



## **EGG FREEZING WITH HALACHA AND HOPE**

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# Ensuring that No Child Sits Alone

by Rabbi Yisrael Motzen



Avi\* was five years old when a brief encounter changed his life. He and his brother were playing outside their Flatbush home with their recently divorced mother when a Chassid walked by and asked, “Who’s taking your sons to shul?” Before she could answer, he offered to bring the boys himself and find someone for them to sit with.

Avi could not have known then how consequential that small act of kindness would become. One of the findings of the OU’s recent study on attrition is that children of divorced parents often display lower levels of religious engagement than their peers. There are many possible explanations, but one is remarkably practical: often, a child from a divorced home simply has nowhere to sit in shul. The impact of shul on children

and teens can be profound.

For me, shul was where I met nineteen-year-olds freshly returned from Israel who broadened my spiritual horizons. Through conversations I could not have had elsewhere, and by observing their devotion during davening and commitment to Torah learning afterward, they shaped my religious life. Shul also forced me to interact with older generations, giving me social skills and relationships that have benefited me ever since. It is difficult for me to imagine who I would be without regular shul attendance.

I could easily imagine an alternate reality for Avi. His mother brings him and his brother to shul on Shabbos Mevorchim. She heads to the women’s section while the boys stand near the back doors. Too young to follow the siddur on their own, they whisper during davening. An older man shushes them. They stop briefly, then start again. This time, he snaps at them.

The boys slip into the hallway and begin to play until another adult scolds them for running around during davening. The next time their mother suggests going to shul, Avi refuses. Who could

blame him?

But that is not what happened. That Shabbos morning, the Chassid seated Avi with Michael, a father of five. This kind man showed Avi the place in the siddur, encouraged him to take short breaks when he needed to release energy, and afterward brought him to kiddush to make sure he had something to eat. Avi loved going to shul.

Over time, Michael became far more than a seatmate; he became a mentor. Study after study has demonstrated the positive impact mentors have on resilience, especially during formative years. More than thirty years later, Avi still calls Michael to discuss major decisions and life challenges. There is no shortage of Avi’s in our communities.

A growing number of children from single-parent homes linger at the doorway of shul, deciding, often quietly and unconsciously, which direction to move - closer to their faith or further away. With these children in mind, Kol Echad set out to streamline the process of identifying and training what we call Shul Mentors. The first challenge was also the most important: safeguarding children’s physical and emotional wellbeing. As



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critical as spiritual belonging may be, child safety can never be sacrificed in its pursuit. This population is especially vulnerable to exploitation. Working with Debbie Fox, LCSW, of the Magen Yeladim Institute, we developed comprehensive safety protocols for Shul Mentors, including a captain who oversees and checks in on each mentoring relationship. Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, Managing Director of Communal Engagement at the Orthodox Union and rabbi of Young Israel of Passaic-Clifton, crafted guidance to help mentors strike the proper educational and spiritual balance. Finally, we created a simple, step-by-step framework to help shul leadership implement the program.

We called it Makom Kavuah, reflecting the belief that every child deserves a place in shul.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are among the few times when virtually everyone in our community comes to shul. Imagine if every congregation had a Makom Kavuah program, letting single parents and their children know they belong. Imagine the spiritual and social impact. Making this vision a reality is not complicated.

Most shuls already ask members to reserve seats for the Yamim Noraim. Can your shul add one small checkbox asking whether a family would appreciate a Shul Mentor during davening? Of course it can. That small box may

change a life.

Rabbi Sarel Malitzky of Congregation Ohr Torah implemented Makom Kavuah in his shul last year, promoting it broadly throughout his community. After Yom Tov, he told me that not a single parent had used the program. “But,” he added, “two women, one divorced and one widowed, both with children no longer living at home, told me that for the first time in their lives, they felt seen in shul.”

As shuls begin preparing their Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur registrations, now is the time to act. Makom Kavuah is simple, free, and capable of having life-altering impact. Please join us in ensuring that every child has a Makom Kavuah. ■

To receive the Makom Kavuah toolkit or to learn more please email [kolechad@ou.org](mailto:kolechad@ou.org).

## Personalities and Perspectives

# Creating Community for Singles Over 40

by Yaakov Langer

Loneliness doesn't always look the way people imagine it. Sometimes it is not an elderly person sitting alone or someone completely disconnected from the world. Sometimes it is a successful, thoughtful person sitting in a Manhattan apartment on Friday night with nowhere to go.

Over and over, Shira kept hearing the same thing from people she met throughout New York's Jewish community.

“I'm lonely.”

Not with drama or desperation, just quietly and honestly.

What surprised her was who was saying it. The people she met were intelligent, socially capable, professionally successful, and deeply interesting. Many had active lives, careers, hobbies, and friends. Yet beneath all of that was a quieter reality: they felt isolated.

And the more people she met, the more she realized this was not an individual problem. It was an entire population quietly slipping through the cracks.

## Starting Over

Shira's own journey into this world began after her divorce.

Living in a family-oriented New Jersey suburb, she often felt there was no obvious place for someone in her stage of life. About a year and a half ago, encouraged by her therapist to expand her social network, she began spending Shabbat in Manhattan.

At first, the experience felt transformative.

“All of a sudden, I felt seen again,” she says.

She found communal meals, vibrant synagogues, and other singles navigating similar experiences. For the first time in years, she felt connected to Jewish communal life again. But over time, she noticed something strange.

Most of the programming and infrastructure she encountered was built for Jews in their twenties and thirties. Once people aged out of those communities, there seemed to be very little waiting for them on the other side.

“I kept asking people, ‘Where do people go after 40?’” she recalls. “And nobody really had an answer.”

At first, she assumed she simply had not found the right community yet. But as she continued meeting people, the same themes kept resurfacing: isolation, disconnection, and long Shabbatot spent alone.

What struck her most was that these were not just a handful of isolated cases. There were hundreds of people experiencing the same thing.

“There are so many events for younger people,” she explains. “You know where to go in your twenties and thirties. But there didn’t seem to be that infrastructure for older singles.”

Most of the programming and infrastructure she encountered was built for Jews in their twenties and thirties. Once people aged out of those communities, there seemed to be very little waiting for them on the other side.

### **The Friday Night Problem**

The loneliness became especially pronounced on Shabbat.

“Summer Shabbat is really long,” she says. “And when you’re sitting home alone week after week, it becomes deeply isolating.”

Even when communal meals existed, many people found them intimidating. Walking into a room full of families or established social circles alone could feel overwhelming. Many preferred

staying home over risking the discomfort of feeling out of place.

Shira realized the problem was not simply a lack of events. It was a lack of consistent, welcoming spaces where people could build familiarity and community over time.

So she decided to create one herself.

### **Building Something New**

Her first event was a Shabbat dinner hosted in partnership with Lincoln Square Synagogue. She intentionally designed it for Jews in their forties, fifties, and sixties, an age demographic she felt was often overlooked.

Ninety-two people attended. “There was this incredible energy in the room,” she says. “People were talking, smiling, connecting. It was beautiful to watch.”

That first dinner quickly became something much larger. What began as a single WhatsApp group evolved into three groups with more than 1,000 members combined. Shira began organizing large Shabbat dinners, smaller in-home meals, restaurant outings, brunches, cultural events, walking groups, and social gatherings throughout the city.

Her focus, however, was never primarily matchmaking. “I’m not a magician,” she says with a laugh. “I don’t think I’m

necessarily the person to solve dating for people over 40.”

What she does believe in is connection. “I think relationships of all kinds are built through repeated interaction,” she explains. “Friendships, dating, community. People become comfortable with each other over time.”

That philosophy shaped everything she built. Rather than one-time events, she wanted recurring spaces where people could repeatedly encounter familiar faces and slowly develop real relationships.

### **Feeling Seen Again**

The impact has been significant. People who once spent every Friday night alone now regularly attend meals and gatherings. Some have formed friendships. Some have dated. Others simply feel they have somewhere to belong again.

“A lot of people tell me they finally feel seen,” she says. What makes the issue especially painful, she believes, is that many older singles feel invisible within communities that otherwise care deeply about connection and belonging.

The Jewish community, she explains, does an extraordinary job supporting certain stages of life: young professionals, newlyweds, families with children. But older singles,



widows, divorced individuals, and others who do not fit traditional family structures are often unintentionally overlooked.

“People assume that if you’re older, your social life is already established,” she says. “But over time, many people’s networks shrink dramatically.”

She is quick to emphasize that this issue extends far beyond singles over 40. “We have widows, widowers, people without children, people without partners,” she says. “There are so many people who don’t fit the traditional structure and end up isolated.”

### **Lowering the Bar**

The solution, she believes, does not always require massive communal initiatives. Sometimes it starts much smaller.

A coffee meetup after shul.

A walking group.

Inviting someone to join errands.

A shared meal.

“We need lower-pressure ways for people to connect,” she says. “Connection doesn’t always have to be some huge production.”

She believes people seeking connection must be willing to push through discomfort and take emotional risks themselves.

“It takes courage to walk into a room where you don’t know anyone,” she says. “I know that because I did it myself.”

Shira also believes that more people can step up. Quick to downplay her own capabilities, she is adamant that anyone can do the work that she does. And she hopes that more people roll up their sleeves to do so.

Her experience organizing events leaves her deeply optimistic.

She hears regularly from people who once spent every Friday night alone and are now texting friends plans for Shabbos. Familiar faces have started becoming actual friendships. Some people who were initially too intimidated to attend events now regularly show up and bring

others with them.

Part of that optimism comes from watching the broader Jewish community slowly recognize people who previously felt forgotten. Synagogues and organizations have increasingly begun creating programming for older singles and more inclusive communal spaces. As one indication of a shift in mindset, the **Orthodox Union's Kol Echad** has provided back-end support for Shira's programming, enabling her to focus her attention where she is needed most.

"It's not just about events," she says. "It's about people feeling like they matter. People tell me all the time that they finally feel seen. That they finally feel like they matter to the community again."

### Not Meant to Be Alone

At its core, her work is not really about social programming. It is about reminding people that they are not alone.

In a city filled with millions of people, that reminder can change everything.

"We are social creatures," Shira says. "We are not supposed to live isolated from each other." And maybe that is the larger lesson underneath all of this. Most people are carrying loneliness far more quietly than we realize.

Sometimes all it takes to change that is a text message. An invitation. A shared meal. Someone willing to create a space and say: you belong here too. ■

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NYC Jewish Singles (40s, 50s, & 60s) WhatsApp group:  
<http://bit.ly/JewishSingles40s50s60s>

NJ Jewish Singles (40s, 50s, & 60s) WhatsApp group:  
<https://bit.ly/NJewishSingles40s50s60s>

NY/NJ Jewish Singles (35-55) WhatsApp group:  
<https://bit.ly/JewishSingles35-55>

IG @Jewish.Singles.Events

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Yaakov Langer is the founder of Living L'chaim and the "Inspiration for the Nation."

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# Minhagim After Divorce

Should a Divorcee Keep the Customs of Her Ex-Husband?

by Rabbi Moshe Walter

A divorcee recently asked whether she could discontinue the custom of abstaining from eating gebroks (matzah meal or other mixtures of matzah and hot water) on Pesach, which had been her ex-husband's custom, and return to her family's custom of eating gebroks. The divorcee wanted to once again enjoy her family's kneidalach, matzah brei, and matzah pizza - foods she had not eaten during her fifteen-year marriage. May she drop the custom of not eating gebroks?

Consider the reverse situation as well. An Ashkenazi divorcee asked whether she could retain her Sephardic ex-husband's custom of eating kitniyos on Pesach. She is uninterested in returning to the Ashkenazi custom of refraining from kitniyos and prefers to continue eating rice, beans, and corn, which are important staples in her diet. May she continue following the custom of her Sephardic ex-husband?

Throughout the year, similar questions arise as well. Is a divorcee required to continue waiting the amount of time her ex-husband waited between meat and milk, or should she return to her family's custom? What is the halachah regarding a divorcee who continues to keep her ex-



husband's practice of waiting seventy-two minutes after sunset before ending Shabbos? Must she continue that practice? What about a divorcee whose ex-husband followed a lenient ruling regarding checking fruits and vegetables for bugs? Is she now required to learn a different halachic method for checking produce?

## The Answer: It Depends

Interestingly, we do not find a significant amount of rabbinic or responsa literature in the writings of the Rishonim, Acharonim, or contemporary sefarim that directly addresses this question. The primary source that does discuss this issue is a responsum of the Tashbetz, Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, the

renowned fifteenth-century halachic authority.

The Tashbetz writes that the answer depends on whether the woman has children from her ex-husband. If she does not have children, she should return to her family's customs, as there is nothing binding her to the customs of her ex-husband. However, if she does have children, she should preserve her ex-husband's customs.

The Tashbetz explains that the basis for his ruling stems from the Torah law and Chazal's interpretation regarding a woman married to a Kohen whose husband passes away. If the woman does not have children, she may no longer eat terumah, the special gift designated for Kohanim. Since her husband, the Kohen, is no longer alive, she no longer retains the rights associated with the family of Kohanim. However, if she has children from her husband, the Kohen, she may continue eating terumah due to her children's status as Kohanim.

The Tashbetz brings an additional rabbinic source to support this assertion and concludes that children are the determining factor in how a divorcee should

conduct herself regarding the customs and practices of her ex-husband. Because the children follow their father's customs, the mother should ideally maintain those same practices alongside them. (Responsa Tashbetz 3:179. The Tashbetz notes that this same principle applies to a widow as well.)

Thus, in the cases mentioned above, it would generally be appropriate for a divorcee to maintain her ex-husband's customs regarding kashrus, Shabbos, and Pesach in order to remain aligned with her children's practices. Indeed, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv reportedly ruled in accordance with the opinion of the Tashbetz. (Tal Imrasi, Toras Minhagei Issur, klal 16 seif 4, footnotes 13-14. The opinion of the Tashbetz is also codified in Sefer Kol Nidrei, chapter 77:7.)

However, there are exceptions to this rule. For example, if there are lenient customs of her ex-husband that the divorcee wishes to be more stringent about, and the change would not dramatically affect the children's practices, such a change may be permitted. Additionally, in situations where maintaining a particular stringency would be overly burdensome, *hataras nedarim* (annulment of the practice as a *neder*) may be appropriate.

Beyond the halachic importance of this ruling, it also contains significant practical wisdom. The

struggles and challenges faced by children of divorce are obvious, and anything that can provide continuity, familiarity, and stability is invaluable. A divorcee with children who maintains the practices, customs, and halachic standards of the home can help foster a critical sense of consistency and emotional stability for her children's well-being.

While many divorcees understandably wish to leave behind the customs associated with a former marriage and begin anew, it is important to appreciate both the halachic considerations and the practical sensitivities underlying this ruling. There is no doubt that, at times, continuing to follow one's ex-

husband's customs may feel difficult, while at other times it may feel easier or even beneficial.

I cannot stress enough the importance of discussing these important questions with a competent Rav who can provide both halachic guidance and the sensitivity such situations deserve. May Hashem bless all those navigating these challenges with *brachah*, *nachas*, *siyata dishmaya*, and *simchah*. ■

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.

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# Egg Freezing with Halacha and Hope

by Rabbi Elan Segelman



Rabbi Elan Segelman

In many Jewish communities today, much attention has been given to the ongoing “shidduch crisis” and the growing number of single women navigating their twenties, thirties, and forties while still searching for the right person with whom to build a home. Behind this broader communal conversation lies another quieter and deeply personal reality: fertility. Many women find themselves carrying not only the emotional challenge of prolonged singlehood, but also the awareness that the years of optimal fertility continue to pass regardless of where they are in life.

At the same time, these women are not “putting life on hold.” They are building careers, contributing to their communities, supporting family members, pursuing personal growth, and continuing to search thoughtfully and sincerely for the right relationship. Egg freezing has therefore emerged within the Jewish community not as a rejection of marriage or family, but as an attempt to preserve future possibilities while life continues unfolding. Increasingly, rabbanim,

physicians, and fertility organizations recognize that this conversation is not simply medical. It touches biology, halacha, emotional well-being, and questions of emunah and bitachon in profound ways.

Understanding the biological reality is an important part of the conversation. Women are born with all the eggs they will ever have, and over time, both the quantity and quality of those eggs naturally decline. While every woman’s fertility journey is unique, age remains one of the most significant factors affecting fertility potential. Fertility generally begins to decline more noticeably in the mid-to-late thirties and continues thereafter. It is therefore advisable for women in their early 30’s to explore egg freezing.

Egg freezing, also known as oocyte cryopreservation, allows a woman to preserve younger, healthier eggs for potential future use. The process generally begins with approximately ten to twelve days of hormonal injections designed to stimulate the ovaries to mature multiple eggs simultaneously. During this period, the patient undergoes close monitoring through bloodwork and ultrasound imaging so her fertility specialist can carefully track hormone levels and follicle development. Once the eggs reach maturity, the woman undergoes a brief outpatient retrieval procedure under sedation, during which the eggs are collected and frozen for future use.

Modern freezing technology has advanced dramatically over the past decade, significantly improving the reliability and success of egg preservation. While egg freezing can never guarantee a future pregnancy, it can meaningfully preserve reproductive potential, particularly when eggs are frozen at younger ages. For many women, egg freezing provides something deeply valuable

emotionally: a sense of time and possibility. It allows them to continue pursuing the right relationship thoughtfully and patiently, without feeling that each passing year necessarily closes another opportunity for building the family they hope for.

Alongside the medical considerations, egg freezing also presents important halachic questions, particularly regarding Shabbos. Because fertility treatment operates according to the body's biological timing, injections, monitoring appointments, and bloodwork could potentially coincide with Shabbos, creating understandable concern for women seeking to balance halachic commitment with medical necessity.

For example, the injections themselves involve several halachic considerations. Medications may need to be mixed, syringes assembled, and injections administered during a very specific medical window. In many situations, contemporary poskim permit these injections when necessary for fertility treatment. One important factor is that these injections are generally administered subcutaneously rather than directly into a vein; therefore, certain classic concerns associated with blood extraction do not apply. While every individual situation should be discussed with a competent halachic authority, the broader halachic approach has generally been understanding and



supportive of facilitating fertility treatment in permissible ways.

Bloodwork and monitoring, which take place continuously throughout the treatment process, can present additional halachic and logistical challenges as well. Hormone levels often need to be checked on very specific days, and delaying bloodwork or monitoring can sometimes compromise an entire treatment cycle. Through years of working closely with rabbanim, physicians, and fertility clinics, PUAH has helped develop practical solutions that allow women to continue necessary treatment while remaining sensitive to halachic concerns. In certain communities, for example, arrangements can be made for a non-Jewish phlebotomist or nurse to come directly to the patient's home on Shabbos, perform the blood draw there, and ensure timely delivery to the laboratory so the cycle can proceed uninterrupted. These accommodations reflect a

broader principle within halacha: a deep commitment to balancing medical responsibility with human dignity and compassion.

Another major halachic consideration surrounding egg freezing is hashgacha (rabbinic supervision) within fertility laboratories. During the fertility process, a woman's eggs are retrieved, labeled, frozen, thawed, and transferred through multiple laboratory stages. Some poskim encourage, and others even require, supervision protocols to ensure absolute identification integrity and eliminate even the slightest possibility of error or mix-up.

These questions deserve to be acknowledged seriously and compassionately. Yet Jewish tradition has long embraced the partnership between human effort and divine blessing. We do not view medicine as standing in opposition to faith. On the contrary, we understand that Hashem works through the

the natural world, including through physicians, scientific discovery, and medical advancement.

One powerful way to frame this idea is to recognize the historical moment in which we live. If Hashem did not want humanity to have access to fertility preservation and reproductive medicine, these technologies simply would not exist. A woman born in 1902 did not have access to egg freezing, IVF, or modern fertility care. But women living today were born into a generation in which these opportunities do exist. The fact that fertility medicine emerged in our era and not one hundred years ago reflects that this is the generation in which Hashem allowed these possibilities to become available.

Using appropriate medical treatment is therefore not a rejection of emunah. It can instead be viewed as an embrace of the tools and opportunities that Hashem placed into the world. The doctors, medications, and scientific breakthroughs are not replacing Hashem. They are part of the system through which Hashem allows bracha to enter the world.

At its best, the conversation around egg freezing should not be driven by panic or fear, but by knowledge, dignity, halachic sensitivity, and faith. When approached thoughtfully, fertility preservation can represent not a departure from Jewish values, but an expression of them: embracing

human responsibility while recognizing that ultimately all bracha comes from Hashem.

PUAH has become a vital address for women navigating these questions, helping bridge the worlds of medicine, halacha, and emotional support with extraordinary sensitivity and professionalism. By working closely with rabbanim, physicians, and fertility specialists, PUAH helps ensure that women never feel forced to choose between medical excellence and halachic integrity.

In many ways, that is the deeper message of this entire conversation: that with the right

guidance, support, and perspective, women can move forward with confidence, clarity, and hope, knowing that pursuing responsible hishtadlus and holding onto emunah are not contradictions, but partners. ■

Rabbi Segelman serves as the Rabbinic Director of PUAH USA, where he helps individuals and couples navigate fertility treatment through the lens of halacha and modern medicine.

In 2016, Rabbi Segelman became the Rabbinic Educator at New York Medical College and Touro College of Dental Medicine. In 2021, he moved to Los Angeles, where he currently serves as the Rabbi of Young Israel of Hancock Park.

## Inspiration and Jewish Life

# How to Support Someone Going Through Divorce

by Staff Writer

Sarah stared at her phone for ten minutes before responding to a text. Not because she was busy. Not because she didn't appreciate the message. She simply didn't have the emotional energy to answer.

Across town, David sat in his car outside Bais Din, preparing himself for another difficult hearing. Meanwhile, Rachel declined yet another Shabbat invitation. She wanted to go, but the thought of answering questions and sitting alone

among couples felt overwhelming.

Divorce is more than a legal process. It can shake a person's sense of stability, identity, family, and community. For friends and relatives, it can be difficult to know how to help. The good news is that support rarely requires profound wisdom. More often, it requires consistency, sensitivity, and a willingness to simply be there.

The most meaningful support is often remarkably ordinary: a text message, a cup of coffee, a walk around the neighborhood, or an invitation to join you for a meal. Even if they don't always respond, knowing someone continues to reach out can be a tremendous source of comfort.

Just as important is the ability to listen. Divorce often leaves people feeling unheard. Resist the urge to immediately offer solutions or explanations. Sometimes the most supportive response is simply, "That sounds really hard."

Avoid taking sides or becoming involved in the conflict. Divorce stories are complicated, and your role is not to be a judge or investigator. Offer compassion rather than commentary and respect your friend's pace. Some days they may want to talk for hours; other days they may want to discuss anything except the divorce.

When offering help, be specific. Rather than saying, "Let me know if you need anything," offer to bring dinner, help with childcare, or meet for coffee after a difficult

court date. Small acts of practical support can make a significant difference.

One of the hidden challenges of divorce is isolation. After a few declined invitations, people often stop asking. Keep inviting them to Shabbat meals, community events, and social gatherings. The invitation itself sends an important message: You still belong.

Protect their privacy and stay out of the conflict. Don't pass along updates about an ex-spouse, and don't involve yourself in legal or mediation matters. Even well-intentioned involvement can reopen wounds or complicate an already difficult situation.

As time passes, continue checking in. The support often floods in at the beginning and then fades. Yet birthdays, anniversaries, Yom Tovim, and court dates can remain painful long after others assume the crisis has passed.

Most importantly, remember the bigger picture. Divorce is one chapter, not the entire story. The person sitting across from you is still the same person with strengths, dreams, talents, and a future ahead. Sometimes one of the greatest gifts you can offer is helping them remember that. ■

Content adapted with permission from the United Synagogue's Letzadech/a pamphlet, developed in collaboration with Our Kids First and Jewish Family Centre.

- 1 Be Present**
  - Send a text.
  - Invite them for coffee.
  - Check in regularly.
  - Don't disappear if they don't respond.
- 2 Listen, Don't Fix**
  - Let them talk.
  - Avoid unsolicited advice.
  - "That sounds really hard" is enough.
- 3 Stay Neutral**
  - Don't take sides.
  - Avoid gossip and speculation.
  - Offer compassion, not commentary.
- 4 Respect Their Pace**
  - Some people want to talk; others don't.
  - Let them lead.
  - Be patient on difficult days.
- 5 Offer Specific Help**

Instead of "Let me know if you need anything," try:

  - Bring a meal.
  - Help with childcare.
  - Invite them out for a distraction.
- 6 Make Room for Every Feeling**
  - Grief.
  - Relief.
  - Anger.
  - Hope.

All of these emotions can coexist.
- 7 Keep Including Them**
  - Continue inviting them to meals, events, and outings.
  - Even if they say no.
  - Remind them they belong.
- 8 Protect Their Privacy**
  - Keep their story confidential.
  - Don't share details without permission.
- 9 Stay Out of the Conflict**
  - Don't pass messages.
  - Don't share updates about an ex.
  - Do not get involved in the mediation/ legal proceedings.
  - Your role is to support your friend, not to act as a mediator, advocate, or legal advisor.
- 10 Reflect Their Strength**
  - Acknowledge their resilience.
  - Avoid clichés and platitudes.
  - A sincere "I'm proud of how you're handling this" goes a long way.
- 11 Be There for the Long Haul**
  - Support often fades too quickly.
  - Check in on birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and court dates.
- 12 Remember the Children**
  - Don't discuss the divorce in front of them.
  - Be a calm, caring adult presence.
- 13 Encourage Professional Support**
  - Therapists
  - Coaches
  - Rabbis
  - Support organizations
- 14 Remember the Bigger Picture**

Divorce is one chapter, not the whole story. Your friend is still the same person—with strengths, dreams, and a future ahead.

# Master Matchmaker Fellowship: Turning Passion for Shidduchim Into Success

by Rebbetzin Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky



Most matchmakers never planned to become matchmakers. They make one suggestion, it works, and suddenly friends begin calling to ask if they know of others to set up. Before long, they are accumulating profiles, notes, making introductions, losing sleep over daters they would like ideas for, and wondering whether they are really doing this right.

What if more people had not only the heart for this work, but the skills to match? Shidduchim are too important to rely upon good intentions alone.

In recent years, many matchmakers have begun asking similar questions: How can I expand my network and make more targeted suggestions? Which skills do I need to improve to be more successful? How can I maximize results?

To address these needs, YUConnects, with support from the Kol Echad Department of the

OU, developed the Master Matchmaker Fellowship (MMF), a program designed to provide structured training, mentorship, and peer collaboration for both new and experienced matchmakers.

Recent findings from an Orthodox Union (OU) study show that respondents who married between 2010 and 2023 were far more likely than those in previous decades to have had a matchmaker involved at some point during their courtship.

Traditionally, matchmakers are engaged to meet with daters and suggest potential matches. Increasingly, however, daters are also turning to experienced matchmakers to facilitate introductions that were originally suggested by friends or family, believing the process will be more effective with professional guidance.

Whether matchmakers are generating match ideas themselves or helping advance introductions proposed by others, their growing involvement tells an important story: matchmakers are playing an increasingly significant role in helping people build Jewish homes.

At the same time, the research reveals three major challenges:

1. Demand exceeds capacity. There are simply not enough matchmakers with enough time to meet the growing need.
2. Training is limited. Many people involved in making shidduchim are deeply caring and committed but do not have access to formal training or mentorship.
3. Professional development is lacking. Even experienced matchmakers need opportunities to sharpen their skills, learn new approaches, and grow alongside peers.

There is another critical piece to this picture: The research finds many marriages are suggested by a friend or family member, who are not official matchmakers. These “dabblers” care deeply and want to contribute meaningfully, but they, too, need guidance on how to best bring their match ideas to fruition.

The fellowship was designed for a broad audience, from dabblers to seasoned matchmakers. Virtual modules are taught by experienced matchmakers, therapists, coaches, and rabbinic

authorities. Topics range from practical systems for organizing information efficiently to learning how to build trust with their daters.

One of the most important elements of effective matchmaking is networking. Successful matchmakers need trusted colleagues with whom they can brainstorm, consult, and collaborate. This is why the fellowship's cohort-based structure is so valuable. Beyond the formal curriculum, participants build meaningful and productive relationships and expand their matchmaking networks.

The two recent pilot cohorts included participants from across the United States, Canada, and Israel. The fellowship's goal is more than simply training individual matchmakers to be more effective, but to cultivate a more successful matchmaking community.

### **What Participants Are Saying**

The impact of the fellowship is best expressed by those who experienced it firsthand: "I use the content I gained all the time. As I speak with people, different things pop into my head, and I know I got it from here."

"I've used probably dozens of tips from this fellowship just in the last 72 hours. I feel more confident in my ability to guide the singles in my network."

"I learned so much — from your

organizational suggestions to how to phrase things. I now have more couples dating than I did before I took this course."

These reflections highlight something powerful: when matchmakers feel equipped having the right training and tools, they can immediately put them into practice and maximize their effectiveness.

### **Looking Ahead**

If we want to strengthen the matchmaking ecosystem, we need to invest in the people doing this essential work. Matchmaking is some of the most personalized, thoughtful, and impactful work in our community, and those who dedicate themselves to it deserve

**Many people involved in making shidduchim are deeply caring and committed but do not have access to formal training or mentorship.**

meaningful support. The Master Matchmaker Fellowship was created to meet this need. More than a training program, it is an investment in both new and experienced matchmakers gifting them the skills, structure, mentorship, and peer network to succeed and grow.

As demand for thoughtful introductions and relationship facilitation continues to increase,

the fellowship is expanding the community of people equipped to make targeted matches. By developing matchmakers and strengthening their connections to one another, the Master Matchmaker Fellowship is expanding the infrastructure that supports more opportunities for people to find meaningful connections and foster long lasting marriages.

Chazal teach, Kol haboneh bayis echad b'Yisrael k'ilu banah achas mei'churbos Yerushalayim - one who helps build a Jewish home is considered as though they have rebuilt one of the ruins of Jerusalem. Every successful shidduch represents not only the beginning of a new family, but a priceless contribution to the future of the Jewish People. By investing in matchmakers, we are investing in countless future homes, families, and generations yet to come. ■

Visit [yuconnects.com/MMF](https://yuconnects.com/MMF) to learn more and apply for a future cohort.

Nineteen years ago, Rebbetzin Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky helped launch YUConnects, to increase opportunities for men and women interested in dating and relationship building. She holds both a MSW and Ph.D. from Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work.

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