



Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family

THE NOAH SYNDROME

Cynthia

I know that although they want me present and consider me part of the family, they are all wondering "What's wrong with her? Why isn't she married?"

Thanksgiving is coming soon and the extended family is gathering once again. My mother's remaining siblings and their children, children-in-law and grandchildren – a group of 40+ people. My cousin has volunteered to host a buffet dinner, creating a warm, friendly informal (affordable) setting. She has done a great job in coordinating what each of us will bring, guaranteeing that everyone's favorite dish will be offered.

My first reaction is warm and fuzzy, remembering how much fun such gatherings were when we were kids. We cousins are very close in age and really enjoyed getting together. We made every family occasion into a party. I am so pleased that my cousin has taken on the role of family matriarch, as this is way too much for our parents.

But these are memories of my childhood. I know that I will be the odd person out at this event. My cousins will be there with their spouses and children. The event will focus on the kids, over whom the grandparents will kvell – each one is obviously more brilliant and more talented than the next. I know that although they want me present and consider me part of the family, they are all wondering "What's wrong with her? Why isn't she married?"

The older members of the family will verbalize it, while I know that my cousins are thinking it. "What's wrong with her?" Is going through their minds. The conversation will have little that relates in any way to my life. They cannot begin to imagine that I can find fulfillment in my profession, friends and volunteer work. What kind of life is that for a grown-up Jewish woman? They live in a world that I do not understand, one in which women do not do things alone. It makes no sense to me.

So, much as I want to be present and will enjoy seeing my family, I dread the holiday and wish I could find somewhere else to be. They have no idea that I am uncomfortable. If they knew, they would have no idea how to make the situation better.