

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family

THE NOAH SYNDROME

Introduction

When God instructed Noah to take animals in pairs – male and female – into the ark, the implication was understood. The pairing of male and female perpetuates the species. This pairing was ritualized early on by the rite of marriage.

To many minds, and certainly within the Jewish community, marriage is the gold standard. This notion is exemplified when an infant is named and his/her parents are wished that “*Your child be raised to [a life of] Torah, chuppah (marriage) and ma’asim tovim (good deeds).*”

The problem, as we all well know, is that the gold standard has a lot of scuff marks. With nearly half of marriages ending in divorce – and an amazing recently-released statistic, that by the year 2020 almost *half* of the people over 50 will be single – social expectations and prescriptions need to be reassessed.

While there are those who legitimately maintain that marriage = procreation (although Supreme Court Justice Elana Kagen challenged that formulation during arguments about the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act), marriage and family, and even reproduction as we knew it, are undergoing radical transformation. Single parent households, same sex partners, single mothers by choice, and single member households rapidly are changing the social terrain.

Our challenge as members of Women's League for Conservative Judaism is to create social environments that do not regard couples as the exclusive, or even primary, unit of measure. We can begin with some social accommodations to singlehood that might be as simple as asking caterers to set tables in odd, rather than even, numbers. Perhaps we might encourage women to make a gift “shower” for a single friend who is turning 40. We might engage in social advocacy, supporting the repeal of civil laws and benefits that favor married over single households.

Noah kept himself busy counting two by two – but another heroic character in the Bible just a few books later in the Song Deborah proclaimed: “Awake! Awake! Arise to meet the new dawn.”

It's a new dawn for Women's League!

