



Women's League for Conservative Judaism

**Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family**

## **THE NOAH SYNDROME**

**Madelyn**

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I suppose one of the reasons I prolonged my marriage was because, intuitively, I had the sense that I wasn't going to fit in when my husband and I separated/divorced. Even though at the time of my divorce I had a young child, and we had been active in our small synagogue, these factors were not enough to bridge the gap of my being newly-single. It was almost as if no one had ever seen a family such as ours before.

Our rabbi was young and friendly with the requisite wife and four children with whom we were close. While I pride myself on conducting myself appropriately and without undue drama, the rabbi said to me that he had absolutely no idea that our marriage had been in distress. He was troubled by our situation, and no doubt because of our relationship with him, was not especially helpful to either of us as we navigated our way through the mess. Though undoubtedly there were counselors in the city where we lived, and a university or two with counseling services that might have been useful, the rabbi made no effort to refer me/us to them. After the split, my son and I sort of melted into the woodwork until we moved away.

That turned out to be a surprise as well. We moved to an area where I had many close relatives, and I had always wanted to be there. After the excitement of having us around wore off and the routine set in, reality hit me: I was a single woman in a good-sized family that until that point was mostly all couples. My cousin, who was widowed, didn't seem to be in the same category as me. *Was I a pariah?* It took me the longest time to figure out that I was a threat. Me? One of my aunts (God rest her soul) was on the lookout for a man for me. As if a single woman couldn't navigate through life without a man, and as if all single women are potential husband-stealers! Perhaps others saw my divorced status as an option (for better or for worse) to their couple-hood.

But in the final analysis, all I wanted was to create a good environment for my son and to be with family and friends who understood me. Understanding, unfortunately, often is more easily said than done.