

Dating & Shalom Bayis

Tips and Tidbits

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Dating for the Divorced

While much attention is placed on the dating scene for young men and women, there are numerous other scenarios and situations that do not get nearly as much focus.

Individuals who may be in different predicaments and not fall into the same category as everyone else are often left wondering where they fall along the spectrum of daters and what can they can do to leverage their dating life. One such example, which we will focus on, is that of someone who is divorced.

In considering situations like these, the person is faced with two elements: navigating their own personal life and navigating through the *shidduch* system. Let us discuss both aspects.

Depending on the age of the divorced individual, there are several key components that are wise to consider being looking to date again. Has enough time passed since the prior relationship? In order to be emotionally fit and ready for a new relationship, any remaining ties and trauma that relate to the previous relationship must be dealt with. While it certainly has formed a part of your life, it is in the past and ends in the past. If your thoughts and feelings still wander there, and they are cause for distress, take more time to recalibrate yourself. The last thing you want is a rebound relationship, where your desire to simply be with someone else sets you up for another unsuitable relationship, because the person does not match you and your judgement is clouded. Take your time.

This is particularly important to stress, because it is quite likely, especially in the case of divorces for young couples, that you will be asked when you are ready to date again. People may even tell you, "You know, you're getting a bit older..." When this happens, listen to yourself. This input is coming from people who either are not privy to the details of your life or simply like giving advice. There is no need to rush. You don't simply want to be married. You want to be married to the right person for you, and there is no timeline. Listen to your inner voice and be confident in who you are. That should be your compass which guides you, not the myriad other opinions circulating around you telling you what they think is best for you.

Additionally, ask yourself, "Why am I ready now to get married? What is different about me now than before?" Depending on the cause to the end of your earlier relationship, you want to take close notice of your development. You inevitably will have grown, and you want to examine what is new about you now. Why did you make the earlier mistakes you did? Why will they not be repeated? If these questions cannot be answered *concretely*, and you merely sense that you've gone through a difficult experience, but can now pick yourself up and move on, you have more work to do. You want to be *crystal clear* what is different about you now, because otherwise, any previous errors made will remain uncorrected.

Moreover, ask someone you trust for honest feedback. What do they tell you about yourself? You are looking for the blunt truth here. No sugarcoating, no niceties, no minimizing. Once you hear the feedback, observe how you react. How do you feel and how do you respond? This is a hugely important consideration, because the ability to take in honest feedback tells you about your maturity. You may be a grown adult, but it is this factor which is the best gauge for your growth. Do you embrace hearing such truth from someone you trust or is it dismissed and argued with? What if they tell you something you don't want to hear? If you view such feedback as criticism instead of a gift, then you are essentially uncomfortable looking at yourself in a mirror. The suggestion: take more time to develop this ability to handle feedback, both positive and negative, and only then begin dating.

Lastly, you want to be realistic as to how your future life could potentially look. Given the specifics of your situation, such as if you have children, you want to have a strong sense of how matters could work. If, for instance, you need to remain settled in one specific city for some time, date people from that city or someone who would be willing to live there. Have this detailed information confirmed before going out with someone, for otherwise, much effort and energy can be put into something which is simply unrealistic. Look to be flexible, but stay within the practical confines of what your life is actually like.

Once all of the above is in place, working your way through the *shidduch* system with *someone you are comfortable with and trust* is very important. You want to ensure that the person you are working with is genuinely someone who cares about you, and is not someone who is working with dozens of other people and simply says, “Yeah, yeah, I can help you...” You have gone through the process of dating, engagement and marriage once, and that should provide you with insight into what works for you. Do not sell yourself out in desperation and take every suggested date that comes your way from just anyone because someone said it will work.

Next, take your time dating. You will likely feel this way anyway and wish to date longer. But remember, despite the perceived race and pressure that exists to get engaged quickly, it is an illusion that brings no good. You cannot rush marrying the person that you will spend the rest of your life with. You know, based on your previous experience, what you don’t want and what you do want, and find that. You may need to adjust your expectations, but never settle and compromise.

Another important question that arises for someone who is divorced and dating is how to express what happened. When prospective dates wish to become more informed about you, they may want to know what precipitated the divorce. When this situation arises, in the early stages of meeting someone and certainly before ever meeting them, a good option is to have one person who you trust and is aware of what has happened speak on your behalf. That can decrease the sensitive and uncomfortable nature of disclosing such personal information early on, and nonetheless be honest and forthright with who you are. If you are asked, you can say something along the lines, “I am more than happy to provide you with the name and number of someone you can address all of your questions and concerns with. Right now, in our relationship, I would prefer not discussing all of that outright.” If the relationship progresses, then you should have grown more comfortable and be capable of disclosing whatever you would like, but this is one way of addressing such concerns early on. The underlying point is that you want to represent yourself *fairly and favorably*.

Find one such person, preferably someone objective and unrelated to you, whom you trust and respect and let them assist you in this regard. It is recommended that you limit this to *one person* who will receive all calls and questions about you, for otherwise, you may become confused as to what exact information is being shared about you, which will make it more difficult to streamline one, singular storyline you tell all prospective matches. Keep it short, simple and the same for anyone who inquires about you.

It is also highly important to consider that the names of references you include on your resume, if you choose to have one, be people you feel comfortable with. If they will be receiving any phone calls about you, it is wise to have a conversation beforehand with them as what information you would *not* like them to share. They can discuss your character, background and many other aspects, but when it comes to your previous relationship, you may want to advise them to tell the person calling, “I am not the person to answer those questions. I can provide you with the name and number of someone who can if you would like.” Let your friends know that you are directing all such questions to one person only, and you request of them to refer such inquiries there and avoid answering any such questions themselves.

Lastly, gain a clear understanding of how matters will work between you and the person who is setting you up with someone else. Whether it be a professional *shadchan* or someone else, you want to be clear on what they can do to actually help you, and where you would like to draw the line and independently reach out and interact with your date. You do not want a *shadchan* to become enmeshed and a voice in the course of how a relationship should progress. Unless you are explicitly seeking their input as a dating coach, the *shadchan* remains someone who is working for you, not the other way around. Unfortunately, when boundaries become blurred between the *shadchan* and either one or both of the dating partners, misunderstanding, pressure and mistakes result that can derail the relationship. Especially in situations with someone who is divorced, you want to be able to relate to your date on a timeline and in a way that suits you. You don’t want the *shadchan* to begin sharing information about you which you are unready to share, regardless of how long you have dated the other person. That is your discretion and decision. Outline your principles and terms before getting to work with a *shadchan* or anyone else, and it will help ensure that your dating experiences steer clear of unnecessary or frustrating incidents.

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