We Are Not a ‘Crisis’: Changing the Singlehood Narrative

I still remember where I was standing in my seminary beit midrash when a friend of mine approached me with “my husband” in mind. She ventured into a long explanation about why this was the *perfect* match for me, how we have so much in common, and how it will be all settled right after our return to America. “You won’t have to shidduch date,” she gushed, “I have found your *bashert.”*

This story is all too familiar to me. Why? Because everyone means well. They make bold and dramatic statements in order to excite the single and receive their coveted “yes.” So, while my journey into the shidduch world began with this slow and steady build-up, it coincided with an all-too-quick crash, when I came home to find out that “my husband” was engaged to someone else. We never even went on a first date.

I would be lying if I told you that this was the most crushing moment of my shidduch years. It was only the first of many let-downs in over a decade of one-and-dones, two-and-throughs, and “serious” relationships that just didn’t work out. Hundreds of “perfect match” suggestions, shadchan meet-and-greets, singles Shabbatonim, “young professional events,” and an endless roller coaster of emotions. When I entered the dating world, I had this image of what my future “should” be like. I went to all the “right” schools and camps, had a curated line-up of reputable references, and of

course, hit all the right *hashkafic* notes. I was not out of the box, eclectic, or off the beaten path. I was healthy, took care of myself, was from a well-regarded family, and had a great group of friends. I did everything "right" but did not achieve the results I so desperately sought.

But after years in this stage, my mindset has completely changed. So much so, that if posed with the choice, I would do this all over again.

Make no mistake: I am excited and eager to meet my spouse. But while I am single, I choose to live a life filled with aspirations and ambitions beyond "getting results" in dating. I live life to get positive results in *myself*.

This past decade shaped me into who I am today. A struggle as public as this challenged me to deepen my relationships with friends, family, Hashem and myself. I have been forced to confront others, and in turn, face my relationships with family and friends through vulnerability and uncomfortable conversations. I have been hurt in the dating process, yet have worked tirelessly on my faith, and am grateful that my relationship with Hashem has never wavered. I have been confronted with myself, and as frightening as that might have been, I am glad I have gotten to know myself now, better than ever,

To have learned through countless relationships and to reflect on life, love, and marriage, not as an end goal, but as one element along the journey of life, is something I consider my greatest privilege. I would never wish this *length* of a challenge on anyone, but I am grateful that this is mine.

And that's why I am here, writing this letter. Not as a fresh shidduch dater, but as someone who has grown to see her single years as a blessing, not a curse. Singlehood should not be looked at with dread, fear, and trepidation, and no single should ever be made to feel "in crisis." My intention here is to try and change the narrative of singlehood—not only for the singles but for all who interact with them.

After years of unsolicited advice, I now share some in return.

To the Jewish community: We can and *have* to do better. The expectations placed upon young adults to immediately marry and start a family are extremely overwhelming. Why are we pushing our young adults to get married with little to no income, and very often, insufficient time to figure out their individual life aspirations? Why is there an assumption that there is something *wrong* with someone who is "older" but still single? Jews are much more than their relationship status. The next time you are with someone single, focus on them as a person. Ask them about their roommates, their commute to work, and their family. Celebrate people's *personal* accomplishments, not just engagements and weddings. Applaud singles for enduring the process until they find the *right* partner, not just settling for *any* partner.

To the shadchanim: We see your dedication and devotion to creating happy and healthy homes, and we appreciate you. But if a single expresses disinterest at a suggested match, please understand that this is *our* future. Choosing a marriage partner is a choice that lasts well beyond the fanfare and celebration. It's a commitment meant to last the rest of our lives. Trust that if we are dating, we *do* want to get married. We have the right to set a standard for ourselves and not settle in fear of being labeled "picky." Think about the single and respect their decisions, even if that means the match is

not perfect. Don't focus on what the single is "throwing away" rather encourage them to know their worth and find what they believe is right for themselves, while offering your advice in kind. Be our cheerleader, and please, don't give up on us.

To the seminary and yeshiva educators: You are instrumental in our eyes. You have a tremendous opportunity to teach young adults, merely 17- and 18-year-olds, about life and adulthood, which is way more than just dating and marriage. Teach our youth life skills, educate them on how to be good human beings, and imbue them with the importance of developing a real connection with themselves and with Hashem. Train them in resilience, in prayer, and in giving to others. Speak about the importance of building a family, *coupled* with the immense importance of self-worth, self-esteem, and self-dignity. Be real with our young adults about the challenges of life, about the ups and downs that *will* come their way, and about the importance of being *sameach b'chelko*—happy with their "lot"—day in and day out. Teach them about acceptance of the path that Hashem paves for each and every one of them, even if their timeline might not look like their friends.

To all parents out there: You are wonderful. We love you, and we know that this weighs heavily on your hearts. For years, you provided for us, given us everything we ever needed, and fixed our greatest problems. But the thing is: Being single is not a problem to fix. It might be frustrating and worrisome, but we are not in a "crisis." It's a current and fluid state of life because Hashem has not yet introduced your child to their spouse. Encourage your child to live their best life—to travel, invest in friendships, or continue their studies. Acknowledge their "wins" and ensure they know that you are proud of them, wherever they are in life. Marriage is not a trophy to win or a checkbox to mark off. It is the single greatest decision we will make in our lives, and we want to get it right. We want to have children and bring you pride as grandparents. When it happens, it happens. You are no better or worse a parent if your child is single; there is no correlation.

And finally, to the struggling single: You are awesome. You are strong. You should embrace this time as one of the greatest. A chance to really step back and think about life, love, and relationships, before getting swept up into one. Take the time while you're in a relationship to assess, think, and communicate your needs. And when you're not in a relationship, take the time to appreciate your strengths, worth, and importance in this world. Be confident to end a relationship that is not right for you, and don't tear yourself apart if someone breaks up with you. It only takes one. Speak to Hashem, He will always listen. Seek help and guidance when you need it. Don't be afraid to be alone. Always be yourself. Embrace your friendships and explore new hobbies, places, and experiences. Take opportunities. Know that marriage is a wonderful experience, but if you waste all of your single years, being sad that you're not married, you will have wasted what could have been a wonderful experience as well. Don't sit around waiting for your other "half." *You are whole* just as you are. Embrace life, be happy for others, and be happy for yourself. Have dreams, goals, and life ambitions, outside of marriage. Life is not a race. You are not in competition with anyone, Hashem has created this path for you, and you only. He loves you and has your best interest at heart. Take advantage of the time Hashem has given you to work on *you*, so that one day, you can show Him the incredible version of yourself that He knew you would become. You are not a crisis and in time, it will happen for you. You can do this. We are all rooting for you.