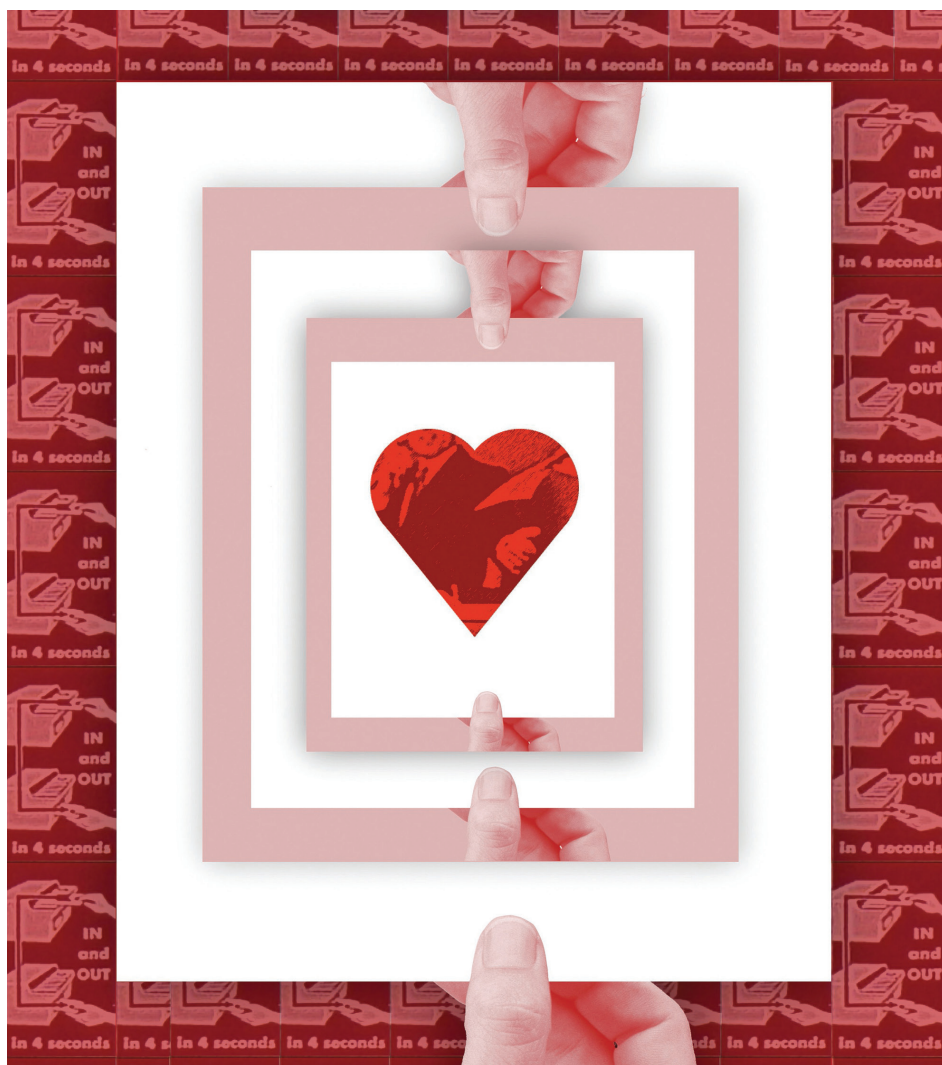


# The second time around

• BATYA L. LUDMAN

**S**tarting to date again is never easy, but it is especially difficult when you haven't dated in years. Whether as a result of the death of a partner, a divorce, or "just" the end of a long-standing relationship, thinking of reentering the dating scene today may engender anxiety, especially since it likely resembles little of what you experienced the first time around.



'IT'S DIFFICULT to recognize the role that you may have played in a problematic relationship.' (Wes Bausmith/Los Angeles Times/MCT)

Potential dating partners are carefully screened via social media, leaving little to chance, and often setting the tone for this new relationship. Today, one typically collects an amount of knowledge before the first date that would make Sherlock Holmes jealous. Sadly though, much of the information may be incorrect and negatively influence the dating process. Communication may be only via text message, filled with abbreviations and emojis.

If your former marriage was good and ended with the death of your partner, you may have a strong desire to replicate all that you liked. You may have high expectations for your new partner, making comparisons as you go along. If you came from a bad relationship, one that may have ended in divorce, you may be wary, and be searching for someone very different the second time around.

However, you may sadly discover many similarities in your choice of new partner, in part because it's difficult to recognize the role that you may have played in a problematic relationship, and it's even harder to change yourself and ensure that your expectations are realistic.

Add to the situation such complicating factors as your grief over various aspects lost from your previous relationship (both good and bad), and the stress of the intervening years as you became

more settled in your own ways as a single person with more responsibilities and less availability, between work, family, a home, aging parents. These are all factors in your potential mate's former life as well, and you have a recipe for experiencing challenges that you may never have experienced previously.

These issues are complex enough to potentially frighten you from even contemplating entering the dating arena! However, no longer lacking the innocence you may once have had, your real life experience also can be empowering and strengthen a new relationship.

Here are some suggestions for navigating the new dating scene.

1. Examine past relationships. What went well and what didn't? What role did you play in making things good or bad? Could you have done anything differently? Assess honestly the ways that you've changed since then.

2. Determine your current needs. What you are looking for? What is important to you now may differ greatly from the first time around. Do you want, for example, a companion for dinner or for travel, or do you want a serious long-term committed relationship that may lead to marriage?

3. Before getting involved with someone else, it is important to examine the losses you've experienced in the past to ensure that you have dealt with all the difficult issues and are truly ready to move on. If you have started dating prematurely, perhaps in an endeavor to get rid of the pain of being alone in your grief, you may discover that you cannot yet move forward.

Don't be afraid to seek professional help, as "the second time around" may bring up issues that you weren't aware of or thought you had previously resolved. This will help ensure that you are ready to date and enable you to do so with greater ease.

4. Acknowledge that dating may be outside your comfort zone and that it may be scary to contemplate starting anew. This is especially true if you think you may have failed the first time around or had a marriage with your one and only soul mate. Ask yourself why you want to date again and make sure that it's for the right reasons. Start slowly and, as difficult as it may be, try not to have preconceived ideas or make comparisons. Even if what you had before was wonderful, it is now a different place and time, and both you and this new person in your life are not the same.

5. Once acknowledging that you're interested in dating again, tell other people. Maybe you're ready to be fixed up, to test out singles events or to check out dating websites and apps.

6. Be yourself and be open and honest with your date as you work together to develop a partnership. While no relationship is perfect, good communication is essential. It takes time to build something together, especially since you don't have a shared history. You'll also be less likely to fall head over heels in love as you may once have, and while perhaps you were very committed the first time, now when you have disagreements, which are inevitable, your desire to exit the relationship may be stronger than your desire, energy and commitment to attempt to work things out.

7. Keep an open mind. Go into the relationship with low expectations and find a place in your heart for compromise. This is a new relationship, times are different and you, too, have changed. Acknowledge it, embrace it as best as you can, and allow yourself to move forward.

8. As you date, ask yourself how this new person helps brings out the best in you. Does he/she understand you and make you a better and happier person? Do you have shared values and beliefs? Are you a good friend to each other? Being a soul mate and a friend is about doing nice things for, and giving pleasure to, one another. It involves being respectful, kind and caring, making time for each other, free from distractions, and finding time to have fun and laugh, as you enjoy new beginnings and this new phase in your life. ■

*The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist (PsyD) in private practice in Ra'anana, and author of the book Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships – Resolving Conflicts. ludman@netvision.net.il; www.drbatyaludman.com*