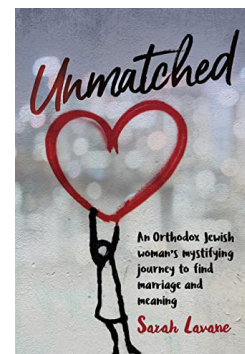




## An Honest Look At *Shidduchim*

By Rosally Saltsman



"It cannot be *Your* will only if I marry, and *my* fault if I don't."

*Unmatched* is a book unmatched in the world of Orthodox Jewish literature. It follows Sarah in her quest for her *bashert* in a very up close and personal way. We are introduced to her dreams and

goals on the marriage front and her suitors who are more or less suitable to meet those goals. It's an inside look at the challenges facing a religious single woman that is at the same time idealistic, amusing, longing, poignant, in the religious world where marriage and children are so pivotal to a happy and meaningful life. At least from the point of view of the people trying to set her up.

"Pre-readers spanning a wide age range of varying hashkafic and marital statuses have told me that the story has resonated with them all because the emotions are pretty universal," says Lavane. "This memoir aims to bring solace and comfort to the *unmatched* as well as foster sensitivity and awareness for the *matched*. Primarily this book hopes to enlighten people that tend to often unwittingly marginalize religious singles. Whether it's a *shadchan*, parents, rabbis, experts, *shuls*, long-married, newly-married or anyone else who just are not aware, or have not had the opportunity to truly comprehend what it's like on the other side."

In a conversational and metaphorical style that is refreshing, Lavane talks about growing up in post-baby boomer America as a religious woman who's trying to find love while not compromising her values. She faces a lot of issues American Jewish women face in a secular and non-Jewish world, especially in her interactions with non-Jewish men

*Unmatched*  
An Orthodox Jewish woman's  
mystifying journey to find  
marriage and meaning

By Sarah Lavane

Sifria Publishing

which are free of a lot of the pressures she faces in her dating life.

The book begins with Lavane's ideas of what marriage is about from a young age. Of course, these include the thoughts all young girls have that they will marry young and start their families with no problem. When that doesn't happen, they remain hopeful despite the many prophecies of doom from family and matchmakers who tend to blame them for their predicament, despite the fact that women who have less stellar resumes marry and have children before them.

One of the things I loved about the book was that instead of using pseudonyms, Lavane uses titles for the men she dates like Yeshiva Guy, Coed Guy, Swell and Singular, as she exposes us to every dating scenario from the ridiculous to the sublime. While not every woman has experienced the kind of nightmarish scenarios Lavane has, it's important to be aware that they are prevalent and that many women experience them. And Lavane presents them for the most part in good humor.

"I hope it gives singles, validation and the feeling of being heard. One of my unmarried pre-readers told me she sobbed when she finished reading the book because although her experiences varied from mine, she finally felt understood."

Lavane expresses a lot of faith even though she

sometimes rails against her fate. But she works hard to learn and internalize the lessons that this situation naturally teaches.

"I would tell my younger self to let go and forgive herself for her mistakes and not allow them to become internal blocks. If she experiences heartache, she should grieve for a short while if she must, but don't wallow or hold on to it for too long. If she has fears or doubts about a potential match, talk it out with a mentor before writing someone off prematurely.

"So much of what happened to me was outside of my control, but the things that were in my control, I should've let go of sooner. Of course, every stage of life has its new challenges and new mistakes to be made."

She is impeccably honest about her pain, her mistakes and her resolutions to work on herself. Lavane teaches us a lot about many of the misconceptions we, as people, have that hold us back in life from true connection.

I think this book will help singles forgive themselves and hopefully teach the family, friends and matchmakers of singles to be more sensitive in their dealings with them. Life does not begin at marriage and those who are not married for whatever reason should be treated with respect, even admiration. The search for one's soulmate is an Odyssey sometimes peopled with the same kind of mythical creatures that Odysseus faced. And while some find their *bashert* right away, many women (and men) have more challenges than others. And those challenges don't reflect on their value as a person.

At the end of the day, Lavane, is a heroine and her story is one of *chizuk*, inspiration and instruction to everyone in the *parsha* and everyone who knows someone in the *parsha*.

"This book is not just for singles. I hope other people will be motivated, eager or curious enough to pick up a copy. If this book cultivates more empathy and less judgment all around, it would have served its purpose."