Relationship-endings and Jewish communities

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American Jewish marriages end in divorce at a similar rate as American marriages in general. In her article, **Rekindling Tradition as Life Partnerships End**, Kathleen Jenkins uses dozens of qualitative interviews with Jewish divorce(e)s and clergy to explore how divorce affects Jewish practices, attachments, and needs.

All the participants talked about how negatively divorce impacted their home practice, shabbat and holiday celebrations. Many turned or returned to synagogue congregational life as a source of meaningful Jewish engagement. Singing, communal prayer, and various rituals that communities have developed, like a mikvah visit associated with the completion of the divorce or the recitation of kaddish for the death of the relationship, could be sources of comfort and meaning.

On the other hand, respondents also often described experiences of silence, frustration, and shame: synagogue dues not accessible to a suddenly poorer unit; activities centered around families; fear of gossip and/or anxiety around divorce making discussions of divorce feel taboo, etc.

The author points out that the transitional period after a divorce is a time of rich spiritual potential, one that Jewish communities and clergy should not overlook in terms of outreach and building communal connections. Her recommendations include ideas like explicitly including divorce in references to areas of pastoral care and not shying away from mentioning divorce in sermons; establishing and offering ritual practices associated with divorce; and diversifying synagogue activities beyond the normative family model.