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family focus

Cooperative Divorce

Lawyer specializes in helping clients through life transitions with dignity.

Lynne Meredith Golodner
Special to the Jewish News

Not many people go to law school thinking they want to specialize in divorce. But growing up, Alisa Peskin-Shepherd saw divorce firsthand and was inspired by a neighbor whose compassionate approach to family law spurred her toward carving out a career in this niche.

Now, the Congregation B'nai Moshe member, who regularly reads Torah on Shabbat and serves on the synagogue's board of directors, has branded her own Bloomfield Hills law practice as Transitions Legal because she specializes in helping people through life transitions with dignity, compassion and strategic guidance.

"My life and academic experiences brought me to where I am right now," says Peskin-Shepherd of Birmingham.

"Ultimately, I realized that I could help people going through a very difficult, challenging, but empowering time in their lives if I chose this niche."

Peskin-Shepherd specializes in what she calls "mediative" divorce, where the first goal is to collaborate and work with the other side cooperatively. "You can't always do it," says the mother of two grown daughters, "but you should always try."

For families, she says, this approach maintains "a sense of respect for the other person — especially if you have children. No matter the age, children of divorce feel the effects throughout their lives. I believe it is essential to reduce stress and tension whenever possible so everyone can heal and build a satisfying life post-divorce."

Peskin-Shepherd is particularly sensitive to the nuances of Jewish divorce. Her understanding of Jewish law helps her remain aware of things like stipulating in a civil divorce that the parties will grant a kosher *get* (divorce decree) as required by Jewish law. She also guides Jewish clients toward including whatever may be meaningful in the Jewish family lifecycle.

"Divorce is a legal proceeding, yes, but it is a very emotional time for people going through it," she says. "Imagine hammering out the details of a divorce decree and forgetting to include something as important as a *get* — the lack of a *get* means you cannot technically remarry under Jewish law. That could be devastating and, in

the heat of the moment, surely isn't the first thing on a person's mind. But it matters down the road."

That's a divorce attorney's job, says Peskin-Shepherd: To see the big picture for clients, and present all possible options so clients are informed and empowered.

To be successful in business, Peskin-Shepherd keeps her eye on her business values. "That's how I determine if a client is a good fit or if I should refer them to someone else. In any business, it helps to articulate — and to write it down — what your vision, goal and values are. Once you put them out there, they become real, the driving force propelling your business forward."

She tells her clients the same thing. "The first step in any divorce is to articulate your basic values — what's important to you? Then make your choices on that basis. If you know your priorities, it is easier to decide which fights are worth having and which you can set aside."

An approved mediator statewide, Peskin-Shepherd has acted as a guardian-ad-litem, protecting the interests of children within the legal system, and has special training in domestic violence through the State Bar of Michigan Open Justice Commission. She speaks widely and leads workshops on topics related to divorce, counseling and mediation, and was a member of the Family Mediation Council board for many years.

"When people ask me if I like my work, I say, 'Of course, I love what I do — otherwise I really couldn't practice this type of law,'" she says. "I have the gift of helping people through difficult times in their lives toward a manageable outcome. I am so honored to guide people through emotionally challenging times; it requires bravery to leave a marriage that isn't working and build an entirely new, independent life. My clients are my inspiration." □

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Alisa Peskin-Shepherd