



Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family

THE NOAH SYNDROME

Ella Alone

"People would often ask me if things were getting better... We get better when we recover from an illness, but we do not recover after losing a partner who never comes back, as our health hopefully does."

My name is Ella. I am a widow. When my husband died suddenly with no warning, I found myself alone after 23 years of marriage. I was alone in the decisions I had to make raising our two daughters and helping them cope with their loss and how to go on with their lives. I was alone making the financial decisions necessary to protect us as a family, and alone as a single in the couples world of our (and now my) social network.

The last "alone" was the most difficult. Let me explain and perhaps help others in how we treat those who have to cope with the loss of a life partner.

People would greet me after services at our synagogue and ask me if "things were getting better." I wanted, quite literally, to scream and tell them that things wouldn't get better, but rather, that I was adjusting to my "new" life. We get better when we recover from an illness, but we do not recover after losing a partner who never comes back -- as our health hopefully does.

I felt uncomfortable when I joined other couples at dinner, because instead of splitting the bill as we did when I was there with my husband, they always insisted on treating me. They meant well but it made me feel like they felt sorry for me – that alone I could not take care of myself.

- Why not just split the bill by the number of people, instead of by the number of couples?
- Why not charge per person at social events instead of by couples?
- Why not invite your single friends with an invitation that reads their name and "guest" to weddings and life cycle celebrations?
- It is nice to have someone (if you wish) who could dance with you instead of sitting alone at the table while all the couples get up to dance.
- It would be nice to be seated at a mixed table instead of one with the other widows or singles.
- It would be nice to have a per person price for patrons and benefactors instead of the typical two tickets included price that is really targeted for couples and that makes a widow feel uncomfortable.

People mean well but we need to think carefully about our actions and words toward those who find themselves suddenly (or even continuously) alone. Good friends continue to include me in their dinners and parties or an evening at a play, concert or a movie. But with careful consideration they can make a widow feel more comfortable in social situations. They could make me feel like I fit in rather than am merely an *extra*.