

Chiburim: Making the right connection

• By RUTH BELOFF

In this digital age of Internet dating, chat rooms and Facebook, communicating with other singles may be easier than ever before – but not necessarily more successful. Finding the right mate is serious business, and a nonprofit organization called Chiburim is making every effort to help singles seal the deal.

Chiburim (Connections) was established three years ago to help singles in Israel meet their potential life partner. Geared for Jewish men and women aged 25 to 45 from all sectors and streams of Israeli society, Chiburim takes a hands-on approach to helping its members find the perfect match.

“The Jewish holidays are a particularly difficult time for single people,” says Yael Shapira, executive director of Chiburim. “They dread Passover, and they start planning how to get away for Purim. At Chiburim, we provide hope for the future and give our members a strong sense of self-confidence.”

The cost of registration is a one-time payment of NIS 180. Each member is assigned a volunteer mentor, or facilitator, who gets to know the person over a three-month period. During that time, the member meets with the mentor once a month and has a weekly phone conversation in which he/she shares his/her likes and dislikes, hopes and desires. Once the mentor has a good sense of who the member is and what he/she is looking for, the mentor searches through Chiburim’s ever-expanding database, seeking potential prospects who meet the member’s personality and criteria. The member is then given the name and can contact that person and see how it goes.

The philosophy of Chiburim is to focus on one connection at a time. Rather than bombard the member with a slew of potential prospects, Chiburim believes in having its members get to know one person at a time as opposed to offering them too many options at once. If the suggested match does not fill the bill, then the mentor proffers the next possibility.

An important element during that three-month period is the mentoring itself. The facilitator provides the member with advice and counseling in terms of interacting with others and helps him/her develop more self-confidence if necessary and ways in which to overcome any obstacles he/she may have in regard to forming meaningful relationships. This mentorship is invaluable in helping to achieve a successful out-

come.

Another important aim of the mentoring process is to help members expand their perspective and be open to more options when it comes to meeting new prospects. For as we well know, sometimes the heart responds in person to somebody one might never have considered on paper.

If after the three-month period a meaningful match has not been struck, he/she is kept in the Chiburim database without having to re-register and remains a viable potential for other singles coming on board.

“They stay in our database until they get married,” says Shapira.

The mentors at Chiburim are men and women from all over the country who volunteer their time and expertise to help singles navigate the dating world. With qualifications ranging from degrees in social work and psychology to warm hearts and good intentions, they all want to help singles meet and marry their ideal significant other.

But it’s not enough to have an academic degree and/or a good heart. The mentors are given training sessions in implementing the philosophy and the techniques that Chiburim espouses.

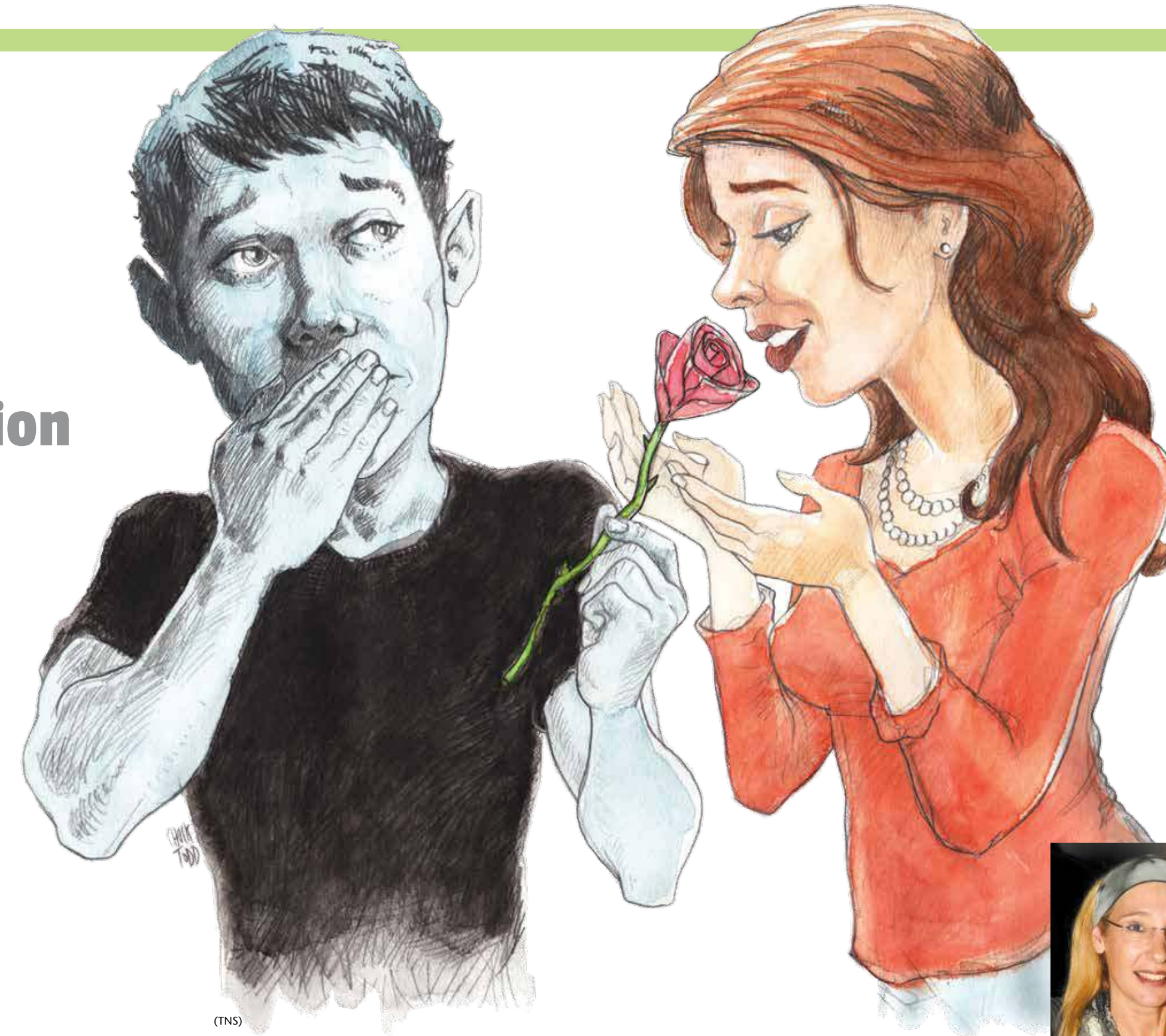
“The mentor is not a coach or a therapist,” Shapira stresses. “He/she is a sounding board, a supportive ally on the member’s journey. Some of our mentors do have a coaching or therapeutic background, but it is not mandatory.”

Potential mentors for Chiburim are first interviewed on the phone. Then they take a tutorial on the computer, and then they attend training sessions and workshops in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem on “the Chiburim way of finding *zugiyut* [relationship]” as Shapira puts it.

Personal experience and/or professional work in the field aside, such focused preparation helps the mentors feel more fully equipped to work with and empower the singles. A mentor can be assigned to a maximum of three members at a time.

“We can only accept as many members as we have mentors,” says Shapira. “We need many good, strong volunteers,” she adds.

To date (*and to date!*), there are 650 members in the Chiburim database. The members come from all sectors of Israeli society. They can be never married, divorced or widowed, religious or secular, English or Hebrew speaking, Sabras or olim, between the ages of 25 and 45. The common denominator is that they sincerely want to find a life partner. Chiburim is not a dating service. It is an organization dedicated to having its members



(TNS)

walk down the aisle, headed for a lifetime of wedded bliss.

To that end, Chiburim endeavors to have its members mix and mingle as much as possible. It notifies them about singles events and other activities and opportunities where they can meet and interact with their peers. This summer, for example, Chiburim hosted a wine-and-cheese party for potential new clients at a venue in Jerusalem, and the room was filled to overflowing. Shapira reports that five couples paired up after the mixer and went out on dates.

Similarly, at a meeting the week before to recruit new mentors, the room was filled to capacity with people who wanted to learn how they could be instrumental in helping Jewish singles meet their match.

In either case, be it as a member or a mentor, the key element is commitment: sincere dedication to taking the time and making the effort to achieve the objective.

How it started

Chiburim was founded in 2013 by Judi Stern, with the support of her husband, Roy.

“My dream was to be a part of the process of alleviating people’s loneliness,” says the native New Yorker.

“When I was in my early 20s, all my friends were married. I felt alone and started to panic,” she reveals. “Then, when I was 25, I met Roy,” smiles the happily married mother of seven and grandmother of 10.

She met Roy at the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York, she recounts, where her brother, Shlomo Riskin, was the rabbi.

Stern, who lives in Efrat, made aliya in 1988. She divides her time between teaching English, being “an active grandmother” as she puts it, and working with Chiburim.

“For singles between 25 and 45, it’s a major challenge to find a partner. This population is very lonely. They want to have family of their own,” Stern says. “Chiburim is unique in that it is personalized and inclusive. I don’t want anyone at Chiburim to fall through the cracks.

“The mentors of Chiburim serve as advisers and offer their support and, hopefully, provide our members with a whole new perspective on life.”

– R.B.



Chiburim executive director Yael Shapira. (Photos: Chiburim)



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In that regard, if a Chiburim member finds his/her soul mate through some other source, the mentors and administrators are just as delighted as if they had made the match themselves and offer the same mentoring service.

As Shapira says, “We don’t have a monopoly on the way people meet each other. Chiburim is one more tool in their tool kit to help them do the job.”

And it is a very effective tool, indeed. According to Shapira, 24 members of the Chiburim circle are married, either to people they met within Chiburim or via some other source and eight are engaged.

As far as Chiburim is concerned, it doesn’t matter what vehicle singles use, as long as it helps them reach their destination – the holy state of matrimony. But for those pursuing that path in earnest, Chiburim may be just the ticket.

For more information about Chiburim: chiburim.co.il. For more information about becoming a member or a mentor: 053-728-6954



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