jewish) Holidays by Michele Herenstein

A feeling of trepidation takes hold of my heart. The Jewish holidays are upon us again, and as a 30-something single in a family of all married siblings, I'm feeling anxiety and pain. I should be excited, as I get to spend two days with my parents, brothers, sisters-in-law and their kids. However, for weeks before a holiday arrives, I experience apprehension that grows exponentially as each holiday draws closer.

Please don't get me wrong. I love my family very much. I've always gotten along with my siblings and their spouses, I love my nieces and nephews like crazy, and I've always considered my family to be closer than most. The idea of being with them should ease the pain of being single and alone, and should ease the sense of loneliness I feel, being single among married couples.

Hence, my feelings of guilt because I do

not look forward to being with my family during the holidays. I don't look forward to having to put on a happy face, when cheerful is the last thing I feel. I don't look forward to the questions my nieces invariably ask when wanting to know why I am not yet married.

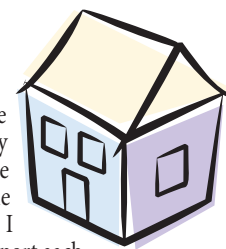
It is as if an important part of me is missing. I watch the loving eye contact between my siblings and their spouses, the hand holding under the table as we eat the holiday meals, and the cheerful chattering of my nieces and nephews. I listen to talk of the kids' baseball leagues, dance lessons, and where the next family get-together should be held. Someone tries to pull me into the conversation every once in a while, but I don't really have anything to add. I feel separated from what is going on. What I really want to say aloud is "What about me? I want someone to talk to, to love, who will understand me,

and really listen to me, and have things in common with me. I want to enjoy my own little boy and girl."

Sitting in synagogue on *Rosh Hashana*, I have tears in my eyes, because another year has past, and I'm still alone. And being with my family only makes it worse. Seeing the happiness among my family members and knowing it's due to the one thing I don't have, a loving spouse and children, makes my heart ache. Jewish holidays are times when families come together. But I don't have my own family yet. And this point is driven home to me very clearly every time I'm with my siblings for the holidays.

I sit at the meals wishing there was someone who could understand what I'm going through and I've come up with what I think is a really good idea. If there were one or more singles sitting at the meals with me, this

would surely ease the loneliness I feel. They would probably be feeling some of the same emotions as I am, and we could support each other, just by sharing these times together. I would have someone to laugh with when my nieces asked their probing questions, someone to roll my eyes at when my siblings were acting mushy and I was feeling vulnerable, and someone who would be going through what I was going through and could relate.



Having another single around for the holidays would make me feel less alone.

There are always some singles who have nowhere to go for the holidays, because their families aren't observant, or perhaps they live too far away. If these singles were invited for the Jewish holidays by families like mine, where there is one single among many married couples, this could have multiple benefits. First and foremost, it would be a tremendous *mitzvah* (good deed) on the part of the families doing the inviting. It would also alleviate some of the pain that the singles feel at being the only one who is single. Personally, having another single around for the holidays would make me feel less alone, and more open to enjoying my family's company, without the added burden of loneliness.

Before the holidays wrap up for the year, I wish to call out to families who have singles in their midst. I wish to tell them that we, the singles, are lonely, and need help this time of year, help that could come from having other singles around. So please, this year when we are all trying to make changes, do something new, something good, and invite singles to your tables and to your homes on *Yom Tov*. You will warm others' hearts, and maybe even your own. ■

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The Answer Is...

A question lurking behind these articles, rarely addressed directly, is the perplexing one of why so many young Jewish men and women are single despite the significant burdens that status places upon them. The Orthodox Caucus hopes that you the reader will weigh in on the issue; Rabbi Gidon Rothstein argues that to some extent the singles simply reflect a broader social phenomenon exemplified by the divorce rate and the frequency with which Orthodox synagogues are firing their rabbis. To read his essay in full and/or share your thoughts, log on to:

www.orthosingles.org

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Ten Commandments for Married People

by Michael Feldstein

Are you married, but looking to do something constructive for your single friends? Below are ten things married couples can easily accomplish within their communities, which will enhance the lives of their single counterparts and lead to more singles meeting one another and getting married:

- 1 Stay in contact with your single friends after you get married.** Many singles feel abandoned by their friends once they get married. Call them occasionally and find out about what's going on in their lives. Take an interest in what interests them. Ask them for advice, and share your joys with them. Invite them over for a *Shabbat* weekend. They will appreciate the contact—and feel better about themselves.
- 2 Be supportive.** Instead of simply giving advice, listen to what your single friends are saying. Show them that you care. This, in turn, will lead many of your single friends to share details about their lives with you, without making it seem like you are prying into their business.
- 3 Avoid making judgments about current relationships in which your single friends may be involved.** If you are specifically asked by your single friend about a person they are seeing, be honest and forthcoming about how you feel, without being judgmental. If they don't ask, keep your thoughts to yourself.
- 4 Give thought to setting up singles.** Don't suggest a date simply because two people are the same age, or because someone asks you whether you know a good guy. Get to know singles personally, rather than treating them like index cards. Respect confidential information

shared with you. Don't assume someone is available and interested before checking first. And once you've suggested a potential date to a person, and he or she is interested, make sure to follow up and not leave the person hanging.

- 5 Include single members of your community in the planning and development of your *shul*.** If they deserve to be honored at a dinner, don't exclude them simply because they are single. There's also no *halacha* that a *gabbai* or a president of a *shul* has to be married.
- 6 Invite singles to your *Shabbat* meals.** This is a great way for singles to meet each other in a normal and non-pressurized environment. In fact, there is at least one community (Baltimore) where this program is more formalized and singles can sign up to be placed at the homes of married couples who have volunteered to host a meal. Plan a different kind of singles *Shabbaton*, where 40-50 singles can spend *Shabbat* weekend in your community, and various couples can host 6-8 singles each for *Shabbat* meals.
- 7 Don't give in to pressure to conform.** If someone asks you a question that has no bearing on a potential *shidduch*, don't answer it—make it clear that you refuse to participate in such silly behavior. Avoid the labeling that has become so common in the Orthodox community, and treasure the rich diversity within our ranks.
- 8 Encourage mixed seating at weddings.** Speak to your rabbi about making this standard practice for any marriage he performs. There are few better ways for large groups of singles to get to know each other in a comfortable and natural environment than at a mixed

table of singles at a wedding. No less a *Torah* scholar than Rav Aharon Soloveichik met his future spouse at a wedding with mixed seating. Countless more *shidduchim* can be made if we encourage this practice.

- 9 Create normal, healthy social activities for singles.** Put together a planning committee consisting of both singles and married people from your *shul*. Organize social events for singles, such as an arts festival or a *chessed* (volunteering) project, which allow singles to interact with each other without the program feeling like a typical singles event.
- 10 Empower singles that you know to arrange their own dates,** rather than rely only on dates through third-parties or *shadchans*. There is still no better method to finding a mate than singles meeting informally. Singles must become more proactive in their search for a spouse, and married individuals can encourage them to get more involved in different kinds of activities, which will increase their chance of finding a *shidduch* on their own.

Ultimately, the ability for more Orthodox Jewish singles to get married will fall on the shoulders of singles themselves. However, if we can mobilize the efforts of those who are already happily married, and get more people in our community involved in helping singles, we can create many more marriages – and greatly alleviate the singles problem. ■

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SDJM: Single Divorced Jewish Mother by Shoshana Bulow, CSW

A year after my divorce, a friend's mother asked her son of he'd consider dating me. There I was, eight years his senior, divorced, and the mother of three young children. "Are you sure she's Jewish?" I asked him.

Unfortunately my question was not groundless. That kind of openness is not representative of the general reaction in the Orthodox community to divorce and single parent families. Despite our growing numbers, the more common reaction is one of discomfort and inattention, making families feel marginalized at a time when they most need to feel embraced. Many would prefer to think that divorce does not happen in our community, and when it does, that it can be dealt with privately. Some rabbis say they are ill at ease when dealing with divorcing congregants. Of course this cannot be an excuse any more than would shying away from funerals, *shiva* homes, or hospital visits would be acceptable. However, it is not only rabbis who can make a difference; anyone can promote change in this area, creating a more empathic, sensitive and inclusive mindset within the Jewish community.

The overall picture of my life post-divorce is a good one. In the nine years since my separation, I feel gratified to have three wonderful children who, for all the challenges of having raised them as a single parent, have been my primary source of happiness and pride. I have been blessed with supportive parents and extraordinary friends who make the tapestry of our lives so much richer. Professionally, I have developed a meaningful career. Personally, I have learned about my resilience and resourcefulness as well as about my vulnerabilities. Even in difficult moments, I have found solace knowing that the place I return to is one of optimism, connection, and promise.

Yet, raising children as a single parent in the Jewish community has not been easy. When I first separated, some close friends helped me get through that difficult period, but the larger community chose to hang back. Many women who I would bump into in the neighborhood would whisper to me that they admired my courage, that they wished they had half my strength.

But for the most part, the same people in

Raising children as a single parent in the Jewish community has not been easy.

our Cleveland community who six years earlier were vying to invite the new rabbi's family to their homes for a *Shabbat* meal were now keeping their distance. Naively, I did not anticipate the impact my divorce would have on certain friendships, nor did I anticipate that any of my friends would judge

me harshly. I certainly did not expect my sexual orientation to be questioned by a former friend, stating that she could not imagine any other reason I would leave my marriage.

Don't be surprised if you feel ostracized, it's not about you.

I was forewarned about what to expect as a divorced woman in the broader Orthodox community by my friends' experiences with divorce in their own families. "Don't be surprised if you feel ostracized, it's not about you." But as my ex-husband received *Shabbat* invitations and I did not, I could not help but wonder why. Did they perceive him as helpless? Had they taken on the anger he had for me? Or, perhaps, unlike my perceived diminished value as a newly single, divorced mother with three young children, my ex-husband was re-entering the singles pool as an eligible bachelor, a desirable commodity on the *shidduch* market?

The story is a recurrent one. The divorced mother feels left out, marginalized, only conditionally accepted. Theories about why this is so abound. There are those who feel that the divorced woman presents a threat, either as a newly single woman, or as someone who has made the choice to end her marriage. She may prompt thoughts of leaving in others who may privately be having problems of their own. There are still others who feel that the marginalization has to do with social connections: financially, politically, and socially, the single mother often has less power, less to offer in terms of social advancement.

My children also felt this discomfort. During the early months of our separation, their teachers were uncomfortable broaching the issue of divorce, even though they clearly cared that the children were going through a difficult time. I worried that the teachers' silence could make my children feel ashamed of what was happening, and/or that they had to keep their pain a secret. So I pushed their teachers to talk to them, and even suggested words they could use. And while some teachers were better able to manage these difficult conversations, the sad fact was that they received no professional guidance.

Understandably, people may feel torn between respecting privacy and appearing indifferent to the divorced parent. But as the number of single-parent families in our community increases, the need to become aware of the day-to-day realities of these households becomes even more pressing.

Because unlike the way in which we may (often erroneously) perceive a birth, illness or death as a one-time event, divorce – when there are children involved – is a life-long process.

Countless ongoing challenges face the divorced family for years beyond the initial separation. Perhaps the biggest issue is that of co-parenting, or, all too often, trying to cope as a single parent when the other parent ceases to fulfill his or her parental responsibilities. There are the unremitting financial difficulties of divorce, as well as, for some, the chronic logistics of helping children navigate between two households. There is the complexity of helping children maintain and nurture a relationship with their other parent, despite one's own oftentimes negative feelings and experiences with their ex-spouse. There is the logistical and emotional balancing act of continuing to be a responsible parent while also dating.

On a community level, there is the issue of children in *shul* who must sit by themselves on the other side of the *mehitza*, or, who may prefer not to enter *shul* at all rather than sit alone. This could be easily remedied by organizing informal Big Sister/Big Brother programs in our synagogues where people can volunteer to be on the lookout for the child of a divorced or widowed parent, and invite the child to sit with him or her in *shul*. Similarly, on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, children sitting alone should be given priority by those responsible for seating arrangements and should be placed near friends rather than just given a leftover seat.

Our community's lack of awareness is manifest in the failure of most synagogues to have single parent membership categories. Most synagogues would gladly offer reduced membership rates to anyone in need, but the fact is that most single parents do not have the same financial means as two-parent households. Maintaining a household within the Jewish community is quite costly: single mothers are already likely to be requesting aid for school, camp, and other activities that are the norm for many families. A single-parent membership category in our synagogues would both acknowledge their financial situation and

eliminate the shame that often accompanies having to ask for help.

Single parents often feel discomfort in going to school, synagogue and social functions alone, and many times will opt not to attend. To offset this we should have single parent events as part of our synagogue social functions. A woman who was organizing a singles' *Shabbat* event in my area several years ago sheepishly told me that I had purposely not been informed of the gathering. "There will be *kohanim* there," she said, "so we did not invite divorced women." Somehow, the prohibition of a *kohen* marrying a divorcee got translated into excluding divorced women from the singles' event list, even though many of the men in attendance would not be *kohanim*.

Our schools can do a better job of being sensitive to divorced families. They should provide teachers with in-service trainings about handling difficult issues that arise in families. Teachers need to be trained to use more sensitive language, as even benign comments and requests (for example, "both of your parents should sign your homework") can be emotionally laden for a child. Similarly, children of divorced parents should not be listed twice on the class list, as many schools still do. Additionally, schools can increase their sensitivity to the single parent body by recognizing that they often do not have the same financial or time resources as two-parent families.

The Orthodox community has begun to take important steps in giving voice to the issues faced by single parent households in our community. But having a voice is a two-sided equation: it is dependent both on an individual's self-expression, and on the listener's openness to hearing what is being said. It must not be left solely to those who face challenge or adversity to express their voice. It is the community's responsibility to witness, listen and respond. ■

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Is Any Marriage Better Than No Marriage? by Deborah Mark

It's no accident that many of the do's and don'ts of dating today would seem more familiar to a couple's great-grandparents than to their own parents. Serendipity is out. *Shadchans* and speed dating are in.

One of the payoffs of traditions and rules is supposed to be a sense of certainty and security. But even as they date and decide, many young people are nagging themselves with doubts: Is any marriage better than no marriage? Should I settle?

Old world methods—encouraging marriages based on external notions of compatibility — ‘worked’ for Tevye, Golde, and thousands like them. They didn't look for fireworks; love and affection would come with time. It often did. How have we changed?

For centuries, roles for wives and husbands were clearly delineated. Women didn't travel to learn *Torah* and to acquire their own *hashkafa*. Men weren't disqualified by their lack of ambition or physical bearing; women weren't expected to look like a sylph after several pregnancies. Material consumption was not

the byword of Jewish life. Status was achievable through various means, not just through wealth. Getting by was acceptable, inevitable.

There were also discreet outlets. People worked six days a week. Men often left home for weeks at a time to earn a living or to learn at a distant *yeshiva*. Men sometimes left women for years in order to start a life elsewhere before sending for the family. Women often received emotional sustenance from each other.

Many of the modern pressures and expectations were unthinkable one hundred years ago. Today's marriages demand more emotional intimacy, negotiation, conversation and stimulation than was ever expected between the traditional husband and wife.

American Orthodox life also evolved. It now presents itself as a lifestyle of having it all and having it all sooner: the best education and careers, optimum looks, gourmet kosher restaurants, opportunities for learning, annual vacations, multiple trips to Israel, *yeshiva* educations and camps for children, a

beautiful, spacious home, nice cars, a variety of stylish clothes and accessories, a lavish *bris*, wedding and *bar* and *bat mitzvahs*. And have the ability, of course, to be *ba'alei tzedakah* (philanthropic).

In this context, it's no wonder that people are placing a market value on themselves and on potential spouses. Should you settle? The questions reflect alternating fears that the best opportunity may have passed you by, or, the fear that you could do better. There is a lurking sense of entitlement on the one hand, and a fear of being judged on the other. The capitalistic model has permeated our consciousness. It's like real estate: how high is high? Or, in the stock market, when do you know to cash in? Will tomorrow bring a better offer?

It's long been a custom at the Stern College dormitory that whenever a resident is engaged to marry, her friends decorate the door to her suite with rings and symbols of the *chatan's* (groom's) profession. By the end of the term, walking through those halls, there is the inescapable suggestion of *mezuzot* and *mashkof al ha-batim* (the marking of the doorposts before the exodus from Egypt), indicating who is ‘protected’ and who is not.

It's understandable too, if young people are eager to be engaged. Being engaged is a public, affirming, communal experience. You are celebrated, feted and blessed by all. From that time forward, a significant amount of time, money and attention is spent on the details of the wedding itself. The anticipation of being the center of attention at the party of a lifetime can be seductive in itself. You are relieved of the uncertainties and loneliness of single life. That and the positive reinforcement of family and friends make it easy to gloss over potential problems in the relationship.

Yet, after the last *sheva brachos*, you're on your own. Marriage, by contrast is a most private experience. In fact, it's easy to get the impression that all the unhappiness resides with those who are single, that perhaps any marriage is preferable to being alone, for it is the problems of singles that are most openly discussed.

It is natural, too, for young people on the verge of marriage to imagine the fulfillment of hopes and dreams rather than anticipate the complexities that accumulate with living a long life. A partner's vulnerability is probably not high on anyone's dating checklist.

What message is conveyed about dating and marriage when more families are altering their lives based on what they hope will lead to ‘proper’ future *shidduchim* for their children? When the fear of ‘ruining’ a future *shidduch* translates into years of avoiding the perception of deviance or veering from the norm? With this trend, categories of ‘deviance’ and ‘defect’ have broadened. Is it in our interest as a community to cultivate a lack of authenticity, less acceptance of vulnerability or limited respect for differences of opinion and experience?

The paradox is that, as one married woman wrote, “One of the things that keeps

us from intimacy... is that we're afraid people will see our stuff. And yet it's so much better when we can be in it together, when we can be honest. It opens doors to redemption and to letting light shine in on some dark places.”

This same woman, someone who knowingly married a man who had a life-threatening illness, offers another perspective: “You're not choosing a particular future when you decide to get married; you're choosing a partner for whatever the future brings. And you're choosing to look upon a potential marriage partner as the person that, no matter what happens, I want to do this together with you... You're always going to be hit by curve balls and even the things that you expect are always going to be more challenging when they arrive than what you had imagined.”

It is precisely because marriage is a central value and the basis for family and Jewish continuity, that we each have a stake in making it more likely for others to get it right. We can make room for multiple opportunities for young people to get to know and be comfortable with one another. The human costs for the mistakes are incalculable. As is, divorce rates are up, there are *agunot* (women without a *get*) among us and domestic violence in the Orthodox community is estimated at rates of 15-20%, equal to the population at large.

...being the last person in your crowd to marry will have no bearing on the quality of your married life, if you end up with the one who is right for you.

It would help if, instead of adding to the pressure, people and institutions make single people feel welcome enough so they can proceed at their own pace, in as many ways as can be made available to them, to meet someone. It would help also to reinforce what married people know — that in the end, being the last person in your crowd to marry will have no bearing on the quality of your married life, if you end up with the one who is right for you.

Perhaps it was a response to the anarchy of today's secular mores, but along the way, have our young people lost some of the viable alternatives for dating and marriage that worked for so many for so long? They and the modern Orthodox community should not settle for less. ■

Deborah Mark, an attorney, is a freelance writer and co-editor of Two Jews, Three Opinions: A Collection of Twentieth-Century Jewish Quotations (Perigee 2000).



What It Means to be Single on the Upper West Side by Anonymous

I'd like to describe what it's like to be a *frum* single living on the West Side in your 30s:

It means: always having to be ‘on.’ It's like every *Shabbos* is a *Shabbaton*: you go to *shul*, in part for the *davening*, but also for the socializing. Everyone dressed to kill, everyone busy looking over their shoulder to see who else they could be speaking to.

It means: going to singles events you really don't want to go to because, you never know. This might just be the event that ‘he’ is at or maybe someone who knows someone for you is there. So you get all dressed up, do your hair and makeup and put on a great big smile even though all you want to do is cry. Then you go to an event where:

- you invariably end up seeing the same people you saw at the last event.
- it quickly becomes apparent that even though the event organizers gave a specific age range as well as a religious range for the people coming, you see that many people do not fit into either category.
- you have to keep yourself from counting how many ‘exes’ are in the room.
- you go up and try to charm the hostesses because maybe they'll know someone for you.

It means: having to listen to people tell you, “What's one date, what could it hurt?” when they have no idea how much it can and does hurt. People think they are doing you a favor but the truth is that all of the thought that went into deciding if these two people are appropriate for one another came down to

one sentence: They're both single. It would be nice for more thought to go into it than that.

It means: dealing with my family. I love my siblings, I truly do. And I am very happy for each of them and how their lives have progressed. But it gets harder and harder to go to family affairs and be the only single one there. There are times that my feelings overwhelm me and I have to actually leave the room. And as cute and innocent as the kids are, the questions about why I'm not married are difficult. They don't understand, and quite frankly, neither do I.

It means: spending money. An evening event can range in price from \$5 to \$100 while a weekend event can range from \$300 and up. And that of course does not include the transportation costs. Or the clothes. And then there are *shadchans* who expect \$1,800 from both you and the *chasan* (groom) if they are successful in finding you a match since they figure you or your parents would surely pay anything to have you married.

It means: being amazingly lonely. When you're younger you have lots of friends. Then slowly, they all get married and somehow you still manage to be single. You don't replace those friends by investing the time and effort into establishing a new set of single friends because, how much longer will you be single anyway and once you're married you'll establish new “couple” friends.

What does it all mean? I share this with you, not to gain your sympathy, or even your empathy, but simply to provide a first-hand account of what the singles scene is really like from someone who is still in it. ■

Dating a Commodity: An Accountant's Eye for Marriage by Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman

Rabbinical Judaism and societies based on *halachic* precepts have what sociologists call a “bias” toward marriage. From the moment that week-old infants are officially blessed that they grow up to marry, Jewish tradition urges all adult Jews to conduct their lives in a married state. On a practical level, most historical Jewish societies have encouraged marriage with ‘carrots’ – communal celebration of and support for the newlyweds – and ‘sticks’ – communal mistrust of unmarried adults, especially of unmarried men. As a result, unmarried Jews have seldom found a comfortable niche in traditional communities.

One has only to look at contemporary Orthodox communities today, or to read Tova Mirvis’ touching new novel, *The Outside World*, to see that Orthodox communal preferences for married rather than single lifestyles have not diminished. Indeed, in many communities an obsession with marriage has been ratcheted up to fever pitch. Young women in particular are often made to feel that they are damaged goods if they have not married – and married well – by their early twenties.

Despite the historical Jewish bias and current communal pressure toward marriage, ironically, proportions of singles in contemporary Jewish communities have reached unprecedented levels. [See *Survey Says*, page 1] Orthodox communities today face the dual challenges of:

1. trying to understand the reasons for this increase in singleness within observant communities; and
2. creating communal policies in response.

Virtually universal levels of college education and careerism are often cited as the primary reasons for delayed marriage and non-marriage. However, an equally significant but seldom-discussed contributing factor is the commodification of potential marriage partners, and human relationships in general. In many Orthodox communities today, potential spouses are coldly evaluated by more than one party, including the young man or woman, his or her family, and sometimes an intermediary playing the role of *shadchan* – even before a first date. The potential date/spouse can be deemed inappropriate on a variety of bases, such as (a) religiosity, (b) familial medical history, and (c) financial resources.

a. Levels of religiosity are minutely calibrated: If a girl herself or one of her family members, for example, has been in any way associated with a woman’s *tefillah* group or other aspects of Orthodox feminism, she may find herself on a black list even for putatively “centrist” young Orthodox men attending universities. On the other hand, a “too *frum*” level of piety may disqualify one as well.

b. Men and women are similarly scrutinized not only as to their own health but also concerning siblings and other family

members. Some otherwise “modern” Orthodox Jewish parents urge “a complete genetic workup” before their children’s relationships proceed to commitment.

- c. And more than one relationship has foundered over financial negotiations between sets of parents prior to the wedding.

Interestingly, the fear of unwise commitments these mercantile evaluations represent derive not only from the historical Jewish pattern of *shadchones* and arranged marriages, but also from consumerism and contemporary Western values.

As the popular HBO series *Sex and the City* famously illustrates, secular Western singles also are terrified of getting stuck with the wrong person. Like Orthodox Jews, they approach relationships with a list of desirable and undesirable attributes. Additionally, Jewish men and women sometimes look at each other with distorted perceptions; many are influenced by negative depictions of Jews, particularly Jewish women, in television and movies. When men and women approach each other as potential purchases to be appraised, both among Orthodox and secular Jews, an obsession with getting the best “deal” in bargaining for a high-quality spouse creates an environment in which there is little tolerance for human imperfections – and little room for spontaneity or romance.

When men and women approach each other as potential purchases to be appraised... [it] creates an environment in which there is little tolerance for human imperfections...

Not enough attention has been paid to the wider sociological implications of the commodification of marriage. Realistic evaluation of potential romantic and marriage partners is certainly an important skill, and is also a wholesome reaction against the naïveté with which unsuitable persons have sometimes been shackled together. This is particularly true in the Orthodox community, where the situation of *agunot* (women without a *get*) who cannot win release from their failed marriages is unfortunately still a bitterly unsolved problem.

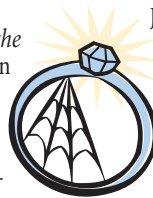
Nevertheless, the widespread habit of evaluating single men and women with an accountant’s eye as marital merchandise is both demoralizing and dehumanizing. Rather than being exclusively Orthodox, it fits right into the *Sex and the City* mentality of keeping a scorecard on dates and potential dates. Taught to regard each other with suspicion, some Jewish singles – including

Orthodox singles – continue to be suspicious and remain unmarried. Taught to avoid involvements without a guarantee of health, financial solvency, and eternally shared values and lifestyles, singles see quite well that no relationship comes with a guarantee and consciously or unconsciously avoid serious involvements.

Fostered both by secular American consumerism and by some aspects of *shadchones* and historical arranged marriages, commodification impoverishes relationships and has set many a promising friendship off course. Along with toxic portrayals of

Jewish women in television, film and popular culture, I believe commodification bears significant responsibility for the attenuated singlehood of many Jews.

The Orthodox community faces an extraordinary challenge of creating a



Singled Out?

by Rabbi David Aaron

Not too long ago I was invited to speak at a singles event. When I arrived, I noticed that most of the people had a strange nervous tick, a kind of head bobbing. After a while I started to notice that the tick was not consistent among all the participants: some bobbed their heads quickly up and down, while other’s bobbed in a long drawn out way. Finally I realized that it was not a nervous tick at all, but the participants were eyeing each other up and down.

During my presentation, I asked the participants to write a list of what they were looking for in a future partner. I then asked for volunteers to share their list with the crowd. People anxiously put up their hands hoping that by the end of their reading some other lonely soul would call out, “Yoo-hoo, here I am.”

So my first volunteer got up, and nervously read: “I am looking for someone who is warm, soft, calm...” At that point someone rudely called out: “Get the guy a cat.” The crowd burst into laughter. Not exactly a love-your-neighbor-as-yourself scene. After that all the volunteers’ hands quickly went down.

After the presentation, I had a very uncomfortable conversation with a woman who was “dressed to kill,” as the saying goes. More specifically, she was undressed to kill, and I doubt she understood why I talked to her with my head turned sideways. This woman was very annoyed by the singles event. “You know, rabbi,” she sighed, “I am so sick and tired of men looking at me like a piece of meat.” I thought but did not say, “So why do you dress like that?” What I did say was, “You know what happens at these singles events? Everybody is looking for more. If they are looking for an attractive person, they will always be able to find somebody more attractive. If they are looking for someone intelligent, there will be someone out there who is more intelligent.”

When you view people from the outside, sizing them up externally you can always find

countercultural approach, in which boys and girls are educated by their parents, their teachers, and their community to regard each other with empathy, humanity, and *menschlichkeit*, rather than as purchasable entities.

Orthodoxy gives us a head start in resisting this negative cultural trend, because our plethora of ritual and social laws has given us plenty of practice in being countercultural. Orthodox communities can only be enhanced by increased humanity, both in the way we treat the singles among us, and in the way we educate the children who will face singleness or marriage tomorrow. ■

Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman is Associate Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, and Codirector of the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women, both at Brandeis University. She has also written several books and has published dozens of articles on American Jewish life and literature.

someone more beautiful, more intelligent, or more successful. But when you look at someone on the inside, when you look at their true self – their soul – you will never find anyone who can compare. And if you let people see your soul then they will never find anyone who can compare to you.

In the realm of the soul no two people are alike. Jewish Mysticism teaches that the soul, your true I, is none other than a spark of God, and therefore you are absolutely unique and incomparable. And when you relate as a soul to another soul your true self radiates a warm and brilliant divine light. Your true individuality shines out.

Jewish Mysticism teaches that souls are really only interested in and attracted to souls. The only thing that attracts one person to another is actually not a ‘thing’ at all. It is the spiritual, the essence, the divine—the ‘you’. The more that you can reveal yourself as a soul, the easier it will be to find your soul mate. But we tend to behave in ways that get in the way of letting our soul shine out.

If you let people see your soul then they will never find anyone who can compare to you.

When people have lists of characteristics they are seeking in a mate, they will always be able to find someone funnier, smarter or more beautiful. These lists can be counterproductive and misleading because they are only describing a persona, and not a soul. The question is: are you looking for a persona partner or a soul mate? ■

Rabbi David Aaron is Dean of Isralight and author of *The Secret Life of God, Endless Light and Seeing God*. Please visit him on the web at www.rabbidavidaaron.com

Attitudes Toward Socializing...and Socializing Attitudes

by Rabbi Jeremy Wieder

There has been a great deal of concern expressed recently in our community about relatively new problems of social interaction between young men and young women and in particular, the process of dating. In speaking with students in Yeshiva and Stern Colleges, many of whom expressed the distress and discomfort they feel in this new environment, I have heard a number of recurring themes.

One primary lament is that there are few venues in which collegiate men and women meet socially which are both in keeping with their (appropriate) religious sensibilities and free of pressure to reach premature decisions. "Good" students typically shun co-ed events or programs. For some this is a choice - they are genuinely and sincerely convinced that such events are inappropriate or they are too busy with their night *sefer* (learning) or other responsibilities; what seems more problematic is that many others follow along because they are afraid of being "branded" as "not serious".

In the absence of social opportunities many young men and women feel compelled to resort to some variety of the "shidduch system" in order to meet potential spouses. There is certainly nothing problematic when such a system is informal, i.e. friends introducing friends. But when the system starts to resemble an official "shidduch system," with professional *shadchanim* (matchmakers) and "rules" and negative consequences for those who fail to participate or conform, serious problems begin to emerge. The system does not work well for most in our community. Certainly if an individual wishes to follow that route there is nothing wrong, but because a generally maladapted approach has become a peer-enforced norm, our young adults are subject to extreme social pressure and emotional angst.

The system does not work well for most in our community

Witnessing the anxieties these new mores appear to produce I have wondered why they are being adopted by so many of our young adults. What are the sources of these new attitudes and why are our students receptive to them? I have turned to students who feel uncomfortable with but constrained by contemporary assumptions about appropriate modes of interaction between men and women in general, and dating in particular, in an effort to understand.

In reflecting on their experiences many students cannot identify a specific source but simply point to an attitude which they typically absorb while spending the year studying in Israel, although some have already been exposed to similar messages while in high school, and their experiences in Israel may serve as a catalyst to act on them. They inter-

nalize this attitude even if they do not themselves hear any lectures or preaching on the topic because peer pressure from those students who have already absorbed the message wields tremendous influence over them.

Some have been able to articulate more specific messages being conveyed to them. Young men (again, in high school or in Israel) hear that young women are their *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) and exposure to them is dangerous to their spiritual health. Young women absorb the message that, at their core, men are primarily interested in them as sexual objects; in order to avoid this dehumanizing objectification, interactions between men and women must occur only as part of a most carefully controlled process with the sole purpose of finding a compatible spouse.

One popular charismatic preacher makes the rounds of many of the women's seminars "revealing" to the young women that they are basically naïve and don't seem to "get" the fact that the guys who would hang out with them are primarily interested in sex, irrespective of anything those guys might tell them. And, unfortunately, this message resonates with them because it affirms what many of them have seen in their teenage experience, both in the larger culture and - to our great anguish - in their own experiences during their high school years. (In the absence of such a backdrop, the preaching would more likely fall on deaf ears.)

Most of the young men and women who in response to these messages impose upon themselves strict limitations and restrictions on their interactions with members of the opposite sex and in dating sincerely wish to do the right thing. But very few of those who have gained their respect explicitly address the topic of relationships and dating and those who do tend to do so without nuance or subtlety. As a result our most earnest and sincere young people aren't given an opportunity to recognize that there can be, especially as they approach marriageable age, appropriate middle ground which avoids the perils of both extremes.

We must address these issues in a variety of ways and from multiple perspectives if we are to solve this problem. A long-term approach will involve careful consideration of the experiences of our young men and women before they even go to Israel, which render these problematic messages credible and predispose them to receptivity. It will also involve dealing directly with the purveyors of the harmful attitudes being fostered before and during students' sojourn in Israel.

But there are also steps that we can take in the short term to ameliorate some of the distress our students are experiencing. Here I wish to propose several ideas, suggested to me by students, to address the problem, as it already exists. The Rabbinic leaders to whom our youth turn for guidance should:

1. Convey to young men and women that *halacha* is well aware of the potency of human sexuality and has instituted measures to safeguard us from giving

unbridled expression to our passions. Within the context of "fences" such as *yichud* and *negiah*, though, there can exist a middle ground between inappropriate socializing and the *shidduch* system.

2. Create *halachically* appropriate social venues and use all of their suasion to encourage young men and women to participate. More activities whose primary purpose is for some other cause, a *chesed*/social action project or an intellectual endeavor, for example, need to be created. These events, whose social component is incidental, are more productive and less pressured than "mixers" and busy young men and women are more likely to attend.

3. Explicitly convey to young men and women that they should not shy away from these events because they are not *frum*. We need to emphasize that while it is perfectly acceptable to go about dating by being set up, that is no more "kosher" than meeting people in a less-pressured environment.

Kesheim shePartzufeihen Shonot kach De'oteihen Shonot - one size does not fit all people, and therefore it is important to create an environment in which various appropriate options will be available to the young men and women in our community to facilitate their finding their soulmates. ■

Rabbi Jeremy Wieder is a Rosh Yeshiva and instructor of Bible at Yeshiva University. He is also a doctoral candidate in Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University.

Matchmaking 101 by Shira Hirschman Weiss

I was single not too long ago and a part of me still is: when I eventually met and married my husband, I knew I could not allow myself to forget the struggle of dating. I shudder when friends tell me about perfectly mismatched blind dates, vicariously taken aback by how off the mark suggestions can be. Having made three successful matches in my single days, I also could not overlook the matchmakers who tried so hard to get it right. So, I promised myself I would accept that same responsibility when setting up friends and acquaintances - I try very hard to get it right.

Here, then, are some of my suggestions - as well as pitfalls I've encountered now that I have dedicated myself to helping others find their match too.

When it comes to setting people up, I light up at the thought of how much these two people have in common, how they are capable of the highest form of intellectual discourse, and alas, what a wonderful marriage it will be. I become exhilarated when I hear about impossible romantic endings that actually panned out in real life. Not so fast!

Matchmaking comes with a price and I'm not talking about the green stuff. When I was only 20 and living with my parents, their friends would kindly suggest matches for me, and I would almost immediately agree to give out my phone number. About 90 dates and three failed relationships into the process, I was living on the Upper West Side often feeling like a has-been at the ridiculously young age of 25. I had either "dated everyone," "met everyone and was everyone's friend" or was seriously "checking into" guys from Brooklyn whose names were mentioned to me.

The matchmaking system had molded me into a Cautious Female Dater, one less inclined to accept a potential date because "it's just a date," and one whose antenna was always up for possible "warning signs." I could have used a more personalized and secure approach when I was dating online, but the options were limited then. At that time, I had my profile on a quite

popular dating site and my picture was viewable to all members. I walked to *shul* on *Shabbat* slightly paranoid, half expecting someone to point to me and say: "Ha ha, I saw your cheesecake picture online!" To the contrary, through sawyouatsinai.com for whom I am now a matchmaker, singles pick their personal matchmakers who only show profiles and pictures to potential matches and are not available for public viewing.

As I try my hand at matchmaking, I employ a personalized approach: I suggest meeting with singles face-to-face before setting them up, to get a better feel for whom they truly are offline and what they are looking for. When I think back to my own experiences with matchmakers, I remember the one whose approach really irked me. By not getting back to me to let me know where things stood, I felt she had rejected me. As a matchmaker, I always follow up (appropriately, not in an in-your-face manner) because it is an essential part of my job.

In all aspects of life and not just with matchmaking, I try to be extremely tactful and avoid bluntness to the point of hurtfulness. Shockingly, this approach is not shared by all of my contemporaries and I have heard *shadchanim* say "you are not his look" or "perhaps you should try to lose a few pounds." I am the first to suggest eye-catching, yet modest outfits that will elicit appropriate interest from my friends' dates. But, matchmaking is not a series of Extreme Makeovers and we are not personal trainers, hair gurus or fashionistas.

We are agents who act on behalf of singles to find their most ideal matches. We try our best and that is our promise to singles as mothers, fathers, homemakers, career people and otherwise active individuals who remember life before marriage and frustrations in dating. Because we can empathize, we hope to make a difference. ■

Shira Hirschman Weiss is a matchmaker for SawYouAtSinai, a writer and a PR Consultant.

SawYouAtSinai.com:
The only screened, discreet dating site with over 5,000 singles and 130 matchmakers!
In just 8 months, hundreds are dating, 9 couples are engaged and 2 are married.

Journey Towards Marriage: Separation, Mourning & Creativity

by Shana Yocheved Schacter, RCSW

There are many lovely, bright, sensitive, attractive, accomplished, fun-loving, and determined men and women who have struggled for many years with the challenge of finding a spouse. This challenge crosses educational, socioeconomic and religious denominational lines and exists in this country and around the world. Psychological dynamics and social realities combine to prevent some adults in their thirties and beyond from finding and choosing husbands and wives.

In fact, many of you who are reading this essay are currently engaged in this confusing and complex journey either for yourselves, your friends or members of your family. In so doing, it is essential that we all maintain our sensitivity to and understanding of the uniqueness of each woman and man, even as we try to describe and understand, in a general way, the emotional and psychological components involved in the effort of finding a spouse. I would like to offer a few thoughts that might enhance our understanding of this matter.

In the life of an older single person, disappointments mount as the hopes for this or that *shidduch* are dashed for one reason or another. Time passes, and many dates come and go. For some, relationships develop for a while and then eventually end. For others, there may not be many dates altogether. Every person experiencing a multiplicity of disappointments or losses must properly mourn the current losses as well as the earlier ones upon which these present losses are built. The degree to which an adult resolves the loss(es) of early significant relationships will determine how well that same adult will be able to manage the current losses and disappointments involved in dating for a protracted period of time.

Single adults with whom I work try to learn from what did or did not go as they had expected in a potential relationship. They attempt to take a candid look at the responsibility they or their partner may have had in the match not moving forward. Eventually many come to realize that unresolved previous losses significantly color their current attempts at making new bonds.

...hope can replace despair.

These earlier losses may also take the form of trauma in one's family of origin, such as physical and/or mental illness, divorce or death. Though one may not be aware of the connection between the losses within one's family and the business of finding a spouse, I have found that reworking earlier life's emotional difficulties enables a person to make new serious commitments.

There is yet another form of loss associated with single adults in their later years.

Young men and women in their teens and twenties consciously or unconsciously develop an ideal version of the person they want to marry. The younger the individual, the more perfect their ideal is likely to be. As people mature, they realize that no human being can possibly fit their ideal.

Men and women who are dating for ten and twenty years or more sometimes find it difficult to separate from their original ideal. What they sometimes fail to realize is that it is precisely the giving up of this early ideal which will allow them to find a match that is actually better suited to them at this time in their life than their original ideal spouse might have been. It is essential for more flexibility to develop and a wider range of

options to be considered.

Relinquishing one's longstanding fantasy is sometimes very difficult because it forces the individual to face the internal and external changes he or she has undergone through the years. It is clear that one must be honest with oneself about these changes, both for the individual's sake as well as for the benefit of finding an appropriate match at this stage in life. Often, however, a mythical notion of whom one wants to marry is retained as a form of resistance to feeling the inevitable discomfort associated with the separation from and mourning of this ideal.

There are no definitive answers or sure advice for people struggling to find their life partners, but I believe that addressing unre-

solved negative feelings and becoming aware of longstanding but outdated fantasies will go a long way to help us in our quest. Though difficult to hear while in the throes of deep upset and disappointment, the proper mourning of losses can provide opportunities to help redefine oneself and create new possibilities for connections. This effort may lead to developing a new perception of oneself, more creative forms of networking and engaging others in our search, and being open to new options. In this way, connections can replace separation, celebration can replace mourning, creativity can replace stagnation and hope can replace despair. ■

Shana Yocheved Schacter is a psychoanalyst in Brookline, MA and New York City.

Ethics of Internet dating by Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz

At a recent *Shabbat* lunch my family and I sat with a couple, both previously divorced, who met on a Jewish dating site and were newly married. This vibrant couple regaled us with experiences of having a long distance relationship and the compromises they had to make as to where to live and how to set up a Brady Bunch type household with all their children from previous marriages. A lively discussion ensued as to why Jewish internet dating services have become so popular and what parameters we thought people who go online should follow.

Is it appropriate for people to lie about their age? Pump up their looks or professions? Does it affect the level of trust that two parties will have for each other, down the road? If you lie about your age, will the other party begin to wonder what else you are lying about? Is it a violation of *halacha* and Jewish values to lie about these things? Does it matter if everybody does it? Is Jewish tradition concerned with creating a dating atmosphere in which not merely bending the truth but outright deception should be condoned? Do the ends justify the means to create a *bayit neeman b'Yisrael* (a home based on Jewish ideals)?

As many of us are aware, there are a variety of approaches within Jewish tradition to the question of lying, and specifically with regard to white lies. In the *Torah* and *Talmud*, we are told to keep far from lies, to avoid distorting the truth. Yet the rabbis counsel us that not all truth is to be spoken when it would cause emotional distress, embarrassment and shame. We find sources concerned with preserving *shalom bayit* (domestic harmony) as well as weighing the intent of our deception. Thus we learn that at times it is deemed not only acceptable, but also necessary to bend the truth to avoid hurting someone's feelings. Still other sources indicate that even when you have the best intentions, outright deceptions are to be avoided for fear that you will become a habitual liar.

Somehow these sources seem moot when measured against the truth of the marketplace

– according to my single friends, “everybody” who signs up for internet dating exaggerates their looks, their credentials and even their age. And even after getting a date, people engage in outright deceptions. Men will tell women that they will call them, when they have no intention of doing so. Women will say they are interested in going out again even though they have no desire to. Yet, isn't this behavior just ‘custom of the trade’, a form of buyer beware when going out?

It seems that dating has come down to a list of 20 questions...

Some rabbis have tried to balance the *Torah's* desire for truth with the stark reality of the dating world by permitting, for example, women to lower their age by up to five years on their internet dating forms, with the stipulation that they divulge their age on the first date. This is one approach to level the playing field. In general, though, because there is now a widespread assumption that people automatically take off years when they fill out these forms, an ironic result can ensue for the wholly honest person: When they list their actual age, people will automatically assume that they are older!

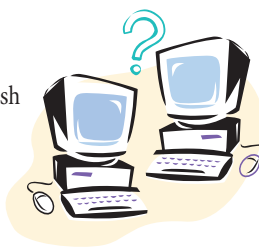
Many women bemoan previously commitment-phobic men who suddenly wake up in their mid-40's and decide that they are ready to settle down, yet are unwilling to even consider women who are close or at their age. Men might cite the “ticking of the biological clock” as an excuse to date younger women; but in reality it may just appeal to a man's self esteem to have a younger woman on his arm. Some men who are not doctors, lawyers, accountants, or MBAs have equally complained that if they were to list their real jobs women would never respond to their emails. These dilemmas pose a challenge not only for those in our community who are single but

also for the Jewish community as a whole as to the overall ethical atmosphere of our community.

Within the world of *shidduch* dating, we have heard of people wanting to know what type of tablecloth their potential date uses at a *Shabbat* table, the type of clothes worn by the mother at a Friday night dinner and the style of furniture in the house. It seems that dating has come down to a list of twenty questions, a test that each party has to pass with the right answers before they will even go out together. Why have so many people become so inflexible that they won't even take a chance and consider options that might broaden their ability to meet the “right one”?

Perhaps the dearth of informal places for people to meet that used to exist (synagogue/Young Israel dances; singles weekends at hotels of yesteryear – Grossingers/Concord, Brown's; mixed seating tables at weddings) has led to the explosive growth of internet dating. With that growth has come a whole new series of difficult ethical choices that have to be made. We as a community, whether single or married, rabbis and laypeople, have an obligation to create an overall atmosphere where ethical parameters infuse all our lives, on a daily basis. We need to reexamine the expectations that we wish for in potential mates and work on creating a Jewish culture where we are initially sensitive to people's emotional needs as much as their physical and spiritual ones. ■

Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz is consultant to Hadassah and Community Liaison to New York City Public Advocate Mark Green as well as a board member of JOFA. A member of the New York UJA Federation Committee on Medical Ethics, she is a prolific writer and is a frequent lecturer on topics relating to Jewish ethics.



A Jerusalem Story by Chananya Weissman

The walls of Jerusalem loomed before Tikva as she prepared to exit the city. She hesitated as she reached Jaffa Gate, her stomach fluttering with a mixture of fear and excitement. It would be so easy to turn back and scamper home. It was a crazy thing she was doing, really, and very much out of character. Her friends would never let her live it down if they found out.

The urge to turn back was powerful, but fleeting; Tikva knew that she would continue on her journey. While the potential for failure and embarrassment made Tikva literally tremble, at least it would be over with after a couple of hours. If she turned back, though, the self-doubt over a lost opportunity would gnaw at her indefinitely. She could not bear to think of missing an opportunity, the opportunity—not after all she had been through.

Tikva hurried forward, the hem of her white dress gliding across the grass as Jerusalem dwindled behind her.

“Come on, Yeshua, don’t give me excuses. We’re all going together, and you’re coming with us.”

Yeshua shot his friend an angry look. “This is absurd, absolutely ridiculous. You’re not getting me to go. Just forget about it!”

Shimon laughed. “So you’re just going to sit here by yourself?”

“I wish you’d let me,” retorted Yeshua. “Go enjoy yourself. I’m sure you’ll have a great time. It’s not for me.”

“Listen, you have no excuse not to go. A lot of people are going to be there – but I’m tired

of arguing with you. You know what’s best for yourself.”

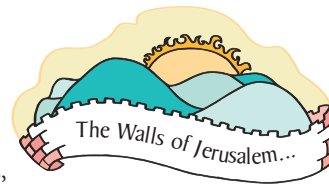
Shimon patted him on the back, which struck Yeshua as unnecessarily patronizing, and turned to leave. “You know what’s best for yourself,” he repeated.

Tikva wished she’d gone with a friend. The whole experience was so awkward and full of pressure. Her sisters had gone in years past, with mixed results, but this was Tikva’s first time. She knew that, one way or the other, she would never do this again.

She noticed that her dress had a small stain in the front, a faded yellow streak. It wasn’t obvious, but it sure didn’t make her feel any better. Why couldn’t she have gotten a nicer dress? Why did the odds always seem stacked against her? And why did things never work the few times the odds seemed more favorable? Why?

Tears welled inside her, but Tikva forced them back. There would be plenty of time for her to cry later, and she expected to take full advantage of it. But not now. Tikva had beautiful eyes, and she intended to keep them that way. She was far from glamorous, as were some of the other girls, but Tikva had a pleasant appearance. At certain times, when things were right, she could even be radiant. She could not allow herself to cry.

Tikva smiled warmly as she approached the fields. Today her inner radiance would shine through to the surface. The fear and darkness would be buried deep inside her, perhaps never to reemerge. She dared to hope.



Yeshua tried to concentrate on his Talmudic teachings, but it was no use. His normally clear mind refused to stay focused for more than a few moments. After a final attempt to review some laws of agriculture, Yeshua gave up for the day.

“Fine!” he declared to the heavens, which, as usual, did not respond in any way that he could discern. “I’ll go. Let it not be said that I haven’t tried!”

His friends were long gone, and it was questionable whether he would even run into them when he arrived. But that suited Yeshua just fine. He didn’t mind being alone this time, free from their jeers and platitudes. They meant well – for the most part everyone meant well – but Yeshua preferred for things to remain mostly private. Even if that limited his opportunities, it made him feel better, and that had to count.

Yeshua had gone before, several times in fact. The experience had always been dreadful for him... and yet, he acknowledged that it didn’t have to be that way. There was definitely potential for it to be pleasant, and it seemed that for most people it was. Maybe he just placed too much pressure on himself. Maybe this year would be different.

Yeshua would never have admitted it to anyone, but inside he really hoped. He felt a quiet confidence that he could not attribute to anything substantial, but he welcomed it. It really could be different this time, and if he had anything at all to say about it, it really

would be different this time. In that private inner place where no one else could look, Yeshua believed that it would.

Tikva heard the music from a healthy distance, and could almost feel something different in the air.

One of her sisters had met her husband at one of these affairs while Tikva was a child. The story was similar to those told by many others, yet still it seemed so magical. Somehow she had found herself in a conversation with a special young man... before she knew it they had separated from the throngs of people... it seemed like they were in their own little world, a world that had not existed until they found each other... and in just a few short days they decided to share this world on a permanent basis.

Tikva yearned for this, she ached for it. Her world, so beautiful in its own right, often seemed empty, for lack of someone with whom to share it.

The magic often seemed terribly elusive. Today, however, she thought she could almost feel it. God’s presence was in these fields.

Yeshua was old enough to remember when these events occurred twice a year, on *Yom Kippur* afternoon as well as the fifteenth of *Av*. But with the destruction of the second *Bais Hamikdash*, the festive atmosphere following the *Yom Kippur* services in the *Bais Hamikdash* was replaced with a spiritual void. For a few years the traditional dances in the fields continued, but they lacked the spirit and joy of years past. Not surprisingly, few marriages resulted, and the dances began to dwindle. *Yom Kippur* was now an almost entirely solemn day, and the afternoon dances were a thing of the past.

Fortunately, the *Tu B’Av* dances retained their festivity, and continued to be well attended. A few extremists had begun to grumble that the *Tu B’Av* dances should not continue, for several reasons. Some felt that it was an embarrassment to the memory of the *Yom Kippur* dances, which no longer existed. Others argued that society’s morals had reached new lows, and young people should not be allowed to meet and marry in such a public fashion. Yeshua was glad that these fringe voices had little influence in the religious community.

He wished more than anything in the world to find an appropriate wife, and, despite his reluctance to attend the dance, appreciated the opportunity. Yeshua felt hope in the air, and hurried toward the festivities. His bride might very well be there waiting for him.

Tikva danced with the other girls, her soul filled with joy. She knew her face was glowing. Dozens of young men looked on at the edge of the field. Some of them appeared to be contemplating approaching the girls. Tikva wished they would get over their fears and do so already.

Parenting for Successful Dating and Marriage

by Sherry Zimmerman, Esq. and Rosie Einhorn, L.C.S.W.

Today, more people are finding themselves single and are unhappy about it. [See *Survey Says*, page 1] They find it harder to develop relationships that lead to good, stable and happy marriages. How do we reverse this trend and increase the rate of successful, enduring Jewish marriages? By preparing young Jews for dating and marriage, long before they are ready to date. Moreover, parents are the most likely candidates for this responsibility.

The best gift a parent can give to prepare a child for dating and marriage is a positive outlook on marriage in general and their own marriage in particular. Even parents who lack *shalom bayis* or who are divorced can give their children a positive outlook on married life by emphasizing the benefits of married life and noting the good points in their own marriage or former marriage.

Parents should:

1. Make a conscious effort to show their children that they care for each other
2. Describe the values they share and the features they admire in each other.

3. Be aware of the non-verbal cues they use. Spouses sometimes argue and it is healthy for children to observe their parents resolve conflicts constructively and continue to love and respect each other.

Although marriage is a goal the Jewish faith espouses from the moment a Jewish baby is named (*Torah, chuppah and maasim tovim*), in many families this goal is not actively reinforced during a child’s upbringing.

Contemporary culture treats marriage simply as an alternative lifestyle choice: the “me first” ideology encourages children to finish their graduate degrees and internships, establish financial security, become established in a career, and acquire some accoutrements of success before they even consider dating for marriage. When an adult delays marriage-oriented dating in order to achieve other goals, he can have difficulty making a transition from casual dating to developing a serious relationship that can lead to marriage.

In addition, while the achievements we parents encourage our children to accomplish are laudable, they alone do not prepare our

sons and daughters with the skills they will need in their personal and familial relationships. Our children need socialization skills, perhaps akin to a “Social Ed” class in high school, and there is no more important venue for imparting this than the home. Another important *middah* (trait) that many contemporary young adults appear to lack is a sense of responsibility. Parents should inculcate this early, while at the same time facilitating age-appropriate independence.

One of the difficulties of parenthood is that we are so busy with our lives and the demands of raising a family that we don’t think about how our children will navigate the dating maze until they actually begin to date. If we are conscious of the skills that will help them successfully date for marriage and be good spouses, we can adapt our parenting style to help them acquire these skills as they mature. ■

The authors are an attorney and psychotherapist who founded Sasson V’Simcha – The Center For Jewish Marriage, Inc. They are the authors of Talking Tachlis and In The Beginning and write weekly advice columns for The Jewish Press and www.ish.com



A Jerusalem Story *Continued*

One of the young men stood out from the rest of the bunch. She did not know why. There seemed to be nothing remarkable about him... yet something about him had clearly gotten her attention. Maybe it was the way he carried himself... quiet confidence, but not the boisterous self-promotion of many of the others.

Or maybe it was simply the fact that he seemed to be watching her. He wasn't obvious enough about it that Tikva could be sure, but it definitely seemed that he had taken notice of her. Tikva wondered if it was only her imagination. And she wondered if she was crazy to feel an attraction to someone she had never even spoken to. Why should she be attracted to him, she wondered? Why not anyone else? Why not everyone else? Was it right? Was it wise?

She didn't know. But the more she covertly observed this young man, the less she found that she cared.



Yeshua could not justify to himself why he wished very badly to meet that girl in the circle. Her dress did not seem to fit her very well (though Yeshua knew that it was most likely borrowed). There were certainly prettier girls, and so far he had little else by which to gauge anyone. Yet she danced with a great deal of passion that seemed genuine, not simply for show. And she appeared to be keenly aware of the others in her circle, making sure not to allow her own dancing to adversely affect anyone else's. She seemed graceful and charming, yet it was obvious to Yeshua that she did not desire to flaunt her qualities. He was certain that there were many such qualities, only a sample of which were on display. He wished to discover more about her.

Was it his imagination, or did she smile at him ever so briefly?

How does the story end? Here's your opportunity to use your fiction-writing skills... and win a chance to be published in a new online journal! For more information log on to www.orthosingles.org to share your finale and see how others would have the story conclude.

Author's Note: Throughout the generations there have been many Tikvas and Yeshuas, lonely Jews who searched for their respective hopes and salvations. In recent times the search has become more complicated and excruciating than perhaps ever before. Many thousands of Tikvas and Yeshuas are suffering indescribable pain and spiritual solitude every day of their lives. It will always be in God's hands to bring people together. But it remains in our hands to allow God to perform this miracle in a subtle fashion, lest we not merit more supernatural methods. Let us help our single men and women meet one another. And if we cannot help all of them sufficiently, let us not prevent them from helping themselves. May the new year bring the beginnings of many healthy and holy unions.

Chananya Weissman is the founder of EndTheMadness.org

The Widow in the Jewish Community

by Naomi Feder

It is hard to imagine the pain that a woman experiences when she loses her husband. While mourning this incredible loss, she must also transition into this next phase of her life. Essentially, she must learn to see herself as a complete and whole individual rather than as half of a couple. She must assume full responsibility for tasks that she previously had shared with her husband i.e. taking care of finances by herself, making major decisions alone, arranging social activities for herself or her family. She must also learn to be at peace when alone.

The widow will need to tap into her innermost resources, some of which may have been dormant when her husband was alive.

And now she may need help, direction and possibly even permission to develop her potential. Though she may not see it that way initially, it could be an opportunity for her to become more complete than she was before. It can best be accomplished when the woman begins to see herself as valuable unto herself because of the traits she has, because of her accomplishments, because of how she deals with life's struggles and tasks and because of the kind of woman she is.



How does the Jewish community fit in? What role do community members have in this transitional process? To truly understand the responsibility the Jewish Community must have to the more vulnerable person, we look to the laws in the *Torah*. With great sensitivity, the *Torah* commands us not only to meet the widow's concrete needs but to go beyond that and even anticipate her needs.

Doing so makes it unnecessary for her to present herself as needy or dependent on others. We are commanded to adopt the single person into our family – to have her become an integral part of our family.

Inherent in the Orthodox community is an incredible support system. Our laws establish a firm structure creating predictability and security. A basic tenet in Jewish thought is that all Jews are responsible for one another. For a widow or for a single person this can provide a feeling of safety.

Being invited for a *Shabbat* meal can be experienced as an act of inclusion, of being made to feel that one is a vital part of a group.

There are increasingly numerous and important ways a widow or any single woman can establish her own identity and connected-

ness to the community. She can lead or attend classes or study groups, become part of community activities, be a *shul* officer or sit on the Board. Opportunities for community involvement have increased for women – both married and single.

Essentially, she must learn to see herself as a complete and whole individual rather than as half of a couple.

Our community needs to reach out to each widow and adopt her into our midst, valuing her for who she is and for all that she can become. This will be a great help in her task to becoming whole again, and will in turn strengthen the fabric of our community. ■

Naomi Feder is an LCSW, board certified diplomate in clinical social work, with a private practice in Englewood, NJ.

How to Change the Dating Game

by Cory M. Baker, Esq.

It's really amazing how exposed we are as Americans, Jewish or Gentile, to sex, sexuality and romance in the mainstream today. Pop-culture, magazines, film, TV, best-selling books- we are enmeshed in a world where sexuality and dating is everywhere. Some might say that this is the disintegration of true and healthy love and the wearing away of what is right and holy. Many have even said that we are too desensitized to sex and that sex has become casual. Now ask yourself when you last shared a truly romantic and sexually charged evening with a member of the opposite sex...

Our parents' generation consisted of Orthodox Jews who sent many of us to Jewish Day-schools and summer camps and knew what it meant to raise children in a religious and spiritual home. And yet they dealt with dating on an entirely different level. *Yeshiva* high schools and summer camps used to sponsor social dances, sock hops, and other NATURAL environments for dating and the discovery of interpersonal sexuality. Doesn't it seem more normal to be enjoying a cocktail next to an attractive member of the opposite sex rather than hunched over a computer like a Neanderthal scanning for the most recent people who have logged in? Don't get me wrong, internet dating is one of the best things to happen to the Jewish social culture but it won't help you develop the social skills you need when you meet a real live person.

Now, I may be "just another guy on the UWS" but I wanted to share with you some of my thoughts on how to improve the current

singles' situation. The first step is affecting change – changing the way we interact:

For the men:

Realize that it is not an act of Judaic heresy to ask a girl out without being set-up with her. We have become far too dependent on the *shidduch* to do our work for us. Women love to be asked out on a date. This does not mean that all women want to go out with you! But there is rarely a reason not to try and ask. At the very least you can see what does and doesn't work in your approach so you know for next time.

For the women:

- It may be difficult, but it is okay if you're 25 and not dating anyone seriously.
- Don't assume that your *bashert* can only be found outside OZ at W. 95th Street on Friday nights or at the Jewish Center *Shabbat* morning.
- Take a chance and flirt. Flirting is how we know you're interested. Lack of eye contact, dismissive glances and looking over our shoulder for the next conversation is rarely endearing.
- And if you're feeling really crazy ask a guy to hang out sometime. Sure the average Jewish guy may pass a shock-induced kidney stone, but it also may be the smartest thing you ever did.

There are worlds thriving outside of our immediate Jewish communities; head downtown where you can find bars, restaurants, clubs and even JEWS! When I first started to

date my now fiancée, everyone asked: "who set you up?" as if there was no other option

for meeting someone. And when I told them that I met her at a party downtown I was asked if she was religious. We continue to marginalize and ghetto-ize ourselves. A close community is what has kept us together in the past and continues to do so; but it does not bar the 21st century, Modern Orthodox Jew from enjoying the nightlife their city has to offer after the ecstasy of the local kosher pizza shop has worn off.

Finally, perhaps there is room in modern Orthodoxy to be kosher, shomer *Shabbat*, modest and sexual. Sexual in the sense that we act naturally, when meeting, courting and eventually mating. Sexual in the sense that we are investing in ourselves, in being young, smart and single in NYC. Paying a monthly fee to an online dating service seems hardly the sufficient investment necessary for the 20-something Orthodox Jew living outside of North Dakota. Going to parties and events sponsored by Jewish promoters and organizers is a better option. When we begin to realize that the walls we build around ourselves are our own greatest obstacles we may start to learn to hurdle them. ■

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If You Dated Yourself, Would You Go Out on a Second Date?

by Isaac Galena

Good Question. Would you? It's certainly a puzzling inquiry, and the topic of a recent Upper West Side Chabad Friday lecture. Rabbi Shmuel Stauber, a relationship therapist, explained that in relationships you need to fall off the horse a couple times in order to learn to ride.

Breaking every person into a "Fight" or "Flight" personality type, or as he called them "Turtles" (introverts) and "Hailstorms" (extroverts), Rabbi Stauber concluded that if you are one personality type your partner must be the opposite. So, you would not go out on a second date with yourself in the long run,

according to Rabbi Stauber, because although you'll always crave to be with someone like yourself, you will ultimately end up needing someone from the opposite side of the persona spectrum.

Don't buy it? Well here, for your reading pleasure, are some classic examples I came up with for you to chew on – all turtles and hailstorms: Rocky & Adrian, Han Solo & Princess Leah, Kermit & Miss Piggy, Satine & Christian, Agassi & Graff, Chandler & Monica, Beauty & The Beast, John & Yoko, Homer & Marge. It is true. Think about it.

I know this theory is completely debatable on a variety of levels, but you have to admit the

question is an awfully interesting one to ponder. Before you answer for yourself, I'll give you a head start. I sent out an email to a group of friends with the question and I'd like to share some of their responses with you:

- I wouldn't even go on a first date with myself
- I would probably want to be really good friends, have myself over for *Shabbat* dinner.
- I'd say - when are we going out again? You're the most fun date EVER!!!!
- Religion would definitely be an issue.

■ You thought that was a date? I thought we were just hanging out. Oops!

■ I think I would be pretty annoyed not being original anymore, but if I could get over that, I think I would go on a second date. But then I would dump myself eventually because I would be afraid that I was the type to dump me.

■ Probably for a few dates, but then it would just get awkward with a lot of 'Am I really the One for Me?' commitment phobias

■ Yeah, it'd be fun. I could do anything. I would never have to try to impress anyone, or not be myself, and I'd never get into fights! Wait, but after a while I'd get lonely. But I would definitely go on at least the second date!

■ I always go out on a second date, even if it's with a complete loser.

Take what you will from it. I know I'd go out with myself for a few dates, you know, "to see and be seen", but then of course break up due to "irreconcilable differences." So, now it's your turn. Answer for yourself at...

www.orthosingles.org

Isaac Galena is the co-founder of bangitout.com

These words are meant for those who are already Jewish. Let's remember the Ruth model. It worked on Boaz so many years ago and it could still work today. ■

Rabbi Schwartz of Congregation Ohab Zedek in New York, NY is also an instructor at Yeshiva University.



Sex and the City: sexuality on the Upper West Side

by Rabbi Allen Schwartz

Today sex sells, and the West Side of Manhattan sells it about as much as anywhere. This marketplace has even invaded the Orthodox community; but in the Book of Ruth modesty sells, and perhaps there are lessons to be learned by those who are single today.

The Book of Ruth weaves a number of subplots together so that an older couple, both widowed, would meet, fall in love and together build the foundation of the Davidic dynasty. Their first meeting is described from afar as Boaz is taken by something about Ruth and he inquires about her the first time he sees her. What interested Boaz about Ruth?

Our tradition tells us that he saw Ruth behaving differently than all the other women who were gleaning in his field. While the others bent over and often exposed themselves, Ruth carefully bent in a modest and discreet manner, to avoid such exposure.

There are many things that can pique a man's interest in a woman. The first often is a physical attraction. In today's society that attraction goes far beyond physical appearance to an immediate physical relationship. Our society is so convinced that promiscuity sells that everything from bus stops to phone booths to billboards are designed to appeal to the sexual appetites of the consumer.

Sexual pervasiveness throughout society has created some special challenges in the Orthodox community. Most Orthodox men and women would never think of violating Leviticus chapter 11 on a date by dining at a seafood restaurant or by eating a cheeseburger. Yet they have no qualms violating the sexual code, listed 7 chapters later in the same book. The religious argument against this is obvious, but the social argument is just as convincing.

When it was discovered that tobacco companies were targeting our youth there was significant moral outrage. Our innocent, unprotected youth needed our interaction. But where is the same sanctimonious outrage towards MTV, the music industry, magazines and the media in general that make our

daughters so profoundly self conscious of what a boy thinks of her when he is looking her up and down. The cultural influences that bombard our youth have real consequences. Women learn from the "highly rated" TV shows that sex is enticing and empowering. They do not see the emotional scars that are left when physical relationships break off, and promises made in the heat of passion are broken without a second thought.

Into all of this, steps the *Torah*, ...as usual. It just so happens that the traditional and *halachic* norms of modesty are just what today's society needs to hear. We wouldn't dive into a pool if there were only a 50% chance that the pool had water. So why are we ready to give ourselves over to someone in such a significant way before we're sure that it is real. And we can never be 100% sure of this until marriage! I would dare to consider that if every single woman on the West Side pointed to Leviticus 18:19 and told the men: "You don't touch me until you marry me." We'd see many more

marriages. To corroborate this I point to a letter to New York Magazine from a young woman who wrote in early 1998:

I am so sick of the fact that every guy I meet expects that I should sleep with him on the first date. I am mortified on behalf of my peers who, when they hint to their boyfriends about marriage, find themselves dumped like garbage. Just when I thought there was no answer for a modern-day woman, I read your article "Looking for Mr. Goldberg" [by Elizabeth Hayt, Dec. 8, 1997].

I am shocked that there are young Orthodox Jewish men who have honorable intentions, date only to marry, do not lead a woman on, have no ulterior motives, do not even touch them until after they are married – it's like you are speaking about people from Mars. And I am sooo jealous. Why aren't all men like this? It is enough to make me consider converting to Judaism.

– Sandy Denise, Manhattan

The Silent Revolution of the Modern Era

by Liaura Zacharie

Over the past 30 years, sociological and technological changes have significantly impacted the manner in which men and women view themselves, dating and marriage. In a society where material comfort, personal freedom and self-actualization have become a priority, marriage seems to have lost its supremacy. This worldwide trend is considered by European sociologists to be "the silent revolution of the modern era." Some countries, such as Italy, already have a negative population growth; others are headed down the same road. Can we really afford to follow this trend? [See *Survey Says*, page 1]

The unavoidable conclusion is that Jewish continuity depends first and foremost on... ROMANCE! It is hard to understand how, for decades, we've missed this point. However, I believe that this world crisis will compel us to develop new resources that will upgrade the

quality of how people relate to one another.

For many years, Jewish leadership has attempted to counteract assimilation by enhancing Jewish education. But since assimilation is expressed primarily through intermarriage, wouldn't it make more sense to have a large scale, comprehensive, professional initiative facilitating Jewish marriages?

Jewish continuity depends first and foremost on ROMANCE.

For some, marrying Jewish is not a priority, but many find it very painful to marry outside of their faith. They may feel like they are cutting themselves off from their roots, their People, their heritage, their very

identity. It is quite a heavy choice, especially when it happens by lack of choice.

Some singles enjoy being single, though clearly many would rather be married. Singles can commiserate over their status, or they can see it as an opportunity to gain greater personal awareness and grow into individuals who will be able to build more fulfilling relationships. Married society should not feel threatened by these "happy singles", but rather should change our often-condescending looks for a concretely helpful hand and become informal matchmakers.

We ALL know people who aren't married. Aren't we commanded to follow in the footsteps of the Master of the World? According to the *Talmud*, (*Masechet Kiddushin*), after He created the world, God Himself chose to make a match! What could be more uplifting and

continues on next page...

Single, Jewish, and Living with Illness by Ronit Leibowitz and Rochelle Shoretz

Serious illness can be overwhelming for a woman at any stage of life. Facing illness as a single Jewish woman can be all the more challenging. While those around her struggle to balance professional and social lives, the single woman living with cancer, for example, confronts the additional anxieties of life with a serious illness and its impact on dating, fertility, and religious life in the Jewish community.

Illness touches single women's lives in ways that are unique. Single women

- Often do not have the daily or consistent support that a partner can provide.
- May face the emotional turmoil of moving back home to be cared for by loved ones.

- Face serious concerns about the impact of treatment—especially for cancer—on their fertility and ability to biologically parent a child.

- May face greater insecurities about their physical appearance, particularly after surgery or during chemotherapy treatments.

- May lose their hair during chemotherapy and need to cover their heads, a practice that is associated with marriage in the Orthodox community.

- Must decide when and how to tell a prospective partner that they have or have had a serious illness.

- May be concerned about the impact of a diagnosis on their marriage prospects, if they wish to marry with the assistance of a *Shadchan* (matchmaker).

- Are concerned about the potential risk to future generations, as in the case of breast cancer where 1 in 40 Jewish women of Ashkenazi descent are carriers of a mutation in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes that may predispose a carrier to breast cancer.

- Do not have nearly as many support group options. Most groups target women with children, and some may be inappropriate for those who are not sexually active.

More frightening than living with a serious illness such as cancer is thinking that you are the only person like you living with serious illness. For single Jewish women, the support of peers can be invaluable. Women who address common health concerns can form a community within the community, a place of reassurance and guidance, where no woman must feel alone. The challenge before us is to shape the broader Jewish community into that very same haven. ■

Ronit Leibowitz is a student at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work and a summer intern at Sharsheret.

Rochelle Shoretz is the Founder and Executive Director of Sharsheret, a national not-for-profit organization supporting young Jewish women facing breast cancer. Call toll-free (866) 474-2774 or visit our website www.sharsheret.org

Introducing My Date to My Medical Issue

by Anonymous

I had finally met someone – possibly The One. But I was faced with the unpleasant responsibility of having to reveal to him my medical issue and I knew this could make or break our relationship.

The time was right: women's intuition, the backing of my *Rav* and my *frum* therapist confirmed that for me. I had *emunah* that this would work out for the best. I repeated to myself the words of Queen Esther, as she prepared to confront King Achashveirosh, "*Ka'asher Avaditi Avaditi.*" I told myself, if he were not able to handle it, I wouldn't want him anyway. But if he can handle it, if he rises to the challenge, this will bring us closer.

I was very upfront and honest: I laid all the cards on the table. I told him all about my condition and its ramifications for marriage and children. And he responded with a strong verbal commitment to be there for me no matter what.

His *Rav* advised that we go to my doctor together and that he should speak to the doctor alone. I *davened* so fervently that

this would work out. When he walked out of the doctor's office after a brief meeting, he suggested we go out to dinner. That night... he proposed!

**I told myself, if he
were not able to handle it
I wouldn't want him anyway.**

I'm so thankful to *Hashem* for a *chosson* who really sees the whole picture and evaluated me in my entirety before making a decision. His *Yiras Shamayim*, courage and strength of character are a daily inspiration to me.

I met Shimon from *Frumster*, and believe it or not, I took the first step and contacted him. The fact that he was not intimidated by my lead demonstrated his confidence and self-esteem. It was only due to the securities and controls on the website that I was comfortable initiating contact. As a woman, I felt greatly

empowered as the initiator, but as a



frum woman, it was equally important for me to maintain the level of *tznius* that I wanted my future relationship to uphold. *Frumster* made it possible for me to achieve both. That Shimon was receptive was the first indication that he would warmly receive the difficult news and problems I needed to share – now and in the future. ■

Chaya and Shimon* were married during 5764/2004. They are just one of over 135 couples who have become married through Frumster's Orthodox managed online dating & marriage service.

*Names changed to protect privacy

With over 270 members matched, and 14,000 members, Frumster empowers success. Members conduct their own searches and can contact a potential match through the private Frumster network or through the Frumster Matchmaker. Our secure and comfortable dating environment draws singles of all ages and outlooks who are sincerely searching for a marriage partner.

The Silent Revolution continued

rewarding than having the merit to bring happiness to Jews who want to build a family, while at the same time strengthening the Jewish People?

So what are the reasons for this growing population of single people? We can point to a combination of complex factors, among them, the relational discomfort of modern society. Individualism, egoism, lack of authenticity, and lack of fulfillment are expressed most acutely in intimate relationships. In addition, because marriages are no longer arranged, singles need a strong sense of identity and a high level of self-awareness, which they may not have achieved by the time they are ready to marry. And finally, for today's singles, functional partnerships are no longer sufficient. Singles aspire to a higher quality of relationship including love, intimacy and growth. Such relationships take longer to cultivate and involve a more selective search process.

Our goal must be to find suitable partners in a way that is easily accessible, efficient, economical and enjoyable. Fulfillment of this goal can be achieved by raising awareness on different levels. On the communal level, we need to elicit public cooperation to facilitate Jewish marriages. On the family level we need to educate parents about the impact a strong healthy marriage has on their children's attitude toward marriage. And finally, on the individual level we need to provide singles with the tools and social skills necessary to create and build long lasting relationships.

We need to create opportunities for singles to meet in informal and natural settings and we need to be creative. We must develop new methods and programs to suit the needs of today's singles. We also need to raise standards and provide training for professional matchmakers.



Many singles feel bewildered and hurt by the failure of the community and its leadership to recognize their issues and by the absence of official initiatives to deal with them. By ignoring such a large part of our people we neglect our tradition of compassion, concern for others and for future generations. Our community tends to function best in "emergency mode". But in this situation we must take care of things at an earlier stage and act in "prevention mode". Let this be the end of the silent revolution, the end of our silence, and the foundation of our future. ■

Liaura Zacharie is the Founder of Eden 2000, a Jerusalem based NPO that has raised the singles' issue to the national agenda in Israel and is currently promoting "Romancing Israel", a national Jewish singles project aimed at addressing the singles issue in Israel and beyond.

Mixed Blessings עֵינֵי הַיָּהוָה

by Rabbi Josh Yuter

If you're Jewish and single, odds are you've been hit with one of the most annoying brachot ever invented: "*Im yirtzeh Hashem* (God willing) by you!" (IYH)

Some go through comical measures to avoid this phrase. For her younger sister's wedding, a friend of mine made a T-Shirt saying, "No No. *Im Yirtzeh Hashem* by YOU!" From what I recall her telling me, it worked nicely.

When I was learning in Israel, my *chavruta* (study partner) got engaged and I had to endure my share of IYH's. Noticing my apparent disapproval, one woman said, "Oh, you should be happy! It's a *bracha!*" I didn't want to get into an argument at this point, so I simply nodded, smiled, and went on my merry way.

Not long afterward, I was at a *Shabbat* meal with the same woman. Somehow in the context of the conversation, I said IYH regarding someone having children. Instead of accepting this *bracha*, the same woman incredulously said, "You know, you really shouldn't say things like that."

"Why not? Isn't it a *bracha*?"

"Yes, but you don't know...maybe there's a reason why they don't have kids."

"Maybe there's a reason I'm not married?"

"Look, you just shouldn't."

I could have countered that if IYH is indeed a *bracha*, then it should be welcomed in all cases. I was not nagging, "*nu*, when are we

continues on next page...

Single Orthodox Men: A Guide to the Perplexed by Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Ph.D.

Alan, a twenty-eight year old Orthodox man from the Upper West Side tells me that he wants very much to have a family, but “somehow”, the three serious relationships he has had didn’t end in marriage. Could this have something to do with him? Alan’s story is typical of many twenty-something Orthodox men who are not finding it easy to commit themselves to marriage.

A significant source of the problems of single Orthodox men is the trouble they have coming to terms with the cultural changes produced by the success of American feminism. In the world of modern Orthodoxy, the influence of American feminism has primarily played itself out in two areas. First, for some Orthodox men, the increasing demand by Orthodox women for a redistribution of power in intimate attachments and family life has raised complex control issues and reduced their expectation of safety in marriage. Second, as changing gender roles in the wider American society have changed

Jewish family culture, some Orthodox men have experienced confusion about their masculine identity and sense of self worth. I will consider each of these areas in turn.

EZER K’NEGDO: **Fear, Danger & Insecurity**

Insecurity about the unpredictability of marriage relationships is not new. If people arranged marriages, says the *Yalkut Shimoni* [794] there would be widespread marital violence. Hence, *Hashem* does the matchmaking before birth – for first marriages at least. Rashi’s comment on the phrase *ezer k’negdo* [Bereishit 2:18] – “If the man merits, she will be a helper; if he does not merit, she will be against him.” – is hardly reassuring. After all, who can rely on his own merit? There is nothing new in a man fearing that he will end up with a wife who berates or humiliates him.

As modern Orthodox women have become increasingly socially and economically successful and independent, it has become hard-

er for some men to feel secure in their own ability to stand up for themselves in a marriage. On the one hand, these men want, indeed can only really respect, women who are competent enough to take the initiative in building a strong family life. On the other hand, they fear “falling under the control” of any woman they perceive as personally powerful enough to actually succeed in playing this role within the family. Without even realizing it, they test for a “safe” marriage by undermining the power of prospective female marriage partners. If they fail to gain control in this way, they leave the relationship. If they persist in trying, the woman leaves.

In addition, *yeshiva* education does not seem to have helped Orthodox men deal with their fascination with and fear of female sexuality. On the one hand, many Orthodox men want and actively search for satisfying sexual experiences with women. On the other hand, they need to control the expression of sexuality in women in order to avoid experiencing the fear that they cannot appropriately control their own sexual impulses. For many men, their anxiety about lack of sexual self-control leads to a fear that women will use their sexuality to control or abuse them. As one man put it to me, “any woman with enough sexual power to rock my world might also wreck it.” We can see why such a fear makes it hard to commit to marriage.

AL KEN YA’AZOV ISH: **Boys Becoming Men?**

Leaving one’s family of origin and creating a new family of one’s own requires the transfer or expansion of intimate attachments formed in childhood. While all of us enter marriage with “baggage” from our childhood family, most men enter with “patriarchal baggage”. In its most stereotypical form, this baggage makes it seem “natural” to them that men are the head of the family, make the money and make the important decisions and that women are expected to cook, clean and take care of the children. The more stereotypically patriarchal the baggage, the harder it is to cope with the shifts in gender roles that have been occurring in American society. This problem is only exacerbated for Orthodox

men who have been taught socially conservative interpretations of *Torah* as if they were timeless truths.

Orthodox men, as most American men, are not entirely sure how to be a man. This insecurity puts a contemporary modern Orthodox woman in a difficult situation. Some men leave relationships just to avoid facing the difficult reality that ultimately their sense of their own masculinity can never be entirely validated by their mate, but must largely come from within themselves.

MA’ALIN BA’KODESH: **Holy Step by Holy Step**

In my experience, Orthodox dating with its negotiated personal attachments – think *shidduchim*, “job descriptions”, “deal breakers”, telescoped dating time tables and nearly irresolvable questions of sexuality, control and guilt – only aggravates matters. Although both parties arrive as autonomous individuals, it is primarily the woman who is expected to surrender her fully independent status once the deal is made. In fact, for some men, no deal can really erase the fear that his presently autonomous female negotiating partner will in fact retain – or worse give up now but later rediscover – the independence she showed during the negotiating process.

Of course, Orthodox dating could allow intimate attachments to develop gradually. Relationships would begin with interest and attraction and, as increasing friendship blends with romantic attraction, move on to a yet deeper level of caring that would make it possible to take the personal risks that are part of a commitment to a lifetime of intimacy. I think that the cultural changes I have discussed would be more comfortably handled if, rather than negotiating their marriages, Orthodox men and women let their personal commitments gradually grow out of their intensifying feelings for each other. Maybe, the experience of genuine trust in a relationship can provide the sense of safety that contracts cannot. ■

Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard is the director of organizational development at the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. He holds Ph.D.’s in philosophy and clinical psychology.

Mixed Blessings continued

going to have some *nachas*?” But “if God wills it, it should happen” – a perfectly *frum* theological blessing. I realized the discussion wasn’t going anywhere, so I dropped the subject.

Since then, I’ve asked several people if there is a difference between saying IYH to a single person looking to get married or a married person who is trying to have children. Both deal with highly personal and emotional struggles, yet IYH is socially acceptable in one context and apparently reviled in another.

In my highly unscientific study, I found that most women instinctively notice a difference between the two situations, but few could articulate what that would be. One person related to me stories of friends of hers who have struggled with miscarriages and fertility clinics, emphasizing the myriad of problems that couples face. Since one never knows what a couple goes through, even an IYH could prove to be traumatic.

...it’s possible that you could strike a sensitive nerve and add more to a person’s anguish.

I do not wish to minimize the struggles that people go through in either area. My problem is in the hypocrisy. If you truly believe that IYH is a *bracha* and will be accepted as such, then there should be no distinction based on the circumstance. If you find it offensive in some cases, then that would indicate that you don’t really believe it’s

a true *bracha*. I suspect the latter to be true in most cases.

For some reason, many are under the impression that singles have no feelings: one can mockingly throw out an IYH with little regard to a person’s struggles. We have created a cultural hazing process that only ends when one gets married. Apparently, it’s only then that a person’s private life is “off limits” from the teases of the community.

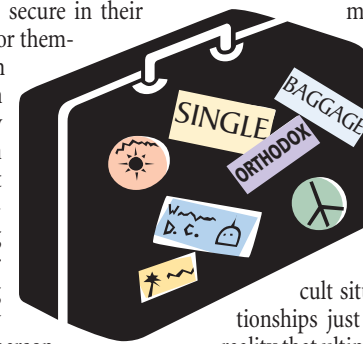
So before you throw out another “IYH by you” – even as a joke – first think about how it’s going to be received by the other person. It’s possible they might not be offended, and it’s possible that they might accept it wholeheartedly. But it’s also possible that you could strike a sensitive nerve and add more to a person’s anguish. If you’re not sure yourself, think about whether you would say it to a married couple that is trying to have children.

The point is that maybe it’s time to re-evaluate commonly accepted phrases. Maybe we’re actually hurting people with words which aren’t as well intentioned as they sound. Maybe we should take the time to think about how our words affect other people, even when they’re socially conditioned.

Maybe if we start empathizing with other people, we can collectively develop a strong supportive community which would extend beyond the dating world and into every facet of social interaction.

Im yirtzeh Hashem by us all. ■

Rabbi Josh Yuter is currently studying Sociology of Religion at the University of Chicago; his blogs can be read at <http://yutopia.yucs.org>



**IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE,
WHERE THE FLEETING NATURE OF LIFE
IS SO APPARENT, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER
TO HELP PEOPLE FIND SHARED HAPPINESS AND
A SENSE OF BELONGING. – Rabbi Josh Joseph**

CONCLUSION: Troubled Transitions – A Challenge and an Opportunity

A Statement by The Orthodox Caucus

We recognize that a subtle balance needs to be struck between validating the lifestyles and choices of unmarried Jews, while simultaneously promoting an awareness and appreciation of the importance of married and family life. We must all understand the complexities of single life, which may be transitional or permanent: many people postpone marriage for a variety of reasons – education, financial independence, career changes – and therefore expectations must change.

TO THE COMMUNITY:

Single people should be respected as whole individuals with interests and accomplishments apart from their marital or dating status. They should be embraced by the community, included at *Shabbat* meals, on Boards of institutions and as dinner honorees. They should be made to feel welcome at community social events and their fami-

lies' tables alongside their married siblings, and they should not be abandoned by their married friends. We must actively examine socialization and dating practices: are singles today adopting unhealthy, self-defeating habits? With the increasing array of virtual dating options, avenues exist today that were not available in years past; but just because one door opens, does not mean we should close another. Events should be conducive for people to meet one another: be it a wedding, or a lecture or social volunteerism, we as a community, should not unnecessarily segregate the sexes.

TO THE LEADERSHIP:

Empower single people to be more involved in community life; they are a source of creativity, productivity, support, and energy that should be fully appreciated in all areas of Jewish life. In addition, provide informal settings and natural venues for single

people to meet. Encourage the community as a whole to be involved in these issues.

TO THE SINGLES:

Don't wait until you are married to be involved in religious life: become active in your community and confront the challenges and difficulties that are presented by the confluence of relationships, career and religion. Be open to the reality of the choices before you. Create your own opportunities for dating. Be open-minded. Remember that at the core of a marriage is a relationship. Dating should not be about a checklist of characteristics in a potential mate, but about whether you can share a moment, share an experience, and talk comfortably with the other person. Sure, you may have differences, but are they irreconcilable? Relationships require flexibility to handle the inevitable curves life will bring.

FOR ALL OF US:

In the current climate, where the fleeting nature of life is so apparent, it is more important than ever to help people find shared happiness and a sense of belonging. Perhaps if we all modeled an appreciation for life then we wouldn't have to worry about solutions to loneliness and lack of fulfillment. This is not just a message for singles: it is for parents AND children; husbands AND wives; boyfriends AND girlfriends.

Hashem gives us all challenges in life; if we fight them we can't but lose. It is about how we react to those challenges and whether we can turn them into opportunities: for choice, for growth, for life.

What will you do about it?

SUGGESTIONS:

Here are just a few of the ways the OC plans to follow up to catalyze the community to act and how you can get involved:

- Talk about these issues with your friends and family.
- Send letters to the editors of your local papers.
- Open your homes to singles on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*.
- Start an event for your *shul* or community where people can meet one another.
- Be mindful of language. We should be careful to use sensitivity when we speak.
- Start a big brother/ big sister program in your synagogue, in which kids of single parent families have a "buddy" to sit with in *shul*.
- Become a thoughtful matchmaker. Set up single people on dates.
- Establish workshops for informal matchmaking at your synagogue.
- Encourage schools, parents, *shuls* to focus on social education for adults and children. Utilize the growing library of books on communication skills.
- Encourage the community to examine segregation of sexes at communal events and personal *simchas*.
- Visit our website www.orthosingles.org and participate in the ongoing search for solutions.

TOP 10 THINGS a guy should NOT say on the phone with a potential first date

by Michele Herenstein

- #10 Don't always bring the conversation back to you. If you ask us a question, at least pretend to be interested in our answer.
- #9 Let's not forage into Jewish geography. We don't need to know who you know, from where you know them, and why. We just want to get to know YOU.
- #8 Don't ask us how old we are. If it's so important to find this out, please do so before the conversation. Some women are not comfortable divulging their ages.
- #7 Don't tell us what a great catch you are. Show it by being a good listener, communicator, and by being a *mensch* on the phone.
- #6 Don't read off the checklist that your Rabbi gave you. Relax and converse. The best way to get to know someone is to chat and see if there's an ease of conversation. The place to find out facts is on the date.
- #5 Don't begin the conversation by saying, "I will have to go soon because my favorite TV show is starting." You're better off fudging the truth and saying that you have to go meet your *chavruta*. We'll have more respect for you. Or News Flash: call when you actually have a few minutes to chat!
- #4 Don't ask if our mothers, sisters, sisters-in-law, and friends cover their hair and only wear skirts. WE are not THEM. What we do religiously is done independent of our family and friends. Remember, please focus on us.
- #3 Sexual innuendoes are not appropriate for a first phone call. Period!
- #2 Do not discuss your ex-girlfriends. Your experiences are probably fascinating, but we really could do without hearing about them. We don't want to become your next "ex-girlfriend" story!
- #1 Do NOT ask us why we aren't married yet! That is a RUDE and impertinent question. And hey, aren't you calling us because you aren't married either? We sure hope that's the case.

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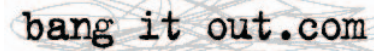
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