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Has Anything Changed?

by Rabbi Yisrael Motzen

“[The Orthodox Caucus] made a similar effort in 2004. Sadly, nothing has changed.” That was the opening sentence of a letter we received at Kol Echad. The writer was referring to an initiative led by our very own Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph to raise awareness about the challenges of singlehood in the Orthodox community. The Caucus published an insightful magazine filled with sage advice for single men and women and highlighted the many ways the broader community could step up and do more to make singles feel welcome in Orthodox spaces. While I understand the writer’s frustration and the feeling that nothing has changed, I beg to differ.

On the very day I opened this email, I noticed an ad in a newspaper that read:

Winter Vacation Checklist:

- Pack a warm coat, scarf, and gloves.
- Confirm activity bookings and itinerary.
- Make sure your regular Shabbos guest has an invitation while you’re away.

Spend a few minutes on Instagram before any Jewish holiday and you’re likely to encounter posts from Tzipora Grodtko or the “Jewish Meme

Queen,” reminding people to invite single men and women for Yom Tov meals, along with practical tips on how to be a better host. You might also come across the thoughtful posts of an anonymous single man writing under the handle Make Room at the Table. People are talking - and more importantly, judging by the number of likes and shares these posts receive, people are listening.

Over the past year, I’ve had the privilege of speaking with the leadership of dozens of shuls about what they can do to be more inclusive. Every one of those conversations ended with concrete commitments to change. Some rabbis asked their offices to compile a list of single members in the shul - not an earth-shattering step, but an important one. Others instituted systems to ensure more people receive Shabbos and Yom Tov invitations. Still others adjusted their membership pricing to better reflect the diversity of their community, creating new price points for singles and clearly conveying the message that everyone belongs. One shul even appointed a dedicated volunteer to oversee programming for this population and to ensure that existing programs were genuinely inclusive.

YU Connects, in partnership with Kol Echad, has just launched its second cohort of shadchan training, ensuring that those involved in making matches are equipped with the appropriate skills and sensitivities. In several cities, community-funded organizations have been established to help facilitate shidduch dating.

Are we there yet? Most definitely not. There is still much work to be done, but I truly believe the needle is moving in the right direction.

In this issue, you’ll find thoughtful reflections from Yoni Z, a popular artist who shares his personal journey through singlehood; an op-ed by the author of *Unmatched*, describing the challenges she has faced as a single woman; and a roadmap for moving the needle even further, written in 2017 by Rabbi Moshe Hauer zt”l.

Vincent van Gogh once said, “Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.” Each of us has a role to play in ensuring that our communities are welcoming to every member - and that every single person feels that they truly belong.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, and I hope you find your own small way to make a difference.

Rabbi Yisrael Motzen
Director, Kol Echad

We Can and We Must Do Better

by Rabbi Moshe Hauer ZT”L



Every year, as a pulpit rabbi in B’nai Jacob Sharei Zion, Rabbi Hauer would choose one theme to discuss throughout Elul and the Yomim Noraim. He chose topics he believed were critical to the spiritual growth and social welfare of his community. In 2017, he focused on how the community relates to single men and women. Though it was written nearly ten years ago, the insights and advice are as relevant today as ever.

As we consider, during this month of Elul, how we can make things better, an area that deserves our attention, and where we can certainly do a lot better, is how we as a community treat the singles in our midst. Here are



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some specific ideas and impressions, gleaned from conversations and communications with singles in our community.

There is one thing our singles clearly do not want, and that is our pity. Baruch Hashem, the single men and women in our community are strong and capable people, living productive lives and accomplishing great things both personally and professionally. They are fine, thank you. What they would really appreciate is our respect.

Respect

Yes, respect. They deserve our respect and recognition for who they are and for all they have to add. It is a common feeling amongst singles that while in their professional lives they are valued and respected, within the community they are somehow relegated to a different status, where their ability to participate and contribute is overlooked. When they step forward to do for others, or to assume a leadership role, make a Kiddush, or invite others for a meal, it is often seen as “sweet” or “cute.”

As a single person wrote to me: “While I know everyone was

doing their best to help by providing Shabbos meals, etc., what I wanted more than any of that was a chance to do for the community and not feel like I was taking from it. I think many people misunderstand people my age and think we are “entitled.” What we truly want is to make an impact.”

Everyone wants to matter, to make a difference to others. The son of Rav Chayim of Volozhin records in his introduction to the Nefesh HaChayim that his father would repeatedly remind him that making a difference to others is what life is all about: “This is the essence of man. We were not created to serve ourselves, but to serve others in every way we can.” Indeed, the basic drive for marriage is built upon the desire to give, to share of oneself. Lo tov heyot ha’adam levado - “It is not good for man to be alone.” The goodness of giving - HaTov v’HaMeitiv, “He Who is good and does good for others” - is the ultimate goodness, and it cannot be experienced alone. Those who have not yet found a life’s partner, or who may have lost their life’s partner to death or divorce, possess a deep desire and capacity to give. We must

recognize this and welcome it in our shuls, organizations, and around our tables.

Our community is blessed with strong families and is built on family values, and those are good things that we should not change. But these values must exist in tandem with recognition of the value of all individuals. By placing an emphasis on family, we may sometimes unintentionally communicate to singles that they have not quite made it, that they are not worthy of a front seat because they do not yet have a spouse.

There is nothing in our worldview that would have us value singles less. Quite the opposite. Ramban, in his final note on Sefer Vayikra (27:29), discusses the story of Yiftach's daughter (Shoftim 11:34–40), whose father had inadvertently pledged her as an offering to G-d. He cites those who explain that she was not offered as a human sacrifice but rather committed to a life devoted solely to the service of G-d, without marriage or children. Ramban objects vehemently to this interpretation, noting that the verse describes how she and her friends mourned her fate. How, asks Ramban, could they mourn a woman whose life was filled with the service of G-d? Her remaining unmarried and childless should not be considered tragic. The path to a full and meaningful life does not need to pass under the chuppah.

Support

Singles benefit from our being there for them. What they often lack is the immediate support system provided by a nuclear family. We can and should be there for them, when it is welcome. But it is essential that we do so respectfully. As one single put it, we must “think beyond cookie-cutter needs and truly listen to the person you are trying to help, giving them space when and if they ask for it.”

“The path to a full and meaningful life does not need to pass under the chuppah.”

We should reach out and invite them early in the week, just as we would a married couple, rather than telling them that they are “welcome to call anytime.” They may appreciate a Melaveh Malka or a Chol HaMoed outing even more than a late and lengthy Friday night meal.

It is not our place to offer unsolicited advice to singles. It is our place to offer unqualified support. When we feel strongly that someone is going about things the wrong way, we must be as cautious about sharing that opinion with a single person as we would be with a married one. Our role is not to guide, but to support, earning trust over time, should advice ever be sought.

Shidduchim

Of course, our singles, as strong

continue to seek deeper fulfillment through marriage. This is an area where we can do much more. Helping others achieve their dearest dreams should be a communal priority. One way we can improve is by retiring the language of “crisis.”

The Chazon Ish (Emunah u'Bitachon, ch. 2) teaches that bitachon does not mean trusting that things will unfold exactly as we wish. It means recognizing that we do not live in a random world; what we experience is guided by G-d's hand. In that framework, there is no room for crisis language. While proper hishtadlus is required, excessive or desperate efforts are not.

Friends of ours were struggling with their children's shidduchim. Visiting Eretz Yisrael, they asked Harav Chaim Kanievsky how they should proceed. His response was simple: “The main hishtadlus is tefillah.” Profound in its simplicity.

There is a G-d. We must make our efforts, but they should be reasonable, serious, and consistent.

Networking

Networking is often the hardest part, and for singles, it can feel especially challenging and even demeaning. Here are two ways we can help.

The idea of single men and women meeting in refined group settings is not halachically

objectionable. Even very traditional organizations have hosted such events. The main challenge is attendance: when the male-to-female ratio is significantly off, the experience can be discouraging.

Smaller, more intentional settings can work better. Inviting two or three single men and women to a Shabbos table allows people to meet a person rather than a résumé. Weddings, too, present opportunities: a couple might suggest seating friends, mechitzah-permitting, together at tables. These approaches will not suit everyone, and no one should be pressured. But they are worth considering.

Even more important is our willingness to actively make introductions. We all have friends, acquaintances, and family in other communities. Think of one single you know and spend fifteen minutes calling others on their behalf, describing this wonderful person and asking if they know someone suitable. And don't stop there. If you identify a possible match, don't simply pass along a name. Invest the time and effort to help move things forward.

We all want to do this. But we get busy, we forget, and opportunities slip away. I know I do.

In Parshas Ki Savo (Devarim 26:13), we read the Viduy Ma'asros, declaring: "I have not transgressed Your mitzvos, and I

have not forgotten." Rashi asks why this is not redundant - if one has not transgressed, surely one has not forgotten.

Harav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal hy"d explains that while we may respond when someone comes to us for help, we often fail to initiate assistance for those who never ask. Not forgetting means being proactive.

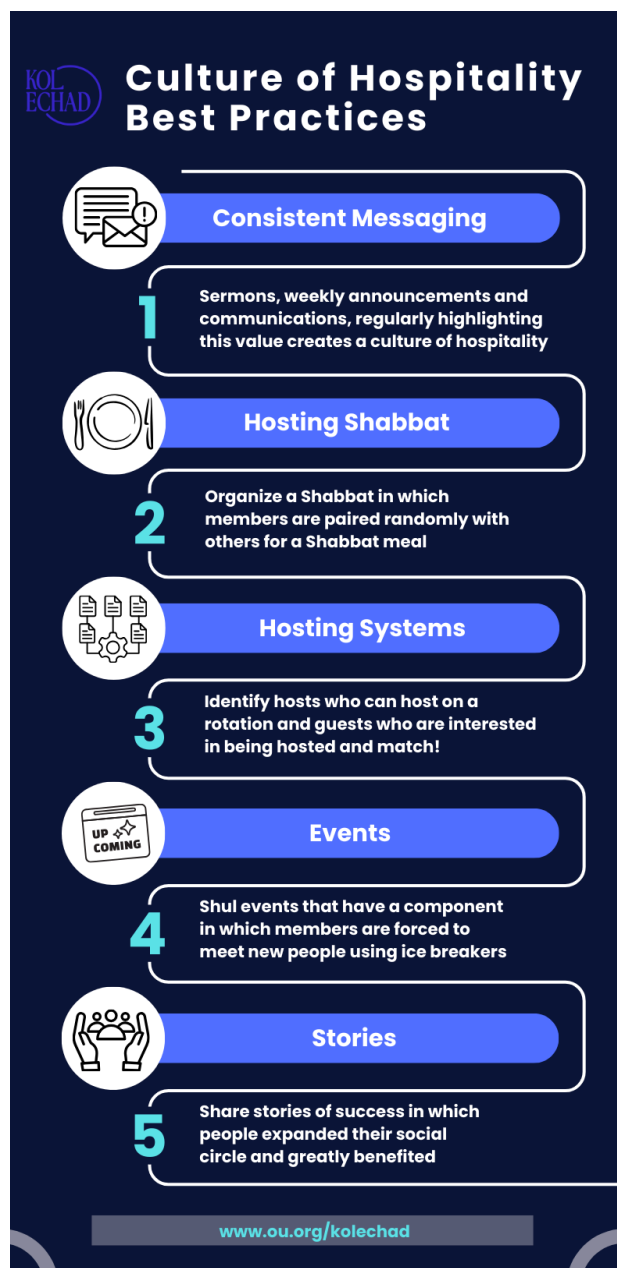
That insight is sobering. While I respond promptly when approached about shidduchim, I do far less initiating than I should. I want to, but I forget to in the busyness of life.

I suspect many of you feel the same. Let us change that. Let us create frameworks that remind, encourage, and guide us to stay engaged in helping one another find happiness.

Later in the same passage (26:15), we ask G-d to look down from the heavens and bless His people. The word used – hashkifah - usually connotes judgment. Yet here it precedes blessing. The Midrash explains that when Jews are actively caring for one another, even a

critical gaze is transformed into blessing.

May G-d look down and see us caring for each other, initiating for one another, and working to help our single friends and neighbors find their partners, and may He bless all of us with success and the fulfillment of our dearest dreams. ■



Single in the Spotlight

A Conversation with Yoni Z

by Avital Chizhik Goldschmidt



ACG: Yoni, I know you as a colleague — you are the chazzan at our shul, the Altneu. But today I wanted to speak with you on a more personal note, about an issue that we often discuss in our community in Manhattan. You’ve spoken openly about the loneliness of being single in the frum community. Can you tell me, what does that loneliness actually look like to you?

YZ: There’s a moment I experience over and over when I’m trying to help set people up. I’ll text someone and ask, “What are you up to tonight?” And they’ll say, “I’m just on my couch, ordered some takeout.”

And it’s not that someone is taking a night off — that’s normal. It’s the listlessness underneath it. It’s the sense of, “This is my life. This is all there is. I’ll probably be on this couch again in five years

— maybe with a dog.”

In Manhattan especially, there’s an extra layer. You’re on JSwipe, you’re on Hinge, you’re sourcing dates in bars or lounges, and you start to feel like prey in a jungle — both men and women. You’re surrounded by millions of people and yet you feel like a speck of dust. No one even knows I exist. What if no one ever will? And that becomes the default belief: no one cares about me.

ACG: Why does that image — someone sitting alone on their couch — hit so hard?

YZ: Because it’s not hopeful loneliness. It’s resignation. Paralyzing. It’s not “In a year, G-d willing, this will look different.” It’s: “This is just my life.”

I know men in our community — handsome, successful, kind — in their 40s. They should be thriving. And instead, there’s an emptiness in their eyes. Not because they did anything wrong. Sometimes people are dealt a difficult hand. I know I was.

And for public people, there’s another layer. You’re visible, but

unseen.

ACG: On your online platform and in podcast interviews, you’ve spoken about how difficult that was for you personally — being single while so much of your life was public. I relate to that, as I was already a published writer by the time I was dating, albeit for a shorter time. What was the hardest piece to carry?

YZ: That people had absolutely no idea who I really was — and there was nothing I could do to correct their assumptions.

You can’t go online and say, “Actually, I’m not the person you think I am.” That looks pathetic. So you just live with people projecting onto you.

I remember a moment that crystallized this for me. I was dating a girl in the Five Towns. She told me, very kindly after a few fun dates, “You’re amazing, but we’re not for each other. You’re not frum enough for me.” I didn’t argue. I respected her perspective. Then she said, “But I have a friend who would be perfect for you.” So while I was sitting right there, she voice-noted this friend, telling her

about me, and the girl replied, “Are you kidding? He’s way too frum for me.”

I looked at the girl and said, “Do you see where I’m stuck?”

Everyone had a completely different version of me. That night, I drove home thinking, No one will ever get me right.

ACG: That kind of misreading feels very common today.

YZ: Absolutely. Especially in Manhattan, where the spectrum is so wide. People write each other off for things that, once you’re married, you realize were never the point.

I’m married less than a year, so I’m not preaching. But it’s true: the checklist you think matters becomes maybe 2% of your marriage. The other 98% is everything you never imagined while dating.

Marriage presents realities you could not predict. And that’s okay. But the measuring tools people are using — looks, status, optics — those are not the tools that sustain a life.

ACG: You’ve spoken about common pitfalls singles fall into. What do you wish people understood earlier?

YZ: First, we can’t remove agency from singles by just saying, “The system is broken.” There are plenty of systemic issues — but people also sabotage themselves.

Here’s one example for men. If a woman came across as very high-energy on a first date, I used to write her off as too intense. What I didn’t understand is that for many women, nervousness shows up as more talking, louder volume - or perhaps the opposite, they listen and talk less - that doesn’t mean they don’t have what to say, they are simply adapting to you and your energy. The woman you meet on date one and date five can be two very different people — in a good way.

“The checklist you think matters becomes maybe 2% of your marriage.”

Men want total transparency immediately, it’s how we are wired : “Show me who you really are.” But that’s not how trust works. Especially not for women. And to women: the car ride is not the date. Everyone, relax. Don’t judge someone based on five minutes of awkwardness while he’s trying to make sure you feel seen while also not crashing the car.

Give people the same chance you often hope they would give you. You’ll be amazed by the incredible people you’ll meet. And perhaps, even the one you’ll marry.

Another issue I see constantly— and it goes far beyond Manhattan —is how easily people will abandon standards and values



under certain conditions. If the man has money, or the woman is exceptionally attractive, suddenly “I want a guy who keeps Shabbos” becomes “we’ll grow together,” and “I want a girl who keeps kosher” becomes “we’ll have a kosher home, but eat out dairy or fish.” Infatuation is never a sustainable foundation. Save your time and energy: date someone with the same values as you or at least close enough.

ACG: Can we talk about status — leagues, optics, “how this will look”?

YZ: I hate to say it but people are their own worst enemies. Tragically, as humans, we date from our wounds. If you grew up without money, you might convince yourself you need wealth — and dress it up as responsibility. If you never got chosen when you were younger, you might chase validation now. But those wounds don’t make good spouses.

People obsess over the engagement photo. What will it say about me? To my high school, my rabbis, my friends? That moment has become a kind of celebrity debut in the frum community. It’s your thirty

seconds of fame — at the expense of thinking about the next fifty years.

ACG: Wow, that is so true. The engagement photo felt so important in that time of our lives. SimchaSpot! So how did marriage change the way you see all of this?

YZ: Here's what I tell people now: look for someone whose presence makes you feel safe. Not impressed. Not challenged. Safe.

If you feel like you constantly have to perform, to win them over - perhaps it's a rush or a thrill, no denying that — but you're signing up for exhaustion. You can't be a superstar every day. With the right person, you feel like you came home. And home welcomes you on your wonderful days and your less spectacular days.

This morning, my wife — eight months pregnant Baruch Hashem — got dressed and ready to conquer the world and then suddenly said, "I need to lie down." And all she wanted was a bagel with scallion cream cheese and lox. So that's where I'm going right after this interview, I'm going to buy her a bagel with scallion cream cheese and lox. That moment is marriage. No audience. No optics. Just compassion and care. And that's what a lot of marriage will actually look like.

ACG: What would you say to



married people about how we treat singles?

YZ: Humility. Sensitivity. Awareness.

There's a loneliness there that unless you've lived it — especially past a certain age — you won't ever understand. And it can become debilitating.

I've seen how many "no's" someone can get in a single day and still be expected to function. Also, it's time we stop with the "soon by you." They already know. Say, "may we share in endless simchas together this year." It says everything, without reopening the wound. We know how to walk into a shiva house. We have to apply a fraction of that sensitivity to people who are single and looking to marry — not pity, just respect.

Because single people aren't broken. There is nothing "wrong" with them. They are carrying something heavy, often quietly, often alone, and the least we can do is not add to it. We would never say to someone facing illness or loss, "Well, why might

Hashem have presented you with this challenge in life? Think about it." That would be considered deeply offensive and socially tone-deaf. Yet with single people, we think nothing of looking them in the eye at a Shabbos table and asking, "So what's going on? Why aren't you married yet?" Sometimes it's even wrapped in a pinch of sugar: "A guy as successful as you," or "a girl as lovely as you." It doesn't make it better or acceptable. I know that once you're married, dating can start to feel like a juicy reality show, full of he-said-she-said, but for the person living it, it remains a daily and very real pain.

If you truly care, think about them when they're not sitting at your Shabbos table. Daven for them at candle lighting. Dedicate your learning that day to so-and-so's success in finding their bashert. Lead with critical thinking. Lead with compassion. To the brave singles out there: Yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin. The salvation of Hashem is like the blink of an eye. ■

Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt is a journalist and rebbetzin living in New York. She is the rebbetzin and co-founder of the Altneu Synagogue on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

Halachic FAQ's for Single Men and Women: Shabbos Candles

by Rabbi Moshe Walter

There is a special mitzvah to light Shabbos candles to bring kavod (honor) and oneg (enjoyment) to Shabbos and for the sake of shalom bayis (prevent people from getting hurt in the dark.) The mitzvah to light Shabbos candles is unique in that it is both a mitzvah for an individual person to fulfil as well as a mitzvah requirement upon the home as a whole. As such for a single person there are often instances and situations where the question of where and when to light arise. We hope the following questions and answers will be helpful to you.

We are a group of single women who live in the same apartment. Do we need to light Shabbos candles or can we rely on our mother's lighting? Should all of us light or can one of us light for everyone?

One of the women in the apartment should light the Shabbos candles on behalf of all the women, and they thereby all fulfil the mitzvah of Shabbos candles. The women cannot rely on their mother's lighting as they are adults and as such are not considered to be dependent



upon their family to fulfil this obligation for them (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 263:6, Aruch HaShulchan 5, Mishnah Berurah 263: 28-30)

I am a single man whose children stay with me every second Shabbos. Am I obligated to light Shabbos candles? What about when my 14-year-old daughter is at my home – should she light on those weeks?

Every home must have Shabbos candles lit. The mitzva of lighting Shabbos candles ordinarily falls on the woman of the home, however in this circumstance it becomes the mitzvah of the man to ensure that Shabbos candles are lit. Even when a daughter is at home with a father, the father should light the candles as he is the baal habayis, master of the house. (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 263: 2-3. Rav Moshe

Feinstein cited in The Radiance of Shabbos chapter 2 footnote 8. However, there are halachic authorities who posit that in this circumstance the daughter should light the Shabbos candles and not the father. See Rav Nissin Karelitz in Chut Shani 4:83-8 who discusses this question at greater length.)

I am invited out for a Friday night meal and I do not feel comfortable lighting at my home and then leaving. What am I allowed to do?

Your concern is understandable and many people share this concern. First of all, if one is lighting candles and leaving the home, one should be careful to ensure that proper caution has been taken when leaving the candles lit. Two classical options exist in this case. One may light at home if one benefits from the candles before leaving for the Shabbos meal or when returning from the Shabbos meal. Additionally, before leaving the home, turn on the electricity for the purpose of having light in the home for Shabbos which is also a component of the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles. (Rav

Moshe Feinstein cited in Responsa Teshuvos V'hanhagos 2:154 and The Radiance of Shabbos chapter 2 footnote 37.) A second and equally valid option is to light the Shabbos candles at the home where you will be eating as you will benefit from the candlelight at the home where you will be eating the Shabbos meal, and as above, turn on the electric lights before Shabbos, for the purpose of having light in the home for Shabbos when returning home from the Shabbos meal.

I am invited out for a Friday night meal, but my hosts live

quite a walk away. Am I able to light and then drive to my host? Light and then drive to minchah?

Yes, you may do so by mentally or verbally stipulating that despite your lighting the Shabbos candles, you are not accepting Shabbos until you say so upon arriving at your destination. This condition should only be executed when necessary, and lighting on condition to drive to be part of a Shabbos meal or lighting on condition to drive to daven minchah is considered halachically necessary, so this condition can and should be

incorporated in this context. This is true for both a man and a woman. (Rema Orach Chaim 263:10 and Mishnah Berurah 263:44 and 42)

May one recite a berachah on electric lights if it is not possible to light Shabbos candles with oil or candles?

If this is the only option, one should certainly turn on the electric lights, or a special electric candelabra for the sake of the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles as doing so fulfills the aforementioned requirements of the mitzvah of Shabbos candles, as the electric lights bring Kavod Shabbos, Oneg Shabbos, and Shalom Bayis.

However, if a berachah can be made on electric lights is a significant dispute between great halachic authorities. While many halachic authorities do permit one to make a berachah on electric lights, the opinion of Rav Moshe Feinstein was that one may not recite a berachah on electric lights. This is true for both incandescent and fluorescent lights. (Radiance of Shabbos chapter 5:3. See Sefer Orchos Shabbos volume 4 25:33 for an extensive summary of the issues and opinions on the topic.) It is difficult to issue an absolute and decisive yes or no answer to this question. I would recommend discussing this question with your Rav. ■

Rabbi Moshe Walter is the rabbi of Woodside Synagogue Ahavas Torah in Silver Spring, Maryland, and executive director of the Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington.

Personalities and Perspectives

Financial Literacy as Personal Growth

A conversation with Stacey Zrihen



You know you are speaking to someone who accomplishes a lot when they start their conversation with, “I have 37 minutes to talk as my car drives me to my next meeting.” Stacey Zrihen is the senior director of coaching for the

Orthodox Union’s Living Smarter Jewish and Achiezer’s Westwood Management Program. She oversees LSJ’s many financial coaches and usually takes on the most difficult cases. Unflappable and passionate, she describes teaching financial literacy as a calling that started at a very young age.

“Before walking into a store, my father would ask me to try to think of how much our purchases would cost.” They’d shop and then on the way home discuss what the actual costs were. Sometimes she she was right and sometimes she was way off, but the lesson stuck

“The loneliness of having no one to speak to exacerbates the issue.”

– finances do not have to be a mystery, it's something you can control.

Listening to her speak, I start to see how budgeting doesn't have to be a tedious task, but rather a means to take ownership of a most fundamental part of who we are. Our Sages use the term *damim* to describe finances, the same term used for our lifeblood, and for good reason. Inasmuch as we aspire to a spiritual life, our finances and our relationship with them are a fundamental part of who we are. Taking control of how we spend, or simply developing a deeper awareness of how we spend without even making any changes, is one of the many ways we can take control of our lives.

Some people turn to LSJ because they are overwhelmed by the costs of Orthodox Jewish life, others are drowning in debt, but financial literacy is for everyone. “Think of financial health no different than you think about your physical wellbeing,” she tells me as she sits in traffic. Physical wellness is trending. People are more conscientious about the food they eat, and more Orthodox men and women are hitting the gym than ever. LSJ's growing popularity is a sign that financial

wellness is taking off as well.

The focus of our conversation is financial planning for men and women who are single. A study by the Orthodox Union on divorced women highlighted the financial vulnerability of single mothers. While all the women in the study were employed, half of them were making less than \$35,000 a year. Anecdotally, we know that many single men are struggling as well. Speaking to a knowledgeable coach can help shave off some costs by being connected to resources or learning valuable tips.

I wondered if there were unique challenges beyond making ends meet that single men and women may face. “YES!” Stacey exclaims. “The loneliness of having no one to speak to exacerbates the issue.” Studies have shown how valuable having a partner can be in overcoming a challenge. Someone who is married has a partner with whom to share the fear of a monthly deficit; someone on their own must face the unknown without that valuable emotional support. This is where a financial coach can make all the difference. A financial coach acts as a confidante, a partner to discuss the fears and concerns of financial planning, who is always well-equipped to recommend potential solutions. Having a financial coach is not a panacea, sometimes no matter what is done, the individual or family may still be left with a monthly deficit, but there is still immense

value in having a coach. A financial coach cannot solve everyone's issues but even letting someone know that they are doing everything they can is very reassuring. “I have almost never met with anyone who felt like it was a waste of time.”

More Orthodox men and women are hitting the gym than ever. LSJ's growing popularity is a sign that financial wellness is taking off as well.

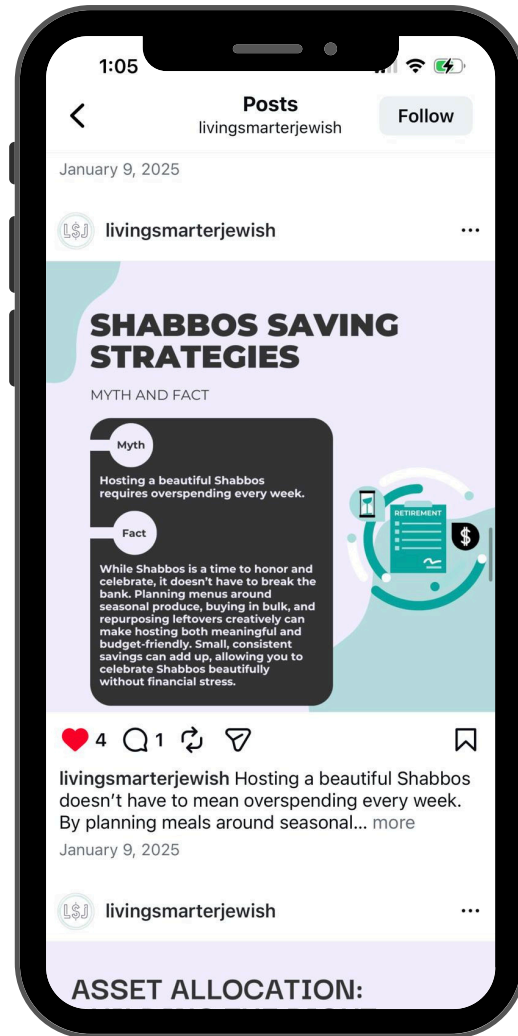
We spoke about many single men and women who feel like they are in limbo, waiting to get married. Some who are blessed to take home a nice paycheck never spend it as they want to save it for their married life. I wondered if this was the right approach. Stacey once again brought it back to physical wellbeing. “Imagine a person dieting who decides to only eat 600 calories a day. They'll lose a lot of weight, but they'll be miserable. You could put away all your money and have a real nice nest egg, but at what cost to your overall wellbeing?” In other words, singlehood, for some, may



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be a great opportunity to save, but it's also valuable to live right now. If a single man or woman is not in debt and has reasonable savings set aside, using the excess to enjoy themselves is more than fine, it's important. Being that this stage in life can be especially challenging, taking time for oneself or even buying something a little more luxurious, can provide a much-needed respite.

As Stacey pulls into her parking spot, she reiterates how everyone, regardless of their marital or financial status, can benefit from a financial coach. LSJ, a project of the Orthodox Union, provides free financial coaching to meet



each person's unique life circumstance. Singlehood, with its inherent loneliness and potential financial challenges, is certainly no exception. 37 minutes is all we needed; Stacey had me sold. Gaining financial literacy is not a task, it's an incredible opportunity to take control of one's life and face life's inevitable challenges with confidence. ■

To find a no-charge financial coach suitable to your needs, please email info@livingsmarterjewish.org

Personalities and Perspectives

The Courage to Be Unmatched and Unmasked

by Sarah Lavane

In each chapter of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz' book "Simple Words" he dissects the true meaning of another "simple word" but the word that I remembered years after reading that book was "Masks." He has a lengthy

explanation of that word and what constitutes a mask. Is it our clothing, the expression on our face, the hairstyle we choose, our behavior or more? And he asks, "What is the real onion?" When you peel the layers off, what is

left? Who are we if we strip our masks off? This thought really resonated with me, especially in my dating life when masks seem to weigh so heavily in the process.

Am I my age? The neighborhood I

I grew up in? The name I'm called? The school I went to? I felt all those things were part of me, but not me. The questions asked by probing shadchanim or dating profiles didn't reflect my true essence. Was I being judged by the very things I felt shouldn't matter all that much? Who am I when things like my height or my school are stripped away? What are the questions and masks that matter? I wasn't sure.

The one thing I was already sure of was that finding a husband was going to be much more difficult than I had ever anticipated. I had the overwhelming sense that untested people couldn't understand it. I was facing this challenge daily and could barely believe what I was going through myself. So when someone made an insensitive remark about my inability to find someone, my overwhelming wish was that I could make them understand who I was. But I didn't know how.

Years later, I read a "bad date stories" book and was very disappointed. Story after story, the author mocked all her bad dates. We all manage to laugh about a bad experience after the fact. But what is it like to go through it again and again? How does it affect us and why isn't that discussed? Couldn't there be a book that had substance and gave people the insight to understand the inner experience of singlehood and dating? I suppose that was the seed of what would eventually turn into my memoir "Unmatched." I had always liked

to write and had written articles, essays and poetry. I had taken writing workshops. Why not write about it? But every one of my attempts fell flat. They were preachy or whiney and just didn't work. The task seemed as futile as explaining the color yellow to a blind man.

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Once the seed was planted though, the compulsion to write that book grew, as did my pile of balled up paper. I thought of all the things people didn't seem to understand - and there were so many little things - everything from the dread of disappointing my parents, figuring out how long was a fair amount of time to wait for a late date, looking into egg freezing, the morbid, selfish worry of who would say kaddish for me if I died childless and so much more. But there was one subject in particular I had never seen addressed anywhere - the difficulty of being shomer negiah everyone navigates this their own

way. There are people who stick to halacha and suppress themselves. Some guiltlessly cross boundaries whether it's first, second or third base. Others give up and go off the derech. None of those options are ideal. Many, like me, walk the tightrope of wanting to do the right thing but slipping up every now and then. Each of these choices has a price. A lot of singles have difficulty reconciling their desire to do the right thing with their need to feel human. It's tough precisely because there is no satisfactory answer to this dilemma. Additionally, it's not discussed because we are a discreet nation.

People who lecture on why bad things happen to good people also won't address the "How can He do this to me?" aspect of dating. We're not supposed to be angry at God. People might question God over war, illness, poverty, infertility but when it comes to matches, the tendency is to blame the "unmatched" rather than question God. God made our matches before we were born. If we haven't found him, the assumption is that it's our fault. So "unmatched" people often struggle with God. Some of us question Him, bargain with Him, get mad at Him, then apologize to Him, thank Him, pray to Him as the cycle starts all over again. Others give up on Him.

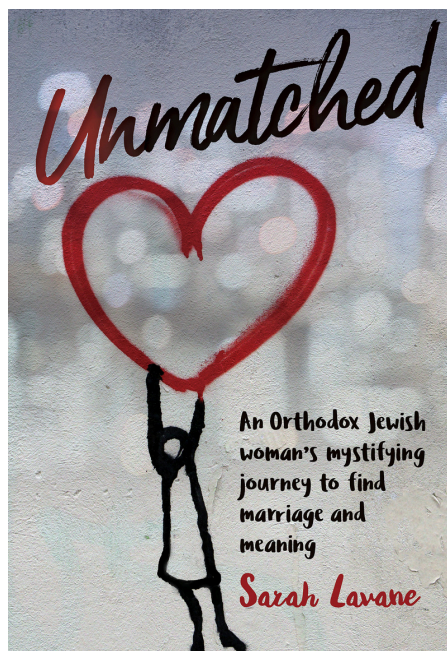
I needed to write about all that. I felt the Orthodox world didn't fully comprehend this subject and should. I needed the "matched"

society I was living in, to understand the “unmatched” amongst them better. A whole segment of society was written off as a “singles crisis.” We are their friends, neighbors, colleagues, relatives and need to be understood. I wanted to put the human face on this community issue ironically by ripping off the masks and labels.

Addressing all this – especially the spiritual struggle – in a book would be challenging. How could I raise this issue in a modest way and still appeal to the broadest audience spanning liberal to machmir? How do I write about difficult subjects in an uplifting, entertaining and charming way? How vulnerable would it feel to share my own story? Would I be judged? Run out of town? Would those more machmir question my behavior and those more liberal wonder what the big deal was? How do I protect the privacy of the other people in the book? It seemed daunting. In time, I realized that instead of trying to explain the impossible, I would invite the readers on my journey.

It was the OU’s own Jewish Action reviewer who later compared my memoir, “Unmatched” to “the immersive experience of a visitor to a museum of the blind, the reader is plunged into an alien environment—the quest of the Jewish woman in search of a compatible mate, along with the raging emotions, the humility, grief, betrayal, despair and faith.” Apparently, this reviewer had indeed been along on my journey.

But while writing it, I couldn’t foresee that review. I struggled and thought “no one is going to be interested in this,” “my writing is terrible,” “how will my family react,” “who will publish this,” -- yet I couldn’t shake my distress at my situation nor the ache of being misunderstood. Even if no one else reads this, I had to write this for myself. I grappled with all the tests and struggles so long, I just needed to get it out.



When I started, I did not feel like an author setting out to write a book. I was just a person with a need to share my story. This book wasn’t “planned” so much as “felt.” I always joke that it took 20 years of thinking about it and four years to write and publish it. But it happened the way it was meant to. It’s a much better book than anything I would’ve written back at the start. I had more life experience, better writing skills and I had lived it, thought about it, discussed it way longer than I had ever imagined I would – all

while working to change the very situation I was writing about. My goal in sharing my story was to bring solace and comfort to the “unmatched” as well as empathy and awareness to the “matched.” And from the reactions I’ve been getting – whether it’s from “unmatched” readers who told me they cried because they finally feel validated or “matched” readers who wrote how eye-opening this story has been for them or how many of the themes resonated for them too – it’s gratifying to see that the book has indeed already begun to do just that.

It took me years to learn to be my authentic self, to peel off some layers of my own onion, allowing me to rise above the boxes and labels that society had imposed on me. There is an irony here, as I mask my identity and those of the characters in my book. The details may be particular to my story, but the themes and emotions are universal. The experiences of love, hope, heartbreak, loss, regret, faith, grief, aging and so much more, affect us all, whether “matched” or “unmatched.” Indeed, we are all so much more than our masks. ■

Sarah Lavane is a writer living in New York. “Unmatched: An Orthodox Jewish Woman’s Mystifying Journey to Find Marriage and Meaning” is her first book. It was chosen as one of Jewish Link’s “Six Best Books of the Year” one month after the book’s launch.

For more info, excerpts and reviews, visit: www.unmatchedstory.com

Little Shoulders

A poem by Tanya Klein



You're walking to shul
Little child of mine
Forlorn and defenseless,
Vulnerable, age nine.
Alone, without father,
You walk down the road
All I see are your shoulders
Little shoulders, big load.

Little shoulders that carry
Much burden, much weight
Little shoulders, big burdens
Will your loneliness abate?
I stand there, and watch you
Wondering, who will receive
My child at shul doorway
Will he have a reprieve?

Will there be a kind man
A sensitive soul
Who will look at your shoulders
Shoulders that reveal all?
A person with insight
With humanity, compassion
A Rachman ben Rachman
Helping others his passion.

Will you walk up to my child
his shoulders embrace

Will you open his siddur
Assist in finding the place?
Or will you elect to turn your
shoulders away
From the sight of my child alone
and astray?

I stood in my doorway
On that balmy Friday night
Watching little shoulders
Walk out of my sight.

My child has grown now,
His shoulders are broad
His shoulders are empty
no tefilin straps hold.
No tzitzis to warm them
Those shoulders I love
No tzitzis carress them
They're out in the cold.

What happened in shul
To my child I don't know,
But you, my dear bretheren
Have a chance now to grow.

Little shoulders are walking
They're all over town.
Tiny little shoulders
And head hanging down.
They come into your shul
And they sit down alone.
Little shoulders that need you
Be staunch now, be strong.
Fellow Jews, dear kind brothers
please heed heartfelt plea
And help little shoulders
Little shoulders in need. ■

Makom Kavuah

BECAUSE EVERY CHILD
SHOULD HAVE A PLACE IN SHUL.

Are you a single parent unable to sit with
your child on the other side of the mechitza?

Would you like a *Shul Mentor*, a caring, responsible
shul member to sit with your child in shul?

SHUL MENTORS ARE:

✓ Handpicked ✓ Trained ✓ Professionally supported

Have someone in mind who'd be a great fit for your child?
Let your shul coordinator know.

To find out more, contact us at kolechad@ou.org



**SOMETIMES,
V'NAHAFOCH HU
IS UP TO YOU!**

To turn someone's Purim around
Is easier than you think
Yes, you can transform their day
(and no, not by offering a drink)

An invitation to your seudah
Will turn dread into anticipation
Especially when it comes early
With an added confirmation

And to show that you care
It doesn't take more
Than a nice mishloach manot
Delivered to their door

So if there's anyone who'd enjoy
That sense of community
Create it **THIS PURIM**
Now's your opportunity!

