

Jewish Divorce Talk

Episode Five – Matchmaking Talk

Baer: Hi, and welcome to a very special episode of "Jewish Divorce Talk," a show about divorce, separation, co-parenting and other unique considerations that arise when couples divorce in the Jewish world. I'm your host, Eliana Baer, New Jersey divorce lawyer and partner at Fox Rothschild, a national law firm with over 1000 attorneys across 29 offices, offering over 70 diverse services and specialties.

On each episode, I'm joined by experts and guests who discuss divorce and related issues from different angles to give their opinions and perspectives that often challenge the way people view divorce in the Jewish community, countering the stigma and driving for reform.

I am so excited about this special episode with friend and client of the firm Fox Rothschild, Aleeza Ben Shalom. Yes, that Aleeza Ben Shalom of the Netflix series, "Jewish Matchmaking." Aleeza is a renowned matchmaker, dating coach, author, sought-after speaker and soulmate clarity expert who empowers marriage-minded singles in their relationships, guiding them from uncertainty and overwhelm, to the clarity needed for confident decision-making regarding their potential life partners.

Leading up to the release of "Jewish Matchmaking" and in a bit of a role reversal, Aleeza has been assisted by her former client and success story, and my colleague, Gabriel Herman, a partner in Fox Rothschild's corporate practice. Aleeza has authored two insightful books, *Get Real, Get Married: A Guide to Get Over Your Hurdles* and *Under the Chuppah and Virtual Dating: Your Guide to Relationships in a Socially Distanced World*.

As the founder of Marriage-Minded Mentor, she connects singles globally with skilled matchmakers and dating coaches. Aleeza's impressive track record has earned her the title of Jewish dating guru, as she has successfully led over 200 singles through the steps to engagement, regardless of age, affiliation or life stage. Her valuable relationship advice has been featured across various media platforms, including *BBC World News*, *NPR*, *Aish.com* and *HuffPost*.

For over 15 years, Aleeza has worked with men and women worldwide to break unhealthy patterns and foster relationships that lead to marriage. During this time, she has trained more than 300 dating coaches and matchmakers worldwide. She and her husband have been married for over 20 years and have been blessed to see her in-laws' healthy marriage for over 60 years, thrive.

A dedicated wife and loving mother of five, Aleeza cherishes her family, which also includes a lovable dog, Koda the Kelev. Her lifelong dream of moving to Israel was realized on March 1, 2021, and she now resides with her family in Pardes Hanna, Israel.

Hi, Aleeza, welcome to the podcast. I am thrilled that you were able to join me today.

Ben Shalom: Thank you, Eliana. I'm so happy to be here.

Baer: I have to be honest, Aleeza, I did not only watch "Jewish Matchmaking," but I binge-watched it and I stayed up way later than I should have. And I just, I went through the entire thing and I loved every second of it. I have to say, like, your openness and your warmth just came out of the TV toward me. And I said to myself, you know how sometimes you watch a TV show and you're like, I'd hang out with her. That's exactly what I said to myself and I'm delighted that we have a chance to hang out for a bit today.

So again, thank you so much.

Ben Shalom: So happy to hang out with you.

Baer: Amazing. So obviously, "Jewish Matchmaking" has been so wildly successful. But not only has it been successful in terms of the audience reach and everything like that, but it's got so many positive reviews with even EJ Dixon of *Rolling Stone* saying the show gave her considerable nachas. And that's something you so rarely encounter with shows portraying any ethnic group or portraying any religiously based group of people. You usually emphasize stereotypes and things like that, but you were so mindful of that as you moved through the production. How did you make sure you didn't fall into those types of pitfalls that we often see?

Ben Shalom: That is a really good question. And it was really difficult, because if you can imagine, you enter, you get mic'd up, the minute you're mic'd up they could hear anything you say. They are recording even when they tell you they're not.

Baer: Hot mic.

Ben Shalom: You are always on. You walk in front of a camera, you are on. Oh, there's no like, and action.

There is no action. You walk in front of a camera, that is the action. You are on camera and literally everything from brushing your hair, how you sit, what you say, what you do, every reaction is caught. I do have a very expressive face, so sometimes with my words you'll get like a laugh and like a little, "Oh," with my eyebrows like a little, "Ooh, okay, that's interesting." Which, is my very playful way of interacting with people, but also guarding my tongue where I wanna make sure what I say and how I say what I say to somebody is clear, articulate and kind. And I wanna shoot an arrow to their heart. I want them to hear what I really have to say. I want them to take it in, but I'm not gonna bring them down as I do that. I'm only looking to bring them up.

So, you'll often hear things from a very open-minded, positive place where I go, "Oh, interesting. Okay." You know, they keep telling me physical things that they're looking for, and I keep going, "What else are you looking for?" Let's pull some more out of you. And then they're like, "Yeah, I don't know. That's it." And I'm like, "Okay. So that's it. Let me just read you the only, the seven things that you gave me, not even like 10. That's all that you want? I bring you this, you're gonna be happy, we're good, we're done?"

And they're like, "No, well." And I'm like, uhhuh, like I, I try to sweetly and lovingly pull it out of people, but it was a real work. Like I wanted to say in Hebrew, avodah, it was a real job to hyper focus on what I said, how I said it, when I said it, to whom I directed the content. Because also they can literally cut and paste you back together in a conversation that might not have been my real reaction to that comment.

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It could come from somewhere else. So, you really just don't know how things are gonna turn out. But I wanted to just represent the best version of myself, and every time I went on camera, I said, "Please, God put the right words in my mouth at the right time. Please let this go in the right way and don't let me mess up. I can't afford to mess up. This has to be amazing."

Baer: You totally nailed it, I have to say. You really did, even from like kissing a mezuzah as you walked into the room and things like that. Just the details of it and the beauty, and portraying your life in Israel. Like all of those little details, I think really drew a picture of your warmth and your life and the portrayal of Judaism as a beautiful religion, not a monolith where everybody thinks and acts the same.

Ben Shalom: Right. So, just so you know, those little details, a lot of the camera men weren't Jewish. Many of the staff that we were working with weren't Jewish. We had some. We had a Jewish producer. We had a religious producer in the back end. But in terms of day-to-day, who was filming, they weren't Jewish. So, they don't necessarily know these little nuances. So, the first time I did it and I walked in and they're filming and I was like, "Wait, I don't think you guys know this. Hold on. Can we do that again? Look, see that thing on the door, right? I'm gonna give that a kiss. This is a religious thing. This is an awareness of God as you enter into a home. There's a blessing and a prayer in there. I know you're not gonna explain all that, but can you, like, use the camera, focus on this. This is a moment. I don't want you to miss it." So, there were certain things that I had a consciousness to point out to them and they were extremely receptive to going, "Oh, okay, let's do that moment."

Or saying a blessing over a glass of water and making sure, like that's important. You should include things like that before I take a drink. Don't just show me drinking, show that as a part of the process.

The other thing also was when I was meeting men. So, I observe shomer negiah and I don't touch. So, I said to them, "Listen, I don't want this to be awkward on camera." Like, if I was meeting somebody, I would explain this to them if they weren't religious. I'm going to wave. I'm gonna say hello. I'm gonna be warm. I'm gonna be friendly. I'm gonna greet you with my face, but I'm not gonna greet you with my hand. And so I said, "Listen, I didn't have the opportunity to meet them," because we meet on camera for the first time, for real, every time. I said, "But please, I don't want an awkward moment when I walk in where they're like, 'Hi, nice to meet you,' and they stick out their hand and I'm going, 'Hi, nice to meet you.' I'm waving.

To me, it's almost like an insulting thing that you don't shake their hand back. I said, "I don't really wanna show that and unless you're gonna explain it, it doesn't make any sense. Can you let them know I'm a waver, I'm not a shaker. I do this shomer negiah thing. Can you explain that to them so that we can have a normal interaction when I walk into the room?"

By the way, this is something nobody else got yet. I didn't tell anybody this. But this is a part of the real things that went on behind the scenes in order for us to show Judaism and to make it wholesome and warm and inviting and that nobody should be uncomfortable. 'Cause I prep people, I let -- in real life -- people know these things so that it's not awkward and it's not weird. It's just, oh, that's what she does. This is what I do. She accepts me, I accept her. And we're all on the level playing field.

Baer: Yeah. And that really shown through. And so many times people view other denominations as "other," right? They're "other." But I thought that the inclusivity of the show was just so telling and your

way of being toward everybody, of every single denomination, and your treatment of them was stellar across the board, and that really shone through a lot.

But in terms of working with the Jewish community, I work with the Jewish community as well, and I always describe it as working with family, right? We know a lot, maybe sometimes too much. And you were able to navigate that so beautifully, even when these special features, challenges, whatever you wanna call them, arise, that are inherent in the community.

Do you consider working with your own community to be a hindrance or an asset that you can use to effectively do your job?

Ben Shalom: It's totally an asset for me because I know my community inside and out. I know the secular community: I grew up secular. I know the religious community: I became religious. And I'm so approachable that people on all ends of the spectrum become very comfortable with me.

Even people, just for example, I've had male coaching and mentoring clients who have said to me, "Listen, I don't wanna do a Zoom call, right? I'm not gonna look at you. I'd like to do a phone call only by phone, and I never wanna meet you in person and I never wanna do a Zoom." I said, "Great, no problem. That's a boundary for you. That's how you guard your eyes, no problem." Right?

And for secular people, if they wanna meet in person, they wanna connect, they wanna have a Zoom, they wanna be, it doesn't matter, I just meet people where they're at and we make a connection. For me, knowing my people is my greatest asset. I have worked with people of other cultures and other backgrounds. So, just for example, faith-based people, Hindus and Christians and Muslims. I've worked with a handful of people over the years and they come to me, they're like, "Ugh, I love your approach. You have such wisdom." And it's faith-based wisdom. I feel like I'm connected, like, I understand what's going on. We understand each other. We almost speak the same language. That's very easy also for me to work with them, but I don't know the nuances and the details of their culture and their religion.

Judaism? Oh, I'm like this. I'm from here. I'm like that. I'm from there. I'm like, I know. I know. I know. I know. Oh, that's, oh, tell me the little nuance. Oh yeah. Okay. Okay. I got it now. Okay. It's very easy for me 'cause I've heavily researched it and I know it so well. But in the rest of the world, I know it to a baseline degree, but I don't live it, so I don't truly understand it like an insider.

Baer: It's funny, I feel the exact same way. That it's, I speak the language. I can pick up on issues like that also, where I'm like, oh, that makes sense, and I know that person. They're my like cousin, sister's, husband, whatever it is.

Ben Shalom: Exactly.

Baer: It's definitely, I agree with you. Definitely an asset. But in general, I think our jobs are wildly different just elementally, right? You get to people at the coupling phase when they're nice and in love and romantic and searching for love. And I get to them at the uncoupling phase. But I also think that our jobs are pretty similar.

You describe your job as the hardest job in the world. And I saw the love for it, but I could also understand why it's so difficult. You have people you're just meeting. You have this laundry list of items that you have to check off and fulfill. And sometimes realistic, sometimes not realistic. Sometimes you manage to make reality out of fantasy, which I think is unbelievable.

But you did describe your job, again, as the hardest job in the world. What was behind that statement for you? Because it looks effortless.

Ben Shalom: Then I'm so glad even more so that I said it. I think anybody who has been through the dating relationship process... okay, I'm gonna take that back. Not anybody, majority of people. Okay. We'll call it, 95% to 98% of people in the world, that look to get together and build a relationship and a life with somebody will experience challenge in the process.

Maybe there's -- I had one couple and they still had a challenge. Once they got over the first hurdle of deciding to be with each other, there was no more challenge. They built a beautiful relationship. But initially they didn't even wanna say yes. But 95%, 98% of people, there's challenge along the way: It's me, it's you, we're creating we. I want this but you want that, but what's good for the relationship?

We're going through this whole entire process and we're trying to bind two people together. And it's really, I just think it's really hard. Look at the marriage rates, which have gone down over years. And look at the divorce rates, those have gone up. So, the quantity of people getting married is decreasing while the quantity of people of getting divorced is increasing. Houston, we have a problem.

Like this is not an easy task. And getting married, again, I'm like, anybody, oh, you wanna get married? Good. I'll put you together. Go to the local judge. Take care of it. Boom. You're married. Okay? Yay, you got married. But you're gonna stay married? Oh, for a lifetime? Two years, five years, 10 years, 20 years? Oh really? Yeah, you're gonna make that work?

How's that gonna work out for you. I am me. You are you. We get together. I don't like this. You don't like that. You have to build a relationship constantly. And it's so much of an effort. And if you look at the show and you see my relationship or whatever your like, "Oh, it's so wonderful, so effortless. It must be the most perfect thing in the world."

Yeah, I know other people here who have met my husband and me and see us on our normal days also, right? Like, we're normal humans. We disagree and we're both strong personalities, right? We want what we want. So we have to duke it out sometimes and figure out how to make a relationship work. It's hard.

But I have to say, if I had to pick the second hardest job in the world, I think you have it. I think coupling -

Baer: I agree.

Ben Shalom: It's hard. I think uncoupling, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you have the harder job in the world. Maybe mine is the second hardest job compared to yours, because getting out of something is a mess.

Baer: But I thought it was somewhat the same, only because people come to you with a list, right? Of expectations, of things that might be challenging, things that might not be quite realistic. And it's your job to either fulfill those expectations, against all odds, or, in the alternative, to explain to people, "That might not be best suited for you."

You are looking out for your client, for your person and you're -- speaking of duking it out -- duking it out so that they get to the outcome that they need and they want, and they're satisfied with, which sometimes takes some tough love.

Ben Shalom: We're both peacemakers, we're both people that make shalom. And even though you help people to come apart, you're really helping them to come together in order to create the separation.

Baer: Yes. That's how they describe divorce lawyers, just the peacemakers of the world.

Ben Shalom: See, that's my Aleeza view.

Baer: It's so lovely. But in that vein, you actually introduced the American public to some super cool catchphrases, the "date 'em till you hate 'em," "when and doubt go out," "mystery in your history," "value-based glue," "analysis, paralysis." I could go on.

But you've said that, in terms of your own relationship and other people's relationships, as you go through the cycle of the relationship, these concepts really do resonate and apply. Do you think these concepts could also apply to people as they go through their relationship? Because it's great wisdom for dating, but I think it's even better relationship advice, frankly.

Ben Shalom: Yes. So my secret that everybody doesn't know, but I'm telling them, so now you're gonna know, is that I don't wanna help people get married. I wanna help people stay married. Okay? You're gonna get married. Everybody, you're gonna get married. You're seeking your person, whatever, the world's created so that you should get married. I know that's how the world's set up. You're going to get married. I have full confidence in it. It could take two years. It could take 22 years. I don't know. But you're gonna get married.

But what I don't know is, are you gonna choose to stay married? And I know that I only have an opportunity before they get married to give them the information. And I'm gonna call it the relationship programming and the mindset that they need to stay married for a lifetime. You're gonna pick your person. This is your person. Just wanna let you know today you love them. Tomorrow, you might not really like them. You go, "I love you, but I don't like you at all. No, I don't wanna talk to you. No, I don't wanna look at your face either. No, it's not working for me."

Okay. Sometimes I'll say to my husband, "Listen, I don't like the conversation or everything that's going on." And the first time that happened, he looks at me, he goes, "So change the topic." And I was like, "Like that? Like it's just that easy. You just change the topic and poof, we move on from our problem?"

And he was like, "Yeah, basically. I'll just forget about it and we don't have to deal with it right now if you wanna just move on from it." And I was like, "I do." I was like, "But I want you to lighten the mood."

He goes, "You wanna lighten the mood. So lighten the mood. Tell a joke." I literally, he was a really good teacher. I was like, "Okay, so I could be like the two-year-old kicking and screaming and having my tantrum, and then you're like, want a cookie? And you're like, yay, let's play."

He said, "Yeah, let's just shift out of this. We'll deal with it another time. Now is clearly not the time. We're not accomplishing anything. We're not brushing it under the rug. We're just gonna deal with it in a smart time, and now's a really stupid time to deal with it, so let's deal with it later." And that's what we do in our relationship and it's helped us so much.

And so all of these tips and tools and catch phrases. For me, I like sticky language. I like to play with something until it's memorable. Because once it's memorable, I don't have to reteach you a concept. You understand the concept because you remember the phrase. So, "date 'em till you hate 'em." I can't stand the word hate. More than anything in the world, it's my least favorite word in the entire world. I don't like the word hate. But I use it. Why? Because nobody forgets it. Because it's the most memorable thing in the world. And it tells them, give you a chance for your eyes to catch up, give you a chance for your heart to catch up, give you a chance for your head to get on board and give them a chance to connect and grow on you and build something.

And yeah, the best way to say that is, "date 'em till you hate 'em." And people remember it, and they laugh. And when you laugh, you release good endorphins. And when you release good endorphins, you're in a better mood and now you can deal with your life better. And I didn't even teach you all that, but I know it works.

So, I've never even told, nobody else knows this on, I never said this on a different podcast, but like, that's some of the wisdom that's hidden behind why I use a catchphrase that is humorous, that makes somebody laugh and smile. That's not just memorable. I'm actually causing a chemical reaction in their body by getting them to laugh and have a humorous moment. And that opens up their heart and boom, I can now help them shift and grow and remember this for a lifetime.

We don't have the, you know, date 'em till you hate 'em, marry 'em till you hate 'em too, like the divorce version of it. But I just, I'll play with it a little bit. We'll come up with it and then we'll have a catchphrase for you also.

Baer: No, but that could apply because it's stay married until you, you really can't stand 'em anymore. Right?

Ben Shalom: It's really true. Because people, they come to me and I have, by the way, saved marriages because they will come to me and say, "I'm separated and I wanna start dating." And I said, "You're married and I don't set up married people." And they're like, "No, but I'm separated." I said, "Yes, separated equals married. That's how it works in the world. Unless you get divorced, you're not single anymore. You could be a dater, but you're not a single dater, you're a married dater. And I don't work with married people."

And I have had a handful of people that I've worked with where I said, listen, I know you think you're gonna find something la magical, bigger and better out there for you. And you might, it's also true. But you might miss something that's here and you probably have, I don't know, kids, a life, a this, a that, a

foundation of everything. And before you ditch it, we should really invest in it. Because, by the way -- oh, I do say this. This is a nice thing, and I'm sure divorce lawyers might use this -- you're taking 50% of the problem with you. You are half of the problem, and maybe even more. So, you're gonna go into a new relationship with a new person. And guess what? It's only 50% new. So do me a favor. Fix your schmutz now with this person that you are with. And then when you're all in a better place and you've done everything to fix yourself and everything to fix your relationship, and it's still really not working. Now you're gonna go into a new relationship, you're gonna take that 50% with you, but it's a good 50%, and you're gonna know how to work with a person that you can really live with because this person, you can't. Okay. We really tried. We really dated them, married 'em until we hated 'em.

Baer: And that's where your little baggage icon really could come in.

Ben Shalom: Yes.

Baer: Where you're writing all your baggage on the screen, and you're saying, okay I'm basically taking this with me. And I find a lot of what you do, what you just described, is that paradigm-shifting work.

Ben Shalom: Yes.

Baer: Where you are breaking unhealthy patterns and you're helping people find the fire again, or find it to begin with and then find it again.

Ben Shalom: Yes.

Baer: So, how do you work with people to essentially reprogram, almost, their brain, right? You're talking about serotonin, release of endorphins and creating positive associations with certain catchphrases. How do you train people to do that? And obviously not like dogs, but in terms of just rewiring their outlook?

Ben Shalom: So, I have programs and courses. The baggage graphic that you're talking about is a program called Dating Detox. And now that you mentioned it, I'm like, ooh, we could turn that into a married version and have marriage detox also. People probably need to sort out all their stuff and when they sort it all out, in the same way that I do it with dating, we could do it with marriage and we could actually help them to do this reprogramming.

So, now that I thought about that I'll have to work on it in my back end with my people, but I think it would be --

Baer: You need a new catch phrase.

Ben Shalom: No, I think it would be fantastic as a "fix your relationship" or "predivorce something." Like, you can't get divorced until you do this. You've gotta do this.

The other piece of it is, I have a program that's called Soulmate Clarity. Which, as you're going through the dating process, we're evaluating. Are you my person? Aren't you my person? And we're going back and forth. But, once you're married, nothing is a "potential deal breaker." Okay? Outside, I'm gonna say

abuse and addiction and things in that category. I'm not talking about life-threatening, or things of that nature. Okay?

Baer: Of course.

Ben Shalom: Within a normal context of a relationship that isn't functioning. We don't have anything that enters into our relationship as a "potential deal breaker." We don't use the "D" word. We don't ever talk about divorce. And we don't approach our life where we always have one foot out the door.

And so I have courses in different programs and things where I, like you're talking about, help people to reframe and train their thinking so they understand relationships at a deeper level and understand the inner workings of it so that they can help themselves. So, oh, it's not a deal breaker. Okay, what is it? It means I have to accept it. No, but I don't accept it.

But if you don't accept it, it becomes a deal breaker, and then you're gonna lead to divorce. So, you have choices. We can either be aligned, you can accept it about them, or if it's a potential deal breaker, you should have never gotten married.

Oh, but you didn't know that. Now you got married and you didn't know that, oh, let me teach you something. Once you get married, whatever you didn't know it's yours. Hey, you get to keep it. Doesn't matter whether you knew it or you didn't. You liked it or you didn't. That becomes part of what comes with that package, and this is how we deal with it.

I've got stuff and my husband has things he doesn't love about me. He loves me. He doesn't love that trait about me. And maybe I work on that through my lifetime 'cause that's good for my relationship. Maybe I don't. Maybe that's a point of friction for us, I don't know. But we have an awareness of it. And when you have an awareness of something and you call it out, you have the potential to experience it and do something about it.

Baer: That is such valuable wisdom and I really appreciate it. I wanna end with this. When I saw you writing in a notebook, I was so delighted because I have a thousand of these.

Ben Shalom: Yay.

Baer: Now you have a fellow notebook person. I write everything down just so I can cross it off. But yes, I write everything down.

So excited to see it, but now you have a fellow notebook friend. So, I really appreciate you coming on. I know it's probably been a whirlwind over the last few weeks, so thank you for taking the time, and it's been a pleasure speaking to you, really, truly. And I'm gonna binge-watch it again. I can't help myself.

Ben Shalom: Thank you so much. Thank you for having me. This was a delight.

Baer: Thank you so much.

And of course you can find out more about me at foxrothchild.com/elianabaer, where you can also find my latest blogs. You can find me on LinkedIn at Eliana Baer and on Instagram @elianatbaeresq. If you've

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