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Alumni Retreat. "Intermarriage." undated.

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- \*2. "The Demographic Imperatives of Outreach", by Barry A. Kosmin, from Journal of Jewish Communal Service, Spring 1990.
3. "Reform Jewish Leaders, Intermarriage and Conversion", by Jonathan D. Sarna, from Journal of Reform Judaism, Winter 1990.
4. "Intermarriage Among Jews in Germany, U.S.S.R., and Switzerland", from Jewish Social Studies, 1940.

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- \*5. "Star-Crossed: More Gentiles and Jews are Intermarrying -- And It's Not All Chicken Soup", by Fran Schumer, from New York Magazine, April 2, 1990.
6. "Intermarriage, Divorce and the Jewish Status of Children", by Sanford Seltzer, an Horizon Institute Report (UAHC, 1981).

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- \*7. "Presidential Address -- Union of American Hebrew Congregations Board of Trustees", by Alexander M. Schindler, December 1978.
- \*8. "Conversion to Judaism: A Background Analysis", by Lawrence Grossman, American Jewish Committee, 1987.

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- \*9. "Time Bombs", by Paul Cowan and Rachel Cowan, from Mixed Blessings, Penguin Books, 1987.

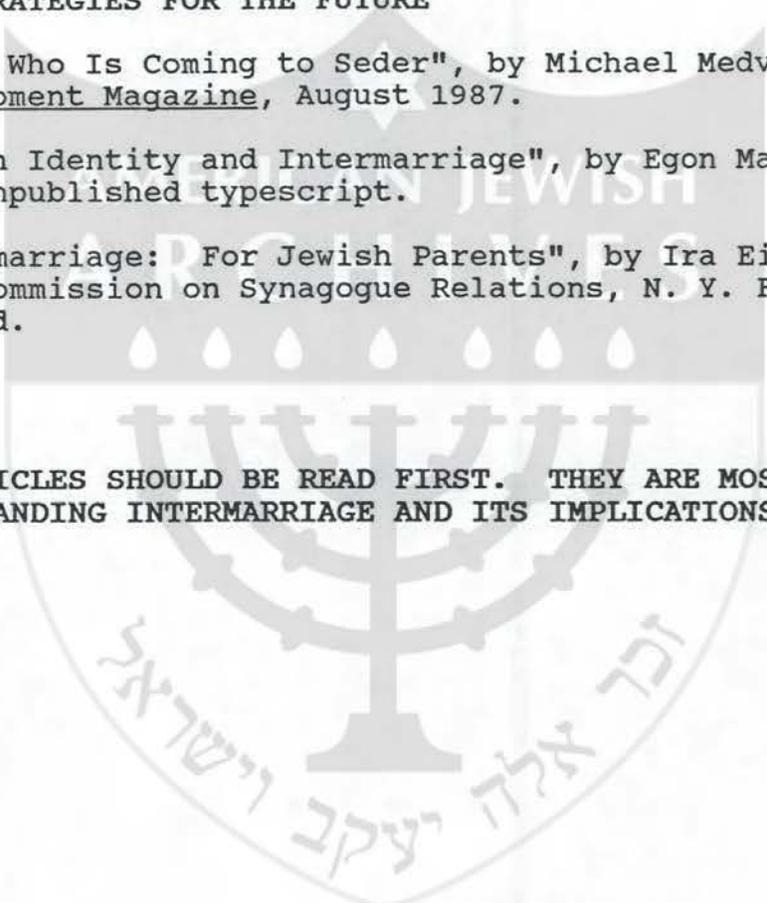
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- \*10. "Intermarriage, Outreach and a New Agenda for Jewish Survival: A Perspective on the Contemporary American Jewish Community", by Egon Mayer, from Journal of Jewish Communal Service, Spring 1990.
- 11. "The Stranger in Our Mirror", by Harold Shulweis, from Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community: Creating an Agenda for Our Future, UAHC, 1989.

#### FAMILIAL STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

- 12. "Guess Who Is Coming to Seder", by Michael Medved, from Moment Magazine, August 1987.
- 13. "Jewish Identity and Intermarriage", by Egon Mayer, unpublished typescript.
- \*14. "Intermarriage: For Jewish Parents", by Ira Eisenstein, Commission on Synagogue Relations, N. Y. Federation, nd.

**\*MARKED ARTICLES SHOULD BE READ FIRST. THEY ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERMARRIAGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS.**



READINGS FOR PLENARY 1  
THE INTERMARRIAGE CRISIS: COMMUNAL IMPLICATIONS

- \*1. Egon Mayer, "Intermarriage Research at the American Jewish Committee: Its Evolution and Impact".

Mayer has conducted four major surveys of intermarriage trends under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee. He has studied the demography of intermarriage, conversion among intermarried people, the children of intermarried couples, and the effects of rabbinic officiation on intermarriage. This article summarizes the findings of all four studies.

- \*2. Barry A. Kosmin, "The Demographic Imperatives of Outreach", Journal of Jewish Communal Service, (Spring 1990 -- forthcoming).

Kosmin is a demographer who directs research for the Council of Jewish Federations. In this article, soon to be published, he graphically lays out the statistical impact of intermarriage, and argues that the Jewish community has yet to confront the issue and its implications.

3. Jonathan D. Sarna, "Intermarriage and Conversion", Journal of Reform Judaism, Winter 1990.

Sarna writes in response to a study which finds that converts to Judaism, although identifying strongly with the Jewish religion, nevertheless remain only weakly linked with the Jewish people. He worries that there will be little to hold the children of converts within the Jewish fold, and argues that "Outreach" leading to conversion may not be a sufficient antidote to intermarriage.

4. Uriah Zevi Engelman, "Intermarriage Among Jews in Germany, USSR, and Switzerland," Jewish Social Studies, (Vol. 2, no. 2: 1940).

This is an excerpt from an article of historic interest, which provides an interesting context for a study of intermarriage. The statistics Engelman marshalls clearly demonstrate that an increasing rate of intermarriage is a reality for the Jewish community, as it feels increasingly "at home" in a free society. We have included the section dealing with Germany only. The original echos the same findings in the USSR and in Switzerland.

## Intermarriage Research at the American Jewish Committee: Its Evolution and Impact

EGON MAYER

**JEWISH OPINION AND** Jewish communal policy toward intermarriage between Jews and Christians have changed dramatically since the end of the 1970s. Succinctly put, they have shifted from outrage to outreach.

The feelings of outrage were voiced from many a pulpit. In all the denominations, sermons on the subject routinely bore such titles as "Intermarriage: A Threat to Jewish Survival" and "Modern Romance and the Bloodless Holocaust." Even the Reform rabbinate, at the liberal end of the Jewish denominational spectrum, felt impelled at its annual meeting in 1973 to recall its stand adopted in 1909, "that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged." Moreover, the majority of that body affirmed its "opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage."<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, there were always those in the Jewish community, both among the laity and within the rabbinate, who wanted to keep open every possible channel to Judaism for both the Jewish intermarriers and their families. But until the end of the 1970s their voices were heard, if at all, in pianissimo.

Those voices began to gain strength and clarity in late 1978, when Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), announced at the biennial meeting of his organization a program of "outreach" to the non-Jewish spouses and children of mixed marriages.<sup>2</sup> This was the first such

program initiated by any segment of the organized Jewish community in modern Jewish history, reflecting a shift in Jewish public opinion. In three successive surveys of the Boston Jewish community, a cross-section of its adult population was asked how they would most probably react if one of their children were to intermarry. In 1965 a little over one quarter, 26 percent, said they would strongly oppose the marriage. Forty-four percent said they would "discourage" it, and another 25 percent said they would remain neutral or accept the marriage. By 1975 the survey of a comparable sample of Boston Jews found that only 14 percent would "strongly oppose" such a marriage, and 59 percent would remain neutral or accept it. And by 1985 the same type of survey found that only 9 percent of Boston's Jewish adults would "strongly oppose" their children's intermarriage, and 66 percent would either remain neutral in the face of it or would accept it.<sup>3</sup> These Boston trends were symptomatic of growing tolerance toward intermarriage across the country.

Though the Jewish community has been concerned with the social, religious, and familial consequences of marriage between Jews and non-Jews since biblical times, it was only recently—since the turn of the twentieth century—that it carried out any systematic studies of the subject. Consistent with the traditional Jewish concern, the studies that were undertaken before the mid-1970s assumed that intermarriage constituted an "assimilatory loss" to the Jewish community, both in terms of population size and in terms of cultural vitality. While not all researchers shared the Jewish community's sense of alarm at the prospect of such loss, they concurred with Milton Gordon's summary proposition that there is an "indissoluble connection . . . between structural assimilation and marital assimilation. That is," Gordon continued, "entrance of the minority group into the social cliques, clubs, and institutions of the core society at the primary group level inevitably will lead to a substantial amount of intermarriage."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Gordon postulated, "If marital assimilation . . . takes place fully, the minority group loses its ethnic identity in the larger host or core society, and identificational assimilation takes place."<sup>5</sup>

Arthur Ruppin, the Russian-born father of modern Jewish sociology (and a deeply committed Zionist) was perhaps the first to develop demographic statistics demonstrating the growing trend in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century toward intermarriage.<sup>6</sup> Basing his reports in the *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der*

*Juden* on local censuses or community surveys, Ruppin chronicled the numerical trends while assuming a linkage between intermarriage and assimilation. In his eyes, "inmarriage formed the strongest bond making Jews into a homogeneous ethnic unit, able to show a unique power of resistance against the assimilating forces of Christianity and Islam. Even Jews . . . who have dropped the Jewish ritual, will remain Jews so long as they and their children marry other Jews . . . mixed marriage would finally separate them from their people."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the first social science study of intermarriage involving Jews in the United States was Julius Drachler's *Intermarriage in New York City* (1921), which maintained, along the lines suggested by Ruppin, that intermarriage is an index of group assimilation.

Curiously, the subject of intermarriage is notable for its absence from the concerns of Jewish social science in the 1950s. Marshall Sklare's by-now classic anthology, *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group* (1957), does not contain a single reference to the subject. Why is this so? Since Drachler had found between 1908 and 1912 that, among all white ethnic groups in New York City, Jews were the least likely to intermarry, there had set in a kind of sociological complacency, an assumption that in whatever other ways Jews might change from the ways of their forebears, they would never intermarry with their non-Jewish neighbors in large numbers. This view was confirmed by a mid-decade special census in 1957, which found that the Jewish intermarriage rate was about 7 percent—just a few percentage points higher than what Drachler had found some decades earlier for second-generation Jews. Though intermarriage was clearly a potential problem for the Jewish community in a free and open society, the demographic data during the first half of the twentieth century rendered the problem more theoretical than real. Ironically, a decade later it would be Marshall Sklare who would alert American Jews to the assimilatory impact of intermarriage, in the pages of *Commentary* (May 1965 and March 1970).

The first indication that Jewish intermarriage might move from the fringes of an isolated, tiny minority into the core of the community came from two local community surveys: one by Stanley K. Bigman of the Jewish community of Washington, D.C. (1957), and the other by Fred Massarik of the Jewish community of San Francisco (1959). They found intermarriage rates of 13 percent and 18 percent respectively.

Those familiar with Uriah Z. Engelman's study of the history of intermarriage trends in Germany, the U.S.S.R., and Switzerland (1940) were not surprised by the Bigman and Massarik findings. After all, European Jewries had experienced a steady rise in the incidence of intermarriage from the 1880s until the 1930s. Why should America be different? Yet for the first half of this century America was different. But, the incidence of intermarriage was beginning to raise its disturbing specter on the American Jewish scene by the end of the 1950s.

Except for a handful of small-scale studies that looked at the psychological profile of intermarriers and their children, the dominant social-science approach to the study of Jewish intermarriage, since the early efforts of Ruppin, Drachsler, and Engelman, was demographic. The primary question was that of frequency, or, at a somewhat more refined level, frequency among various subpopulation segments. Virtually all of the research on Jewish intermarriage until the mid-1970s tried to answer the questions: How many Jews marry non-Jews? Which parts of the population are most prone to intermarriage?

The fruits of this demographic approach were summed up in a thorough and important essay by Erich Rosenthal, "Studies of Jewish Intermarriage in the United States," in the *American Jewish Year Book* of 1963. That essay links the growing incidence of intermarriage to a general "race relations cycle" that all immigrant groups presumably go through. Rosenthal observes, "Intermarriage is the final stage in this process, which starts with competition and conflict among groups upon initial contact and which ends, after an intermediate phase of accommodation, in assimilation and amalgamation."\* Given this broad theoretical perspective on intermarriage, all that was left for research to do was to identify the pace at which Jews of various kinds and in various circumstances would pass through the seemingly inevitable "race relations cycle" and blend into the wider American society, which seemed to be awaiting them with open arms. Rosenthal identified several demographic groups that exhibited higher rates of intermarriage than others: American-born Jews further removed from the immigrant generation, Jews living in areas of low Jewish population density, Jews who have been previously married and divorced.

Seven years after the Rosenthal essay, the *American Jewish Year Book* (1970) commissioned Arnold Schwartz to update and summarize the extant research in the field. His overview summarized the

various data sources, which included (1) the 1957 U.S. Census, (2) Rosenthal's survey of marriage records in Iowa and Indiana, (3) the various community surveys undertaken by local Jewish community councils and federations, and (4) large sample surveys, such as the NORC survey of 34,000 college students in 1961, which contained a sizable Jewish subsample. From a careful reading of these sources, Schwartz added two more factors to Rosenthal's that might help to account for higher rates of intermarriage: social mobility associated with higher education, and gender—men tended to have higher rates of intermarriage than women.

While Schwartz's essay shared much in common with Rosenthal's, its tone and some of its substance differed from its predecessor. Rosenthal had concluded pessimistically:

The studies presented here reveal that . . . intermarriage usually spells the end of belonging to the Jewish community. This finding, which repeats earlier European experiences, takes on special significance if viewed against the fact that the fertility of the Jewish population in the United States is barely sufficient to maintain its present size. . . . it may well be that intermarriage is going to be of ever increasing significance for the future demographic balance of the Jewish population in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Schwartz concluded on a far more sanguine note.

Summing up the various studies of intermarriage rates . . . one can hazard a guess that . . . the rates are not yet high enough to warrant fear of imminent dissolution of the American Jewish community by intermarriage. . . . the net loss is less than the gross intermarriage.<sup>10</sup>

He cited the apparently rising incidence of conversions to Judaism in the 1960s, and the frequency with which children were raised as Jews even in mixed marriages, as reasons for his optimism.

Both Rosenthal's studies and Schwartz's summary essay antedated the 1972 publication of the National Jewish Population Study, the first major national sample survey of America's Jews, which shocked the organized Jewish community into a new awareness of the extent of intermarriage among the most recently marrying Jews. That by-now legendary study showed that while the rate of

intermarriage prior to 1960 had not gone above 13 percent, the rate more than doubled by 1965, and 31 percent of the Jews who married between 1966 and 1972 married someone who was not born Jewish. That finding, raising the age-old specter of large-scale assimilation and the ultimate decline, if not demise, of American Jewry, sent tremors through the community. Apparently, the alarmist prognostications of Ruppin, Engelman, and Rosenthal were becoming a demographic probability, if not yet a sociological certainty.

The publication of the National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) ushered in a new era of concern about intermarriage, both on the programmatic and research fronts. Programmatically, it was clear that the exhortations against intermarriage from pulpits and parents had done little to stem the tide. On the research side, it was evident that tracing the fluctuating rates of intermarriage for various subgroups of the Jewish population was not a sufficient guide to community action in dealing with this thorny subject.

It was at that point that the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, under the leadership of my friend and mentor, Yehuda Rosenman, took a new approach to the subject. At its meeting on December 18, 1974, according to its minutes, the Jewish Communal Affairs Commission "expressed a desire to concentrate on data regarding the consequences of intermarriage for the next generation." It thus explicitly rejected the earlier demographic approaches to the subject that had concentrated on causation. At a consultation on intermarriage and conversion on February 27, 1975, Mr. Rosenman confirmed and lamented "the lack of data regarding the results of intermarriages as they apply to children of such unions, and the overall plus-minus effect of such marriages as compared to endogamous marriages." Technically put, whereas previous research had looked at intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews as a *dependent variable*, or an outcome of social-demographic forces, the new research would view intermarriage as an *independent variable*, a factor that possibly shaped aspects of Jewish identity and Jewish family life.

Yehuda Rosenman decided to elicit the advice of the young Jewish social scientists who had begun to emerge from the universities in the early 1970s. On April 16, 1975, he convened a "brainstorming luncheon" for some dozen of these academics and AJC senior staff. He put to the group his question: what kind of research might the American Jewish Committee initiate that would enable the organized Jewish community to deal more effectively with intermarriage?

Yehuda observed that whenever the subject of intermarriage was raised in Jewish communal circles it generated much heat. Our work, he said, should dissipate some of the heat, and shed light.

Just how heated consideration of the subject could become was apparent some three weeks later at the annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee, where the Sabbath morning program was devoted to the subject, "The Jewish Family and Intermarriage." The session was chaired by the late Mr. Mervin Riseman, an urbane New York attorney. The principal discussants were the late Rabbi Max Routtenberg, former chairman of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, and Dr. Saul Hofstein, a consultant in social planning to the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York. Both speakers responded pessimistically to the recently reported intermarriage trends. Rabbi Routtenberg struck a somewhat liberal note, suggesting that the Jewish community should try to retain the allegiance of intermarrieds and encourage their conversions. Dr. Hofstein expressed more alarm, warning that the future of the Jewish community was jeopardized by growing intermarriage, and that its leaders must redouble their efforts to stem the tide.

The ensuing discussion from the floor showed that many present felt a deep personal involvement in the subject. Some were intermarried Jews who were faithful members of the American Jewish Committee. At least one of the speakers from the floor expressed outrage at what he perceived to be the panelists' disparagement of intermarrieds. He urged the Jewish community to think of the non-Jewish partners in these marriages as a source of potential gain rather than loss for Judaism. In the heat of the moment, one AJC member turned to the assemblage of over 100 people and asked, "How many here have some intermarriage in your families?" As Yehuda later reported, a sea of hands rose into the air. The message was clear and urgent: AJC-sponsored research on the subject must not derogate either intermarrying Jews or their non-Jewish spouses; it should identify opportunities for positive action.

In November 1975, I submitted to Yehuda, at his invitation, a proposal for research that would begin to address the tasks at hand in a way that differed from the work of earlier scholars. First, it focused on the consequences rather than the causes of intermarriage. Second, it was designed to gain insight into family relationships, Jewish practices, attitudes, and experiences in far greater depth than the older, demographically oriented studies. Finally, it proposed to include in the inquiry not only the born-Jews who had

intermarried, but also the Christian-born spouses whom they had married; the study would focus on the intermarried *family* and not only on the intermarried Jewish *individual*.

This approach was not simply an interesting methodological innovation. The proposed research design bestowed a degree of communal recognition upon the reality and even the integrity of the intermarried family that the Jewish community had never before given it. It is to Yehuda's credit that, despite his own personal feelings on this issue and the considerable pressure brought to bear on him from some quarters of the organized Jewish community, he recognized that a truly dispassionate study would not be possible without looking at the intermarried family as a whole. If that entailed bestowing a measure of at least implicit legitimacy upon these traditionally prohibited and frowned-upon unions, that was a risk Yehuda would take in order to shed "light" upon the subject.

The study was also designed to test certain common perceptions about the impact of intermarriage. The research proposal noted the following items of "conventional wisdom" that would be probed:

1. Intermarriage leads to assimilation.
2. Intermarrying Jews are intent upon rejecting their faith, their parents, and their community.
3. Intermarriage disrupts relations between Jewish intermarriers and their parents.
4. Intermarriages are less stable and less satisfactory unions than in-marriages.
5. Non-Jews can never feel at home in a Jewish family and community. Therefore they try to draw their born-Jewish spouses away from their roots, leading them to assimilate.
6. Intermarriage represents a failure of adequate Jewish socialization and social control on the part of parents and rabbis. This can and must be remedied in order to prevent intermarriages.
7. Jewish men are somehow psychologically more impelled to marry non-Jews than are Jewish women.
8. Any communal accommodation to or legitimization of intermarriage will hasten its growth, and the inevitable decline of the Jewish community.

The American Jewish Committee underwrote a research design that would make personal contact with hundreds of intermarried

families, representing a cross-section of that population throughout the United States. Between the spring of 1976 and the spring of 1977 a total of 446 couples were surveyed by means of personal interviews and written questionnaires. The resulting data were summarized in a publication entitled *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future* (1979). Among its principal findings, this study showed that

1. Very few Jews who marry non-Jews (less than 4 percent) convert to the religion of their spouse, while many more of the non-Jews who marry Jews (over 21 percent) convert to Judaism; thus conversionary marriages, which comprise somewhere between a fifth and a third of all Jewish intermarriages, counteract to some extent the much-feared assimilatory impact of intermarriage.
2. Even in the absence of formal conversion to Judaism by the non-Jewish spouse, the tendency of the Jewish spouse and the family unit toward assimilation is neither uniform nor universal. Selected home-centered rituals, such as lighting Hanukkah candles or celebrating the Passover seder, remain present in the lives of at least half the mixed-married population, while other symbolic expressions of Jewishness, such as lighting candles on Friday nights to honor the Sabbath, are practiced only among a small minority. Also, a large proportion of the non-Jews who marry Jews relinquish their identification with their religion of ancestry. These findings challenged the widely assumed linkage between intermarriage and assimilation. They also suggested that the organized Jewish community might do well to respond to the intermarried with gestures of outreach and welcome.
3. The ties of intermarrying Jews to their parents are generally not impaired. Indeed, Jews in intermarriages have ties to their parents at least as strong as those their non-Jewish partners have with theirs, and perhaps even stronger.
4. While Jewish men more often marry non-Jewish women than Jewish females marry non-Jewish males, the statistical difference between the two groups diminishes dramatically in the younger age cohorts. There is, then, no apparent psychological "germ" predisposing Jewish men to marry non-Jewish women.
5. The study revealed no evidence of marital discord and impending marital dissolution in intermarried families.

While *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future* sounded a hopeful note, it left unresolved some of the most important questions about the outcomes of intermarriage: What becomes of the children? Are they raised as Jews or not? Are they psychologically troubled by the fact that they are born to and raised by parents from two different religious-ethnic heritages? Do they accept or reject their social and psychological identities?

A second study, undertaken between 1981 and 1983, was published in 1983 under the title *Children of Intermarriage*. It was based on a self-administered questionnaire sent to the adolescent and adult children of couples who had participated in the first study. The findings of this second survey tempered considerably the optimism of the first. It found that, of the children who were raised in mixed-marriage families (no conversion on the part of the non-Jewish parent), only 24 percent identified themselves as Jewish. More than three-quarters did not. And virtually none married Jews themselves. On the other hand, children who were raised in conversionary families (where the erstwhile non-Jewish parent had become Jewish) showed a better-than-85-percent Jewish identification, and more than 60 percent married Jews. The study found no indications that the respondents in either group were disturbed by or rejected their identity. Nor did it show any signs of special conflict with or rejection of their parents.

But the findings did raise another issue about the identities of children raised in conversionary families. While, as noted before, those children overwhelmingly identified as Jews, their answers to questions about whether Jews have a special responsibility for one another and a special responsibility toward Israel drew universalistic rather than particularistic responses. It came as no surprise that this was even more common among the children raised in mixed marriages, who were far less likely to identify as Jews altogether. Yehuda Rosenman concluded from this that children who are raised in conversionary families and identify as Jews tend to see their Jewishness in religious terms rather than as an amalgam of religion and ethnicity. He drew the practical implication that educational programs for all Jewish children, but particularly for children raised in conversionary families, ought to concentrate on the ethnic, historical, and cultural elements of Jewish identification.

Since this second study underscored the importance of conversion in improving the odds that intermarried couples would raise their children as Jews, in 1984 the American Jewish Committee sponsored

yet a third study focusing on the dynamics of conversion. It asked: Who converts and who does not in an intermarriage? What are the factors that stimulate conversion, and what is the quality of Jewish identification that results from conversion?

This study, conducted by mail survey questionnaires, was based on a newly drawn national sample. The sample was selected through a careful procedure of what came to be called a "randomized snowball technique," which involved drawing distinctive Jewish surnames at random from local telephone directories in fifteen selected areas of the country. Individuals bearing these surnames were contacted by telephone and asked for names, addresses, and phone numbers of people they knew who were intermarried. Picking Jewish names out of the phone book ensured that the informants and the sample represented a cross-section of the Jewish population. And indeed, the approximately 700 people who received questionnaires were from every sector of the Jewish community—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and unaffiliated—in virtually the same proportions as demographic surveys have shown for the Jewish community in general.

The American Jewish Committee's publication of *Conversion Among the Intermarried* in 1987 disproved some of the conventional wisdom about conversion. The most significant finding concerned the religious motivation of those who convert to Judaism. It has often been said, particularly by rabbis, that non-Jews who convert in intermarriages are motivated by social convenience, not serious religious conviction. Yet the study showed that the great majority of converts perceive themselves and conduct themselves as more religious than those who do not convert. Those who converted to Judaism were more likely than the nonconverts to also report that their Jewish partners and the parents of their Jewish partners were religious. Clearly, the motivations of the convert alone are not sufficient to explain who converts to Judaism and who does not. One needs to focus on the familial context. Where a non-Jew marries a religiously identified, religiously affiliated, religiously involved Jewish partner, there is a much greater likelihood of conversion than where a non-Jew marries a Jew who is distant from religion.

A second finding of great practical importance is that many of those who converted to Judaism reported that someone—typically their born-Jewish husband or wife—had invited them to that possibility. Conversion was not a decision that came out of the clear blue sky; it was based on family discussions. At the very least, some kind

of intrafamilial social influence did stimulate the formerly non-Jewish partner to become Jewish. The converse is true as well. Those in the sample who did not convert to Judaism, more often than not, stayed non-Jewish by default. When asked whether they had ever thought about conversion, or whether their nonconversion represented a considered decision, the overwhelming majority responded that they had never thought about the subject. No one—neither spouse nor in-laws—had ever raised it.

This study showed that rabbis play a relatively small role in people's decisions to convert. Rabbis enter the scene only after such a decision is made; very few converts indicated that their conversion was influenced by rabbinic contact. Also, *Conversion Among the Intermarried* raised serious questions about the popular assumption that rabbis who perform marriages between Jews and non-Jews somehow manage to draw the couples closer to the Jewish community, and that rabbis who refuse to officiate "turn off" the couple, alienating them from the Jewish community. Rabbis who officiated at mixed marriages rarely asked the couples in our sample to consider the possibility of conversion. Moreover, about 10 percent of the converts had sought out a rabbi prior to their conversion to perform their marriages, and had been rebuffed. Yet, they ended up converting. For that 10 percent, rabbinic rejection did not turn them away from Judaism. On the contrary, it seems to have given them the message that if they wanted the benefit of clergy, they had to become full-fledged Jews—and they proceeded to do so.

Taken together, the three American Jewish Committee studies, spanning a decade, have shed a great deal of light on the subject and dispelled considerable heat surrounding it. They have also set a standard for how to look at intermarried families as families. They have provided a social-scientific backbone for the Jewish community's efforts to grapple with the demographic revolution that confronts American Jewry, and stimulated new initiatives, such as programs to encourage the conversion of non-Jews married to Jews, that are unprecedented in the last sixteen hundred years of Jewish history.

These three studies are a testimonial to an institution. They are a credit to the American Jewish Committee, examples of its ability to attack major social challenges facing American Jews on the basis of thoughtful analysis and dispassionate scientific inquiry.

These studies are also a testimonial to Yehuda Rosenman, who was able to translate his deep Jewish convictions and concerns into

a creative strategy for developing new knowledge, even when that knowledge required that we transcend some of our favorite preconceptions. It was Yehuda's compassionate and pragmatic commitment to Jewish survival that stimulated both the American Jewish Committee and the host of people whom he drew into the process of research and deliberation to confront the challenge of intermarriage, not with handwringing and alarm, but with a sense of passionate engagement and a call to action. That sense of engagement shaped the research process and the programmatic application of the findings in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

#### NOTES

1. Sanford Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Getting Married* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1984), p. 11.
2. Alexander M. Schindler, "Presidential Address," UAHC Convention, Houston, Texas, Dec. 2, 1978.
3. Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *Boston's Jewish Community: The 1985 CJP Demographic Survey* (Boston, 1987).
4. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 80.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Arthur Ruppin, *The Jewish Fate and Future* (London: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 106.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Erich Rosenthal, "Studies of Jewish Intermarriage in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 64 (1963), p. 8.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
10. Arnold Schwartz, "Intermarriage in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 71 (1970), p. 110.

From the Journal of Jewish Communal Service  
Spring 1990

**The Demographic Imperatives of Outreach**  
**Barry A. Kosmin, Ph.D.**

Unless the erosion of the Jewish population can be halted, the Jews are destined for the future of an endangered species. The challenge before American Jewry today is to save for the Jewish people one million children of intermarriage. How successful the Jewish community is in the task of outreach and conversion will determine the future of the American Jewish community.

The centrality of the demographic experience for any society is acknowledged by most scholars, but it is even more critical for a people such as American Jews. As an essentially voluntary community in a free society, America's Jews are not only a biological population subject to change in the ratio of births to deaths but also a social population. Nobody can be sure that his or her biological descendants will be Jews. Moreover, as the sad history of the twentieth century has shown, the terms of Jewish group survival can also be dramatically altered by cataclysmic political change. Jews are therefore better termed a biosocial population, since the crucial demographic process of family formation - marriage at both the individual and mass levels - is influenced by sociological, psychological, anthropological, historical, and religious factors.

This article outlines some of the demographic facts that describe in broad terms the American Jewish family structure; Its objective is to set the parameters of discourse about the prospects of American Jewry in the face of current intermarriage trends.

**Historical Overview**

In historical terms, the change in the demography of the Jewish people in the twentieth century is not only unparalleled but also catastrophic. In 1900, only three generations ago, world Jewry was significantly younger than today, its core was centered between the Oder and Dnieper rivers in Europe and it had a rate of growth of nearly 1.5% per annum, close to that of present-day developing countries. In 1920, numbering 16 or 17 million, Jews were more numerous than Mexicans, Vietnamese, Egyptians or Canadians. There was one Jew for every five Latin Americans; today there is only one Jew for every fifty Latin Americans.

In one of the most significant changes the world has seen this century - the more than doubling in the world's population to over four billion, despite war and natural disasters - the Jews have had the opposite experience. The Jewish population has shrunk to under 13 million people in 1989. Of all the peoples who

suffered loses in World War II, the Jews alone have failed to recover. The remaining Jews just did not have the demographic reserves to make up for the losses of the Shoah. Moreover to their biological loses, Jews have added social losses resulting from the loss of the loyalty of born Jews.

Unless the erosion of Jewish numbers (through a downward geometric progression) can be halted, the Jews are destined for the future of an endangered species. Living organisms either expand and grow. If they stop growing, they begin to die. In both biological and economic worlds, stasis or zero population growth leads to decline or the euphemism of negative growth.

### **American Jewry in Perspective**

The prognosis for American Jewry, which now comprises nearly half of world Jewry, is only a slightly grayer version of the black picture described above. Although immigration has increased since Roosevelt's days, lack of sufficient population growth has reduced American Jewry's relative proportion of the total American population by one third. Biologically there is zero population growth. Thankfully there is now again a healthy flow of Soviet immigrants, young families who will be needed for the future viability of American Jewish communal institutions. Yet, they are probably not sufficient to stem the tide of Jewish population attrition in this country, even if they do choose to identify as Jews.

Recent surveys of the American Jewish population at the local and national levels have shown that Jews are the population with the largest proportion of one-person households and the smallest proportion of households with children. Only one third of Jewish households contain a person under the age of 18 years. What the Jewish community lacks most is that which inspired our ancestors and lightened their oppressed and tedious lives-children. Despite all the cultural myths about the vaunted Jewish family, Jews are becoming the least familial group in the nation.

It is highly doubtful that any amount of social engineering by Jewish voluntary agencies will change contemporary Jewish social patterns, particularly marriage patterns. The mass of Jewish young adults will not be persuaded to marry younger or only to marry born Jews, nor can one hope to inspire Jewish women to have larger numbers of children. However, there may be a window of opportunity that could reverse the erosion of the Jewish population base.

At this time the relatively large Jewish demographic cohorts of the Baby Boom aged 25-35 are beginning to settle down, marry, and produce children. Of course, it is also this group that is intermarrying at record levels. Among Baby Boomers at least 37% of the married men and 24% of the married women are in interfaith marriages. These figures can be compared with the 14% of men born

between 1925 and 1945 and the 7% of men born before 1925 who are intermarried. (Kosmin et al., 1989)

However, in theory intermarriage need not lead to Jewish population losses. From a halachic perspective the child of a Jewish woman is Jewish. So even if all Jewish women are intermarried, all of their children would be Jewish and there would be no intergenerational loss of numbers, at least according to traditional Jewish law. Moreover we know that Gentile women married to Jewish men are far more likely to convert than are Gentile men to Jewish women. The increasing incidence of intermarriage among Jewish women and the disproportionate rate of conversion to Judaism among Gentile women may in fact result in an increasing number of Jewish children.

The real Jewish problem with intermarriage is not demographic. It is operational and sociological. The fact is that Jewish communal and religious organizations fail to capture their potential market because they completely ignore the intermarried and their children as a significant Jewish constituency. This has always been so, but the magnitude of the challenge has clearly grown.

#### **Children-The Key to Outreach**

It is the sheer dimension of this challenge in the 1990's that makes it a make-or-break situation for American Jewry. The greatest tragedy of the Shoah was the murder of 1 million Jewish children. The challenge before American Jewry today is to save for the Jewish people one million potentially Jewish children, who are alive and well in the cities and suburbs across this continent at this moment.

There are approximately 850,000 Jewish young people under the age of 18 living with two Jewish parents. There is an even larger number with only one parent of Jewish extraction. Why are there more of the latter than the former? Not only do we have numbers of children from interfaith couples but we constantly add to the total when Jewish marriages are dissolved because 32% of intermarriers marry out on their second marriage, thereby creating blended families. Yet, around 400,000 of these children of intermarriage without conversion of the Gentile spouse are Jewish according to the criteria of all Jewish denominations - They have Jewish mothers.

Now, if between around 33 and 60% of Jewish children (the proportion varies according to how one defines who is a Jew) are at risk, then outreach to the children of mixed and blended marriages should be a communal priority (from a demographic point of view). The need is even greater in the West and South, particularly in California and Texas, where the proportion of next generation affected by intermarriage is higher than the national norm.

## Implications For The Future

How successful the organized Jewish community is in the task of recruitment, outreach, and conversion will decide whether in the year 2020 there will be an elderly, vulnerable, and fast diminishing Jewish population of 4 million Jews in this country or a demographically well-balanced and expanding population of 7 million. To realize the latter scenario, American Jewish religious and communal institutions must recognize that they no longer have a captive market and that they must provide reasons and incentives for people to take up their Jewish option. They will also have to relearn the power of positive thought, regain their optimism, and become risk takers.

In our market society people consume goods and services that they regard as valuable and attractive and that make them feel good. By the nature of their education and incomes Jews are the most sophisticated consumers in the nation. They want quality products. One way they can be persuaded that the Jewish community is a worthwhile and quality product is by persuading high-status Gentiles that it is one. As Peter Berger (1979) suggested some years ago, the social psychology of a group such as the Jews means that if you first convince the outsiders of its value then the insiders will buy into it. The Jewish community needs successful outreach for credible inreach.

The importance of this insight is magnified by a few facts from the early screening phase of the CJF 1990 National Survey of American Jews. Our results suggest that there are 150,000 people who were raised as Jews who no longer identify as Jews in any way. About 100,000 say they are Christians, and the remainder have no religion or are agnostic. There are also several hundred thousand adults - children of intermarriage - with a Jewish parent who do not identify as Jews. Over 200,00 are now Christians, and 180,000 of them have no religion. These are all demographic losses. Yet, 230,000 have not transferred their loyalty to another brand of religion.

In addition, over a half-million Christians consider themselves Jewish by virtue of being married to a Jew. Some may be open to conversion through persuasion to convert. More importantly, these findings suggest that they would react positively if their children were offered an exposure to Judaism. This also confirms some curious 1981 Canadian Census data in which hundreds of Gentile parents recorded their children as Jewish on their census forms, even when there was no longer a Jewish adult in the home, i.e., the biological Jewish parent was noncustodial. In Vancouver, British Columbia, a community of under 1500 Jews, 305 Jewish children were in this category. Obviously some Gentiles have much less of a problem with Jewishness than many Jews.

Given the current rates of intermarriage by a sophisticated population of autonomous mature adults, we are long past the stage where we can invoke effective religious, communal, or

familial sanctions against marrying those born into other faiths. However, we can be successful in outreach to these Jews and the conversion of their spouses and children if we can get "equal time" with the Christians and new religions. We shall need the kind of drive, enthusiasm, and communal support that Christian evangelism evokes in its constituency in order to achieve this goal. The demographic imperative for outreach and conversion necessitates our competition in the free marketplace of ideas; the challenges of the 1990's offer American Jewry no other realistic alternative.



# Reform Jewish Leaders, Intermarriage, and Conversion\*

Jonathan D. Sarna

## Introduction

Back in 1818, Attorney General William Wirt, one of the finest attorneys general in America's history, wondered in a private letter whether persecutions of the Jews, for all of their unhappy effects, perhaps held the key to Jewish unity. "I believe," he wrote to John Myers of Norfolk, Virginia, "that if those persecutions had never existed the Jews would have melted down into the general mass of the people of the world." He went on to suggest that if persecutions came to an end, the "children of Israel" might even then cease to exist as a separate nation. Within 150 years he was sure that they would be indistinguishable from the rest of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

Now, more than 150 years later, we know that Wirt was wrong: the Jewish people lives on. The relationship that Wirt posited between persecutions and Jewish identity may not be wrong, but to date, we have never had the opportunity to find out. Meanwhile, prophecies of doom have continued unabated. *Look* magazine some years ago featured a cover story on the "Vanishing American Jew." *Look* itself has since vanished, not just once but twice, and the Jewish people lives on. A volume entitled *The End of the Jewish People*, by the French sociologist George Friedman, has also come and gone. Again, the Jewish people lives on. Indeed, somebody once pointed out that prediction is very difficult, especially about the future. This may be particularly worth remembering today.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking about the future, most of us, when we are honest, speak about contemporary trends and extrapolate (usually quite

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wrongly) that they will continue *ad infinitum*. So it is that a task force examining the future of Reform Judaism sensibly began with a study of contemporary Reform Jewish leaders. We cannot begin to think about where we are going in the Reform movement until we know where we are now.

To my mind, this study, entitled *Leaders of Reform Judaism*,<sup>3</sup> offers us some very important information. It is an honest study, it is methodologically sophisticated, and it makes available a wealth of interesting data. Like all such studies, it must be used with discernment: the data base is necessarily small; women seem to be overrepresented (60 percent to 40 percent); East Coast Jews are underrepresented; and over 80 percent of the respondents are over the age of 40. Obviously, the leadership of the Reform movement is neither a microcosm of American Jewry nor a microcosm of the Reform movement as a whole. But this study can nevertheless teach us a great deal, especially about the complex question of intermarriage — the central focus, we are told, of the research task force's mandate.

### Jewish Knowledge

Before turning to this issue, however, I do want to lament that one subject was largely overlooked in this study, and that is the (to my mind) critical question of what Reform Jewish leaders know about Judaism in general and about Reform Judaism in particular. We are, to be sure, given the discouraging information that only about one in five Reform Jewish leaders knows modern Hebrew more than slightly, and that 44 percent have either little or no ability at all even to read prayerbook Hebrew. But what about knowledge of Judaism? How many leaders could pass a minimal test in Jewish cultural literacy? Do they read Jewish books, study Jewish texts in translation, look back into Jewish history? I think that it would be important to know, and I furthermore think that if the answer is embarrassing we ought to do something about it. Leadership seminars, summer institutes, serious programs of continuing adult studies, scholarships for those who want to take Jewish studies courses at neighborhood universities — these and similar programs should, in my opinion, all be part of the agenda for the future of Reform Judaism. I believe that such programs would improve the caliber of Reform leaders and the quality of Reform Jewish life itself; and yes, in their own way, I think that such educational programs would also help to counteract intermarriage. I realize that educated Jews, too, meet and fall in love with non-Jews, but if they do, it is some comfort to know

that they are at least able to explain why Judaism means so much to them, and why (we hope) they also want it to become the religion of their children.

### Intermarriage

Intermarriage is, as I mentioned, the central focus of this overall study, and it deserves special comment. For just as Attorney General Wirt predicted, the decline of persecution and the rise of interfaith intimacy have made it harder and harder to maintain Jewish distinctiveness. Intermarriage, in other words, is the price we pay for living in a highly tolerant society where Jews and Christians interact freely. Most people today do not, as they once did, intermarry in order to escape Judaism; instead, they intermarry because they happen to meet and fall in love with a non-Jew.<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, for this reason, the intermarriage rates for men and women have converged. It is no longer the case that many more Jewish men intermarry than Jewish women. Bruce Phillips found that in Los Angeles, among under-thirty Jews, the opposite was true; more Jewish women intermarried than men. The conversion rate is similarly far more balanced today than in the past. Whereas among Reform leaders surveyed here 90 percent of the converts were women, today according to Phillips, men are converting at an even higher rate than women.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, then, neither intermarriage nor conversion should be seen as a sex-linked phenomenon. Relevant programs must be directed to men and women alike.

What can we do about intermarriage? The leadership study is pessimistic: "Given the cultural realities of contemporary North America," it concludes, "there is no necessary connection between the degree of one's Jewish religious background, activity and practice and the decision to marry a born non-Jew (p. 90)." Strictly speaking that is correct: there is no "necessary" connection; even ultra-Orthodox Jews occasionally marry born non-Jews. But there certainly is a *statistically significant* connection. This study, Steven M. Cohen's studies, and simple common sense all indicate that, generally speaking, the more intense one's Jewish commitment, the less likely one is to intermarry. Even if one does marry a born non-Jew, one is more likely, given a strong Jewish commitment, to insist that the non-Jewish partner convert.

There is no reason for us to hide or dispute these facts. Instead, I think that we should publicize them widely and use them to make the strongest possible case for encouraging worried Reform Jewish parents to begin nurturing Jewish consciousness early and to continue Jewish education and identity training long past Bar/

Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation. This may not guarantee marriage to a nice Jewish boy or girl, but it does at least improve the odds.

Other ways of improving the odds need to be encouraged also. Clearly one of the most effective means of promoting in-group marriage is to place Jews in situations where they are most likely, just in the normal course of events, to meet other Jews. One of the reasons New York City has a lower intermarriage rate than most other Jewish communities in America is precisely this: in New York the odds of meeting a suitable mate who happens to be Jewish are relatively high. Some of our synagogues, temples, Jewish centers, and Hillel houses around the country achieve this same goal through extraordinarily successful Jewish singles activities. But a great many Jewish singles are not being reached by Jewish organizations. What we need for them, I believe, is a concerted nationwide outreach program (or to use Leonard Fein's term, an "in-reach program") designed to help single Jews meet other Jews wherever they are. Such a program, if sensibly and sensitively carried out and backed by sociological research and adequate funding, could go a long way in mitigating some of the problems of our singles, and keeping them within our community.

I want to say a word at this point about the chapter in the leadership study dealing with rabbinic officiation at intermarriages. I for one found it illuminating to learn that lay leaders today are as divided on this subject as rabbis are. Perhaps understandably, those whose own children have intermarried often feel differently from those whose children have not. What we lack, however, is any adequate measure of the impact that rabbinic decisions (on whether or not to officiate) have actually made on the intermarrying couples themselves. I know from Mark Winer and Egon Mayer that such surveys are now underway, and I want to use this opportunity to sound a note of caution. The key question is not just mechanically quantitative, as these surveys would have us believe, but also elusively qualitative. In other words, before we can measure impact effectively we need to know not just whether a rabbi agreed to officiate, but also how the rabbi explained his or her decision and then related to the couple beforehand and afterwards. There are rabbis who have a remarkable ability to say "no" graciously without losing their influence, and there are rabbis who, even if they do perform intermarriages, are more likely to drive people away from our faith than draw them near to it. I know of no current research that takes account of these qualitative aspects of rabbinic work, and I am, therefore, leery of drawing any meaningful conclusions at this time, much less of making policy recommendations for the future.

### "Jews by Choice"

This brings me to what I consider to be the most innovative and compelling sections of this report, those that deal with converts to Judaism, or "Jews by Choice." Nobody knows how many converts have entered the Jewish fold, but estimating conservatively at two percent of America's 5.7 million Jews yields a population of over 115,000 men and women. If all of them lived in one community, it would be the ninth largest Jewish community in America, with more Jews than St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Cincinnati combined. This is an unprecedented situation not only in America but in all of modern Jewish history. It deserves a great deal more scholarly attention than it receives.

Only a small number of converts are actually included in this survey (41 converts, 51 born Jews married to converts). The conclusions drawn, however, correlate well with other surveys, notably those of Egon Mayer and Steven Huberman,<sup>6</sup> and are also supported by impressionistic evidence. Here I want to discuss three interrelated trends that to my mind hold especially important implications for the future.

First of all, all surveys agree that converts tend to emphasize religious and spiritual aspects of Judaism: they attend synagogue more often than born Jews do, they observe basic home rituals, and they look to the synagogue as their spiritual center. What Harold Kushner found in Conservative synagogues applies to Reform temples as well:

[Converts] define their Jewishness in terms familiar to them from their Christian upbringing: prayer and ritual observance. By their numbers and sincerity, they are reshaping American Judaism into a less ethnic, more spiritual community."<sup>7</sup>

The implications of these changes are not yet altogether clear; they may prove, despite my skepticism, to be wholly positive. Certainly, rabbis and congregational leaders need to be alert to what is going on, so that they may set appropriate priorities for the coming decades.

The second and more troubling trend that I see is the tendency of converts to subordinate the ethnic aspects of their Judaism. They score far below born Jews in the Jewish communalism index that Mark Winer describes. They are more diffident about *Kelal Yisrael* in general, particularly the idea that Jews should extend special help to fellow Jews in need. And their support of Israel is, statistically speaking, much lower than that of born Jews. These

findings are not surprising; Egon Mayer found similar attitudes in his study. Nor are these findings hard to understand, since most Introduction to Judaism courses emphasize religion over ethnicity, and most converts come to Judaism from a religion that considers universalism more important than peoplehood. But if not surprising, these findings are deeply troubling, especially since even among born Reform Jews the values that have been traditionally associated with Jewish peoplehood seem to be eroding. *Kelal Yisrael* and *Ahavat Yisrael* — the fraternal feelings of love that bind Jews one to another even when they disagree — have weakened their hold on many of our leaders today. We are fast losing our ability to view the Jewish people in familial terms as one big *mishpoche*. Obviously, this problem is not unique to Reform Jews: the principles of *Kelal Yisrael* and *Ahavat Yisrael* are spurned by far too many Orthodox Jews as well, especially in Israel. But while this magnifies our challenge, it does not absolve us from the obligation to uphold these principles no matter who violates them. Bitter experience should have taught us that these principles are sacred; whenever Jews have not been responsible for one another, tragedy has resulted. So while others preach intra-Jewish hatred, we must learn to practice what Israel's great chief rabbi, Rav Kook, called *ahavat chinam*, boundless love. This means love for converts, love for Conservative and Orthodox Jews, yes, even love for Jews who don't love us. That is what the family of Israel is all about.

We are a long way from meeting this goal. Leaders of Reform Judaism score low on communalism, leaders who are converts score lower, and impressionistic evidence suggests that many ordinary Jews score lower still. There is thus an urgent need for a vigorous new emphasis on Jewish communalism throughout the Reform movement (indeed, throughout all branches of Judaism) paying special attention to what *Kelal Yisrael* and *Ahavat Yisrael* mean, and how both can be turned into working principles that govern our lives. No priority is more important in terms of safeguarding Jews everywhere and the future of the Jewish people as a whole.

### Converts' Views of Inter-marriage

This brings me to the last trend pointed to in this survey that demands attention, and that is the views expressed by converts on the subject of inter-marriage, particularly what they would do if their own children inter-married. Frighteningly, about 80 percent of converts or those married to converts scored high on the inter-marriage acceptability index: they would not, by their own admis-

sion, feel too badly if their children married non-Jews. Egon Mayer's study showed that many converts would *not even discourage* their children from marrying someone who was not Jewish.<sup>8</sup> In the Reform leadership study, more than 50 percent of the converts responding — leaders, I remind you — would not even be bothered a great deal if their children *converted to Christianity!* (p. 109). There is here a world of difference between converts and born Jews, and one that augurs very badly indeed for our future. If today, when most Jewish parents still disapprove of intermarriage, we have such a significant intermarriage rate, tomorrow, when a substantial number will not disapprove, I fear that the figures will be very bleak indeed.

Now I obviously understand why many converts feel as they do, and in a sense I admire their consistency: they want their children to have the same freedom of choice that they had. The very term "Jew by Choice," so very popular today in Reform circles (some, indeed, argue that we are *all* "Jews by Choice") implies that members of the next generation are free to make a different choice, even if that means Christianity. But as people concerned about Judaism's future, it seems to me that we cannot look upon these statistics with equanimity, and must wholeheartedly reject the proposition that conversion to Judaism is an ephemeral decision in no way binding on one's offspring. Instead we must help converts understand *why* we feel as strongly as we do about preventing intermarriage and apostasy, and must emphasize that to our mind conversion implies not just a choice but a *permanent transformation* — a change in identity, traditionally even a change of name. Perhaps we should discard the very term "Jew by Choice" as misleading and replace it with a stronger term — a Jew by adoption, by conversion, by transformation. Certainly, it seems to me, as I have already argued, that we need to place new stress on the peoplehood aspects of Judaism, with appropriate educational and outreach programs.

Let us make no mistake; the data we now have at hand should serve as a dire warning: *Unless we act decisively, many of today's converts will be one-generation Jews — Jews with non-Jewish parents and non-Jewish children.* I say this with great personal sadness, since some of the finest, most courageous, and most dedicated Jews I know are proud "Jews by Choice," and the last thing I mean to do is to cast doubt on their sincerity. We are a better Jewish community thanks to those who have come to Judaism from the outside, and should be grateful that our problems stem from those entering the Jewish fold rather than from those rushing headlong to abandon it. Still, the data here speak for themselves and are positively alarming. We will be accountable to

posterity if, knowing what we now know, we close our eyes and do nothing.

### Conclusion

Let me close with what I hope is a more comforting thought. Learned Jews and non-Jews have been making dire predictions about the future (or end) of the Jewish people for literally thousands of years — long before William Wirt and long after him — and, as we have seen, their predictions have proved consistently wrong. The reason, I think, has nothing to do with the quality of our prophets, but is rather to the credit of those who listened to them. Refusing to consider the future preordained, clearheaded Jews have always acted to avert the perils they were warned against, and in every case, to a greater or lesser extent, they were successful: the Jewish people lived on.

So it is today. We have prophets, we have wise leaders, and we have a future that is ours to shape. We can shape it well, or we can shape it poorly. May we find the wisdom to do a good job.

### NOTES

\* Edited from a lecture delivered at the Workshop Seminar of the Research Task Force on the Future of Reform Judaism, held at HUC-JIR, New York, on October 9, 1988. I am grateful to Rabbi Sanford Seltzer for inviting me to prepare this lecture, and for permitting me to publish it here.

<sup>1</sup> William Wirt to John Myers (June 12, 1818), Myers Family Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. For the background to this letter, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> See now Stephen J. Whitfield's essay on "The End of Jewish History," in *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism in Europe and America: Essays Presented in Honor of Yehoshua Arieli* (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1986), pp. 385-407, and in a slightly different version in Whitfield's *American Space, Jewish Time* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1988), pp. 171-191.

<sup>3</sup> Mark L. Winer, Sanford Seltzer, and Steven J. Schwager, *Leaders of Reform Judaism: A Study of Jewish Identity, Religious Practices and Beliefs, and Marriage Patterns* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, "Coping with Intermarriage," *Jewish Spectator* 47 (Summer 1982), pp. 26-28.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Phillips, "Los Angeles Jewry: A Demographic Portrait," *American Jewish Year Book* 86 (1986), pp. 145-147, 153, and 177-178.

<sup>6</sup> Egon Mayer and Carl Sheingold, *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979); Egon Mayer, *Children of*

*Intermarriage* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1983); Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, *Conversion Among the Intermarried* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987); Steven Huberman, *New Jews: The Dynamics of Religious Conversion* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Harold Kushner, "The American Jewish Perspective: A Conservative Perspective," *Judaism* 123 (Summer 1982), p. 298.

<sup>8</sup> Mayer, *Children of Intermarriage*, p. 34.



INTERMARRIAGE AMONG JEWS IN GERMANY,  
U.S.S.R., AND SWITZERLAND

BY URIAH ZEVI ENGELMAN

GERMANY

1. *Statistics*

The Jewish marriage statistics of Germany during the first three decades of the twentieth century reveal two trends. On the one hand there was a continuous growth in the number of Jewish mixed unions, which became especially strong in the first years of the World War, and on the other hand the number of Jewish homogeneous marriages decreased (see Table I and Chart II).

TABLE I

ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF HOMOGENEOUS AND MIXED MARRIAGES  
AND THE RATIO OF MIXED PER 100 HOMOGENEOUS WEDDINGS  
1901-1929

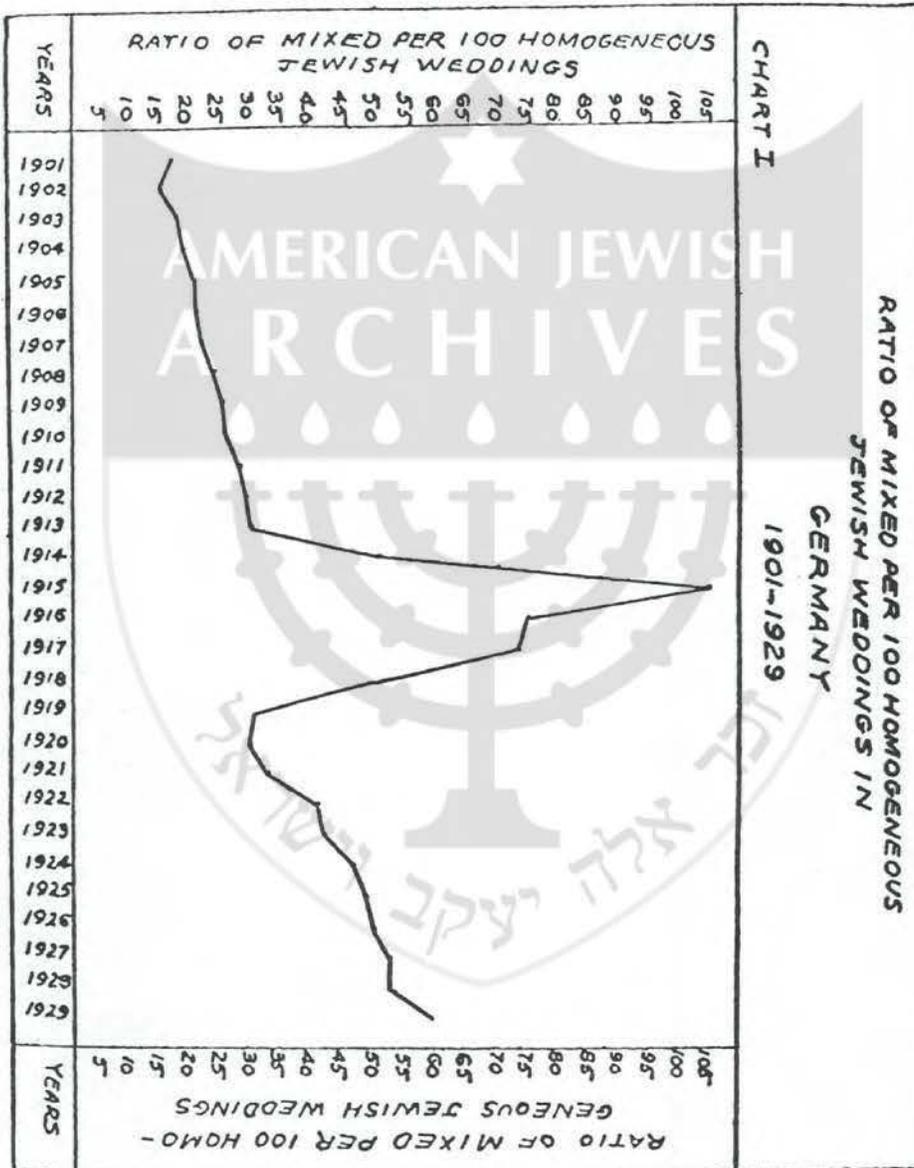
Year	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1901.....	3,878	658	16.9
1902.....	3,925	626	15.7
1903.....	3,831	668	17.4
1904.....	4,001	748	18.6
1905.....	3,905	819	20.9
1906.....	4,080	855	21.0

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Year	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1907.....	4,052	920	22.7
1908.....	3,907	939	24.0
1909.....	3,873	982	25.3
1910.....	3,880	1,003	25.8
1911.....	3,814	1,088	28.5
1912.....	3,833	1,130	29.4
1913.....	3,621	1,122	30.9
1914.....	2,617	1,344	51.3
1915.....	1,098	1,143	104.0
1916.....	1,292	967	74.8
1917.....	1,402	1,035	73.8
1918.....	2,171	1,084	49.9
1919.....	6,295	1,929	30.6
1920.....	7,497	2,211	29.4
1921.....	5,617	1,890	33.6
1922.....	5,025	2,038	40.5
1923.....	4,833	2,008	41.5
1924.....	3,310	1,547	46.7
1925.....	2,904	1,413	48.6
1926.....	2,656	1,315	49.5
1927.....	2,789	1,505	53.9
1928.....	2,983	1,604	53.8
1929.....	2,817	1,663	59.0

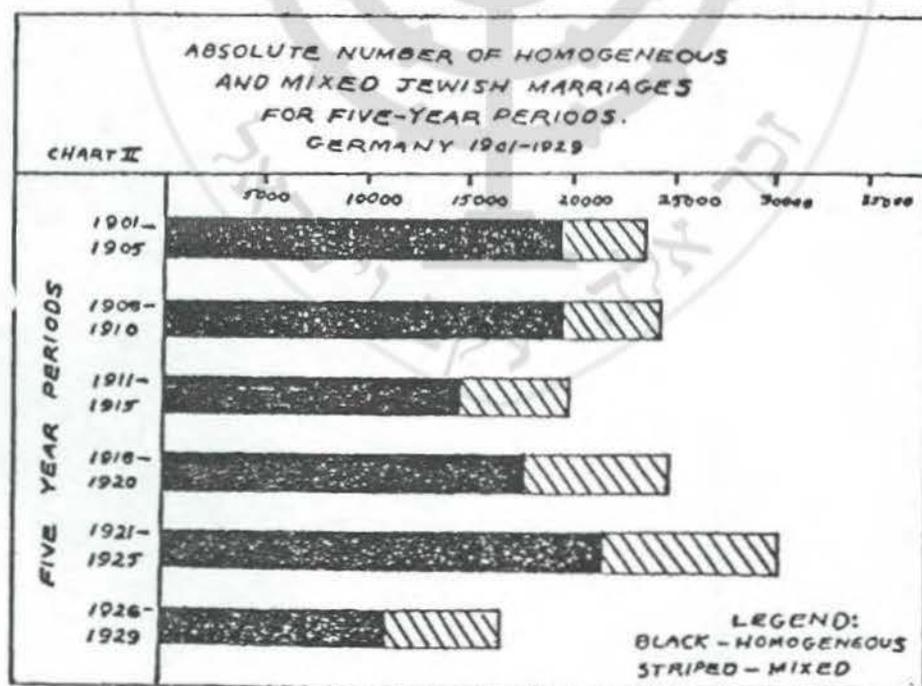
Source: *Allgemeines statistisches Archiv*, vol. xviii (1928); *Die Bewegung der Bevölkerung. Statistik des deutschen Reichs*, vol. cclix (1930) and vol. cccxciii (1931).

From the beginning of the century till the World War, with the exception of the year 1902, the number of Jewish mixed unions per every 100 homogeneous Jewish weddings increased yearly. In the year 1914, which included several war months, the intermarriage rate gained 20 points, rising from 30.9 to 51.3, and in the next year, 1915, the first full war year, it more than doubled: for every 100 Jewish weddings there were recorded for that year 104 mixed Jewish weddings. With the continuance, however, of the war, and the subsidence of the war



fever, the ratio of interdenominational Jewish unions declined, and in the three years from 1916 to 1918 it dropped almost 54 points. In 1919, the first year after the war, the ratio declined to pre-war level; it declined again in 1920, two years after the war, to the ratio of two years before it, to 29.4. But in 1921 an upward movement set in again in the Jewish intermarriage rate, which brought it up within nine years from 29.4 to 59.0. And this increase, one should point out, coincided with the spread of the Nazi movement. The latter served, it seems, as no deterrent in preventing gentiles from marrying Jews. It was only later when intermarriage became a crime punishable by law and concentration camp that the process of the biological fusion of Jews and non-Jews was checked.

The progressive trend among the German Jews to marry out of the fold comes clearly to the fore when the intermarriage rate is computed for quinquennial instead of annual periods (see Table II and Charts II and III).



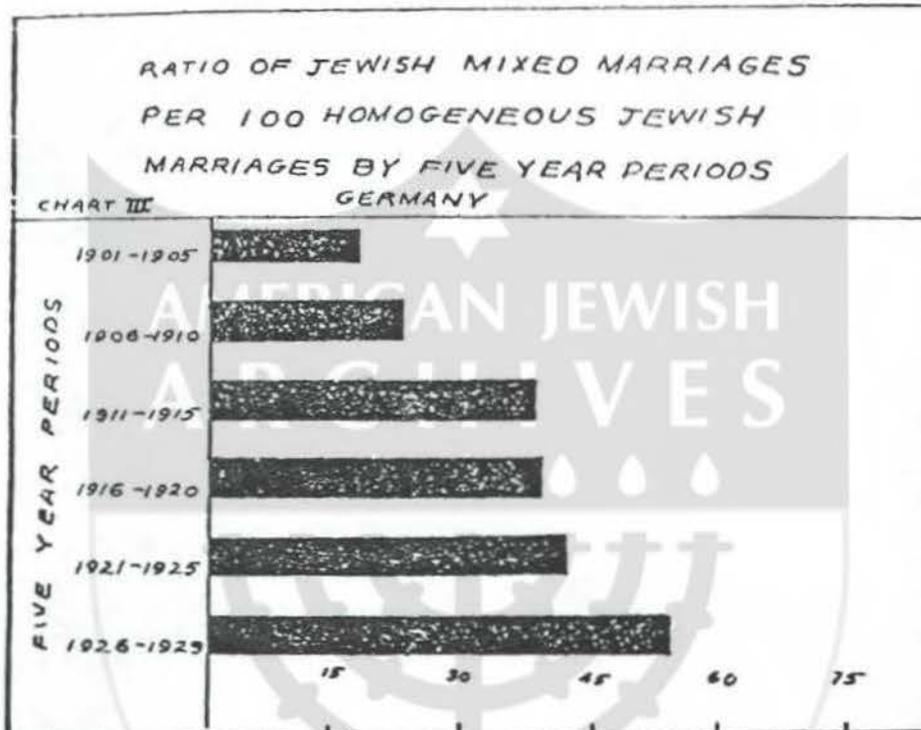


TABLE II

ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF HOMOGENEOUS AND MIXED MARRIAGES  
AND THE RATIO OF MIXED PER 100 UNMIXED  
FOR FIVE-YEAR PERIODS

Years	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1901-1905.....	19,540	3,522	18.01
1906-1910.....	19,792	4,699	23.7
1911-1915.....	14,983	5,827	38.0
1916-1920.....	18,675	7,226	38.6
1921-1925.....	21,687	8,896	41.9
1926-1929.....	11,245	6,087	54.1

The highest relative increases occurred in the years 1911-1915 and in the four-year interval of 1926-1929. In either period the rise in the Jewish mixed intermarriage ratio was not due so much to an increase in the absolute number of mixed Jewish weddings as to a sharp contraction in the number of homogeneous ones.

AMERICAN JEWISH

TABLE III

ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF HOMOGENEOUS AND MIXED MARRIAGES  
IN PRUSSIA AND THE RATIO OF MIXED PER 100 HOMOGENEOUS  
UNIONS FOR FIVE-YEAR PERIODS

Years	Total number of Jewish homogeneous unions	Total number of mixed Jewish unions	Ratio of Jewish mixed weddings per 100 endogamous Jewish marriages
1901-1905.....	12,872	2,610	20.3
1906-1910.....	13,335	3,524	26.4
1911-1915.....	10,337	4,446	44.0
1916-1920.....	13,197	5,480	41.5
1921-1925.....	13,507	5,634	41.7
1926-1929.....	8,563	4,779	56.0

The tendency toward intermarriage among the Jews of Germany was a general one. It manifested itself, with no exception, in all the German states. Prussia, the largest German state, had 403,969 Jewish inhabitants in 1925, or 71.58 percent of all the Jews of Germany. During the 29 years analyzed (see Table III) the absolute number of Jewish homogeneous marriages decreased in Prussia from 12,872 in the five-year period of 1901-1905, to 8,563 in the years 1926-1929, while the mixed group during the same period increased from 2,610 to 4,779. Relatively, Jewish mixed couples per 100 endogamous marriages had risen during this time from 20.3 in 1901-1905 to 56.0 in the years of 1926-1929. The other German states, which had smaller Jewish populations, showed as large and even larger relative increases in the Jewish intermarriage rate for the period studied, as is seen from Table IV.

TABLE IV

RATIO OF JEWISH MIXED MARRIAGES PER 100 ENDOGAMOUS  
JEWISH MARRIAGES FOR VARIOUS GERMAN STATES  
BY QUINQUENNIAL PERIODS

Years	Prussia	Bavaria	Baden	Hesse	Saxony	Württemberg
1901-1905.....	20.3	8.8	8.3	7.0	41.4	5.7
1906-1910.....	26.4	12.0	9.8	9.2	47.5	7.5
1911-1915.....	44.0	19.8	20.1	13.0	62.6	26.2
1916-1920.....	41.5	25.5	23.8	16.9	24.1	30.4
1921-1925.....	41.7	37.3	20.9	17.5	34.2	30.7
1926-1929.....	56.0	31.6	35.9	24.9	82.3	61.7

The trend was especially well-pronounced in the larger cities where the intermarriage rate was considerably above that of the country as a whole. In Berlin, where 30 percent of German Jewry lived, the intermarriage rate was 28.5 in 1891-1895, and 74.6 in the interval of 1926-1929. Similarly, in Hamburg the intermarriage rate leaped from 53.6 in

TABLE V

ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF HOMOGENEOUS AND MIXED MARRIAGES  
AND THE RATIO OF MIXED PER 100 UNMIXED WEDDINGS  
IN BERLIN

Years	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1876-1880.....	1,424	459	30.2
1881-1885.....	1,804	577	31.9
1886-1890.....	2,366	790	33.0
1891-1895.....	2,755	786	28.5
1896-1900.....	2,983	1,057	35.4
1901-1905.....	3,086	1,138	37.5
1906-1910.....	2,992	1,426	47.9
1911-1915.....	2,287	1,467	64.1
1916-1920.....	2,917	1,503	51.5
1921-1924.....	4,132	2,247	54.3
1926-1929.....			74.6

1901-1905 to 96.5 in 1926-1929. Even the city of Frankfurt-am-Main, the seat of German Jewish orthodoxy, saw the intermarriage ratio almost doubled within the period analyzed. It was 24.7 in the period of 1901-1905 and 43.6 in the years of 1926-1929.

TABLE VI

## FRANKFURT-AM-MAIN

Years	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1876-1880.....	483	70	12.0
1881-1885.....	540	61	11.2
1886-1890.....	611	85	13.9
1891-1895.....	597	77	12.9
1896-1900.....	744	162	16.3
1901-1905.....	703	176	24.7
1906-1910.....	787	192	24.3
1911-1915.....	641	242	35.0
1916-1920.....	989	400	30.0
1921-1924.....	1,085	333	30.6
1926-1929.....			43.6

TABLE VII

## HAMBURG

Years	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1901-1905.....	490	263	53.6
1906-1910.....	506	323	63.8
1911-1915.....	467	341	73.0
1916-1920.....	615	451	73.3
1921.....	189	119	62.1
1922-1924.....	483	362	74.9
1926-1929.....			96.5

TABLE VIII

## BRESLAU

Years	Total number of Jewish homogeneous marriages	Total number of mixed Jewish marriages	Ratio of Jewish mixed marriages per 100 homogeneous Jewish marriages
1876-1880.....	862	77	8.9
1881-1885.....	571	66	11.5
1886-1890.....	651	53	8.1
1891-1895.....	706	71	10.0
1896-1900.....	750	109	14.5
1901-1905.....	685	90	13.1
1906-1910.....	688	155	22.8
1911-1915.....	513	179	34.8
1916-1920.....	734	256	34.8
1921-1924.....	862	269	31.2

## 2. Ratios of Males and Females

Both sexes helped to build up the intermarriage ratio. The men, however, contributed the preponderant share. They outnumbered the women for every quinquennial period analyzed. And this despite the fact that the men formed a considerably smaller part of the Jewish population of Germany. According to the census of 1925, there were for every 1,000 Jewish males 1,056 Jewish females.

TABLE IX

## DISTRIBUTION OF MIXED MARRIAGES ACCORDING TO WHETHER WIFE OR HUSBAND WAS OF JEWISH FAITH

Years	Husband, Jew; Wife, non-Jewess	Wife, Jewess; Husband, non-Jew
1901-1905.....	1,906	1,616
1906-1910.....	2,564	2,173
1911-1915.....	3,462	2,365
1916-1920.....	4,276	2,950
1921-1925.....	5,644	3,252
1926-1929.....	3,838	2,249
1901-1929.....	21,690	14,605

Taking the entire period as a whole, men contributed 59.7 percent and the women 40.3 percent to all the mixed Jewish couples of Germany. The reason for the larger number of intermarriages contracted by men is to be ascribed first to the greater participation of the Jewish male population in the economic, social and scientific life of the country. Secondly, men, relatively more than women, found their ambitions and careers thwarted by prevailing antisemitic pressure. In order to escape it Jewish men of Germany had recourse to intermarriage, which in many cases was but a prelude to baptism, if not of the intermarried person, most certainly of their offspring. There is a paucity of data regarding the religious upbringing of children of mixed unions but the little that is available points to the above conclusion. For Prussia, information was gathered regarding 7,620 Jewish children born out of mixed wedlock in the year 1910. Of these children, 1,799 or 23.6 percent were brought up in the Jewish faith; for 271 or 3.5 percent of the children, the religion in which they were brought up was unknown; the rest, namely, 5,532 children, or 72.7 percent of all children born out of mixed wedlock in that year in Prussia, were baptized in the Evangelical and Catholic churches, the former claiming 4,686, the latter 846 children. Since then the percentage of children born to mixed couples and brought up in the Jewish tradition, according to Herbert Philipstahl in the *Algemeines statistisches Archiv* for 1928, has been reduced to about 2 percent.

It is interesting to note here that German Jewish mixed unions were almost childless. In 1927 there was on the average 0.5 of a child to a mixed Jewish couple. In other words, two families had on the average only one child. The sterility of the Jewish mixed marriage is probably the resultant of several causes: (a) the advanced age of the people who usually enter a mixed union, (b) these people usually belong to the liberal, emancipated group who have fewer children, (c) the realization of the futility of intermarriage as an escape from the Jewish environment. Feeling the tragedy of isolation and social handicap in their new milieu as they did before they intermarried, they do not dare, it seems, to bequeath it to their children, and hence they have none.

3. *Preferences in Choosing Mates*

German Jews intermarried more frequently with Protestants than with Catholics. For each of the five quinquennial periods analyzed (Table X), Protestants supplied by far the greater part of the mixed

TABLE X  
AMERICAN JEWISH

Years	Husband, Jew; Wife, Protestant	Wife, Jewess; Husband, Protestant	Marriages contracted with Protestants	Husband, Jew; Wife, Catholic	Wife, Jewess; Husband, Catholic	Marriages contracted with Catholics
1901-1905.....	1,458	1,168	2,626	358	368	726
1906-1910.....	1,947	1,525	3,472	468	471	939
1911-1915.....	2,461	1,547	4,008	606	484	1,090
1916-1920.....	3,097	1,988	5,085	850	731	1,581
1921-1925.....	3,676	2,364	6,040	1,145	916	2,061
1926-1929.....	2,927	1,749	4,676	811	500	1,311
1901-1929.....	15,566	10,341	25,907	4,238	3,470	7,708

Jewish couples. For the period as a whole — 1901-1929 — the share of the Protestants was 25,907 or 77 percent and that of the Catholics, 7,708 or 23 percent of all Jewish mixed unions for which the creed of the married parties was known.

One reason for the greater frequency of Protestant-Jewish marriages is to be found in the relative numbers of Protestants and Catholics in the country. According to the census of 1925, the former claimed 64.1 percent and the latter 32.4 percent of the total population of Germany. Another reason for the propensity of the Jew to marry into Protestantism was the concentration of the Jews in the urban centers where the population is predominantly Protestant. Jewish men contributed to the Protestant-Jewish group of mixed marriages 15,566 or 60 percent; Jewish women, 10,341 or 40 percent. The Catholic-Jewish group of mixed couples was made up of 4,238 or 54.9 percent of Jewish men and 3,470 or 45.1 percent of Jewish women.

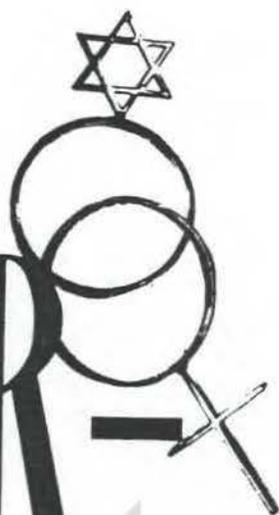
READINGS FOR WORKSHOP 1  
THE INTERMARRIAGE CRISIS: FAMILIAL IMPLICATIONS

- \*5. Fran Schumer, "Star-Crossed: More Gentiles and Jews are Intermarrying--and It's Not All Chicken Soup", New York Magazine, (April 2, 1990).

This was the cover story of a recent issue of a popular magazine. It indicates in journalistic lingo that the issue of intermarriage has become a concern far beyond the limits of the Jewish community, that it reaches every echelon of society. Most striking is the author's view of how commonplace an occurrence intermarriage has become.

6. Sanford Seltzer, "Intermarriage, Divorce and the Jewish Status of Children", (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, An Horizon Institute Report, August 1981).

Much has been written in recent years about the changing American family. Not only intermarriage rates have skyrocketed; divorce rates have also risen. With both rates approaching 50%, one can reason that nearly one marriage in four will be an intermarriage that ends in divorce. What happens to the children in such an instance? Seltzer reviews several cases in which civil courts have asserted jurisdiction over decisions related to the religious upbringing of children of intermarried-then-divorced parents.



# STAR CROSSED

*More Gentiles and Jews Are Intermarrying—  
And It's Not All Chicken Soup*

*By Fran Schumer*

**F**IVE-YEAR-OLD ZOË KELLY-NACHT, A KINDERGARTNER at a public school on the Upper West Side, has her identity all figured out. "I'm Christian and Jewish," she came home and told her mother not long ago. "And so are Jake and Jess and Katie and Marlow. . . ."

New York is starting to look a lot like Zoë's kindergarten class. "Intermarriage seems like the most normal thing in the world," says Richard Rosen, 41, a Jewish writer married to Diane McWhorter, 37, a journalist who was raised Presbyterian. "Most of our friends are intermarried couples."

Once a rare occurrence that most families preferred to keep to themselves, intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is now as American as strawberry-rhubarb pie (on prime time, *thirtysomething's* Jewish Michael is married to Waspy Hope) and a pervasive part of everyday life. At a public Chanukah celebration in Brooklyn this winter, half the children helping light the menorah had Irish last names. Boys named Murphy are routinely bar-mitzvahed. On any given Sunday, the wedding announcements in the

*New York Times* are likely to include a healthy smattering of marriages presided over by a judge, an Ethical Culture leader, or a rabbi and a priest. "Laura Delano Roosevelt was married yesterday to Dr. Charles Henry Silberstein. . . . Acting Justice Shirley Fingerhood of State Supreme Court in Manhattan officiated at the Colony Club in New York. . . . The bride is a granddaughter of the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt," read one such announcement recently.

A list of intermarried celebrities can be assembled from any walk of life—fashion (Calvin and Kelly Klein, Kenneth Cole and Maria Cuomo), business (Henry Kravis and Carolyne Roehm, Leonard and Allison Stern), media (Steve and Courtney Sale Ross), politics (Victor and Betsy Gotbaum, Henry and Nancy Kissinger), the arts (Robert Gottlieb and Maria Tucci, Kirk Varnedoe and Elyn Zimmerman), Hollywood (Kathleen Turner and Jay Weiss, Tracy Pollan and Michael J. Fox). Unlike the Jewish dairyman in the Sholem Aleichem tale who spurns his daughter, parents nowadays accept—indeed celebrate—the melding of yin and yang. Most of the time. "I woke up one day," says a television executive, "and realized that I

was in bed with the two things my mother hated most, a cat and a Jew."

But in general, intermarry is something even the very best families do. "In a small weathered church decorated with the flowers of Cape Cod," ran the front-page article in the *Times*, "Caroline Bouvier Kennedy, the daughter of the late President, married Edwin A. Schlossberg today."

David Hoffman\* and Martha Gilfoyle's\* wedding didn't make the front page, but it had plenty of interfaith ingredients. They had met in the seventies; thirteen years later, they finally decided to get married. The difference in their backgrounds hadn't caused the delay. Quite the contrary. Martha was from the black-sheep branch of a prominent family. "She could identify with being an outsider," David says. Their wedding ceremony, in Mississippi, incorporated the Protestant vows (leaving out the *J*-word), the ritual wineglass, and yarmulkes for David and his father. "People in Oxford didn't quite know what was going on," Martha says. "After the service, my stepmother went up to David and said, 'I liked your little hat.'"

**I**N AMERICA, INTERMARRIAGE IS MOSTLY A CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT affair. Catholics have the highest rate of intermarriage, which has risen steadily from about 18 percent in the twenties to around 40 percent today. The rate at which Protestants marry out of their denominations (Lutherans to Methodists, Episcopalians to Baptists, for example) is enormously high at about 70 percent, but it's a low 18 percent for intermarriage with non-Protestants.

Although historically Jews have had the lowest rate of intermarriage, the real changes have been taking place among this group. Of the roughly 4 million to 4.5 million married Jews in this country, between 15 and 17 percent are married to someone who wasn't born Jewish. In the fifties, the rate was 7 percent. And those now about to take the step constitute between 30 and 40 percent, or five times as many as a generation back. These figures are only an average. In a city like Denver, with a low Jewish population, the rate is 72 percent. "It's an age of demographic revolution," says Egon Mayer, a professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and the author of *Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians*.

The increase in intermarriage is obvious. The reasons for it are harder to ascertain. Growing Jewish self-confidence, an appreciation of ethnic diversity, and the precedence of love over tradition in the modern age have bolstered interfaith unions. A more pervasive factor, though, is social mobility. Fewer Jews went away to college 30 years ago, and those who did tended to return to their ethnic enclaves. The spectrum of jobs available to them was also more limited. It was different for their offspring. Even if a young person grew up in a predominantly Jewish community, the typical baby-boomer was likely to go away to college, then assimilate in a wider Gentile world.

Non-Jewish women and men seemed far more interesting to these natives of Scarsdale, Great Neck, or Shaker Heights than their own kind. "Familiarity makes the heart grow fonder—of other things," says David, having grown up in the largely Jewish suburb of Brookline, Massachusetts.

Professionally, Jews became more mobile too. With the exception of Peter Riegert in *Crossing Delancey*, few young people

\*Names and other identifying details have been changed.

went to work in their father's pickle store. As doctors, lawyers, and M.B.A.'s, they helped create a more heterogeneous culture. This was particularly true of women. In the past, intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles typically involved a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman—the "demi-intellectual *shiksas*," Andrew Hacker, professor of political science at Queens College, calls them. "They found white-shoed Christian men 'dullsville': They reminded them of their fathers. So you got the Mia Farrow or Annie Hall character going after the Woody Allen-type guy." But as Jewish women experienced more exposure to non-Jewish men, they thought they perceived in them the same qualities Jewish men had ascribed to the *shiksas*—patience, serenity, a less self-centered view of life. From a three-to-one ratio up until sixties, the proportion of males to females who intermarry has shifted to a more balanced three to two. "Intermarriage has become an equal-opportunity option," Professor Mayer says.

People are also marrying later. "They are more independent, more self-sufficient," Mayer says. Apparently, more desperate, too. "My mother's only reaction was 'Thank God she's getting married,'" says a woman who married at 30. "It didn't hurt that I married a doctor."

But the main reason for the increase in intermarriage is probably greater religious and ethnic tolerance. Anti-Semitism has become less acceptable. As a consequence of the Holocaust, a more ecumenical point of view has emerged. "Before the Second World War, people talked about America as a Christian country," says Irving Howe, author of *World of Our Fathers*. "Afterward, the phrase 'Judeo-Christian tradition' took hold."

As Jews advanced culturally and economically, they made more attractive mates. While Lee Radziwill might marry a Jewish man and sister Jackie Onassis date one because the men are sensitive and bright, it doesn't hurt that they're rich. At the same time, the popularity of Jewish types in the entertainment business (Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand, Woody Allen) has made looking, acting—even being—Jewish less of an oddity. They loved Annie Hall in Peoria.

Moreover, baby-boomers, as a group, were not particularly enamored of religion. "We grew up in the sixties—politics

and community were important, not religion," one says. "We were a generation in love with itself, not married to our respective religions." This was especially true of young Jews. "We're talking about kids who grew up in a more enlightened Jewish culture, kids who were exposed to opera, great books," says another. These young people—most young ethnics, for that matter—were inclusive rather than exclusive. "When we went to college, we found that what we had in common as kids—being third-generation ethnics, coming from the suburbs, being the children of parents who grew up during the Depression—was what united us," David Hoffman says.

In 1968, when George Gallup asked a cross-sample of Americans what they thought of marriage between Jews and Gentiles, 59 percent approved; fifteen years later, more than three quarters of Americans did.

As people have grown more tolerant of intermarriage, religious institutions have, too. "From being very hostile we've gone to being very nice," says Father Andrew Greeley, the well-known Catholic novelist and sociologist. Catholics can do their intermarrying in a church in a ceremony conducted by a





CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT:  
THIRTYSOMETHING'S INTERMARRIED  
MICHAEL AND HOPE; HENRY KRAVIS  
AND CAROLYNE ROEIM; CAROLINE  
KENNEDY AND EDWIN SCHLOSSBERG;  
KENNETH COLE AND MARIA CUOMO;  
LEE RADZIWILL AND HERBERT ROSS.  
MIDDLE: CALVIN AND KELLY KLEIN.

priest, provided they agree to raise their children as Catholics.

**T**HE SITUATION IS A LITTLE MORE TENSE AMONG JEWS. ORGANIZED Judaism tends to view intermarriage as a blight on the tribe, whereas Christian clergy are more concerned with the individual's soul. In Judaism, marrying out has an element of betrayal. Add to this the legal proscriptions against intermarriage found in the Talmud. No Conservative or Orthodox rabbi will preside over an interfaith marriage. Although some Reform rabbis are more permissive, many, too, require that the couple commit to raising the children in the faith.

Traditionally, Judaism has acknowledged only the children of a Jewish mother as Jewish. Children of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother could be Jewish only if the mother or the child converted (in the case of male children, this included ritual circumcision). In 1983, Reform Judaism broke with the Conservatives and Orthodox by declaring that Jewishness could also be

passed on by the father if the family committed to a Jewish way of life. This still left a lot of couples out in the cold.

Alice Crane\*, a playwright, and her husband, Dan Gold\*, a social worker, knew how they wanted to bring up their children. "Dan said, 'The kids will be Jewish,' and I said, 'Fine,'" says Alice. "That was the extent of the discussion." Alice's own secular WASP background "was not a child-centered culture," she says. "I didn't have dinner with my parents, I had dinner with my nanny. To me, a Jewish family meant a child-centered family, something different from what I had known."

When their sons were six and eight, Alice and Dan enrolled them in a Jewish-studies class at their synagogue, a Conservative temple with a progressive bent on the Upper West Side. The children went faithfully for two and a half years. One day, almost as an aside, Alice asked their instructor, "Are you going to bar-mitzvah these children even though I'm not a Jew?" "Well, we've got to talk," he said. The ruling, even from Alice and Dan's progressive congregation, was that the children

couldn't be bar-mitzvahed in the synagogue because Alice wasn't Jewish.

The ruling infuriated Dan even more than it did Alice. "This was where I expected to find Jewish education I believed in," he says. "Then we found that even in this most comfortable setting, this bull--- orthodoxy reigned about being a Jew, about who's a Jew, this macho posturing—I'm more Jewish than you." The alternatives—the children could convert or be bar-mitzvahed at another *shul*—seemed unacceptable. "This was our *shul*, our friends were there, it was a neighborhood institution. We weren't going to start all over again," says Dan.

In the end, they decided to have their sons bar-mitzvahed at home. "What's important is not whether my sons get bar-mitzvahed but that they think they're Jewish, and nothing is going to change that," says Dan. He and Alice remain irked. "Whether they're doing it to punish me or because of the 'chosen people' idea or because of some sense of inferiority the Conservative

relieved when Paul's age group was filled at the temple school and he was enrolled at the YMCA instead.

Everyone is still a little sensitive. At a recent celebration, Arthur's mother raised her glass to make a toast: "Let's drink to the next wonderful event in my son's family, my grandson's bar mitzvah in the year 2000." Barbara was upset. When Arthur discussed the remark with his mother, she replied that it had been a joke. Arthur isn't so sure. "It was a quarter joke and a half wish," he says.

For some interfaith couples, however, intermarriage doesn't provoke debate even though they'd like it to. "I think that if we were living more thoughtfully, it would be an issue," says Jennifer Allen, a Protestant writer married to the cartoonist and playwright Jules Feiffer, who is Jewish.

## Ms. Roosevelt Weds C. H. Silberstein

Laura Delano Roosevelt, a daughter of Mrs. Erasmus Helm Kloman of Washington and the late Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr., was married yesterday to Dr. Charles Henry Silberstein, a son of Mrs. Herbert F. Storer of New York and the late Dr. Richard M. Silberstein. Acting Justice Shirley Fingerhood of State Supreme Court in Manhattan officiated at the Colony Club in New York.

Nancy Roosevelt Ireland was the matron of honor for her sister, Jeffrey S. Silberstein was his brother's best man.

Ms. Roosevelt, who will keep her name, is an assistant vice president at the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York, where she coordinates the bank's charitable contributions to the arts. She graduated from the Madeira School and the University of Virginia, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She received a master's degree in public and private management from Yale University.

The bride is a granddaughter of the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt, who served as United States delegate to the United Nations. Her father was a Democratic Representative from Manhattan, an Under Secretary of Commerce from 1963 to 1965 and the first chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Her mother, Suzanne Kloman, is a landscape designer in Washington. The bride's stepfather retired as a special-policy analyst for the National Academy of Public Administration in Washington. Ms. Roosevelt is a granddaughter also of the late Lee J. Ferris, a partner in the New York law firm of Appleton Rice & Ferris. Dr. Silberstein, a resident psychiatrist at the Payne Whitney Clinic of New York Hospital-Cornell Medi-



Laura Roosevelt  
the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Dr. Silberstein's father, a psychiatrist, was the founding director of the Staten Island Mental Health Society and of the department of psychiatry at St. Vincent's Hospital on Staten Island. The bridegroom's mother, Muriel Silberstein Storer, is an artist, a past president of the New York City Art Commission, a trustee emerita of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the founding director of

FDR'S GRANDDAUGHTER TAKES THE INTERFAITH STEP

movement has, I don't know," Dan says. "But in the long run, they are making it more difficult for me to raise my kids Jewish. They're pushing me away from organized religion."

Disagreements about religious education can perplex the happiest of families. When Protestant Barbara Cole\*, an illustrator, and her Jewish husband, Arthur Roberts\*, an art dealer, got married, they were too old for their parents to meddle in—or care about—their interfaith match. "My mother had given up hope," Arthur says. He was 54, and neither he nor Barbara was very religious. "Besides, on my travels, I had seen too many countries locked into mortal combat over religion," Arthur says. Their wedding was a carefully planned 50-50 affair. Barbara's mother read from Ecclesiastes and Corinthians; Arthur's father read from the Old Testament in Hebrew.

But Arthur and Barbara's son, Paul\*, has complicated matters. Paul was born "a week after Easter," Barbara says. "A week before Passover," her in-laws revise. The best preschool near Arthur and Barbara's house was in a synagogue. How would Paul learn about his Christian half? Barbara's sister asked. "From me," Barbara said. But she admits that she was

**E**VEN WHEN ORGANIZED RELIGION COOPERATES, HOW do you raise the children? Most couples opt for an even-handed solution, though few get further than figuring out whom to spend what holidays with. This doesn't preclude the occasional hitch. "If he wants to raise the children Jewish, I'm not going to be the one to go and figure out what that means," a Protestant wife says of her Jewish husband. "He's going to have to do it. But he's not as well informed about the Old Testament as I am."

Nor is there any guarantee that children will abide by the agreement their parents have reached once they're adults. The Jewish community is especially concerned about this, since, according to one study, only 24 percent of children in dual-faith households grow up identifying themselves as Jews. According to another, more than 90 percent of children from marriages in which the non-Jew doesn't convert end up marrying non-Jews.

David Hoffman and Martha Gilfoyle's daughter, Kate\*, was born ten months ago. The issue of her religious upbringing is still unresolved. "If Martha would agree, I'd say, 'Let's raise Kate as a Jew,'" David says. "When she's older, if she wants to repudiate that, okay. But I want to expose her to this as a child." Martha isn't so sure. She's had a bit of a religious reawakening since Kate's birth. "Growing up Christian was one of the comforting things about my childhood," she says, "the idea that God had accounted for every hair on your head." She admits that nothing in Judaism contradicts that idea, but there are other issues to iron out, Martha says, such as "the concept of somebody being half man and half God. To grow up pondering that and not being able to understand it is sort of an important metaphor."

For now, she and David remain undecided. They would like Kate to be what she is—half-and-half. But they're aware of the problems inherent in such liberal-mindedness. Martha remembers an article about the child of a mixed marriage who ended up following the Swami Satchidananda.

**M**ARRIAGE BRINGS IN-LAWS. INTERMARRIAGE CAN BRING all-out war. Non-Jewish spouses complain most about interfering relatives. Jewish partners discern anti-Semitism. One Jewish woman, a political consultant, was shocked when her father-in-law made anti-Semitic remarks in her presence. A Jewish math professor whose wife is Protestant says that early in their relationship, his future father-in-law used the expression "Jew me down." "He didn't even realize what he was doing," the professor says.

"Jewish in-laws tend to be more blatant about raising their objections," says Rabbi Rachel Cowan, co-author of *Mixed Blessings: Marriage Between Jews and Christians* and herself a convert to Judaism. Which is not to say the other side doesn't vent its feelings—more subtly. A Jewish woman married to a Catholic says, "My husband's family don't talk if they have anything negative to say."

Jean Kotkin is an Ethical Culture leader who performs roughly 50 interfaith weddings a year. Most of them are joyous. At one of the more touching ceremonies, the groom's father, a rab-

# STAR-CROSSED

bi, spoke eloquently. "It's my son's choice, and my son is very important to us," he told Kotkin afterward. "I don't want to lose him."

At other Jewish-Gentile weddings, the response is less warm. "I'm asked to stay for the reception and referee," says Kotkin. "I've seen parents who swear they won't attend." She has known whole families not to show up. The worst time was when the mother of a Catholic bride *did* appear: "She was in slacks and hair curlers and stood outside the door screaming. Six men had to make a passageway so that the guests could enter without her assaulting them."

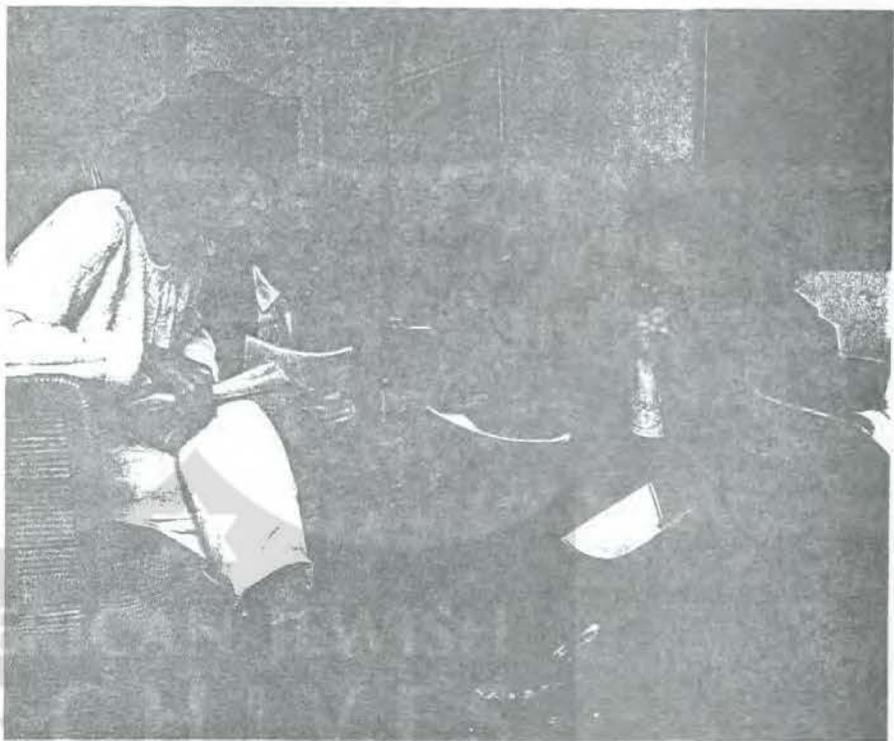
Many parents of children who marry out tend to feel judged, rejected, or guilty. When told that his son was marrying a Christian, an Orthodox father asked, "What did I do wrong?" "Resigned anxiety" is the phrase Irving Howe uses to describe the attitude of Jewish parents he meets at lectures on intermarriage.

"Some of their children, though, feel their parents are being unfair," Howe says. "The children can understand why strictly Orthodox parents would be upset, but when it's their mother and father who go to *shul* once a year, they feel it's hypocritical."

"In dealing with families, you're dealing with an entangled web of loyalties," says Esther Perel, a therapist who counsels interfaith couples and groups. "For this reason, it's important to sort out to what extent the problems are really religious and to what extent they're interpersonal." Often, the lines get blurred.

They did for Joanna Stern\*. Before her marriage to John Luca\*, a lapsed Catholic, Joanna saw a lot of his sisters and brothers. Now invitations are rejected; overtures are rebuffed. Once, in an effort to please her husband, Joanna cooked Easter dinner at their house. The only member of John's family there was John. He was also, to Joanna's dismay, the only non-Jew. She can understand why his family might not want to spend religious holidays like Passover and Christmas with them, but she can't explain why Thanksgiving or her son's birthday gets boycotted. Religious differences have created personal ones, she fears.

**N**O STICKING POINT SEEMS TO LOOM larger under already fraught circumstances than The Tree. "The Christmas tree is such an interesting symbol," says Rabbi Cowan. "To Jews, it's a totally Christian symbol. To non-Jews, it's as secular as the Thanksgiving turkey. It causes some Christians to think about the Christ child, but only minimally." Even so, it's hard to give up. "We had a tree the year after I converted," Rabbi Cowan says. "But the next year, we didn't... and to me it seemed like a hole." For their part, many Jews who had Christmas trees while growing up suddenly seem to view them



RABBI RACHEL COWAN INSTRUCTS INTERFAITH COUPLES.

as Torquemada's Cross and ban them from the house when they intermarry.

Come December, intermarried couples also have to agonize not only about how to spend the holidays but where and with whom. In-law problems are especially acute during this season. One Jewish woman married to a Catholic usually spends Christmas at his mother's. Every year, she asks if she can bring her widowed mother, and every year her mother-in-law turns her down. "She says she doesn't want to clean the house." It's never an easy day. "I always have this tightness in my chest," the daughter-in-law says.

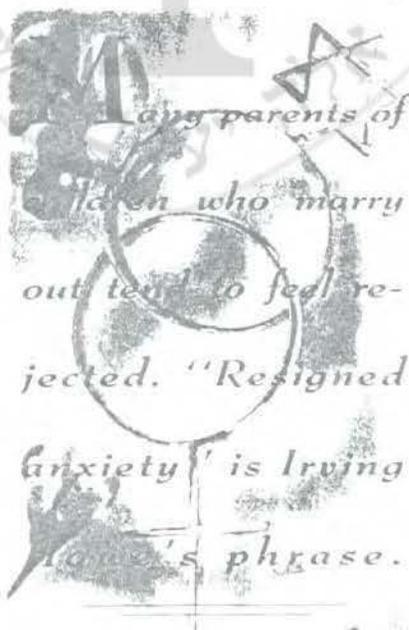
Christina Mason\*, an interior decorator, and sculptor Michael Gold\* were married in September. Three months later they celebrated their first Christmas. It wasn't all Christina had hoped it would be. Nor was it for Michael, she suspects.

They had already survived one holiday ordeal: The previous April, they had celebrated Passover in their apartment with friends and, says Christina, "I cried afterward, I felt so excluded. I didn't have the fervor the others had. I saw it on Michael's face." The same thing happened in reverse at Christmas.

"In December, it really hit me that as much as we really love each other, there are some things we'll never share even if we celebrate all the holidays," Christina says sadly. In their apartment, on the last night of Chanukah, the tablecloth caught fire. Christina feels it was a metaphor for what had happened earlier in the month.

"The really shocking thing to both of us is that no matter how solid we thought we were about the issue before we married, we now realize that it *is* an issue," she says.

Of the two big holidays, Chanukah and



Christmas, Chanukah seems, burning tablecloths notwithstanding, to have come out ahead. "I don't think anybody celebrates Chanukah as much as intermarried couples," one participant says. "It's unfair," a Christian four-year-old says of his interfaith classmates' double yield.

**C**ONVERSION IS NO LONGER THE SOLUTION IT USED TO BE. The more widespread intermarriage becomes, the less democratic conversion seems. And today it's hard to predict which half of the couple will convert. In Jewish-Gentile marriages, the rate of conversion is slightly lower than among Protestants and Catholics who marry each other. According to one study, only about a third of the Jewish-Gentile matches result in a spouse's conversion. The conversion rate for the Gentile spouses is almost six times that of the Jewish ones. According to this study, nearly nine out of ten of the converts to Judaism are women.

Lawyer Nora McNichols Friedman\* didn't convert until after she had had two children. "It makes life easier for my children," she says. "I think children need a strong sense of identity. They need to know where they're coming from."

Not the least surprised was her husband, Steve\*, a surgeon, who had never even broached the subject. "He never pushed it," says Nora. "I think he's still trying to be politic about it, in case I change my mind."

Many converts to Judaism complain that their parents are more accepting of their Jewish spouse than their in-laws are of them, even though it's usually the in-laws who lobbied for conversion. Others say they feel they'll always be outsiders. Mary Katherine O'Rourke\*, a very Irish-looking redhead dating a Jew, is tired of not looking Jewish. Every time she goes to *shul*, she imagines people pointing and saying, "There goes that *shiksa*." "I feel very much better when I see women with red hair there," Mary Katherine says.

Bob Levy\*, an accountant, and Leslie Cooney\*, an office manager, are one of the couples in the "Derekh Torah" course Rachel Cowan teaches, sponsored by the 92nd Street Y. They have been engaged for more than a year. Leslie, the product of a mixed marriage herself (a not-very-observant Greek Orthodox married to a more observant Catholic), is planning to convert. Her decision seems to be largely the result of her own grab-bag past. She received a "watered-down version" of Catholicism, she says, which was further undermined by her mother's indifferent attitude toward religion. Her beliefs were dealt a final blow by the death of her sister not long ago. This made her feel open to something new. Perhaps because she had already been divorced, her Catholic relatives weren't too upset. Her Greek Orthodox grandmother was. "At least he's not Turkish," she said.

On the brink of conversion, Leslie has several concerns. Bob has told her about how Irish boys in his neighborhood used to taunt him with "What are you doing for Christmas, Jew?" Leslie doesn't want that for her children. She's also afraid of losing her Greek heritage altogether. "After a few generations, it's all wishy-washy," she says. "Nobody knows how to bake baklava anymore."

"The differences aren't just between Moses and Christ," says Esther Perel. "You're dealing with issues of money, sex, education, child-rearing practices, food, family relationships, styles of

emotional expressiveness, issues of autonomy, dependency—all of these are culturally embedded." One study puts the divorce rate among Jewish couples at 17 percent. Among Jewish-Gentile couples, it's almost twice that.

Still, most people who intermarry are like most people who marry—they don't get divorced. And if the divorce rate for intermarried couples has been high in the past, there are reasons to believe that this is changing. With intermarriage as common as it is, interfaith couples are less isolated and under less strain. All religions are campaigning not only to help hybrid couples but to woo them to one side or the other. Dial 1-800-235-USCC and the U. S. Catholic Conference will send you pamphlets. The Brooklyn Diocese gives a course for interfaith couples before marriage. Reform Judaism's new policy is to "reject intermarriage but to accept the intermarried," says Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American-Hebrew Congregations. With two out of five young Jews intermarrying, it's easy to see why.

Jonathan Klein's\* background is strictly *Our Crowd*. "There's nobody more anti-Semitic than aristocratic German Jews," says the Wall Street lawyer, who is married to a Unitarian. He has grown fond of the Unitarian church in his neighborhood and talks about joining. If he does, he'll hardly be the only religious

émigré. According to a minister at the church, more than half the couples there are of mixed faiths, and more than 80 percent of the congregants are converts. "I'll tell you what's going to wipe out the Jews in this country," says an intermarried Jew. "Intermarriage."

For the most part, however, intermarriage seems to enrich lives by allowing interfaith couples to draw on two cultures and two religions. In some cases, it can strengthen tenuous roots. "I never felt so Christian until I had something to compare it to," Barbara Cole says.

Zoë Kelly-Nacht's mother, Mary Beth Kelly, a psychotherapist, grew up Catholic. She met her Jewish husband, Henry Nacht, now an internist, in Cambridge when they were college students. They shrugged off their families' initial objections to their wanting to get married, especially the "How will you raise the children?" one.

"We couldn't picture religion having much meaning for us even if we had children," says Mary Beth.

As it turned out, religion has taken on a welcome meaning for them. Mary Beth finds that religion "has helped my children with values." Zoë's experience at Congregation Rodeph Sholom, where she attended nursery school, was "positive and joyful," her mother says. "It wasn't repressive like my own experience, nor abstract like Henry's." And rather than keep their two families apart, religion has brought them closer together. Mary Beth's father attends bar mitzvahs; Henry's nieces spend Christmas with them.

"Families like ours," says Mary Beth, "help make the world a smaller place."

As a therapist, Mary Beth doesn't underestimate the complexity of intermarried life. She just thinks its dualities can be salutary. Last year, she gave birth to her second child, Asher, named after the hero of Chaim Potok's *My Name Is Asher Lev*. In the novel, the Orthodox protagonist, an artist, discovers to his horror that he feels a need to paint crucifixes. He resolves his dilemma the same way Mary Beth would like her son to resolve any he may have.

"To his own satisfaction," she says.



# an Horizon Institute Report

Union of American Hebrew Congregations 638 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10021

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## INTERMARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND THE JEWISH STATUS OF CHILDREN

by Rabbi Sanford Seltzer  
Director of Planning and Research  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Current estimates indicate that upwards of 1/3 of all marriages involving Jews involve persons of another religious faith and that at the very minimum, 30% of all non-Jews who marry Jews convert to Judaism. The data further reveal that the incidence of Jewish men marrying non-Jewish women is from two to four times greater than that of Jewish women marrying non-Jewish men.<sup>1</sup> While no precise figures are available, it would appear that the divorce rate among Jews is rapidly approaching that of the overall divorce rate in the United States, now projected at 40% of all marriages.<sup>2</sup> There are at present no statistics dealing with divorce among couples where one partner has converted to Judaism; neither are there studies comparing these figures with the divorce rate in marriages where both husband and wife are born Jews.<sup>3</sup>

As divorce among Jews married to non-Jews or to persons who have converted to Judaism increases, child custody cases dealing with the religious upbringing of children following a divorce may well become more frequent. As a general rule, mothers retain custody in 90% of all child custody disputes in keeping with long held judicial interpretations of the "tender years" and "best interests" doctrines that women are the more nurturing of the child's natural parents.<sup>4</sup> Since Jewish men are more prone to marry non-Jewish women than are Jewish women to select non-Jewish men as spouses, the legal tradition of awarding custody to the child's mother may have significant ramifications for the Jewish community.

This Horizon Report will examine a number of custody cases contesting the religious identity of children and the impact of the ruling of civil courts upon the Jewish family and the Jewish community. Complications arising from the question of matrilineal-patrilineal determinations of Jewish identity and status will also be addressed, as will the matter of conversion procedures, counseling and orientation provided potential converts to Judaism and their born Jewish spouses as well as couples in a mixed-marriage.

### THE LEGAL SITUATION

Legal scholars are generally agreed that the parent obtaining custody is to be granted broad discretion in the religious upbringing of the child unless otherwise ordered and that such judicial intervention is to be restricted to situations where the child will be harmed in some tangible way by the religious doctrines espoused by the custodial parent.<sup>5</sup>

Lee M. Friedman, in an article written in the 1916 edition of the Harvard Law Review, noted: "As between father and mother any religious question respecting the child's religion will be settled by the award of the right of custody. . . ." Friedman added that in the event of the death of the father, it was safe to predict that "the courts will hold that where the surviving mother has the right of custody she has a right to dictate the religious teaching the child shall receive irrespective of any question of the father's religion or his possible wishes on the subject."<sup>7</sup>

Steven M. Zarowny observes: "The court award of custody may seal the child's spiritual future. . . ." In referring to the complexities of these cases and the more than occasional inconsistencies in judicial decisions, he concludes: "The tensions ensuing from such disputes may best be minimized by placing the power to choose religious training for the child fully in the hands of the custodial parent. Courts should not dislodge that power unless such action is necessary to prevent actual or imminent danger to the child's health or safety."<sup>9</sup> Zarowny's concerns are best illustrated by a review of a series of child custody cases focusing upon religious identity and the obligations of the custodial parent.



The Horizon Institute, a center for research, policy and planning for the UAHC and its member congregations, provides principled and appropriate Jewish responses to the demands of a complex modern society, and is dedicated to the belief that the Synagogue remains the central institution for the preservation of Judaism and the survival of the Jewish people.

#### LYNCH VS UHLENHOPP—IOWA 1956

In 1956, the Iowa Supreme Court held that a provision in a divorce decree requiring the Protestant wife of a Roman Catholic husband to raise their child as a Roman Catholic, was "void for uncertainty and indefiniteness."<sup>10</sup> A lower court had found the woman guilty of contempt for allegedly violating this provision of the divorce agreement entered into by the couple. The American Jewish Congress had filed an *amicus curiae* brief in behalf of the woman. In rendering its decision, the Supreme Court of Iowa said: "Courts should be slow to place in divorce decrees provisions controlling the religious beliefs of children even granting certainty and constitutionality and consent of the parties."<sup>11</sup> The court added most significantly: "The courts have generally refused to enforce agreement between the father and the mother concerning the religious training of children but have held that the parent having custody is not bound by a previous contract."<sup>12</sup>

#### LUNDEEN VS STREMMINGER—VIRGINIA 1962

The Iowa decision disallowing parental agreements regarding the religious upbringing of children is reflected in a similar ruling by the Supreme Court of Virginia in 1962, in the case of *Lundeen vs. Stremminger*. The case involved the custody of two children, then seven and five years of age, whose father was Jewish and whose mother was Roman Catholic. A lower court had upheld the validity of a provision in the original divorce decree stipulating that the children be reared as Jews and attend a Jewish religious school as well as synagogue services weekly. The Supreme Court upheld the petition of the children's mother "that such a provision violates section 58 of the Virginia Constitution which guaranteed that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry."<sup>13</sup>

It bears repeating, however, that the courts have not been consistent in rulings dealing with the religious upbringing of children thereby compounding the difficulties encountered in the resolution of this matter. In 1969, the New Jersey Supreme Court awarded custody of a couple's two children to the father instead of the mother, even though both parents were born Jews and there was no challenge to the fitness of the mother as the appropriate custodial parent. The parents had written a divorce agreement themselves in which it was stipulated that the children be raised as Jews regardless of the parental marital preferences subsequent to their divorce. The mother had married a non-Jew and moved to Idaho. She now lived 80 miles from the nearest synagogue and some 300 miles from the only other synagogue in the entire state. In granting custody to the father, the court invoked the doctrine of "best interest" stating: "Here religious training is most important and a factor which must be given the most serious consideration in child custody cases."<sup>14</sup>

In *Wager vs Wager*, a Jewish father successfully enjoined the Jewish woman from whom he was now divorced and who was the custodial parent of their children from enrolling them in a Hebrew School which met on Saturday since he claimed their religious school education interfered with his rights of visitation. The Appellate Court of New Jersey, in ruling in the father's favor, opined that the children would derive greater benefit from their association with the father than from their religious education and "that any deficiencies in the children's religious training may be overcome if the children desire it when they become more mature."<sup>15</sup>

In yet another instance, a New York judge awarded joint custody of their children to a Jewish father and a Thai mother. The children lived with their mother during the week and their father on weekends. In handing down his decision, the judge commented: "While divided custody is not always to be desired, particularly in children of such tender age, the circumstances of these children's parental background would seem to dictate that they become familiar and at ease in the culture and values of both."<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic examples of custody cases impacting upon the Jewish identity of children are those in which the child's mother, a convert to Judaism, declares that she has reverted back to her former faith and now intends to raise children born of the marriage as non-Jews. Such cases are of profound importance, not merely in terms of the well being of children subsequent to the dissolution of a marriage and the maintenance of some family stability, but in terms of the legal status of Jewish conversions in the civil courts of the United States.

#### GREEN VS GREEN

The case of *Green vs Green* is still pending in the Michigan courts. Here, the plaintiff, a born Jewish father of two children, was married to a woman who converted to Judaism in accordance with both Reform, and later, Orthodox criteria. The two children, both boys, underwent *brit milah*, were given Hebrew names and were blessed from the pulpit of the congregation where the family held membership. The children attended the religious school of the synagogue. The mother, in the course of filing for divorce, has renounced Judaism and has said that

she intends on raising the children as Roman Catholics. The father seeks custody on the grounds that a conversion to Judaism, done voluntarily and of one's own free will, is the equivalent of a legal contract and as such is duly enforceable. In addition, since the couple were married in a Conservative ritual, and signed a *ketubah*, this antenuptual agreement is binding.

In their brief, the attorneys for the plaintiff, the Jewish father argue: "Defendant cannot now dispute the validity of her contract or the enforcement thereof. It matters not what she may decide is right for herself, but that personal decision cannot affect the rights and heritage of her minor children. It is exactly this point that both the conversion certificate and the *ketubah* certificate address themselves to when reference is made to raising children in loyalty and faithfulness to Jewish ideals and beliefs, to Jewish hopes and the Jewish mode of life."<sup>17</sup>

The attorneys for the plaintiff have sought to buttress their arguments by citing the decision of another Michigan court requiring a Jewish husband to grant his wife a *get* in accordance with the *ketubah* they both signed pre-nuptially. In its ruling, the court, after noting that this was the first time such a case had been tried in Michigan, defined the *get* as a "secular instrument" without which the wife could not be released from her marital obligations and "her right to liberty under the 14th Amendment would be destroyed."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the most controversial of recent cases involving women who renounced Judaism after conversion is that of *Schwarzman vs Schwarzman*. Here, a Roman Catholic woman agreed to convert to Judaism as a precondition for her marriage to a Jewish man. She was converted by a Reform rabbi who then married the couple in a Jewish ceremony. The couple had four children, all of whom were named in the synagogue. The woman subsequently divorced her husband, married a Roman Catholic man, renounced Judaism herself and reverted back to Catholicism, adding that she intended to now raise the children as Catholics. Her former husband brought suit enjoining her from rearing the children as Catholics on the grounds that they were Jews by birth and identity by virtue of the prenuptial oral agreement the couple had made, as well as the women's formal conversion to Judaism and the ritual naming of the children as Jews after their births. The father did not seek custody of the children nor did he question the fitness of the mother as the custodial parent.<sup>19</sup> In her defense, the mother asserted that at the time she agreed to convert to Judaism she was under emotional stress and pressure, "that she never truly adopted Judaism as her faith and that upon the termination of the marriage she returned eagerly and wholeheartedly to her original faith."<sup>20</sup> The court ruled in favor of the mother and denied the petition of the Jewish father. It based its decision essentially upon the testimony of an Orthodox rabbi and other *halachic* citations. The court asserted that since the mother's conversion was coerced and did not include the ceremony of ritual immersion, it was invalid, consequently the mother was never Jewish and the children were not Jewish either. The court concluded: "The court finds the defendant mother a fit and proper custodian and that the four children are neither Jewish or Roman Catholic, that the custodian mother is not engaged in changing the religion of the children, that there is no agreement between the parties binding upon the mother so as to direct or control the religious educational upbringing of the children."<sup>21</sup>

## THE PROBLEM OF JUDICIAL INTERVENTION

These diverse interpretations and court rulings, as well as the particular circumstances of *Schwarzman vs Schwarzman*, raise serious questions for the Jewish community. Subsequent to the *Schwarzman* ruling, Rabbi Joseph B. Glaser, himself an attorney and executive vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, challenged the *Schwarzman* decision accusing the judge of "arrogating to himself the right to declare Orthodoxy authentic and Reform not."<sup>22</sup> Glaser went on to state that one of the reasons the Central Conference of American Rabbis did not appeal the decision even though to let it stand created a dangerous legal precedent "was the existence of the nightmarish possibility that were it unsuccessful, for whatever reasons, the mischief wrought by this imprudent intrusion into the separation of church and state would be compounded by affirmation at a higher judicial level. . . ."<sup>23</sup>

The unpredictability of such decisions and the complexities of family law have moved others to speak out as well. Andrew S. Watson, professor of law and psychiatry at the University of Michigan, notes: "The law of the family bears the stamp of many conflicting values from the past, randomly and often illogically mixed with newer views about the rights of children. . . ."<sup>24</sup> He adds: "Judicial ignorance of human psychological behavior is bound to cause results in custody cases leaving much to be desired."<sup>25</sup> Steven Zarowny goes even further warning "since the trial judge decision will be reversed only upon a clear showing of abuse a judge might draft his custody order to promote one belief over another and hide his motivation within the wide discretion afforded him by the imprecisions of the "best interests standard."<sup>26</sup> Zarowny's solution, however, that the power to choose the religious upbringing of the child be vested automatically with the custodial parent unless the health or safety of the child is

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at stake fails to address the concerns of the Jewish community regarding the Jewish identity of children of mixed-marriages raised and educated as Jews, as well as of children of marriages in which the mother has converted to Judaism and later changes her mind.

### DILEMMAS CONFRONTING REFORM JUDAISM

The Reform Jewish community may be especially vulnerable to legal problems involved in child custody cases which focus upon religion. Studies already show that the majority of persons converting to Judaism do so under Reform auspices, usually without the Orthodox requirements of ritual immersion for both men and women and ritual circumcision for men.<sup>27</sup> In addition, an increasing number of mixed-married couples are not only affiliating with Reform congregations, but are raising their children as Jews in adherence to the Reform principle that children born of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers are considered Jewish without conversion if identified as Jews and enrolled in programs leading to Bar/Bat Mitzvah and/or Confirmation.<sup>28</sup>

Given the current divorce rate, it would appear inevitable that Reform definitions of Jewishness would conflict with the custodial prerogatives of non-Jewish mothers who determine to raise children as non-Jews subsequent to a divorce regardless of whether the child has been enrolled in a Reform religious school and identified as a Jew. The implications of the Schwarzman decision regarding the validity of Reform conversions per se have already been mentioned. Under these circumstances, the controversy within the Reform movement over the issue of matrilineal and patrilineal definitions of Jewishness, as well as the right of the Reform rabbi to officiate at a mixed-marriage cannot be discussed without some attention to their status and standing in civil litigation dealing with issues of family law.

Historically, Reform Judaism in the United States deemed divorce a civil matter and opted to discontinue the practice of requiring a Get as a prerequisite for the dissolution of a marriage. In 1929, the Executive Board of the CCAR affirmed that "a divorce is purely a legal action with which the rabbi has no connection."<sup>29</sup> *The Rabbi's Manual* adds: "The general principle of the Conference, although not formally adopted, can be described as follows: civil divorce is accepted as of absolute validity and rabbinic Get deemed no longer necessary. . . . In actual practice the civil law is simply accepted as final."<sup>30</sup> The question arises whether given the Reform position on *get* and the role of the civil courts in granting divorce, it can now challenge the legitimacy of decisions rendered by these courts. The advisability of introducing a Reform *get* and a Reform *ketubah* are matters worthy of serious evaluation if any challenge is to be made regarding judicial decisions in child custody cases involving religious upbringing. Attention should also be directed to the possible modification of the language of certificates of conversion so that prospective converts to Judaism are on record as committing themselves to raising children as Jews before a formal conversion occurs. Here, too, the legality of such pledges may need to be tested in the courts.

It would appear that more thorough counseling procedures involving prospective converts to Judaism and their born Jewish spouses are very much in order as are more comprehensive periods of orientation and education antecedent to undergoing conversion or affiliating with a synagogue as a mixed-married couple. Nor is it inappropriate to caution Jewish families against the exertion of undue pressure upon the non-Jewish partner of a Jewish son or daughter to convert to Judaism before that individual is psychologically ready to do so.

The findings documented in this report may lead some to conclude that the welcome of non-Jews into Judaism and the encouragement of those who seek to link their lives and those of their children with the Jewish people, is dangerous and should be discouraged. This would be an unfortunate and unwarranted misapplication of the facts. It would mean discarding the baby with the bathwater. What is called for are the development of appropriate procedures and constructive responses to changing realities of contemporary life. Reform Judaism is eminently qualified to undertake this challenge and meet it affirmatively.

## NOTES

1. Egon Mayer, "A Cure For Intermarriage," *Moment Magazine*, June 1979, p. 3-4.
2. Edward W. Beal, SEPARATION, DIVORCE AND SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES, THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE, edited by Elizabeth A. Carter and Monica McGoldrick, Gardner Press, New York, 1980, p. 241.
3. For data on the greater incidence of divorce among mixed-married couples than endogamous couples see Allen Maller, Jewish-Gentile Divorce In California, *Jewish Social Studies*, volume 37, no. 3-4, summer fall, 1975, pp. 280-290.
4. Steven M. Zarowny, "The Religious Upbringing of Children After Divorce," *Notre Dame Lawyer*, volume 56, no. 1, October 1980, p. 160.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 161. There are numerous cases in the legal literature dealing with the resolution of charges made by the custodial parent that the religious doctrines of the non-custodial parent are inimical to the best interests of the child, that rights of visitation should be conditioned upon the termination of religious orientation by the non-custodial parent. Since these are somewhat beyond the scope of the subject at hand they are not discussed. They are, however, worthy of examination and analysis.
6. Lee M. Friedman, "Parental Right to Control the Religious Education of A Child," *Harvard Law Review*, volume 39, 1915-16, p. 499.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 500.
8. Zarowny, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
10. Lynch v. Uhlenhopp, 78, *NW Reporter 2d* 491, Iowa, 1956, p. 492.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 499.
13. Lundeen v. Stremminger, 209 Va. 548, p. 551.
14. F'v: H., *Atlantic Reporter*, volume 245, A 2d, 1969 p. 222.
15. Zarowny; *op. cit.*, p. 161.
16. David Miller, "Joint Custody," *Family Law Quarterly*, volume 13, no. 3, Fall 1979, p. 378.
17. Green v. Green, Brief of Plaintiff/Counter Defendant, Circuit Court for the County of Oakland, State of Michigan, October 16, 1980, p. 7.
18. Roth v. Roth, Opinion of the Court, State of Michigan, Circuit Court for the County of Oakland, p. 3.
19. Schwarzman v. Schwarzman, *Family Law Reporter*, volume 3, November 76-77, New York Supreme Court 388 NY 2d 993, p. 2127.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Joseph B. Glaser, "Reform Jewish View of A Court's Ruling," *New York Law Journal*, December 2, 1977, Appendix VI, p. 26.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Andrew S. Watson, "Children of Armageddon: Problems of Custody Following Divorce," *Syracuse Law Review*, volume 21, no. 1, fall, 1969, p. 55.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
26. Zarowny, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
27. Steven Huberman, NEW JEWS: THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION, UAHC, New York, 1979, pp. 19-24. Reform practice in Canada adheres far more closely to Halachic requirements for conversion and may, therefore, affect the ruling of Canadian Courts dealing with child custody differently. The matter requires additional research.
28. Sanford Seltzer, "Membership Status of Non-Jews," *Horizon Report*, August, 1980.
29. See Responsa of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, as contained in its yearbooks, volumes I-LX, 1890-1950. Compiled by Jacob D. Schwarz, UAHC, New York, 1954, no. 78.
30. *Rabbi's Manual*, CCAR, revised, New York, 1961, p. 139.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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READINGS FOR PLENARY 2  
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNAL RESPONSES TO INTERMARRIEDS

- \*7. Alexander Schindler, "Presidential Address -- Union of American Hebrew Congregations Board of Trustees", (UAHC Program Perspectives, December 1978).

Schindler brought the issue of intermarriage to the forefront of the agenda of the Reform movement in 1978. This is the speech in which he outlines his view of the crisis, and proposes a vigorous program of outreach to the non-Jewish spouses of intermarrieds. "Outreach" has become one of the principle responses of the Jewish community to the crisis of intermarriage.

- \*8. Lawrence Grossman, "Conversion to Judaism: A Background Analysis", (American Jewish Committee).

Grossman notes the halachic issue created by the willingness of some movements to accept as Jews the children of intermarried Jewish fathers. He places the process of conversion to Judaism in historical context, and notes that some thinkers have begun to call for an energetic program to supplement Outreach by providing halachic conversions for all children of intermarried couples who wish to be considered Jewish.



# PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations • 838 Fifth Avenue • New York, New York 10021

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

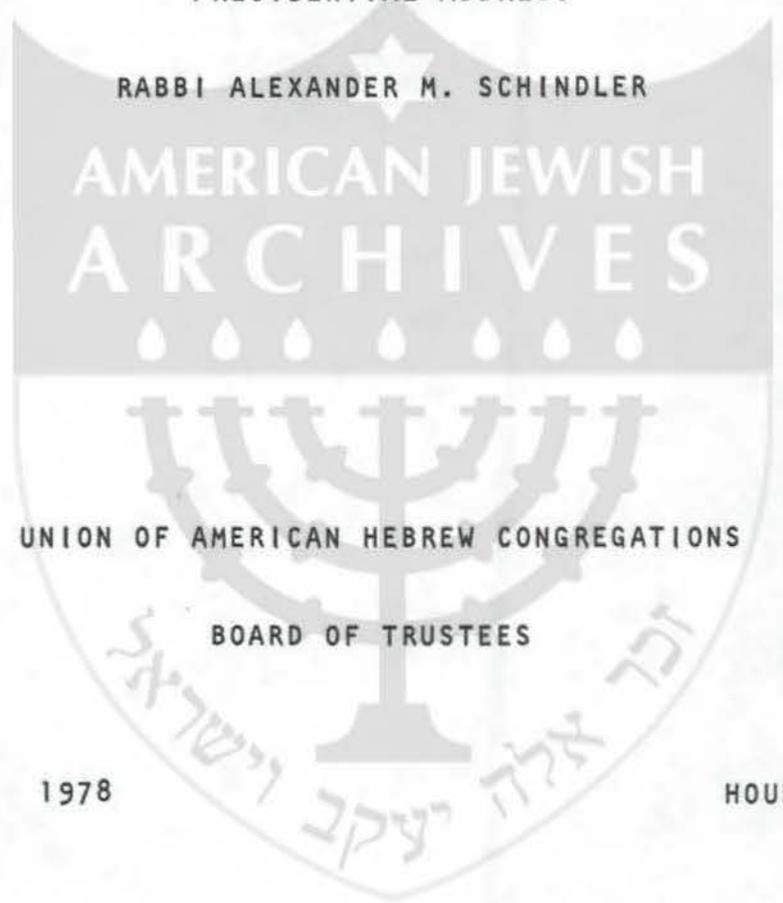
## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

DECEMBER 2, 1978

HOUSTON, TEXAS



It is good to be here, my friends, good to be re-united with the leaders of Reform Jewry, with men and women from many congregations and communities but of one faith, bound together by a common sacred cause. Your presence here gives us much strength, as does your work throughout the year. We are what we are because of you, a product of those rich gifts of mind and heart you bring to our tasks.

It is good to have our number enlarged by the presence of leaders and members of our Southwest congregations. We are grateful for your hospitality. You are true sons and daughters of Abraham whose tent, so the Midrash informs us, had an opening on each of its sides so that whencesoever a stranger might near he would have no difficulty in entering Abraham and Sarah's home.

We are grateful for the sustaining help which you have given us over the years, your material help, and the time and talents and energies of your leaders who have always played an indispensable role in our regional and national councils. I hope that you will participate in our deliberations; in any event, that you will listen most carefully if only to give you the assurance that that which you have given was well applied.

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It is not my intention this night to give you a comprehensive report of the Union's activities -- as I do at these Board meetings from time to time -- but rather to offer a resolution and to place it in its proper context. It is a resolution which recommends the creation of an agency within our movement involving its every arm which will earnestly and urgently confront the problems of intermarriage in specified areas and in an effort to turn the tide which threatens to sweep us away into directions which might enable us to recover our numbers and more important to recharge our inner strength.

I begin with the recognition of a reality: the tide of intermarriage is running against us. As a rabbi committed to the survival of the Jewish people it pains me to say so but the statistics are undeniable. We heard them from Dr. Fein last night. Between the years 1966 and 1972 the rate of Jewish intermarriage in the United States was 31.7%, that is to say, one out of three of our children chooses a non-Jew as a lifemate, and this percentage is steadily rising. We do not really need these figures to instruct us. Our own experience teaches us: We see it in our communities, we feel it in our families. We know it with the knowledge of a heavy heart that there are more and more of these marriages each and every day. Indeed, a survey published in the New York Times only this past week shows that there is increasing acceptance of such marriages, even of interracial marriages, and that the degree of this acceptance has risen most dramatically among Jews.

However much we deplore it, however much we struggle against it as individuals, these are the facts: The tide is running against us. This is the reality and we must face it.

Now facing reality does not import its complacent, fatalistic acceptance. It does not mean that we must prepare to sit shiva for the American Jewish community. Quite the contrary! Facing reality means confronting it, coming to grips with it, determining to reshape it.

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Jewish education is usually held forth as the healing balm, and to a certain extent this is true. Those selfsame statistics which brought us the bad news also gave us proof of that: The incidence of intermarriage is in inverse proportion to the intensity of Jewish rearing. The more Jewish education the less the likelihood of intermarriage. But it isn't always so, alas. As the Mishnah long ago averred: "not every knowledgeable Jew is pious," not every educated Jew is, perforce, a committed Jew.

The Union justly boasts of its program of formal and informal education. The bulk of our resources and energies are expended in this realm: We run camps and Israel tours and youth retreats. We conduct college week-ends and kallahs and teacher training institutes. We create curricula and texts and educational aids.

More to the point, no less than 45,000 youngsters participate in Union-led programs each and every year. Forty-five thousand sons and daughters of Reform congregations, their Jewish literacy enhanced, their Jewish commitments deepened. Among them are your rabbis and leaders of tomorrow; among them, the guides and scholars of our future.

Among them are also many who will intermarry -- hundreds, if not thousands, of them. We live in an open society. Intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the honey of our freedom.

Yet even when our children intermarry, Jewish education remains a crucial factor. Because all the studies agree that in the preponderance of such marriages it is the JEWISH partner who ultimately determines whether or not there will be a conversion to Judaism and whether the children will or will not be reared as Jews. It is the Jewish partner whose will prevails...provided, of course, he or she chooses to exercise that will.

To put the matter differently: the fact of intermarriage does not in and of itself lead to a decline in the Jewish population. "That decline if a decline there be depends on what the Jews who are involved in the intermarriage actually do." (Massarik)

Jewish education is important then but important as it is, tonight I do not make a plea for its extension and intensification although I might well make it, to stem the tide of intermarriage. But rather it is the plea that we as a movement can and should be doing far more than we are once having been touched by the tide to turn it around in our favor.

The conversion of the non-Jewish partner-to-be is clearly the first desideratum and we make a reasonable effort to attain it. The Union offers "Introduction to Judaism" courses in most major communities and congregational rabbis spend countless hours giving instruction. Jewish ideas are explored, ceremonies described. History and Hebrew are taught. But there, by and large, our efforts come to an end. Immediately after the marriage ceremony between the born Jew and the newly converted Jewish partner, we drop the couple and leave them to fend for themselves. We do not help them to make a Jewish home, to rear their children Jewishly, to grapple with their peculiar problems. More serious still, we do not really embrace them, enable them to feel a close kinship with our people.

If the truth be told, we often alienate them in a kind of reverse discrimination, we question their motivations (as if to say that only a madman would choose to be a Jew and so there must be an ulterior motive); or we regard them as being somehow less Jewish (what irony in this for they know more about Judaism than most born Jews); and unto the end of their days we refer to them as "converts," if not worse.

Don't for a moment think these whispers-behind-the-back aren't heard and do not hurt. Listen to these lines written to a colleague recently:

Dear Steve:

I know that I personally resent being referred to as a convert - a word that by now is alien to my heart. My conversion process was nearly ten years ago - I have been a Jew for a long time now. I think, eat and breathe Judaism. My soul is a Jewish soul though I am distinctly aware of my original background and birthright. This does not alter my identity as a Jew. If one is curious about whence I come or if indeed "am I really Jewish," the answer is categorically "Yes, I'm really Jewish - a Jew by choice."

I shall continue to grow and to search as a Jew. My "conversion process" was just that - a process which ended with the ceremony. From then on I was a Jew.

Yours,

Jane

Jews-by-choice have special needs and we need special guidance on how to meet them. There is the problem of how to deal with the Jewish-born partner who is indifferent to his or her faith.

Then there is the matter of the past; The new Jews may have broken with it, but in human terms they cannot forget their non-Jewish parents or families and at certain times of the year, on Christmas and Easter, they are bound to feel ambivalences. Finally, those who choose to become Jews quickly learn that they have adopted something far more than a religion; they have adopted a people with its own history, its way of life.

We certainly need them to be a part of this people, for they can add no strength to us if they are only individuals who share our beliefs rather than members of our community of faith. Newcomers to Judaism

must embark, in effect, on a long term naturalization process and they require knowledgeable and sympathetic guides to hel them along the way.

Let the newly-formed Commission show us how we can provide this special and sensitive assistance, how these couples can be made to feel that the Jewish community welcomes them and that they are fully equal members of the synagogue family.

This point merits the emphasis of repetition. Jews by choice are Jews in the full meaning of the term. Thus Maimonides wrote in answer to a convert's query:

"You ask whether you, being a proselyte, may speak the prayers: 'God and God of our Fathers' and 'Guardian of Israel who hast brought us out of the land of Egypt,' and the like.

"Pronounce all prayers as they are written and do not change a word. Your prayers and your blessings should be the same as any other Jew...

"This above all: do not think little of your origin. We may be descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but your descent is from the Almighty Himself..."

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Now not all non-Jewish partners of an intermarriage convert to Judaism as we so well know. The majority, in fact, do not. Statistics are hard to come by, but what we have, suggests these facts: A preponderance of intermarriage involves Jewish husbands and non-Jewish wives and upward to 40% of these women formally accept our faith. In that smaller grouping involving non-Jewish husbands and Jewish wives, the rate of conversion is not much more than 3%. However something extremely interesting has come to light. Social scientists have uncovered a "Jewish drift," the phenomenon of a "turning" to our faith. Their research has established that "nearly 50% of non-Jewish husbands" though not formally embracing Judaism, "by their own description, nonetheless regard themselves as Jews." (Massarik)

This brings me to my second proposal: I believe that our Reform congregations must do everything possible to draw into Jewish life the non-Jewish spouse of a mixed marriage. The phenomenon of the "Jewish drift" teaches us that we ought to be undertaking more intensive Jewish programs which will build on these already existing ties of identification. If non-Jewish partners can be brought more actively into Jewish communal life, perhaps they themselves will initiate the process of conversion or at the very least we will assure that the children issuing from these marriages will, in fact, be reared as Jews.

We can begin by removing those "not wanted" signs from our hearts. I am in substantial agreement with Dr. Fein here: we reject intermarriage -- not the intermarried. If Jews-by-choice often feel alienated by our attitudes we can imagine how, unwittingly or not, we make the non-Jewish spouses of our children feel.

We can also remove those impediments to a fuller participation which still obtain in too many of our congregations. Even the most stringent approach to Halacha offers more than ample leeway to allow the non-Jewish partner to join in most of our ceremonial and life-cycle events. Thus the Halacha permits a non-Jew to be in the Temple, to sing in the choir, to recite the blessing over the Sabbath and festival candles, and even to handle the Torah. There is no law which forbids a non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

As for the children born of such a marriage, if the mother is Jewish the child is regarded as fully Jewish. But if she is not, then even Orthodoxy, providing consent of the non-Jewish mother is obtained, permits the circumcision of the boy, his enrollment in religious school and his entitlement to be called to the Torah on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah and to be considered a full Jew everlastingly thereafter.

All this is possible under Orthodoxy. How much the more so under Reform! Reform Judaism has never been chained by the Halacha, we insist on its creative unfoldment. If we put our best minds to it, we will find many other ways which can bolster our efforts in this realm.

As a case in point, why should a movement which from its very birth-hour insisted on the full equality of men and women in the religious life unquestioningly accept the principle that Jewish lineage is valid through the maternal line alone? Some years ago, I heard a learned paper by Dr. Wacholder of our College-Institute, a man most knowledgeable in rabbinic sources and heedful of their integrity who argued that there is substantial support in our tradition for the validity of Jewish lineage through the paternal line. I discussed his paper with one of Israel's foremost rabbinic authorities, who found much weight in Dr. Wacholder's argument.

By way of illustration: a leading member of the United States Senate is not a Jew, although he was born a Jew. His father was Jewish. His mother converted from one of the Christian denominations. He was circumcised, reared as a Jew and attended religious school. When the time of his Bar Mitzvah approached, the rabbi refused to recognize the validity of his mother's conversion and did not allow the boy to recite the blessings over the Torah. Embarrassed, enraged, the entire family converted to Christianity. This is why a leading United States Solon is not a Jew today.

Now I am not about to propose a resolution of this maternal/paternal line issue. I lack sufficient knowledge. I merely insist that there is a possibility of the harmonization of tradition with modern need. And that the Task Force for whose creation I call should include representatives of our Rabbinic Conference's Responsa Committee or enlist its effort in toto as we pursue our delicate tasks.

It may well be that in our collective wisdom and mindful of the needs of a larger Jewish unity we will ultimately determine that certain privileges simply cannot be extended to non-Jews. If we do, then I am certain that the thoughtful non-Jew, who is favorably disposed to

Judaism, will recognize that only through conversion can these privileges be won.

It is the inertia which I want to overcome. It is the indifference which I mean to master.

Let no one here misunderstand me to say that I am accepting of intermarriage. I deplore it, I discourage it, I will struggle against it. Rhea and I have five children and we are as ardent as all other Jewish parents in our desire to stem the tide. But if our efforts do not suffice, why then we do not intend to banish our children, we will not say shiva over them. Quite the contrary, we will draw them even closer to our hearts and we will do everything we humanly can to make certain that our grandchildren will be Jews, that they will be a part of our community and share the destiny of this people Israel.

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AMERICAN JEWISH

I have a third proposal to make on the subject of our declining Jewish population in America and it is this: I believe that it is time for our movement to launch a carefully conceived Outreach Program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking roots in religion.

Let me not obfuscate my intent through the use of cosmetic language. Unabashedly and urgently, I call on our members to resume their time-honored vocation and to become champions for Judaism. Champions for Judaism -- these words imply not just passive acceptance but affirmative action.

I sense those images which flash through your mind. Let me therefore enter the substance of my proposal by correcting their distortions.

I do not envisage that we conduct our Outreach Program like some kind of travelling religious circus. I envisage rather the unfoldment of a dignified and responsible approach: the establishment of information centers in many places, well-publicized courses in our synagogues, and the development of suitable publications to serve these facilities and purposes. In other words, I suggest that we respond openly and positively to those God-seekers who voluntarily ask for our knowledge.

Nor do I suggest that we strive to wean people from religions of their choice and with the boast that ours is the only true and valid faith engage in eager rivalry with all established churches. I want to reach a different audience entirely, the unchurched, those reared in non-religious homes or those who have become disillusioned with their taught beliefs, the seekers after truth who require a religion which tolerates, nay encourages all questions, and especially the alienated and the rootless who need the warmth and comfort of a people well-known for its close family ties and of an ancient, noble lineage.

The notion that Judaism is not a propagating faith is wide of the truth. That may have been true for the last four centuries, but it is not true for the four thousand years before that.

Abraham was a convert and our tradition lauds his missionary zeal. Isaiah enjoined us to be a "light unto the nations" and insisted that God's house be a "house of prayer for all peoples." Ruth of Moab, a heathen by birth, became the ancestress of King David. Zechariah foresaw the time when men of every tongue will grasp a Jew by the corner of his garment and say "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

During the Maccabean period, Jewish proselytizing activity reached its zenith...schools for missionaries were established and by the beginning of the Christian era they had succeeded in converting ten percent of the population of the Roman Empire -- or roughly four million souls.

True, the Talmud insists that we test the sincerity of the convert's motivations, by discouraging them, by warning them of the hardships which they will have to endure as Jews. But the Talmud then adds that while we are "to push converts away with the left hand" we ought to "draw them near with the right."

After Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire and, later, again, when Islam conquered the world, Jews were forbidden to seek converts or to accept them. The death penalty was set for the gentile who became a Jew and for the Jew who welcomed him. Many were actually burned at the stake. This served to cool our conversionist ardor somewhat. Still, it was not until the 16th Century that we abandoned all proselytizing efforts and our rabbis began their systematic rejection of those who sought to join us.

But we live in America today. No repressive laws restrain us. The fear of persecution no longer inhibits us. There is no earthly reason now why we cannot reassume our ancient vocation and open our arms wide to all newcomers.

Why are we so hesitant? Are we ashamed? Must one really be a madman to choose Judaism? Let us shuffle off our insecurities! Let us recapture our self-esteem! Let us demonstrate our confidence in those worths which our faith enshrines!

Millions of Americans are searching for something. Tragically -- as the grisly events of the past week have established -- many of these seekers have fallen prey to mystical cults which literally enslave them.

Well, Judaism offer life, not death. It teaches free will, not surrender of body and soul to another human being. The Jew prays directly to God, not through an intermediary who stands between him and his God. Judaism is a religion of hope and not despair, it insists that man and society are perfectible. Judaism has an enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer this troubled world, and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it, frankly, freely, and with dignity.

Aye, there is something different in the world today and we can feel it. The very air we breathe is tense, a wind blows through space, and the treetops are astir. Men and women are restless, but not with

the restlessness of those who have lost their way in the world and have surrendered to despair. But rather with the hopeful questing of those who want to find a way and are determined to reach it. It is a searching after newer and truer values, for deeper, more personal meaning. It is a purposeful adventure of the spirit. These men and women are in the grips of a great hunger which like all "great hungers feeds on itself, growing on what it gets, growing still more on what it fails to get."

The prophet Amos spoke of such a hunger when we said:

"Behold the Day cometh saith the Lord God that I will send a famine in the land not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water but of hearing the words of the Lord."

Can you find a more vivid limning of the very body and spirit of our age? Can you paint a more striking portraiture of the Great Hunger which has seized us?

My friends, we Jews possess the water which can slake the thirst, the bread which can sate the Great Hunger. Let us offer it freely, proudly -- for our well-being and for the sake of those who earnestly seek what is ours to give.



December 2, 1978

RESOLUTION

Rapid demographic change is doing much to affect the future of American Jewry. Among the significant and critical demographic trends are: the growth of mixed-marriage, the decline of the Jewish birth-rate relative to the general population, an increase in the numbers of non-Jews converting to Judaism. These trends require our profound, serious and continuing attention. They call for creative leadership so that we reach out to shape our future and do not become passive products of forces beyond our own control.

Accordingly, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, at its Board meeting in Houston on December 2, 1978, resolves:

1/ To intensify our formal and informal Jewish educational programs within the Reform synagogue and the Reform Jewish movement to stimulate positive and knowledgeable Jewish identification.

2/ To develop a sensitive program of welcoming and involving converts to Judaism, recognizing that those who choose Judaism in good faith are as authentic in their Jewish identity as those who are born Jewish.

3/ To develop an effective outreach program by which the Reform synagogue can seek out mixed married couples in order to respond to the particular emotional and social stresses in their situations and to make the congregation, the rabbi, and Judaism itself available to them and their families.

4/ To plan a special program to bring the message of Judaism to any and all who wish to examine or embrace it. Judaism is not an exclusive club of born Jews; it is a universal faith with an ancient tradition which has deep resonance for people alive today.

5/ To implement these principles, we call upon the Chairman of the Board to appoint a special task force, of members of the Board, to examine these recommendations for implementation in all program departments of the UAHC and to report back to the Spring 1979 meeting of the Board.

**CONVERSION TO JUDAISM**  
**A Background Analysis**

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AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

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Differing approaches to the conversion of non-Jews to Judaism constitute a serious barrier to cooperation and good relations between the various Jewish religious movements today. Indeed, the large and growing number of people recognized as bona fide converts by some American Jews, but not by others, raises the possibility of open schism, with certain Jews -- mainly the Orthodox -- refusing to marry others, on the grounds that those others, ostensibly converts or the offspring of converts, are not authentically Jewish. While it is true that the individual whose conversion is in dispute can be reconverted in a way acceptable to a potential spouse, such a solution ignores the sensitivities of a person who has always thought of himself or herself as a Jew, and who will refuse to submit to another conversion.

The conflict over conversion procedures manifests itself somewhat differently in the State of Israel. There, the only form of Judaism officially recognized is Orthodoxy: no non-Orthodox conversions are allowed. And while those converted outside Israel by non-Orthodox authorities are recognized as Jews when they immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return, elements within Orthodoxy have persistently sought to amend that law to disfranchise them, and, in any case, these individuals face difficulties when they try to marry in Israel. The anger of many non-Orthodox Jews in America over this situation has exacerbated tensions between Jewish groups in the United States, and also threatens to weaken the ties between Israel and American Jewry.

### Confronting the Tradition

Much of the public debate over the conversion issue is not informed by factual knowledge. Classic Jewish texts, trends in Jewish history and sociological forces have affected Jewish attitudes toward the conversion of non-Jews and the development of Jewish conversion procedures. Basic knowledge of the Jewish sources on conversion and an appreciation of the historical context within which they emerged may contribute to constructive dialogue between the Jewish religious movements on this vexing issue.

Conversion, in the modern sense of abandoning one religion to enter another, did not exist in the biblical period. Although the word ger, later translated as proselyte, appears often in Scripture, it refers to

a resident alien, not a convert. As long as the biblical Israelites lived in their own land, Israelite nativity and the religious cult went hand in hand. Non-natives might acknowledge the power of Israel's God and even worship Him, but they remained foreigners, non-Israelites. Foreign women entered the Jewish people through marriage with Israelite men, but there is no record of "conversion" in these cases. Even Ruth, later seen as a model of the righteous convert, makes a commitment to the Israelite nation and its God, but is still called "Ruth the Moabite" until she marries Boaz.

The destruction of the First Temple and the exile to Babylonia in the 6th century B.C.E. seem to have evoked a new attitude toward the acceptance of non-Jews into the fold. With so many Jews living outside the homeland of Israel, it became possible to understand the religion of Israel as something logically distinguishable from Israelite nativity, and foreigners could practice the former despite not being born into the latter. Judaism, taking on a universal character not limited by geography, could appeal to people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, who were welcome to join the Jewish faith-community.

Although our knowledge of the Second Temple period is rather murky, both Jewish and non-Jewish sources indicate that Jews were willing, indeed eager, to spread their religion, and many pagans were happy to accept it. Judaism seems to have been especially popular during the period that Rome dominated the Mediterranean world, when, besides the full-fledged proselytes, there were also those who observed Jewish rituals without actually converting.

Contrary to widespread assumptions, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., the failure of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 135 C.E., and the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the centuries that followed did not turn Jewish opinion against the idea of converting non-Jews. The rabbis, whose influence came increasingly to dominate Jewish life, were full of praise for sincere proselytes; disparaging remarks about converts are few and unrepresentative. The rabbis introduced a prayer into the daily service calling down God's blessing on righteous converts and ruled that acceptance of proselytes was a mitzvah -- a positive obligation.<sup>1</sup>

In Christian Europe, despite laws barring them from converting non-Jews, Jews continued to accept proselytes well into the Middle Ages. Only in the 16th century did there crystallize an anti-conversionary position among Jews which reflected both the widening social distance between Jews and Christians and the escalation of government pressure against Jewish proselytization. From this point on, Judaism increasingly came to be seen as a nonconversionary religion, even though isolated instances of conversion still took place.<sup>2</sup>

The rabbinic scholars of the 2nd and 3rd centuries worked to standardize and regularize procedures for accepting non-Jews into the community. The requirements that they laid out in the Talmud, refined

by medieval commentators and set down in codes of Jewish law, were accepted without significant challenge by world Jewry until the 19th century, and still govern the practice of traditional Jews today. The rabbinic tradition makes three demands of a would-be convert:

1. Male converts require circumcision. If there has already been circumcision, a symbolic drop of blood is drawn.
2. Converts, male or female, must be immersed in a ritual bath.
3. There must be an acceptance of "the yoke of the commandments," that is, a commitment to live by Jewish law.<sup>3</sup>

While these steps may appear uncomplicated, the way they are discussed in the classic Jewish sources raises certain ambiguities that bear directly on today's conflicts over conversion procedure.

What is the proper motivation for conversion? The rabbis were well aware that over the centuries numerous people had become Jews for nonspiritual reasons such as fear, ambition, or the desire to marry a Jew. Rejecting the validity of such motivations, the Talmud affirms that, as a rule, attraction to Judaism for its own sake is the sole acceptable ground for conversion. But after the fact -- if a wrongly motivated conversion has already taken place -- it stands.<sup>4</sup>

There are instances when a rabbinic court may convert a non-Jew even though it knows from the outset that the person is not religiously motivated. If, judging the individual case, the court believes the convert will eventually become a sincere Jew, it may go through with the conversion in spite of the candidate's current ulterior purposes.<sup>5</sup>

Another, related, point of ambiguity is how to define acceptance of the commandments. The source of this requirement is a statement in the Talmud -- in the middle of a discussion unrelated to conversion -- that anyone refusing to accept even one of the commandments is not a valid convert.<sup>6</sup> Yet the classic talmudic source for conversion procedure does not mention such a requirement. Instead, it presents a kind of catechism, a model dialogue that takes place between the non-Jew and the rabbinic court. The court tests the candidate's sincerity by warning that the Jewish people are persecuted and oppressed; materially, there is nothing to gain and much to lose by joining the Jews. If the would-be proselyte is not dissuaded, he or she is told some of the more important and less important commandments, the punishments for transgression and rewards for obedience. Having a general idea of what Judaism entails, the individual can proceed to circumcision and/or immersion.<sup>7</sup> From this source there emerges only a requirement to tell the convert about some of the commandments, and it is assumed that anyone submitting to conversion after hearing about selected aspects of Jewish practice implicitly accepts the Jewish way of life. Yet a third citation in the Talmud teaches that whereas failure to circumcise or immerse the convert invalidates the conversion even after the fact, if

the court -- even one made up of laymen unversed in the law -- performs the ritual aspects of the conversion but neglects to inform the candidate about the commandments, the conversion stands.<sup>8</sup>

Must there be total acceptance of the entire corpus of Jewish law, or education about some of the laws, or are circumcision and immersion enough, ex post facto? The rabbis found ways to reconcile the three sources. Nevertheless, like the leeway granted to courts in assessing the present and future motivation of candidates for conversion, ambiguity over acceptance of the commandments could lead to a variety of approaches, within Jewish law, to the conversion of non-Jews.

For hundreds of years the divisive potential of the talmudic ambiguities had few practical consequences. Social conditions ensured that whatever theoretical disputes might go on among the rabbis over how to assess the motivation for conversion and "acceptance of the commandments," uniformity prevailed in practice. Medieval society was organized along religious lines. A non-Jew who accepted Judaism was not just altering his own personal faith, but was also committing himself to live within the Jewish community, abide by its rules and accept its sanctions. This meant that even a convert motivated primarily by the desire to marry a Jew, or one who had not accepted or was not told about all that Judaism entails, would be socialized into the Jewish way of life by virtue of living in an organized Jewish community. Rarely would there be any reason to question the authenticity of a conversion.

### The Challenge of Modernity

The onset of modernity altered this situation radically. By the middle of the 18th century the religious basis for organizing society was breaking down in parts of Western Europe. Some countries gradually removed legal restraints from, and granted basic rights to, members of minority faiths. As governments moved toward the recognition of equal citizenship for all, the power of the particular religious communities over their members inevitably declined. The rationalistic, skeptical ideology of the Enlightenment reinforced this process, leading to an erosion of religious belief and practice among middle-class Christians and Jews. Judaism was especially vulnerable to these forces, since many in that minority group came to consider the adoption of the Gentile majority's language, dress and cultural patterns as a kind of "passport" into the mainstream of Western society. The French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic conquests brought the new trends into German-speaking lands, where many Jews lived.

One response to these conditions was Reform Judaism. Beginning in Germany in the second decade of the 19th century as an attempt to enhance the esthetics of the Jewish prayer service, it proceeded to revise traditional theology. Reform defined Judaism strictly as a religion; loyalty to the nation in which one lived, it taught, made Jewish nationalistic yearnings obsolete. Reform leaders tended to

disparage ritual as a remnant of outmoded Jewish tribalism, and stressed instead the universalistic ethical message of the biblical prophets. Making great gains in the 1830s and 1840s, the movement spread beyond Germany to other European countries and to the United States.

As in many other areas of Jewish life, Reform veered decisively away from traditional conversion procedures. Immersion in a ritual bath was unacceptable on esthetic grounds. While there was less opposition to circumcision because of its historical centrality as a symbol of Jewishness, it was considered too burdensome to demand of a convert--as was the symbolic letting of blood for a man already circumcised. Reform did not require its converts to fulfill the traditional commandments, as such observance was not demanded even from its born-Jewish members. In 1892 America's Reform rabbis officially resolved that a non-Jew could become Jewish "without any initiatory rite, ceremony or observance whatsoever," so long as he or she demonstrated knowledge and acceptance of certain basic theological beliefs, and agreed to live by them.<sup>9</sup>

The traditionalist community, which was coming to be known as "Orthodox" in the early 19th century, did not accept Reform conversions. But by the 1840s the forces of modernity had become so pervasive that Orthodox rabbis themselves were being asked to convert non-Jews for the purpose of marriage. From that time down to the present, such rabbis have had to face the fact that standards of observance traditionally demanded of converts no longer reflect the observance patterns of much of the Jewish community, at times not even reflecting common practice in some nominally Orthodox congregations. Orthodox rabbinic responses to this unprecedented challenge have varied, mirroring different interpretations of the ambiguities inherent in talmudic law as well as differing assessments of social reality.

One school of thought among the rabbis has stressed the more restrictive halakhic precedents regarding the convert's motivation and expected standards of observance. Jacob Ettlinger (1798-1871), a German Orthodox rabbi, set the tone for a stringent approach. Acknowledging in 1854 that halakhah did not entirely rule out conversions motivated by the desire to marry a Jew, Ettlinger believed nonetheless that under the conditions of the day, rabbinic acquiescence would encourage more inter-marriages, and therefore no such conversions should be performed. Such a rigorist position has become very popular in Orthodox circles in the last 40 years. Rabbi Isaac Herzog (1888-1959), the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, argued that the Talmud's post facto acceptance of improperly motivated converts is only meant to apply when the bulk of the Jewish community is observant, and it can be assumed that the new Jew will learn from his Jewish neighbors how a Jew should live. If, however, most Jews are not observant, as is the case in the 20th century, it must be assumed that the would-be convert will never observe, and the conversion is void. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), the most widely respected halakhic authority in recent years, went so far as to say that a conversion conducted by Orthodox rabbis, with circumcision and immersion, was null and void even after the fact

without a genuine commitment to observe the commandments.

Other authoritative rabbis have chosen to emphasize the more permissive side of the law. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann (1843-1921), the leading German talmudic scholar of his day, exemplified the thinking of this school. He urged rabbis to consider the possible consequences of refusing to do conversions for the purpose of marriage. The couple would surely marry anyway, and the Jewish spouse would be in flagrant violation of Jewish law for living with a non-Jew. This would be the case even if there is a Reform conversion, which is not valid in Orthodox eyes. Worse, he wrote, refraining from converting the non-Jewish partner endangered the ultimate Jewish allegiance of the children. Surely, argued Hoffmann, the lesser of two evils in such cases is to perform a conversion. And what if it is clear that the convert has no intention of living as an Orthodox Jew? Hoffmann reasoned that only an explicit denial to perform a commandment invalidates a conversion. The rabbinic court, therefore, should ask the candidate about those aspects of Jewish law which it knows he accepts, and should not even mention any commandment it knows he will reject.

Another important Orthodox proponent of flexibility in conversion procedure was the first Sephardi Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, Rabbi Benzion Meir Uziel (1880-1953). Citing the talmudic statement that conversion for marriage purposes, while not ideal, is valid after the fact, Uziel reiterated Hoffmann's arguments about the dangerous implications of not converting the non-Jew and, on that basis, he considered the rabbi morally required to do the conversion if the mixed-religion couple could not be dissuaded from marrying. Going even further than Hoffmann, Uziel denied that there was any requirement that the convert accept the commandments; the rabbinical court just had to inform the person about some of them. If the new Jew subsequently is nonobservant, he is a sinner -- but a Jewish sinner. The conversion is not invalidated.<sup>10</sup>

The contrasting approaches to conversion in the halakhic tradition are mirrored in the actual practice of contemporary Orthodox rabbis. Some rely on the Hoffmann-Uziel line of reasoning, which stresses keeping intermarrying couples within the fold. Such rabbis convert non-Jews who plan to marry Jews despite grave doubts about these people's acceptance of the commandments. While insisting on circumcision and/or immersion and evidence that the candidate possesses basic Jewish knowledge, they refrain from demanding guarantees of doctrinal or ritual Orthodoxy. The rabbis conduct the conversion procedure as if motives nobler than marriage to a Jew were involved -- which they really know not to be the case. Other Orthodox rabbis take a stringent stance, even to the point of refusing to perform any conversions, no matter what the facts of the individual case might be, for fear of approving unqualified applicants. Over the last several decades halakhic experts have tended to oppose virtually all conversions that do not produce fully Orthodox Jews. This has created a climate of opinion in which rabbis who perform "minimal" Orthodox conversions rarely defend the practice in public.<sup>11</sup>

Conservative Judaism evolved in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Officially committed to Jewish law but more willing than Orthodoxy to reinterpret the tradition in the light of present-day realities, the Conservative movement retains the halakhic requirements for conversions -- circumcision and/or immersion, and an acceptance of the commandments. Many Conservative rabbis, however, do not insist on the symbolic drawing of blood if a male convert is already circumcised.<sup>12</sup> Conservative adherence to the basic tradition in the area of conversion has won the movement no credit from Orthodox authorities, who argue that Conservative rabbis are not qualified to serve on a rabbinic court because they deny traditional ideas of divine revelation, and that Conservative converts have not accepted the commandments because their teachers did not impart to them an Orthodox understanding of Jewish observance. Widespread Conservative willingness to accept most Reform conversions has also served to weaken the movement's halakhic credibility in Orthodox eyes.

Reconstructionism, which emerged as a full-fledged movement in the 1930s, rejects the concept of a supernatural God who issues commandments, but views much of Jewish practice favorably as representing the folkways of Jewish civilization. The movement recognizes the marriage motive as an acceptable "initial" reason to convert, endorses ritual immersion for the proselyte, and recommends circumcision for the male unless the experience is physically or emotionally hazardous.<sup>13</sup> As Reconstructionist theology and practice are even less traditional than the Conservative, Orthodoxy rejects Reconstructionist conversions as well.

### The Current Crisis

Conflicts between the Jewish religious movements over conversion did not have much of a communal impact in the United States until recently. Before the 1960s, intermarriage rates were quite low, and, since many of the Jews marrying Christians were opting out of the Jewish community, the rate of conversion to Judaism for marriage purposes was even lower. While individuals might face the problem of being considered Jews by one religious group but not by another, the difficulty -- often resolvable in any case by a reconversion -- was not widespread.

Over the last quarter-century, marriages between Jews and Christians have become much more common. While the numbers vary greatly between different localities, the national Jewish intermarriage rate is estimated at between 25 and 30 percent. And since most of the intermarrying Jews today do not wish to leave the Jewish community, and Christian attitudes toward Judaism are much more favorable than in the past, conversion to Judaism is a live option for the non-Jewish spouses. Addressing these changed conditions, the Reform movement in 1978 decided on a policy of active proselytization aimed primarily at these spouses. But potential gains for the Jewish community from this source have exacerbated the problem of diverse conversion standards: there are now

thousands of people -- not just isolated individuals -- who think they have converted to Judaism, but whose Jewish credentials will be challenged should they wish at some point to marry in an Orthodox ceremony, or if they seek to enter Israel and marry there. The proliferation of non-Orthodox conversions has also raised the fear that the Orthodox will shun social contact with members of the other movements in order to prevent their children from falling in love and possibly marrying "Jews" who are not Jewish by Orthodox definitions. Some even predict outright schism within the Jewish community over conversion and related issues.<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, there have been a number of suggestions for healing, or at least minimizing, the divisive impact of varying conversion standards. Most of the creative ideas for dealing with the problem have come from those Orthodox rabbinic leaders who, while committed to the halakhic process, also maintain strong ties with non-Orthodox Jews and believe deeply in Jewish unity.

One view sometimes heard in these circles is that it is irresponsible for the Orthodox to refuse to perform conversions for the purpose of marriage, and then condemn non-Orthodox rabbis for filling the vacuum by converting those the Orthodox would turn away. Rather, Orthodoxy must accept the reality of a high intermarriage rate and reach out to the non-Jewish spouses, many of whom might be attracted to the Orthodox way of life and decide to undergo Orthodox conversions.<sup>15</sup>

There has been some recent discussion among the Orthodox about the procedure for converting children of mixed marriages. Rabbi J. Simcha Cohen argues that the rabbinic sources can be interpreted to exempt minors from the requirement that applies to adult converts of accepting the commandments. This, he says, might make it possible for Orthodox rabbis to convert the children of nonobservant Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers through circumcision and/or immersion, although a parental pledge to give these children a Jewish education would probably be required. Cohen adds that such a strategy is wise, as well as valid: "As long as halakhah provides a device to properly convert children of intermarriage, this device should be utilized aggressively to make contact with vast numbers of Jews."<sup>16</sup>

Another proposal, put forth by Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, seeks a halakhic reevaluation of conversion procedures. He notes that talmudic law accepts the validity of conversions for nonspiritual motives and without acceptance of the commandments only ex post facto -- a rabbi may not perform such conversions knowing the facts of the case. However, Berkovits points out, maintaining the unity of the Jewish people is also a halakhic principle that may be strong enough to override this limitation and permit performance of such conversions, especially if non-Orthodox rabbis are willing to go along with the halakhic forms of circumcision and immersion.<sup>17</sup>

Rabbi Marc Angel has argued for an even more far-reaching reinterpretation of the traditional law. He marshals evidence from the Bible

and Talmud that conversion to Judaism is primarily an expression of national identification with the Jewish people and only secondarily a matter of adherence to the Jewish faith. Relying heavily on the writings of Rabbi Benzion Meir Uziel, Angel asserts that while a commitment to observe Jewish law is to be desired, it is not a requirement for conversion. This approach would validate many conversions that most Orthodox scholars today reject.<sup>18</sup>

Within Reform Judaism, which stands at the opposite pole from Orthodoxy by virtue of its blanket rejection of ritual requirements for conversion, there has been some degree of receptivity to a search for common ground with the other movements. In 1971 Rabbi Herbert Weiner urged his Reform colleagues to reevaluate what he considered to be lax conversion standards that created "chaos and anarchy." Admiring the Orthodox for their commitment to a uniform, structured procedure, he wondered whether classical Reform's visceral antipathy to ritual immersion might not be outmoded. Weiner noted that 19th-century rationalism had been replaced in the minds of many by a craving for religious experience, which immersion could satisfy. And since most converts to Judaism were women, who halakhically require only immersion, perhaps having Orthodox witnesses at the ritual bath could make such conversions acceptable to the Orthodox.<sup>19</sup>

In the years since Weiner made his proposal, the number of Reform rabbis who require immersion -- and circumcision for males -- has risen, although they still constitute a minority in the movement. Yet the hope that such conversions would achieve universal recognition was ill-founded in any case, since the Orthodox, both in the United States and Israel, do not accept Reform "nonbelievers" as a rabbinical court, and insist on acceptance of the commandments in the Orthodox sense. Reform realization that no concession on ritual could satisfy the Orthodox has led to considerable frustration and anger. One factor in the Reform decision to accept children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers as presumptively Jewish even without conversion was the feeling that Orthodox objections could be ignored, since the Orthodox do not take Reform conversions seriously anyway.

### Cooperative Efforts

In view of Orthodoxy's refusal to countenance non-Orthodox conversions even with the inclusion of circumcision/immersion, attention has tended to focus on the creation of some form of cooperative, interdenominational body that would deal with conversions -- and other controversial procedures -- in a manner acceptable to all the groups. This would, in theory, eliminate conflict by ensuring that converts are universally recognized as Jews.<sup>20</sup> In practice, attempts of this kind have run into serious difficulties. Two examples, one national, the other local, illustrate the obstacles to success.

In the 1950s there were discussions between the rabbinical bodies

of moderate Orthodoxy and Conservatism -- both movements committed to halakhah -- for the purpose of setting up a joint rabbinic court, whose members would be chosen on the basis of scholarship and observance, and which would have exclusive jurisdiction over Jewish family law for both groups. Professor Saul Lieberman and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the supreme halakhic authorities of the two movements, agreed on the structure and functioning of such a body, and lawyers were already drawing up the charter when the agreement fell through over the political question of whether such a joint activity implied Orthodox "recognition" of non-Orthodox forms of Judaism. Rabbi Soloveitchik, under pressure from separatist elements within Orthodoxy, withdrew his support and the initiative failed.<sup>21</sup> Recently, Rabbi Norman Lamm, the president of Yeshiva University, has suggested reviving the idea but without tying it to any existing rabbinic bodies, thereby eliminating any suggestion of Orthodox rabbis "recognizing" others.<sup>22</sup> So far, there has been no discernible progress along these lines.

In 1978, the Reform, Conservative and Traditional Orthodox rabbis of Denver, Colorado, formed a board to handle conversions.<sup>23</sup> Each movement was responsible for educating its own candidates in the fundamentals of Judaism, but those converts who wished endorsement by the board had to make "ten commitments," the functional equivalent of the traditional acceptance of Jewish law. These commitments included such matters as observing the Sabbath and the dietary laws, but there were no questions asked about expected degrees of observance, enabling candidates to interpret the commitments with considerable subjectivity. The ritual aspects of conversion -- circumcision or the symbolic letting of blood, and/or immersion, were supervised by the Orthodox rabbis, who then signed the conversion certificate.

The system worked smoothly, but the Orthodox rabbis began to have misgivings. Virtually all the candidates for conversion came to the board via Reform rabbis, and as the number of converts rose, the Orthodox increasingly felt themselves to be at the end of an assembly-line process, overseeing immersions without having established personal relationships with those whose conversion certificates they were signing. A decision by the national Reform movement to target Denver as a showcase for its program of outreach to non-Jews, followed by the Reform acceptance of patrilineal descent without conversion as sufficient for a presumption of Jewishness, induced the Orthodox rabbis to leave the program in 1983, effectively ending it. The torrent of abuse heaped on them by Orthodox leaders elsewhere in the country, once the existence of the board became common knowledge, made it unlikely that they -- or Orthodox rabbis anywhere -- would soon repeat the experiment, without backing from their national bodies.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, without fanfare, rabbis in a number of communities have developed informal ways of handling conversions across denominational lines. Such arrangements, which roughly follow Herbert Weiner's approach, are generally not publicized so as to prevent criticism from the national Orthodox leadership. Therefore, no one knows just how

widespread they are.

Eugene Lipman, a Reform rabbi who retired from the pulpit to assume the presidency of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, has given a rare public description of how a Reform conversion might be made acceptable to traditionalists. When potential converts came to Rabbi Lipman, he insisted on circumcision and/or immersion in order to satisfy Orthodox requirements. Moreover, "where any questions would be asked about the Jewishness of a child, I have always had three of my friends, all with Orthodox smicha (ordination) who have been willing to be there and sign the certificate. There are a lot of converts around, children and adults both, at whose conversions I have been physically present, but silent." Asked if this did not constitute abandonment of Reform principle, Lipman retorted, "The fact that I consider this whole process immoral is not relevant....I'm in the real world, and I want results."<sup>25</sup>

At least one noted Orthodox rabbinic scholar -- Aaron Lichtenstein, head of the Gush Etzion Yeshiva in Israel and son-in-law of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik -- has also been thinking along pragmatic lines. Though not yet prepared to offer a concrete proposal for resolving the conversion controversy, he has stated: "We ought at least probe the option of a modus operandi whereby we might recognize conversions which would be effected under the aegis of others, but which, in practice, would be administered according to halakhic guidelines and meet prevalent Orthodox standards." The possibility of thereby legitimizing non-Orthodox movements, he argues, pales in significance when compared to the human suffering resulting from disputed conversions.<sup>26</sup>

The threat to Jewish cohesion that differences over conversion practices pose is not likely to subside soon, and in the conflict between the movements no one can win. No matter how hard the Orthodox insist that only their conversions are valid, non-Orthodox rabbis will continue to perform their own conversions -- which, in the United States, far outnumber those of the Orthodox. And no matter how often non-Orthodox rabbis declare the legitimacy of their conversions, most of the Orthodox will reject these converts even if there has been circumcision and/or immersion, on the grounds that the rabbis involved are not qualified to serve on a religious court. Meanwhile, the number of "Jews" not recognized as such by the Orthodox will grow, as will tension in Israel over "who is a Jew."

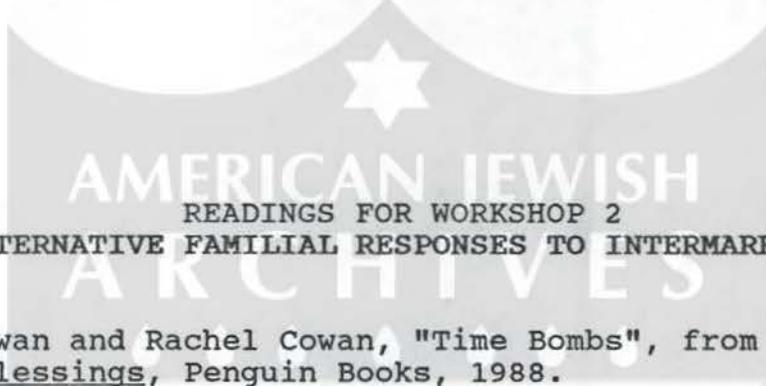
The abortive effort to form a national Orthodox-Conservative religious court and the short-lived Denver experience with a joint conversion board do not provide reasons for optimism about healing the rift through this kind of approach. Yet, as Rabbi Lipman's description and Rabbi Lichtenstein's statement indicate, there are rabbis of good will eager to reach a consensus on conversion standards. The Jewish community should encourage such efforts.

NOTES

1. Shaye J. D. Cohen summarizes what is known of conversion in the ancient world in "From Biblical Israel to Postbiblical Judaism," a contribution to a symposium on conversion published in Conservative Judaism (Summer 1983), 31-45. The Talmud refers to accepting proselytes as a mitzvah in Yebamot 47b.
2. Jacob Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance (New York, 1961), 77-81, 143-48.
3. These are codified and explained in Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah, ch. 268.
4. The source for this is Yebamot 24b.
5. Ibid., Tos. "Lo."
6. Bekhorot 30b.
7. Yebamot 47b.
8. Shabbat 68a, Tos. "Ger."
9. David Philipson, The Reform Movement in Judaism (New York, 1931), 372.
10. The divergent Orthodox responses are delineated in David Ellenson, "The Development of Orthodox Attitudes to Conversion in the Modern Period," Conservative Judaism (Summer 1983), 57-73; Ellenson, "Representative Orthodox Responsa on Conversion and Inter-marriage in the Contemporary Era," Jewish Social Studies (Summer-Fall 1985), 209-220; and Marc Angel, "Another Halakhic Approach to Conversion," Tradition (Winter-Spring 1972), 107-13.
11. Roger Owen describes his undemanding but deeply meaningful Orthodox conversion in "On Becoming a Jew," Commentary (November 1987), 55-62. For evidence of the ascendancy of the strict approach see J. David Bleich, Contemporary Halachic Problems (New York, 1977), ch. 13.
12. Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York, 1979), pp. 440-48; Seymour Siegel, "Gerut and the Conservative Movement: Halakhah," Conservative Judaism (Fall 1979), 32-41.
13. "Reconstructionist Rabbis Issue Guidelines," Reconstructionist (March 1980), 28-30.
14. Irving Greenberg spells out the dangers in Will There Be One Jewish

People by the Year 2000 (New York, 1986). He estimates that by the end of the century there will be between 300,000 and 400,000 converts to Judaism in the United States, at least 90 percent of whom will not be considered Jews by the Orthodox. Steven M. Cohen, however, has recently argued that Greenberg's estimates are too high. See their exchange in Moment (March 1987), 11-22.

15. Steven Riskin, "Conversion in Jewish Law," Tradition (Fall 1973), 38-39. Pinhas Peli, writing in Hadoar (September 5, 1986), 7, reports this to be the view of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
16. J. Simcha Cohen, "The Conversion of Children Born to Gentile Mothers and Jewish Fathers," Tradition (Winter 1987), 14.
17. Eliezer Berkovits, "Conversion 'According to Halakhah' -- What Is It?" Judaism (Fall 1974), 467-78.
18. Marc Angel, "A Fresh Look at Conversion," Midstream (October 1983), 35-38.
19. Herber Weiner, "Conversion: Is Reform Judaism So Right?" Dimensions in American Judaism (Winter 1971), 4-7.
20. The most elaborate discussion of this approach is Reuven Bulka, The Coming Catastrophe (Oakville, Ontario, 1984), ch. 10.
21. Emanuel Rackman, "Political Conflict and Cooperation: Political Considerations in Jewish Interdenominational Relations, 1955-1956," in Stuart A. Cohen and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, eds., Conflict and Consensus in Jewish Political Life (Jerusalem, 1986), 118-27.
22. Norman Lamm, "Seventy Faces," Moment (June 1986), 27.
23. "Traditional Orthodox" is midwestern nomenclature for synagogues affiliated with the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations but whose religious standards (men and women sitting together, for example) are closer to the Conservative movement. Their rabbis are fully Orthodox.
24. "Conversion and Patrilineality," special supplement in the Intermountain Jewish News, December 2, 1983; "Post-mortem by Denver Rabbis," ibid., July 11, 1986; Steven E. Foster, "The Community Rabbinic Conversion Board -- the Denver Model," Journal of Reform Judaism (Summer 1984), 25-32.
25. Baltimore Jewish Times, January 30, 1987, 71.
26. Jewish Action (Holiday Issue, 1986), 39. This is a publication of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.



AMERICAN JEWISH  
READINGS FOR WORKSHOP 2  
ALTERNATIVE FAMILIAL RESPONSES TO INTERMARRIEDS

- \*9. Paul Cowan and Rachel Cowan, "Time Bombs", from Mixed Blessings, Penguin Books, 1988.

This chapter explores issues that intermarried couples must resolve. How will they raise the children? How will they celebrate holidays? In which religious tradition (or both, or none) will children be named and consecrated? How will conflicting expectations of extended family members (of differing religious backgrounds) be satisfied? The Cowans argue that while most couples try to let these issues "resolve themselves" over time, they can become "time bombs" that can destroy a marriage.

From Paul and Rachel Cowan,  
*Mixed Blessings: Marriage Between Jews and  
Christians*, Doubleday, 1987

## 5

# Time Bombs

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AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

The ecology of intermarriages in the 1980s is very different from the ones we have described in the two previous chapters. In our workshops and interviews, Jews almost always display a pride in their religion and ethnicity that was so conspicuously absent when Anne Lazarus Johnston talked about Emma's Jewish writing, or when Harold Hochschild and Walter Lippmann wrote about themselves and their people. The Jews and the Christians we meet are far more conscious of the desire to infuse their families' lives with their religious and cultural heritages than the Lerner or the Aulettas were when they married. They are far more likely than their counterparts in earlier generations to argue about which faith will be ascendant in their households.

Jews, including those who intermarry, worry that their 4,000-year-old history will be extinguished: the Holocaust serves as a constant reminder that survival is perilous. Their desire to transmit identity from one generation to the next has been intensified by the renewed interest in religion and ethnicity that has become such an important part of American life in the past two decades. Furthermore, nowadays Jews like Karen Berkowitz meet gentiles like John Halvorsen as American tumbleweeds, not as latter-day versions of the Harold Hochschild who wanted to escape into Christian America. They are on an equal social and economic footing with their mates as they try to decide whether to raise their children as Jews or Christians.

Just as many Jews who marry gentiles are often surprised to discover that they feel an inexplicably powerful commitment to Jewish survival, so many Christians who wed Jews come to the sudden, unexpected realization that they care more than they had thought about Jesus, about the church, about the meaning of Christmas and Easter.

Often, these religious and cultural feelings are suppressed when a Jewish-Christian couple falls in love. They come to the surface as marriage approaches or when children are born. We call these feelings time bombs in an interfaith relationship. In this portion of *Mixed Blessings* we suggest ways of anticipating these emotions and understanding them. And we suggest ways of transforming potential conflicts into a shared spiritual life.

When Jews and Christians first fall in love, they usually regard themselves as individualists who will be able to transcend the specific cultural demands of the pasts that shaped their beliefs and laid claims on their loyalties. But that is a more difficult task than they imagine, for at some profound level of self and psyche, most will always be attached to the religious and ethnic tribes in which they were raised. They'll remain Americanized Eastern European Jews or German Methodists or Italian Catholics or Chinese Buddhists. They love the cultural assumptions that permeated their households when they were young: the background music of ordinary life, which a child takes for granted, which an adolescent or young adult tries to forget. If couples don't acknowledge such assumptions in the same way that people acknowledge music—as an interior melody that can't be articulated in words—they can damage the ecology of an intermarriage.

If a struggle over religion does begin, it often takes couples by surprise, thrusting them into confusing, seemingly endless discussions. For suddenly they discover that they are not interchangeable parts of an American whole, but two people whose different pasts have endowed them with a distinct set of feelings. How should they discuss their differences? How can each understand the ethnic and religious context in which the other's emotions exist?

Their first disagreements are likely to be over the external features of religious identity—over the holidays they will celebrate, or the way they will raise their children. Then, as they get older, they may find

that the joys of having children, the complexities of finding work that satisfies them, the sorrow of losing loved ones, may cause them to feel a more powerful personal need for religion than they could have imagined when they were married. Sometimes, they become involved with a synagogue or church they thought they'd left behind when they left home. When that happens, an important part of their life is suddenly unfamiliar to their spouse. They have violated the tacit agreement about religion they had made when they got married.

But, as important as religious differences are, they are just one part of the complex array of emotional forces that come into play in an intermarriage. For the partners in a relationship may find that although they don't have specific religious disagreements, they are still troubled because their ethnic assumptions come into conflict. We see this time and again in our workshops. When we describe our own WASP-Jewish conflicts over food, health, emotional privacy, or our style of arguing, the couples laugh with the relief of recognition. Then they begin to talk about cultural differences of their own.

Our understanding of the way conflicts over religion and ethnicity can overlap has been deepened by the ideas contained in ethnotherapy, a family therapy technique that was developed in the early 1970s by Dr. Price Cobb, a black psychiatrist, and adapted for use with Jews by his assistant, Dr. Judith Weinstein Klein. The insights of ethnotherapy were broadened and promoted by Irving Levine and Joseph Giordano of the American Jewish Committee.

Ethnotherapy helps people understand that many of the emotional experiences they assume are universal are actually shaped by a particular cultural background. It also helps them see that their self-images are deeply influenced by the way society perceives the ethnic group to which they belong. It reminds people that religious and ethnic differences are inevitable, not shameful. Thus, ethnotherapists argue that when people from different cultural backgrounds fall in love, rejoice together and grieve together, raise children together, they aren't doing so as undifferentiated white bread Americans, but as men and women whose response to issues as major as life and death, as minor as food or the best way to spend leisure time, have been influenced by their cultural heritages.

In a book called *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, Monica McGoldrick, Director of Family Training at Rutgers Medical School, described her experiences counseling interfaith couples and highlighted the role

cultural differences play. "Couples who choose to [intermarry] are usually seeking a rebalance of the characteristics of their own ethnic background. They are moving away from some values as well as toward others . . . During courtship, a person may be attracted precisely to the fiancé's differentness, but when entrenched in a marital relationship the same qualities often become the rub . . ."

When couples are under stress, she wrote, "[they] react to each other as though the other's behavior were a personal attack rather than just a difference rooted in ethnicity. Typically, we tolerate differences when we are not under stress. In fact, we find them appealing. However when stress is added to a system, our tolerance for differences diminishes. We become frustrated if we are not understood in ways that fit with our wishes and expectations. WASPs tend to withdraw when upset, to move toward stoical isolation, in order to mobilize their powers of reason (their major resource in coping with stress). Jews, on the other hand, seek to analyze their experience together; Italians may seek solace . . . in emotional and dramatic expression of their feelings and a high degree of human contact. Obviously, these groups may perceive each other's reactions as offensive or insensitive although within each group's ethnic context their reactions make excellent sense. In our experience much of therapy involves helping family members recognize each other's behavior as a reaction from a different frame of reference."

When Jewish-Christian couples suppress or ignore religious or ethnic feelings they set the time bombs that can explode in any intermarriage. We are not sociologists. Our sample of workshops and interviews is not large enough to allow us to estimate the percentage of interfaith couples who experience unexpected tensions in their relationships. There are no definitive studies of current divorce rates in marriages between Jews and Christians, although a few 1960s and 1970s studies—in California, Utah, and Indiana—showed that the Jews, Mormons, Protestants, and Catholics who were surveyed did divorce spouses from other religions at a somewhat higher rate than those from their own. A 1984 study by the National Opinion Research Center showed a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and marriage to a spouse from a similar religious background.

We are not arguing that marriages between Christians and Jews can't work, nor would we want to. Many of our friends are happily

intermarried. But we are insisting that, for many people, religion and ethnicity are sufficiently important that they must be taken seriously.

The time bombs that explode are usually ignited by the stress that develops at the moments when interfaith couples are faced with important choices, or difficult losses. They often go off 1) during the December holidays—or more precisely, from the moment the first Christmas decorations group in late October and trigger what has come to be called the December dilemma; 2) when marriage approaches; 3) when a child is born; 4) when a child asks about its identity; 5) when a loved one dies.

With such potential for misunderstanding, it is no wonder that time bombs go off in intermarriages. (In fact, it is a wonder they don't go off more often.) The best way to avoid these explosions is to be aware of their potential—and of the moments they have occurred in the lives of other Jewish-Christian couples who assumed that their love would conquer all.

### *Courtship*

Some Jews and Christians become aware of their ethnic and religious incompatibility while they are courting. They may discover that a lover is an unconscious bigot. They may become aware that the man or woman they'd regarded as an attractive fellow professional has deep religious or ethnic loyalties which they cannot share. Or they may realize that they will feel like a traitor if they leave their family religion or their spouse doesn't join it.

Many couples don't experience these feelings at all. If there are disagreements, they emerge much later in a relationship. Others detect them, then dismiss them.

Many try to resolve them through negotiations. They try to hammer out their own and their future children's beliefs as if they were bargaining over an eight-hour day. But you can't negotiate faith: a committed Jew and a religious Catholic can't simply split the difference between them and decide to be Unitarians. The discussion might end in tears or in a tacit agreement not to raise the subject again. It is seldom resolved.

Sometimes couples use religious conflicts as a smokescreen which

allows them to avoid other issues. Perhaps they fear intimacy. Perhaps they're intrigued by each other but don't love each other enough to wed.

Sometimes couples who are courting say that the only intermarriage issue that troubles them is their parents' disapproval of the relationship. They are hurt and angry when their parents refuse to meet the person they are dating or threaten to boycott the wedding.

They usually react to their parents' rage by ignoring their own disagreements. For the opposition seems like bigotry. They now perceive themselves as soldiers in the army of love and regard their wedding as a rebellion against narrow-mindedness, and bad manners. Instead of surrendering, they resolve to fight harder.

But occasionally hostile parents do manage to ignite the time bomb. We have decided to describe two relationships where that happened because both provide an x-ray view of tensions that would have made both couples miserable if they had married.

In one instance, an Episcopalian from the South had a strong desire to remain a Christian and held subtly disdainful feelings about Jews. But in her desire to be urbane, she had discarded her religious practice. Her fiancé, who had tried to leave his ethnic past behind him when he went to Dartmouth and Harvard Business School, ignored her attitudes when they manifested themselves in comments about his mother's taste in food and house decoration. But when his mother refused to invite the young woman to her home for a Passover seder they both had to confront their deepest feelings—the bomb had been ignited.

The time bomb that exploded in the other relationship typifies a problem we see frequently in our workshops. In every group there is at least one child of a Holocaust survivor. Often these people have had trouble gauging the claim the past has on them. As courtship proceeds toward marriage conflicts with parents frequently develop. As they are forced to choose between parents and lovers, they often discover that Jewish loyalties intensify. Often the gentiles who love them will pay a high price for the fact that these children of survivors are so out of touch with their feelings.

***Molly and Tom: Guess Who Isn't Coming to the Seder?***

Molly Perkins, thirty-four, was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Her Episcopalian parents had lost much of the family fortune during the Depression. Molly was always aware that they weren't as wealthy as most of their friends, but they belonged to the same church, same social clubs, and attended the same balls as the rest of the city's elite.

As a girl, she'd enjoyed the life of Protestant high society. She had liked going to church on Sunday. "I wasn't at all religious, but I always had this image that I'd walk down the aisle with my father and that after the wedding I'd have a reception at his social club. I must have imagined that wedding eighty-seven times with eighty-seven different grooms."

But she thought she said good-bye to all that when she enrolled at Smith and became a feminist and a political radical who felt scorn for religion. At twenty-five she moved to Boston and embarked on what she expected to be a lifetime career in the theater. She lived with Tom Schwartz, a graduate of Dartmouth and Harvard Business School, who'd been raised in a Conservative Jewish home in the Boston suburbs. Molly and Tom were both agnostics whose tastes in jokes, people, books, and plays made them feel like soul mates. Tom, who represented hi-tech businesses, thought Molly's career as an actress was "racy." Molly was amazed that Tom could make the business world seem interesting to her.

After they had lived together for two years, they began to talk about getting married. Often they would argue about the two hurdles they would have to cross on the way to the altar—Tom's family and the way they would raise their children.

Tom was very close to his mother, but his mother had no use for his Protestant girlfriend. As Molly recalled it, "At first, he didn't want to introduce me to her, and I asked him, 'Why not?' People's mothers had *always* liked me. I was great to bring home. I would always write thank-you notes. Finally, Tom told me that his mother was upset that I wasn't Jewish. None of the Jewish families I'd known in Atlanta had felt that way.

"At first, I thought that when Tom's mother met me she would forget that I wasn't Jewish and just like *me*. But that didn't happen—she didn't like me and she was rude about it. It was the first time I experienced the tribal thing."

Both women were aware of the complex blend of social class and inherited culture that divided them. "Tom's family had more money than my family did—but they were very newly rich. My family is old poor. My mother is the kind of person who might be serving hot dogs, but the silver would be out. It wasn't that she was trying to look like she was rich—it was just that a certain level of etiquette, a certain standard of living, were *de rigueur*.

"I was raised to think you didn't talk about money, but Tom's family talked about money a lot. I feel embarrassed to say it, but I thought their taste was really tacky. I remember going out there once for Thanksgiving dinner. They had a beautiful table that Tom's mother always bragged about. But it was covered with a plastic tablecloth. There was plastic on the lamps. When I remarked on that to Tom, he laughed. But he loved his mother a lot. In retrospect, I think he was hurt."

Tom and Molly loved their life in their Back Bay apartment and they wanted to get married. But they couldn't decide what sort of family they would raise.

The conflict was as stark as possible: "Tom didn't want our children to be Christians and I didn't want them to be Jews. At first I thought they should be raised without religion, but I couldn't shake my own warm feelings about my upbringing in Atlanta." Once Tom suggested they be raised as Unitarians, but Molly just "snorted and said that's no compromise at all. It fizzes both religions out. It's not Christian, really, and it's certainly not Jewish."

At the least, Molly wanted a Christmas tree. But Tom wouldn't allow a tree in his home. Molly thought that was part of the psychological complexity that made him so interesting and so attractive. "Dartmouth had really gotten to him. He'd loved the fraternities, and the tweed jacket, pipe smoking routine. He was really struggling with that. But his ethnic identity was strong. He was always talking about the Holocaust and Eastern European-Jewish history."

When Molly suggested they call the tree a Hanukkah bush, he got furious and said, "That's for assimilated Jews." Soon, the specter of the tree began to haunt their relationship. It was as if they were experiencing the December dilemma all year round.

"I thought I'd change his mind one year when I took him to Atlanta for Christmas. My parents welcomed him. We had a big Christmas tree. We had all the parties. There was a big Christmas Eve dinner of

roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. There were Christmas presents under the tree for him. We had an open house on Christmas Day with eggnog. It was all very Waspy. I thought he'd enjoy it. But he was uncomfortable the whole week we were there."

The time bomb, which Molly called "the straw that broke the camel's back," exploded during Passover 1980, when Mrs. Schwartz refused to invite Molly to the family seder. It was her tactic for sabotaging the wedding and it worked.

Molly was enraged. "I said, 'What do you mean your mother asked that I not come?'

" 'Well, she doesn't want you.'

"I said, 'Are you going?'

" 'Yes,' he said, 'I can't miss Passover.' "

With chagrin, she said, "I remember yelling at Tom about Jews being stubborn. I guess I had just had his mother up to my ears. I couldn't stand this stubbornness, and this refusal to accept me and let me in. So I said, 'You Jews are assimilated as much as you want to be. You're keeping yourselves separate.' As soon as those words came out I thought, 'Oh, God, what have I said?' But I was really angry.

"I felt, 'Damn it, *these people*: they're stubborn, they won't fit in, they won't compromise.' Once I'd thought those qualities were admirable—they had allowed Jews to survive without a country for two thousand years—but suddenly I felt, '*They* really think they're better than anybody else. They ask for what they get. They *will* be different. They *will* set themselves apart. They *will* be pushy and rude. Well, what do they expect?'

"I think, at some level, I felt that my family—we WASPs, we Episcopalians—had bent over backwards to accept Tom. If we had wanted to, we could have been snobby and anti-Semitic. But we were irreproachable. I kept thinking that Tom and his family should be grateful that we talked to them. But they'd turned the tables. I thought, 'How dare they not be grateful that my family and I had accepted them?'

Then, she added, "I hate remembering that. It's so snotty, so cruel. But I do harbor those feelings somewhere inside me. And Tom saw them. He told me I was wildly anti-Semitic. In his mind, it placed me in the camp of those who had always persecuted Jews. I guess that was the real end of the affair."

A week after they broke up, "Easter rolled around," Molly recalled.

"We were still living in the same apartment, since neither of us had a new place to live. It was uncomfortable: what do you say to someone whose bed you're sharing after you've broken up with him? Besides, after that experience with Tom and his mother I was getting Waspier by the minute.

"So, I decided to get up and go to church. I went to an Episcopal church for a two-hour service that knocked my socks off. I remember the bishop knocking at the sanctuary door and those huge doors being thrown open—then he said, 'Christ is Risen.' I thought, 'Ooh, maybe He is.'

"That was April. I didn't go back to church because I was involved in a show. But when it was over in May—and I'd finally moved out of the apartment—I expected to fall apart. So I went to visit my grandmother and went to church with her. I thought I was being a good girl. Then I went home to Atlanta and went to my old church with my parents. I didn't think of myself as religious, but I loved the experience. So when I got back to Boston I started going to church. I've never stopped."

The next year Molly became a divinity student and was ordained as a minister upon graduation. She now has a pulpit in the Midwest. Tom married a Jewish woman, and they're active in their synagogue in New Jersey. Mrs. Schwartz, who still lives outside Boston, feels an abiding sense of relief that she has never had to talk about "my daughter-in-law, the Reverend."

### *Sheila and Phil: She Was the Love of My Life*

Sheila Eisen, the only child of Holocaust survivors, came to one of our early workshops with her fiancé Phil Angelli, a Catholic from New Jersey.

As they told the story, her parents were their problem. Although the couple was engaged, Sheila's parents refused to meet Phil and said they would disown Sheila if the wedding took place. Phil, whose parents had left the Catholic church because it was too narrow-minded for them, was enraged. He wanted to help free Sheila from what he regarded as her parents' bigotry. They didn't resolve their

dilemma during the workshop cycle. But a time bomb went off later on.

Sheila was raised on Long Island in a home that "felt European Jewish first, American second. My parents' entire social circle consists of other survivors. They spend a lot of the money they earn putting up monuments to the dead, or sending checks to the gentiles who helped them in the war."

Outwardly, she had a typical American-Jewish childhood. She went to Hebrew school for seven years, but her social life revolved around the friendships she made in public school. Being a cheerleader made her very popular. But inwardly she was haunted: "My mother always told me to marry a Jew because a non-Jew would turn on me."

After Sheila had studied mass communications at NYU, she went to work in an advertising agency. When she settled in Manhattan, she was so busy that she ordered almost all her dinners at the local deli where Phil Angelli, an aspiring actor, was working to make ends meet until he got a decent role in a play. "He is a big, tubby guy—I wasn't particularly attracted to him. But suddenly I realized I loved spending time with him."

Phil had always felt a special affinity toward Jews. When he was fourteen, he got involved with a theater group at a local temple. "I spent a lot of time at that temple. I liked it. I've always considered myself more of a universalist than anything else. But I could never understand why so many of my Jewish friends said they would only marry Jews. Why would someone close off all their options at seventeen?"

When he got to know Sheila, he realized that "she was the great love of my life. I'd never been able to open myself up in the way I did to her."

Soon she felt the same way. "After we had been pals for about six months, going to movies and theater together, I felt a slap on my face saying, 'wake up, shmuck, you love this guy.' But at the same time, the other side of my mind was saying: 'This is not a good thing that he's not Jewish. Do you want to go home and tell your parents about it?'"

Sheila tried to warn Phil about the dangers that lay ahead. "I told him it was going to be a long uphill battle—a combination of *West Side Story*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the soaps we were always watching together. They'll never let us come to their house together. They'll

refuse to meet you or talk to you on the phone. They'll do everything they can to break us up."

But Phil couldn't understand how they could do that. "Why did she care so much about her parents' opinion? I know they suffered, and I feel very badly for them. I knew they believed that if their daughter married a gentile, the gift of life they had received when they survived the camps would be in vain. I thought about converting for a long time. But they wouldn't even meet me for dinner. They didn't care who *I* was. As far as they were concerned, I was just another *goy* who was completing Hitler's work. Why would I give up my identity if I was going to be treated like that? How could they be such bigots after they had suffered that kind of persecution?

"But Sheila's parents had this hold on her. Sometimes, we'd wake up in the morning after a wonderful night at the theater or just be joking around with each other and her parents would call up. She would argue with them angrily, but when she hung up she'd begin to cry. I'd say, 'Your love for me is your decision, not theirs. I don't see them in this bed here with us this morning.' She would agree with me for a while. But then the guilt would come back."

Actually, Sheila felt liberated by Phil's arguments. "You know that part of Helen Epstein's book *Children of the Holocaust* where she says, 'they were not parents like any other parents, and we are not children like any other children'? That stuck like granite in my mind. I always felt set apart. I always wanted to tell my children about what my parents had suffered. But Phil taught me suffering is not confined to Jews."

Phil was a loving man who could make Sheila laugh, who delighted in buying her flowers and a good meal when she was feeling depressed, and in holding her close. "Our relationship was like the best of those Hollywood love movies in the forties," Phil said. Within a year, they were man and wife in everything but name. They shared the rent on their apartment as well as a joint bank account. Phil became an assistant TV producer. He took Sheila on a wonderful vacation on the *QE2*. In August 1982, they became engaged.

"I didn't tell my parents until after Yom Kippur," Sheila said. "I didn't want to spoil the Holidays for them. They had come over to my apartment—Phil was away somewhere—and brought me enough food for a small disaster. The room was filled with the flowers Phil had left so that I'd think of him when he was gone. When I told them

we were engaged my father shot me a look of hatred and anger that I'd never seen on his face before. The look was directed at *me*—the daughter he loved. After about twenty minutes, he grabbed my mother and said, 'Come on, Rose, let's go.' It was devastating for both of us."

For the next three months, Sheila's mother called her every day, telling her that she was killing her father and her. Whenever Phil overheard the conversations, he told his fiancée that Jews had been killed by bigots. Why were her parents being bigots? Caught in the crossfire, Sheila began to see a psychiatrist. "Finally, I realized that I was trying to protect both Phil and my parents. I didn't know how I felt any longer. I realized that the person I was really hurting was myself."

The time bomb exploded after a cousin of Sheila's—another child of survivors—had invited them to her wedding. "We were both very excited," Sheila said. "Phil and I had been living together for two and one half years and he had never met my parents. They were going to be there."

But then, a week later, Sheila's cousin called back; she didn't want *her* parents to know that she had invited Phil. Sheila would have to take responsibility for the presence of her gentile fiancé at the event. She panicked at the idea.

"I didn't want her to have all that anxiety on her wedding day. I figured you only get one wedding day to remember. So I went down to the theater where Phil was taking acting lessons and I told him not to come. There would only be fifty people, and they'd all be staring at him: my parents would be uncomfortable and he would be uncomfortable. Of course, he thought I had betrayed him in favor of my parents. Maybe I had."

"I was shocked," Phil recalled. "I asked her, 'Are we engaged?' She said, 'Yes.' I said, 'If we are married we go places as one. We are a unit.' Until then, I had been angry at her parents, but not at her. I thought *we* had something special, that we were battling for an ideal of love. Suddenly, I realized that I could never trust her when it came to a choice between me and her parents. That tore us apart."

The couple argued non-stop for three days. As Phil recalled it, Sheila kept crying hysterically and apologizing. "But I had lost trust. That was the end."

Six months later, Sheila had fallen in love again—with a Jewish

businessman who had been a classmate in high school. "It's like magic," she said. "I've been walking around, pinching myself ever since."

Phil was still bitter, though he tried to keep his anger directed at Sheila and not her people. "If you get stiffed by an Irish cab driver, you'll probably hate all the Irish for a while. Then you'll remember that he was an individual." Then, wistfully, he recalled the love of his life with a phrase which suited his universalist faith. "She understood my craft—I believed in her. We were like two flowers with the same root. And then an arbitrary gardener decided to uproot the garden and plant the flowers on opposite sides."

## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

### *The Wedding Takes Place*

When a Jew and gentile marry, the wedding arrangements can be the source of terrible tension. Who should preside? A rabbi? A minister? Both? A judge or justice of the peace? Sometimes the answer to these questions can shatter childhood dreams. In one workshop, the daughter of a Hebrew school principal, who'd always imagined that she would be married by dancing Hassidic rabbis, decided that it would be unprincipled to have any religious presence at all when she married her Protestant fiancé. There was no honest way she could agree that an intermarriage could be performed "according to the law of Moses"—a crucial part of the Jewish marriage contract. Another Jew permanently antagonized his devoutly Protestant mother-in-law who'd arranged for her minister to perform the wedding. He insisted that he was a Jew and Jews should be married by rabbis.

A Catholic man, who was married by a justice of the peace because his Jewish in-laws refused to come if the wedding included a priest, told his wife that he "needed to feel that someone was blessing us." Though she felt uneasy in churches, she thought her parents had been unfair to the man she loved. She agreed to let a priest marry them secretly the day after their public wedding.

Some parents will never attend an intermarriage, no matter who officiates. They feel they cannot condone their child's act of betrayal. That kind of rejection can cause couples agony. In one of our workshops, a Jew and a Catholic went all the way from New York to Hawaii

to get married because they hoped the long voyage to a beautiful place would let them experience their love for each other instead of the pain of parental disapproval.

By the time a couple actually set the date for a wedding, parental objections rarely prevail. Courtship is over by then. The couple is too committed to each other—and their decision to get married—to feel anything but anger at the interfering parents.

If one or both members want a religious wedding, that anger can extend to the clergy. Sometimes that's true of Catholics who are marrying Jewish divorcés since priests are forbidden to perform a wedding if one of the partners has been divorced. More frequently it is true of Jews, who feel hurt when a rabbi refuses to perform an intermarriage. The majority of rabbis don't perform intermarriages even though they are painfully aware the decision hurts and angers the couples involved. For according to Jewish law a Jewish wedding unites two Jews. It reaffirms the covenant which God established with the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. A wedding which includes someone who is not a Jew, who is not part of the covenant, may be holy but its holiness is not specifically Jewish. These rabbis feel that Jewish law and tradition make it impossible for them to sanctify such unions.

Often, in interviews and workshops, we argue that clerics would be violating their conscience and perhaps risking their jobs if they agreed to perform weddings that their religion forbids. But, from the point of view of the couple who have been spurned, our defense of the clergy sounds theoretical and somewhat heartless. At that point in their relationship, they have decided they will have nothing to do with the religious communities that seemed so hostile when they wanted sanctification for their union.

Nevertheless, we urge couples to think carefully about that feeling, which is very much akin to the anger at the Jewish community we experienced after our honeymoon in Israel. Are they using their conviction that they have been betrayed by narrow-minded rabbis or priests as a way of transforming anxieties about their own religious and ethnic tensions into anger at a common enemy? Are they writing off an entire religious community because of one unhappy experience?

After the wedding there is usually a period when religious issues subside. For most childless couples relish their independence. They

can be vagabonds in time. They have no responsibilities to parents or children.

Many say they seldom thought about their religious differences, or that they ignored their parents' disapproval until a baby was born. But children mark the beginning of a new reality. Most vagabonds are forced to turn into burghers overnight. They feed their children at fixed hours, try to choose homes that are near good day care centers or schools, rely on parents they once rejected to babysit for their youngsters long enough to let them enjoy a few romantic hours of freedom.

By then, many Jews and Christians who marry are forced to face the internal truth they avoided during their courtship, their wedding, and the years when they were childless. They realize that, in their new role as adults, as nurturers, they understand their own parents better and want their approval. They realize that their children will need links to the past to create identities in the present. They care about those identities.

The birth can raise an immediate religious question. Should there be a baptism or a christening, or a brit [a ritual circumcision] if the child is a boy, or a baby naming in synagogue if she is a girl? Discussions of these rituals can transform the silent language through which each partner conveys ethnic and religious attitudes into a shouting match.

Most Jews see the prospect of a baptism or christening as a sign that their child will be separated from them and join a different people. The act that can be so inspiring to their Protestant or Catholic spouse often fills them with guilt.

For the gentile, a brit is a frightening, confusing way of welcoming a male child into the world. For, unlike a hospital circumcision, it is celebrated in a festive atmosphere, in public. Jews watch as the *mohel* [the specialist in ritual circumcision] cuts off the boy's foreskin. They say *mazel tov*—congratulations—while he is still crying. From their point of view, the brit represents God's covenant with Abraham: the baby has just joined the Jewish people. The gentile often wonders how he or she could have consented to letting the baby be subjected to such a foreign ritual.

The couple may face another difficult issue when a child is born. If the mother is not Jewish, there may be a lot of pressure on the couple to agree to convert the baby to Judaism according to the rituals

established by Jewish law. (Jewish law requires circumcision of a boy, and immersion in the mikvah, or ritual bath, for a boy or a girl.) If the baby is not legally converted, the Orthodox and Conservative movements of Judaism will not recognize him or her as a Jew.

Some parents feel that conversion is a logical part of the decision to raise the child as a Jew. Others resent the law or think it is irrelevant. Some mothers worry that the formal act of conversion will make them feel set apart from the rest of the family.

By the time the birthing ceremony takes place the marriage has gained its own momentum. The couple has too much stake in each other and their new family to let this argument disrupt a marriage. But in reality, the problems that arise when a child is born and when a baby begins to speak are more wrenching than those that arise during courtship.

Thus, Molly Perkins and Tom Schwartz can forget each other; Phil Angelli can retain a bittersweet memory of his relationship with Sheila Eisen. But the couples we are about to describe, Lars Swenson and Judy Horowitz, and Ted and Margie Kaplan, didn't recognize the power of their religious and ethnic loyalties until they had children. When their time bombs went off, they were forced to make decisions for a third person, not just for themselves.

The time bombs did not destroy either marriage. But they forced the couples to make compromises that left each partner feeling somewhat lonely and dissatisfied.

### *Lars and Judy: Can a Devout Christian Raise an Observant Jew?*

Lars Swenson and Judy Horowitz were prototypical American tumbleweeds. She was an urban Jew who seldom went to synagogue; he was a religious Lutheran from a farm in Nebraska. They met as a doctor and lawyer in Los Angeles. They were opposites whose cultural differences attracted them to each other.

Lars, thirty-two, grew up in a small Midwestern town where his grandparents and his parents were pillars of the church. It was a very conservative environment. At home, men would stand in the living room talking about farm prices while their wives did the dishes in the

kitchen. No liquor was permitted in the house. It was a milieu where premarital sex was regarded as sin. Lars loved the security it afforded, but he was a restless person who wanted to travel widely and meet a broad range of people. In college, he decided to become a doctor.

When he was in medical school in Los Angeles, some friends invited him out for a Chinese dinner. He sat next to Judy Horowitz, thirty-one, a tax lawyer who had always lived in the city, near her parents. "I was smitten," he said.

"You said you were impressed that I gave you my phone number that night," Judy recalled. "That was a perfectly natural thing for me to do."

Lars, who was used to demure women, saw the act as an appealingly aggressive one. "Besides, I felt a physical attraction . . ."

"He said that my jeans were too tight," Judy laughed.

"I liked her *zaftig* quality," he said, using naturally the Yiddish word for appealingly plump. "I come from a family of lean people."

When Judy met Lars, she had just divorced a Jewish man, "who relied on his parents for money and drifted from one job to another while I was in law school. It was hard for me to respect that." So, when she met Lars, "I was intrigued by this guy from a farm in Nebraska who had such big dreams. He was sure he would become a great doctor. It was exciting to meet someone who seemed so idealistic and courageous."

It had never occurred to Judy that, from Lars's perspective, the mere fact of her Judaism made her alluring. But when he described his early attraction to her he said, "I thought I was doing something exciting—in a bad sense—when I began to go out with a Jewish attorney from a big city. It was everything I wasn't supposed to do.

"My mother always said that she didn't care who I married as long as it was a nice Christian girl. So, when I told her about Judy, I said two out of three isn't bad. She's nice and she's a girl."

But she certainly wasn't a devout Christian like Lars and his family. She was a Jewish agnostic.

That difference became a conflict when they moved to New York, began to live together, and got engaged. They came to one of our workshops to try to work it out.

One episode symbolized their problem. Lars, a man of faith, was interested in Judy's Judaism. He liked going to High Holiday services and Passover seders. That year he asked her to accompany him to a

Good Friday service at a church he had just joined. She agreed to do so, but when she got to church she developed a fierce headache. She said that there was something in the nature of a Christian service that disagreed with her. Feeling sorrowful, Lars left with her.

Wouldn't the conflict deepen when a baby was born? She didn't want to be a religious Jew or let the children be Christian. He couldn't let his children be atheists. Nevertheless, they were sure that their love was so powerful that any problem would work itself out.

That summer, they got married in the United Nations chapel—a neutral place—by a Unitarian minister—a neutral person. Judy was satisfied. "It was a non-denominational service—Shakespeare and the Old Testament. It was very nice." Lars felt he had made a compromise. "We just didn't think we could do justice to both Judaism and Christianity in the wedding service, so why even try? Our decision to have a Unitarian minister seemed like the lowest common denominator." But he was pleased with its outcome. He thought the ceremony had a "beautiful spiritual feeling."

Judy became pregnant the next fall. For a time they thought the problem of the child's upbringing would resolve itself, just as their wedding had. Now that they were married they had learned to relax with each other. That year they were able to resolve the "December dilemma" much more easily than they had settled their dispute over Easter. Maybe they wouldn't have to feel one another's pulse whenever a religious holiday rolled around after all.

Judy's mother and brother had come to New York to visit them. "We had a Hanukkah party, and then we talked about getting a Christmas tree," Lars said. "But I didn't want to offend my mother-in-law. So we bought a fern. But then Judy's mother said, 'How can we not have a Christmas—Lars must really want one.' So *she* decorated the fern.

"It was a special day," Lars said. "We had put together a sort of last minute Swedish Christmas dinner. We had dried fruit in a bag, which was always our appetizer at home, and ate roast pork, then whitefish and lutefish. Then we had cauliflower and cheese sauce, which had been a tradition in my family. We exchanged a few Christmas presents.

"Judy and her family wanted me to have the same kind of Christmas I had at home. That meant reading from the New Testament. They

urged me to do that. On Christmas Eve, my father reads the Christmas story from Luke, so that's what I did."

"We were surprised at how short the Christmas story was," Judy said. "We were used to the Haggadah."

They could find a way of enjoying the holidays together. They could even joke about their differences. But what would happen in the future, when a new person was in the house? They hadn't resolved the question when their daughter Eve was born.

"For a while, we thought about raising her with neither religion," Lars said. "But I didn't like that. I was raised as a religious Christian, and I think if I converted I'd be a religious Jew. I'd always be a religious something. It's more important for me to have my children raised religion/Jewish than religion/nothing or religion/both."

"I met a woman in New York whose father was Catholic and whose mother was Jewish. She told me that they were very happy, and that they had raised her with neither. She was very flippant about faith. She said, 'When I want to be Jewish I can be Jewish. When I want to be Catholic I can be Catholic.' That bothered me. To me, you're one or the other—you can't be both. You can't believe in Christ *and* be Jewish. It's a contradiction in terms."

But how could he avoid duplicating that contradiction in his own home? He was searching for the formula that would resolve that question.

He'd learned through experiences like the one on Good Friday that, "It would be difficult for Judy if our children were raised Christian. She would feel alienated. I'm more comfortable with Judaism. So we've decided to send Eve to Hebrew school, and make it clear that the Jewish holidays are the family holidays."

"But I can't give up my Christian beliefs. So we've decided to tell her that Christmas and Easter are *Daddy's* holidays."

Judy's feelings were much simpler. "I was willing to teach Eve both religions, and tell her she didn't have to believe in anything except the Golden Rule. But we had to make a compromise. If Lars insists that Eve have formal religious training, then let it be in a religion that I'm comfortable with in my conscience."

Can Lars live with that decision? Or will he always feel that he's walking on a narrow precipice between his intense religious feelings and Judy's strong ethnic ones?

As he talked, it became clear that he was already having more

difficulty than he wanted to admit. Just after he finished describing the agreement he and Judy had reached about Eve, he said sadly that he rarely went to the church he joined when he arrived in New York. "I feel cut off, especially now that we've made the decision to raise Eve as a Jew. I miss it.

"I don't want to announce her birth to my church back home either. I don't want them to criticize me because my daughter is a Jew.

"Once I told my parents that my children might be raised as Jews. But I don't want to tell them that we've actually made the decision. It's not the kind of thing I want to mention in a phone call or even a letter. I think they would be very upset because she won't be baptized. In their minds, baptism is the way of affirming a baby's place in the family of God."

They decided to name Eve in a synagogue, and arranged to bring her there one Friday night. On Thursday, Lars telephoned the rabbi to postpone the event. He didn't want it to take place behind his parents' backs. But he didn't know how to tell his parents that it would take place at all.

Would he be betraying them? Would he be cheating his daughter and an important part of himself? He couldn't answer those questions.

Eve is two now. She has neither been named in a synagogue nor baptized in a church.

### ***Ted Kaplan: "My Son Had to Understand the Jewish Me"***

For Lars and Judy, the newborn child they loved was an embodiment of existing religious differences they could not resolve. For Ted Kaplan, the son of Orthodox Jews from a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn, the birth of a child marked the beginning of a religious reawakening. But he was just as troubled as Lars.

We met him after we spoke in a Cleveland synagogue, and talked for hours about the tension between his desire to explore his Jewish self and share it with his son, and his wife Margie's feeling that Judaism posed a potential threat to their marriage.

Margie had met him at the point when he was at the greatest psychological distance from his Jewish identity. When they got en-

gaged he was trying to re-create himself as a Midwesterner with a Jewish background. He talked sarcastically about his upbringing as a traditionally observant Jew. How could she—a Protestant from the rural Midwest—have imagined the transition he would undergo when he had a son?

Ted went to a yeshiva until he was eleven and switched to public school. His home was kosher. His father was an important figure in his community's religious life. "I was brought up playing in shul. That was great fun."

But in late adolescence, Ted grew restless as he realized there was an America beyond his Jewish world. He blamed his parents for confining him to their Jewish ghetto. In the summer between his senior year in high school and his freshman year in college, he and his parents drove to Amish country. "One morning at breakfast I ordered a piece of ham. I wanted to see what it tasted like. Rage came over my father's face. He could see the message I was giving him." Here, Ted's voice was sad and lethargic.

When he entered Brooklyn College, he wrote a paper for a psychology class about the early roots of religion. "I read Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, and argued that the only basis for belief was psychological. My parents were furious. Then I fell in love with American literature. I was probably taking a cue from my parents. They loved this country—they were the kind of Jewish immigrants who used to dress in their best clothes on Election Day because they wanted to show respect for a land that had given them such freedom. But when I tried to talk to them about Emerson's transcendentalism or Whitman's religion of democracy, they got frustrated and angry. I still don't know whether they thought I should be devoting myself to Torah and Talmud, or to learning a profession and making money, or whether they were jealous that I really had a chance to be part of the country they dreamed of.

"But I know that I was always angry at them, too. Now I think that by rejecting the religious part of myself I was rejecting them. It hurt all three of us."

Ted decided to study American literature in Indiana, Theodore Dreiser's home. At first, he tried to conceal his identity as a Jew and as a New Yorker. "When I was in Indiana, people could quickly hear my accent. I was trying to get away from the image New Yorkers have of being aggressive. So I worked on my voice. I tried not to pronounce

certain things too harshly, and I tried to talk in a low register so my accent wouldn't stand out."

But, by his third year in graduate school, he had become uncomfortable in his disguise. "During one spring break, I had gone to a psychological encounter group when I suddenly realized it was Passover. I began to wonder why I'd rejected my parents so forcefully when I loved them so much. I remember calling them up that night—they were in the midst of their seder—to tell them that I loved them. I felt terrible that I wasn't at a seder."

His fleeting experience at Passover buttressed his pride in his ethnic identity, though he never imagined it was a harbinger of renewed religious feelings. "I began to realize that what people called Jewish aggressiveness was the drive that had helped so many Jews succeed. I asked myself why I wanted to erase that from my personality. So I went out and bought a New York Yankee hat. I figured if I have the accent already I can't hide it. I might as well accept who I am."

That was a personal discovery. It was a way of accepting the identity he had been born with. But it didn't push him toward any involvement with the Jewish community.

At graduate school, Ted had become aware that he was avoiding Jewish women. "I had so many stereotypes of controlling, obnoxious Jews that I couldn't imagine myself marrying one."

In 1972, he met Margie, a tall, slim Protestant woman whose father was a professor of Romance Languages. "She seemed undemanding. She's not academic, but her father is. She could accept the fact that I was a graduate student, struggling for a Ph.D., and not in business making millions. She accepted me. She made me feel good about myself."

When he told his parents that he planned to marry Margie, they were furious. That intensified Ted's sense of guilt and sorrow, love and rage.

"I went through horrendous times with them—they fought with me, they argued with me. They wrote me long tomes of letters asking what was I going to do with my children. I said Margie and I would raise them with love and give them equal religions. But I didn't understand the issues. Even though I was raised Orthodox, I didn't understand the symbolism of a Jewish wedding.

"It's so strange to look back at that ceremony," he continued. "We were married by a judge, and I remember cringing when he said he

was marrying us under God. This was at the rehearsal. I stood there, wondering whether I should let him say that at the actual ceremony. I did, but I felt embarrassed and threatened."

After Ted and Margie had been married for six years, their first son, Jake, was born. To Ted's astonishment, the religious feelings he thought he had left behind him surged through him now that he was a father.

"I realized that Jake could not really understand me if he didn't understand and know the Jewish part of me. I couldn't teach him until I found out for myself who *I* was as a Jew. I told Margie what I wanted. Suddenly it was clear to me that my son had to be Jewish. I could not tolerate it if he weren't. But this realization came six years after we were married. It wasn't fair to her."

Ted's self-discovery frightened Margie. She felt isolated whenever she entered the synagogue where Ted had begun to worship. Terms Jews take for granted made her feel excluded.

"The rabbi is a terrific person," Ted said. "He gives provocative sermons and he's a great storyteller. But he always talks about Jews and non-Jews, as if the world is divided into those categories. Even though Margie isn't religious, she thinks he should use the word Christian since it's a term of respect. She thinks he's really conveying a message that pits the Jews against the rest of the world."

Margie felt uncomfortable when the rabbi talked about Jewish ethics, even though, from Ted's point of view, he was using a language the congregation understood to urge them to be more moral people. "She doesn't think that ethics are either Jewish or Christian," he said. "From her point of view they're universal. So when the rabbi exhorted the congregation to act according to the Jewish ethical tradition, her response was that Christians had virtues, too. She'd say, 'We were taught to be just as good and ethical as the Jews.'

"When she goes to synagogue she gets worried that our son will pick up the idea that Jews are good and Christians aren't."

Now Jake Kaplan is five years old. Ted has begun to take him to temple most Friday nights and plans to enroll him in Hebrew school. Margie won't let her son be educated in Ted's temple.

"Luckily," he said, "she had been at a bar mitzvah at a synagogue twenty-five minutes from where we live where the rabbi was a woman. That appealed to Margie, who is a feminist. She saw that there were a

lot of interfaith couples, and felt confident that no one would categorize people as Jews and non-Jews.

"She doesn't want to go to any synagogue herself. But she agreed to let Jake go if I did the driving. That seemed like a fair compromise.

"But now that I've embarked in this Jewish direction I can't stop. It's frustrating to go back and see that I've forgotten everything I knew as a kid. I'm learning how to pray in Hebrew again and how to read Torah again. Two weeks ago I began to say morning prayers and lay tefillin. I hadn't done that since I was sixteen."

But, he said sadly, "Margie talks about how much I've changed. She says, 'Your attitude now is not the attitude of the man I married.' She's right, but there's nothing I can do."

Once Jake was born and the time bomb exploded, the common ground upon which they once stood opened into a gulf. For Margie had no way of hearing the language that always resounded in Ted's mind—the ongoing dialogue with the parents and the tradition from which he once seemed to feel so estranged.

"My pain now is that I can't move into Judaism as fast as I want because I'm married to somebody who has a whole different perspective on life than I do. If I move too fast I have to reject her or leave her behind. I'll have to spend time in places where she feels like an outsider, an inferior. I understand why she feels that way. At one level I agree with her. But that doesn't affect my own desire to become more Jewish. What do I have to do to be sure that my son accepts himself as a Jew and doesn't reject his mother as a Christian? How can I keep peace with my wife and still be true to my Jewish self?"

### *A Child Speaks*

Many intermarried parents experience the birth of a child as the moment when they have to make a religious choice. But others want to wait a few years longer. Many still don't feel that they have to make a choice at all.

After all, an infant or toddler isn't going to be affected by a decision to celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah, or to join a church or a synagogue. It will always matter if a boy is circumcised, but he won't remember whether the procedure was done by an intern or a *mohel*.

Baptism is theologically important for Christian families, but the infant won't recall the event. Those arguments are over children, but they essentially concern parents.

The situation changes dramatically when the child begins to speak. For its early questions provide the first clear view of the new family culture. Until they arise, all the nervous discussions about childrens' identities are speculation. You can't predict what a child's disposition will be like, or whether it will be spiritual or practical, or what kind of relationship it will form with each parent. But by the time a youngster is three or four he or she has acquired enough of a personality to show you that a song you've always sung, a burst of mirth or anger, a story you've told, or a prejudice you've displayed can be the seed that spawned a growing consciousness. That consciousness can be a mirror for the religious and ethnic identities parents have created—or failed to create.

By the time children are old enough to ask about their identities, most patterns of a marriage are already established. Couples have negotiated their wedding ceremonies, the details of housekeeping, child care, wage earning, bill paying. They know what they'll do when one wants to make love and the other feels too tired. They have learned whether they can live with an annoying habit, like chronic lateness or bad table manners, or whether those habits may be the first step on the route to the divorce court.

But when the new person in their home asks questions which indicate uncertainty about his or her religious or ethnic identity, the interfaith couple may feel its marital ecology is imperiled. If the child asks a question indirectly, the couple may fail to acknowledge its importance or dismiss it as a cute remark. If the question suggests urgency, as our son Matt's question about Haman did, it may provoke such doubt and disagreement that the parents ignore it altogether.

But they shouldn't. All youngsters need to feel secure. Often, when they ask questions about faith, they are seeking emotional reinforcement. But when children of intermarriages combine remarks about faith with questions about identity they are trying to discover where they belong, as well. They are trying to ascertain *their* religion, *their* ethnicity, *their* place in a world that seems quite puzzling. They need to hear answers that show them their parents are comfortable with whatever spiritual choices they have made.

If the couple has postponed resolving religious and ethnic differ-

ences until the child speaks, the challenge to do so now may seem overwhelming. For if they take the questions they hear seriously, they will have to face the issues they have ignored. That can demand considerable self-discipline and considerable courage. They may have to read the books about religion and culture they've been avoiding; unearth the loyalties and biases they've been burying; make the leap of faith (or the admission that their spouse is the one with faith) that has seemed so dangerous until now.

One of the two couples we are about to describe, Whit and Ruth Forbes, could not unite to accept that challenge. She cared about religion. He couldn't talk about the subject without becoming sarcastic. How would their children disentangle their disagreement? The other couple, Walt and Nell Kramer, began to grow together when their daughter expressed fears about the Jewish part of her identity. Their attempt to answer the five-year-old child's questions propelled them into a search that enriched their lives.

### ***Ruth and Whit: "Is It Seder or Cider?"***

Ruth and Whit Forbes, a Jewish woman, a lawyer, and her Catholic husband, an architect, never discussed their disagreement about the value of religion—or their religious differences—when they fell in love at Middlebury College. Those subjects never surfaced during the first winter of their marriage, which they spent as ski bums in Stowe, or during their years in graduate school.

They are bright, attractive young professionals whose ready wit, and interesting jobs have landed them in a milieu filled with Boston's most successful politicians, business people, and writers. They discussed religion once or twice when their daughters Claire and Wendy were born. But, with a fascinating social life and two small children, they barely had time to discuss *any* subject for long.

We had met the couple through mutual friends, and one day at lunch they talked to us about their religious backgrounds, and the identities they wanted for their children.

Whit, a tall, lean, well-coordinated man, sounds reverent only when he talks about his father, Austin Forbes, a psychologist who teaches behavioral science. Austin Forbes was born an Episcopalian

and converted to Catholicism so that he could marry Whit's mother. His real faith, rationalism, assumed that the only truly religious act a person could perform was to ask another question, make another discovery.

When Whit was growing up, his father insisted that the family live in a middle class Catholic suburb "so that we wouldn't be tainted by the academic milieu." From Whit's point of view, that gave him an advantage over the other faculty children who lived in a predominantly Jewish academic neighborhood. Their parents "pressured them and pulled strings to get them into Ivy League colleges regardless of their merit. I think those kids had pretty miserable childhoods. I was a pretty happy-go-lucky kid. One nice thing about the crazy Catholic neighborhood we lived in was that all the families had lots of children. We could field a baseball team whenever we wanted to. I grew up playing sports all the time."

Most of Whit's friends went to Catholic church, "and my mother made an attempt to get us to go, too." But Austin Forbes sabotaged that through his studied indifference.

"I never saw my father go to church. How could I believe that there was a particular God who had ordered the universe when my father, this behavioral scientist, gave me such a rational upbringing? I couldn't take church seriously. My father got to stay home and read the newspapers and crack jokes about my mother and her religious superstitions while I had to truck off to this stupid church where the nuns would literally patrol the aisles, making sure that you kneeled. But my knees were always injured from sports. My clearest memory of church is sore knees. I quit going when I was twelve."

Whit described himself as a lazy, indifferent student. His parents didn't seem to care if he attended an Ivy League college. "They recognized that I wasn't all that academically driven, and that Middlebury would be a good college for me.

"Besides, in keeping with my recreational orientation, I only applied to schools where I could ski at least a hundred days a year."

Ruth Forbes, née Levy, was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana. When she was eleven, her father decided to sell the family furniture store. He went to the University of Illinois, earned a Ph.D. in sociology, and became a professor in Houston.

The family joined a Reform temple there. "The congregation was very wealthy," she recalled. "There were Cadillacs and diamonds

everywhere you looked. But the rabbi made you forget that. He looked like what you thought Moses would look like—he had gray hair and a beard. Sometimes he came to Sunday school, and told us stories from the Bible in a way that brought them to life. He was a phenomenal speaker with a resonant voice. When he recited the *Shema* [the central statement of Jewish faith], his powerful voice almost made you weep.

"A lot of my friends feel culturally and ethnically Jewish, but not spiritually Jewish. It's the other way around for me. Because of that rabbi, I feel Jewish, in a religious sense."

But in Houston, she was socially uncomfortable as a Jew. In high school, "I began to realize that a lot of my Jewish friends had mothers who would not let them go out with non-Jewish boys, and that was where my problem began. There were very strong Jewish groups in those schools. So I was faced with a choice. I either joined the Jewish groups and had mostly Jewish friends or I became part of the in-crowd at high school—the football team, drill team, student council kids. I wanted a broad range of friends. So I chose the latter."

She hated the schism between the Jews and jocks. It convinced her to stay away from the University of Texas. "I would have had to pledge a Jewish sorority, or stick with the football crowd, and pledge some sorority whose meetings ended with a prayer in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. I didn't think I'd be comfortable in either place."

Then, a cousin sent her a Middlebury College catalogue. When she decided the small New England college looked attractive, her father encouraged her to apply. She loved it from the moment she arrived.

"It was the first time I had lived around beautiful scenery. I got into hiking and backpacking. I took philosophy courses, and I'd sit around talking to people about writers like Herman Hesse. I never felt as if anyone was aware of who was Jewish and who was non-Jewish. I never went to temple, even for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur."

After college, she and Whit spent a winter in Stowe, a ski resort, and were on the slopes every day. Since Ruth had described herself as "an overachiever, unlike Whit," that kind of life seemed out of character. So Rachel asked her if she liked to ski.

"I do now," she said.

"She has to," Whit said, with a slightly stinging chuckle. "It was clear that if Ruth and I were going to survive as a team, she was going

to learn how to ski. That was the one value it was necessary for us to share. I wasn't going to give it up."

Though they never discussed religion, they were already aware of a disagreement over values. It cropped up when they began to discuss marriage.

"Ruth wanted to get married but I put my foot down there," Whit recalled. "I couldn't see the value of weddings. Who gives a damn whether we're married or not? I relented because Ruth had begun law school and we could only get a mortgage on a house if we were man and wife. But I didn't want a religious ceremony—or any ceremony at all. So we went to a judge, who performed the service, and then we threw a big party that weekend in Stowe."

Ruth wasn't satisfied. "My brother married a Jewish woman, and he had a beautiful wedding, under a *huppah* [a wedding canopy]," she said. "All the cousins came from Fort Wayne. None of them came to our wedding, partly because they didn't approve of intermarriage and partly because Stowe seemed so far from Indiana. Of course, my mom and dad were there—they love Whit and were thrilled by the wedding. But sometimes I wish I'd had a Jewish service that was as nice as my brother's."

Then she began to talk about her plans for Claire's religious training. "I thought I had discussed this with Whit . . ."

"You didn't," he said. Then, looking at the couch where Rachel and I were sitting, he added, "You've precipitated our first religious discussion."

"Maybe," Ruth responded a little angrily. "But you know that I've been going to temple off and on all year after two of my friends died. I went on Yom Kippur too. I liked the rabbi. He gave a sermon about how Judaism had to be a more spiritual religion, and I agreed with that. I liked his liberal political views too."

Her four-year-old daughter Claire goes to preschool with a great many Jewish children. Last spring, she asked the question which forced Ruth to confront her feelings about transmitting Judaism.

"It was April, and she told me that a lot of kids in her class were talking about the cider their families were going to have. What she was hearing, of course, was talk about their families' seders. I got furious at myself. Why hadn't I taught her enough about Jewishness so that she could understand what they were talking about? I want my kids to be raised with some understanding of Judaism. I want them to

go to a Jewish Sunday school. I mentioned that to Whit once, and he was worried about the money we'd have to pay for membership."

"Yeah," Whit said, "Ruth did tell me she wanted to join. Then she said there was a *fee*. My reaction was that Catholicism might have been a lot of bullshit, but at least it was free. And my second reaction was, couldn't my child find spiritual life in a condominium in Stowe at roughly the same cost."

Ruth was gentle but unyielding. "Well, I have such good memories of the rabbi in Houston, and I liked the rabbi here so much that I'm going to keep exploring the possibility."

Looking at Ruth, Whit said, "It's not that much of an issue. If you feel strongly about it, I don't care. I mean I know that with a father who doesn't participate, no child is going to get seriously involved. If I stay home reading the paper in the morning, I just assume my kids will react the way I did."

Then, more seriously, "I've seen the materialism at that temple. There are some values I don't think are particularly attractive. They're certainly not New England values."

Turning to us, he said, "You know, this is the first time Ruth and I have really discussed the subject, so it's a sort of introductory level. If we're talking about finding something spiritual, I can think of better ways than organized religion to do it."

"Oh, come on, Whit," Ruth said. "You're an agnostic. You don't care how I raise the girls religiously."

Whit had already said he wouldn't go to synagogue—even on the High Holidays. I wondered how he felt about a seder.

"I probably wouldn't participate. We've occasionally talked about going to a seder, but so far, we haven't made it to one."

Ruth said that she thought he'd be comfortable at one, "because any that we'd be invited to or would have would involve 99 percent couples who are half Jewish and half not."

"It would be a half-assed seder," Whit laughed. "But if it ever started to get serious religious overtones, I'd bow out. It would make me uncomfortable. I'd wonder why I was at something that meant so little to me."

Then Ruth said, "I could become somewhat religious, and my daughters could, too, without Whit's participation. At least, he wouldn't get upset."

"That's true. I'd just react with a kind of passive sarcasm, which is

how I always try to beat Ruth down. I don't really have the conviction to go right at it. I just insult her over time."

Whit was still joking, but Ruth was becoming more worried, more serious. "You're *not* going to stand in the way of Claire's going to Sunday school, are you?"

"Well, if there's a major capital investment in this thing I'll argue with you. If you ever do it and it's no hindrance to me, that's fine. But if it ever takes my time, then it will become an issue."

"But if you can just do what you want to do on Sunday morning, and let's say I even taught a Sunday school class, you wouldn't really care, would you?"

"I'd find that very humorous."

"Well, I've thought about teaching a Sunday school class before," Ruth said.

"You have?" Whit asked incredulously. "Teaching a Sunday school class?"

"Yes. There are parts of my upbringing at that temple in Houston that I'm really grateful I had. I didn't think about them at Middlebury or at law school. But now, being a mother, I think about it more. I'd check out whatever Sunday school I sent Claire to. And if I thought there were some really bad teachers there, maybe I'd teach on Sunday morning. I'd want to make the school better."

"Well, if you did that my attitude would become more than just passive sarcasm. I'd try to sabotage you."

Whit had to go back to work. They walked to the door, hand in hand, and tried to heal their momentary lesion with an affectionate kiss. That night, they told each other, they would enjoy a long, leisurely dinner with a bottle of the finest wine Whit could find.

### ***Walt and Nell: "Why Are People Always So Mean to the Jews?"***

Walt Kramer is a Jew from Minneapolis. Nell Wilson, who was raised in Oregon, is the daughter of a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant man and a Mexican woman who was born a Catholic.

When they were graduate students at Berkeley and Peace Corps volunteers in India, they were proud of the fact that they were an

interfaith couple. They were people with roots in their pasts and tendrils of sympathy that extended through the world. They felt that as a couple with Jewish, Protestant, and Mexican Catholic roots, who had spent time in India and developed an affinity for the Hindu religion, they were a living tribute to integration. Then, when their daughter Vanessa was four, she asked a question that shattered their confidence in their decisions about their family's identity. They decided to reexplore their feelings in one of our workshops.

Nell and Walt had met in 1966, at a party Walt's Jewish fraternity in Berkeley had thrown for Nell's freshman dorm. "Their fantasy for the weekend was to get totally drunk and make love to all the shiksas," Nell recalled. "It was gross."

Walt wasn't at the party but "when my date took me upstairs to show me his room I saw him, with his blazing eyes. Walt was writing a paper, ignoring the rest of us. He seemed so striking, so aloof. I wished I was with him."

He wished he was with her. "She was dressed all in pink that night. I had never seen anybody before who dressed in pink."

"Pink was my favorite color," Nell said. "I had pink cut-offs and a pink fuzzy shirt and a pink bow and pink socks." Remembering the night, she dissolved in laughter.

"I felt that she was out to please," Walt continued. "To me, Jewish women were out to *be pleased*. She was the first gentile woman I'd ever dated, and she seemed more accepting than any woman I had met. I felt I didn't have to be careful to be smart or seem macho. Whatever I did was fine with her."

"You were right," she said. "I was in love with you, with those soulful Jewish eyes."

Unlike many of the couples we have interviewed, both Nell and Walt felt the other's background was attractive. Each was able to help the other appreciate their parents and their cultures.

Until Nell was eight, she lived in the Central Valley of California. She went to school with the children of migrant workers, and spent much of her spare time with her Mexican cousins. She was particularly close to her grandmother, a devout Catholic who believed in a gentle, loving Jesus.

But her mother—a descendant of Aztecs, beautiful, dark-skinned, with hair that flowed down to her waist—had married a tall, sandy-haired Protestant to escape her Hispanic background. She told Nell

to keep her distance from her lively, cheerful relatives whom she always called "lowly Mexicans."

When Nell was eight her father, a former army officer, became an executive at Caterpillar Tractor, and the Wilson family moved to Oregon. Like her classmates, Nell loved hiking and canoeing. She joined the youth group of the Methodist church her Catholic mother had chosen for her. Still, she felt out of place.

"I was always aware I had a Mexican background and had been baptized a Catholic. I felt as if I were living a charade. I wanted to pick up the threads that were lost. I felt as if the heart and soul were gone from my mother—and from us. So, from when I was little, I was searching for what was hidden."

As a boy, Walt received almost as many mixed messages as Nell. His parents were part of Minneapolis' close-knit Jewish world, and his closest friends were the boys he had known in Hebrew school and grade school. But in ninth grade he was sent to a prep school, where he was the only Jew in his class. "All the kids in my school lived on the other side of town. I liked them, but I felt like a foreigner in their houses."

By the time he was seventeen, he began to feel that he didn't belong in Minneapolis' Jewish community either.

"I couldn't wait to get away from home. It seemed like such a conservative environment. All of my peers were going into their family's business. I didn't want any part of it. I didn't want to marry a Jewish woman and join the same country club and the same congregation as all my friends. I didn't want to see my life stretched out ahead of me, predictably."

He was just eighteen when he flew out to college at Berkeley, his American dream. "I didn't even know how to get to the campus from the airport. I hadn't bothered to get a room in a dorm. So I went to the Y. I wasn't afraid. I was exhilarated. I thought sex was going on everywhere. It was the West, and I was free. When I met Nell, she represented that freedom."

From Nell's perspective, Walt was so impulsively adventurous that he almost seemed like a knight. They met in May. That July, when Nell had a job at home in Portland, "Walt called me and said 'I'm coming up to Oregon tomorrow to see you.' It's about seven hundred miles. He drove all day. He picked me up at work, and we stayed out

till midnight. I bought him two dozen doughnuts and he drove back to California. I said, 'This man's for me.' "

After Walt's graduation and Nell's sophomore year they decided to get married. Nell's parents called Walt a "cradle snatcher," and opposed the match so vehemently that Walt and Nell decided to elope. As a result, Walt didn't have to face the problem of finding a rabbi. He never told Nell his feelings about intermarrying. But, from his point of view, "I was thumbing my nose at Jewish rigidity—at the idea that Jews should only marry Jews. That seemed like a form of narrowness that was worth defying."

His parents did not seem upset by the marriage. After the couple eloped, the Kramers arranged an elaborate reception for them in Minneapolis. Walt endured it. Nell loved it.

"For years Walt's parents had been going to every bar mitzvah and Jewish wedding in town. This was a chance to reciprocate. I never saw such a roomful of people. It was an overwhelming experience for me. People were all talking and carrying on. They kept coming up to me and pinching me and saying how cute I was. Everyone was interested in me and very lively. Their liveliness made me feel at home."

Walt couldn't understand why Nell liked them so well. With fondness in her voice, Nell said, "You were so immersed in your parents' culture that you took what you had for granted. You learned to like your family through me."

Then, she added, "You did the same thing for me. You learned Spanish and told me I should be proud of my Mexican heritage. You helped me respect my past."

About a year after Walt and Nell were married, they decided to join the Peace Corps. Their experience with other volunteers taught Nell a new lesson about Walt's Jewish feelings, and hers. "When we were at Berkeley, all his friends were Jews from West L.A. But he was the only Jew in our Peace Corps group. I saw that he was different from the other volunteers. I realized that I liked most Jews more than I liked most other people."

Walt, more guarded, said, "Nell just made me realize that my problems with the other volunteers probably did have something to do with being Jewish. I think most people in our Peace Corps group felt that American culture and American language were superior and that Indian culture and Indian language were inferior. I never felt

that I was an American like them. I thought the volunteers were bigoted against Indians in the same way as they were against Jews."

But neither Walt nor Nell connected those feelings to their own lives. They returned to America in 1972, and settled in New York, where Walt began to study for a Ph.D. in sociology. In 1979, Nell got pregnant.

"I was very cavalier about my children's religion," Walt said. "I thought we should give them some Christianity and some Judaism, and let them choose what they wanted."

"We were involved with Hinduism, anyway," Nell added. "We saw the integration of religions as positive. We used to go on a Hindu retreat for ten days every summer. I liked that. I was involved in meditation and there were a lot of Indians there. I was glad for the connection. We took our daughter Vanessa there until she was about three."

After Vanessa was born, they had their first battle over a religious symbol. "When Vanessa was two I wanted to have a Christmas tree," Nell said. "We had never had a tree before. It was very upsetting to Walt. We had a huge fight. I remember feeling very hurt, and thinking that Walt was very stubborn."

"But we had a tree," Walt interjected.

"Yeah, we had a tree, but it was so begrudging. Walt wouldn't touch it. He wouldn't put anything on it."

"I kept my back to it the whole season. I felt as if I was being very gallant to allow Nell to have it," he said somewhat remorsefully. "I thought I was being generous."

The next year Nell decided she could please Walt and enrich Vanessa's upbringing if the three of them celebrated Hanukkah, too. That decision ignited the time bomb that caused Walt and Nell to reexamine all their assumptions about their family's identities.

That December, Nell recalled, she was sitting on a chair, reading her daughter the Hanukkah story. When Nell told of the Syrian king Antiochus killing Jews who wouldn't bow down to statues of gods, Vanessa asked her, "Mommy, why are people always so mean to the Jews?"

"I felt very clutched," she said. "I knew that as a gentile I was coming from a different place than her. But I also knew that I didn't want her to grow up feeling persecuted. I wanted her to take pleasure in the Jewish part of her identity," she said. "But I didn't know how. I

didn't like the way I choked and stumbled over what I said to her. When Walt came home, I told him what happened."

Walt and Nell had built up so much trust during their courtship and their two years in the Peace Corps that they were able to face the implications of Vanessa's remark instead of arguing over its meaning. "Everyone we talked to thought her question was connected to the fact that we were an interfaith couple," Nell said. "We had never thought about that. We didn't know how to handle the problem. But we knew we couldn't do it by ourselves. That was why we enrolled in your workshop."

In the course of the sessions, they both realized that Nell felt at home in Jewish culture while Walt felt very uncomfortable bringing Christian culture into his home. That summer they decided to spend time in Israel with one of Walt's best friends from childhood, who had become an observant Jew.

Within a year they discovered that they liked the ritual of lighting Friday night candles. They decided to enroll Vanessa in a Hebrew school and they became friends with the parents they met there. Now that Judaism was no longer the religion of Walt's bourgeois childhood, he discovered meaning in solemn holidays like Yom Kippur and joyous ones like Simchat Torah. If anything, Nell liked those occasions even more than her husband.

Their conflict deepened their understanding of each other. It allowed them to discover new meaning in a Jewish way of life.

### *A Parent Dies*

Often, the death of a parent can rekindle religious sparks. That happened to our friend Bliss Geiger, a Methodist from Kansas, who married James Geiger, a Jew from New York. We had met them when we were in the Peace Corps, and had stayed in close touch with them as he got his Ph.D. in English and she got hers in Spanish. Now they're both full professors at New York area universities. The few nights we have dinner alone with them each year are a special time for intimate conversation.

They have a very happy marriage, with plenty of friends and stimulating intellectual work. They adore their daughters, Samantha and

Melissa, who play the violin and the piano respectively with extraordinary skill.

But even though Bliss seldom spoke about it, she had become nostalgic for her childhood Christianity when she had children, and she wished she could teach her daughters her faith. James was an ethnically identified Jew, who didn't like to discuss religion. He didn't want to send the girls to Hebrew school but he couldn't imagine them receiving Christian instruction. They had been married for fifteen years, and adhered to their agreement to raise their daughters as humanists, with neither Judaism nor Christianity.

Still, sometimes, when Bliss tucked the girls into bed, she would recite the Twenty-third Psalm or the Lord's Prayer. She never told James for fear that he'd regard that act as a transgression of their agreement to raise their children without religion.

Bliss's father died when she was approaching forty and the girls were in their teens. When we visited the Geigers in the Berkshires that summer, she seemed drawn and depressed. Her calm, warm smile was still there; so was the slightly naïve charm with which she disarms the academic friends she and James share. But when she talked about her father's funeral she dwelt lovingly on details like the Methodist hymns her father had loved, and the eulogy her father's best friend had given. Sometimes she seemed to drift into psychological spaces where no one could accompany her. Plainly, she was mourning a man of faith. "I wish now I had some of that faith for myself and my girls."

It was a wistful thought, not a demand. For she loved her life and her marriage, and would never consider returning to the simpler world her father had inhabited. Nevertheless, his death had left her feeling lonely. "James has never understood where I'm coming from. I wish Samantha and Melissa understood how my father raised me to see the world. It helped him so much when he was dying. He was so much at peace.

"Even though they're teenagers I would like them to go to Sunday school. It might comfort them in the way it comforted my father. But James would feel betrayed if I suddenly decided to introduce them to Christianity. When I got married I agreed with James that religion was outmoded superstition. But now that my father is gone I regret the decision. I feel as if there's a hole in all of our hearts."

\* \* \*

The idea that time bombs can exist in interfaith relationships is a frightening one. How can a couple defuse them? And once that is accomplished, how can they map the geography of their lives together so that they don't wind up on an island that is too small to sustain their spiritual longings?

Over the past six years we have developed a set of exercises to help people explore those questions as thoroughly as possible. Some couples do them at home, but we have found they're more effective in a workshop setting. There, each couple has acknowledged that religion and ethnicity matter to them and that they are willing to spend time sharing their concerns with others. They discover that they are not living in a private world of neurotic fights over Christmas trees, or seders where they feel unwelcome, or over in-laws who resent them. In the workshops, as they hear other couples describe their fights and feelings, they begin to perceive themselves in a fresh way.



READINGS FOR PLENARY 3  
COMMUNAL STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

- \*10. Egon Mayer, "Intermarriage, Outreach and a New Agenda for Jewish Survival: A Perspective on the Contemporary American Jewish Community", Journal of Jewish Communal Service, (Spring 1990, forthcoming).

Mayer argues that in modern society, Jews have struck a silent bargain, in which they have accepted freedom and toleration in mainstream Western society, in return for a tacit agreement not to be too publicly "different". Over the years, this silent bargain has become so internalized that many Jews themselves have gradually ceased to notice or care about their differentness. In this setting, increasing intermarriage has been inevitable. The antidote, Mayer proposes, is to follow the lead of the Black and Hispanic communities; those groups have actively and vocally lobbied to have positive models which emphasize, and celebrate, their ethnic differences, proudly displayed in the media. Such an effort by Jews would enhance Jewish pride over Jewish difference, and might help us feel at home in Western society without needing to be invisible.

11. Harold Shulweis, "The Stranger in Our Mirror", Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community: Creating an Agenda for Our Future, UAHC, 1989.

Shulweis notes that historically, our attitude towards the "stranger" has always been an indication of our feelings towards the outside world in which we live. He discerns two recurring, and conflicting strands of Jewish attitude towards the stranger or convert. He labels one the "Ezra" response, which views the outside world as incorrigibly alien, and which therefore seeks no discourse, no conversion, no interaction with the outside world. The other he labels the "Ruth" response, which sees the outside world as attractive and approachable, and welcomes interaction. He notes that while most of today's Jewish community takes the "Ruth" position, the "Ezra" position is nevertheless stronger than we might imagine. Our conflicted feelings about intermarriage, he argues, are a reflection of our ambivalence about the value of Jewish particularism in an attractive, universalistic, secular world.

INTERMARRIAGE, OUTREACH AND A NEW AGENDA FOR JEWISH SURVIVAL

A Perspective on the Contemporary American Jewish Community

from Journal of Jewish Communal Service, Spring 1990

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Intermarriage is an unanticipated consequence of a survival strategy, in which Jews gained the benefits of tolerance and civil rights in exchange for social invisibility. The challenge to the American Jewish community posed by intermarriage can only be met if it articulates a new vision of Jewish survival based on a rejection of Jewish social invisibility. Effective Jewish outreach must take Judaism as a religion and Jewishness as a culture and civilization public, staking their claim to a fair share of the public's attention.

While parliamentarians in Israel wage political battle over the question of "Who is a Jew?", rabbis in America wage oratorical battle over the question of patrilineal descent, acceptable procedures for conversion, and the permissibility of rabbis officiating in marriages between Jew and Gentile. These debates, which have generated so much heat in the Jewish community in recent years, have two essential features in common. Each represents some effort on the part of the organized Jewish community to come to grips with intermarriage. And, each one seems to be tangential to the daily lives of most American Jews, particularly to the lives of intermarried couples.

Even as these controversies rage among those who are professionally involved in the organized Jewish community, the laity is transforming the character of the Jewish population and Jewish culture by intermarrying in ever-increasing numbers -- quite oblivious, for the most part, to these impassioned debates.

Will American Jewry survive the demographic revolution that is now being wrought upon it by intermarriage? Will it retain its organizational strength, its cultural vitality into the twenty-first century despite the transformation of the Jewish family? It must, and I believe it can! But, to do so we must go beyond these debates in responding to the challenges of intermarriage. We must embark on a strategy of communal survival that differs sharply from the Jewish survival strategies of the past two centuries.

For the past century the central challenges to Jewish group

survival have been framed by pogroms, the Holocaust, the rebirth of the State of Israel, and the salvaging of remnant Jewish populations in beleaguered lands. Each of these challenges has been met with the outpouring of extraordinary amounts of political creativity and voluntary group activity on the part of America's Jews. However, the successful meeting of these challenges has conditioned the Jewish community to deal with its problems by means that may not be adequate to the present task at hand.

#### **THE TRADITIONAL SURVIVALIST AGENDA**

From the dawn of the liberal era in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe, the majority of Jews chose social, religious, and cultural adaptability as a strategy for group survival. The operative slogan for the Jewish *modus vivendi* was be a Jew in one's home and a citizen on the street. As part of this strategy, liberal Jewish thought argued that Jewish survival is best secured by three factors: tolerance, law, and social invisibility.

1. Tolerance was tacitly understood to mean a sociopolitical climate in which Gentiles did not single out Jews for any special deprivation simply because of their Jewishness. It was perceived as generalized social amiability, or at the very least a benign neglect of those aspects of personal belief and religious practice that distinguished Jew from Gentile.

2. Laws that protect civil rights and liberties came to be seen as the best guarantee of tolerance. Consequently, Jews as individuals and Jewish organizations became the foremost champions of civil rights and liberal social legislation.

3. Social invisibility was the Jewish side of this implied social compact. In return for tolerance and even hospitality, most Jews (with the exception of some Orthodox and Hasidic Jews) implicitly agreed not to display publicly their religious beliefs, practices, speech, manner of dress, or anything else that might visibly differentiate them from their Gentile neighbors. This is the strategy of Jewish survival that Norman Poshotetz (1967, p. 27) called the "brutal bargain." It traded the cultural distinctiveness of the visible Jew for the entree that the invisible Jew might enjoy in the majoritarian society.

Brutal as a bargain or not, there can be little doubt that most Jews believed significant public displays of Jewish religious or cultural distinctiveness would risk the tolerance of their neighbors. Jews would enjoy the benefits of tolerance by "fitting in" with neighbors and restricting their cultural and religious distinctiveness to the home and the synagogue.

The success of this three-part strategy hinged on one very important assumption: that with the social, political and economic benefits that flowed from tolerance, Jews could better enjoy and express their own culture in the private domain. This assumption

further rested directly on the Jewish community of the home.

Yet, even as Jews succeeded in protecting their civil rights through liberal laws, and in securing the tolerance and amiability of their Gentile neighbors, they became less and less distinctive either in their religious beliefs or in their lifestyle. Acceptance from the outside, it seems, was increasingly reciprocated by blending from the inside.

Second and third generation children of Jewish immigrant parents understood less and less of the terms of the "brutal bargain." Their own social mobility experiences place increasing pressure on them to become just like their Gentile peers and their increasing distance from their immigrant ancestors rapidly attenuated that hold of tradition on their lives. Thus, they came to take for granted that their lack of Jewish distinctiveness in the public domain should also prevail in the private domain. In this process Jewishness has become an identity "brand label" in a pluralistic society, with little more distinctiveness of content than the brands off multitude of packaged goods. As such, its primary purpose, like the purpose of many brand labels, is to provide a focal point for the reference group identification. In a society that values group identification, as America does, most Jews want to be known a "Jews" so that they are not perceived as people without a group identity. On the other hand, they have no desire to limit their choices in social participation as a result of being Jewish.

One consequence of this transformation of Jewish identity is that as young Jews have entered the free-choice American marriage market they have found less and less reason to filter out their Gentile friends as potential marriage partners. Not only are their friends more like themselves in all respects, save identity label, but the families and home they plan on forming would also not be distinctively Jewish.

If Jewish parents and Jewish leaders have been distressed about the rising rate of intermarriage, surely one reason is that they have seen the unanticipated consequences of their own survival strategy boomerang in the lives of their children and grandchildren. In short, intermarriage has been one of the inescapable costs of the "brutal bargain." For that reason, efforts to stem its tide have proven generally ineffective.

#### THE INTERMARRIAGE TIDE AND ITS CHANGING SIGNIFICANCE

The proportion of Jews who marry Gentile has increased without let-up over the past two generation. If one were to survey the Jewish marriage market today to see who is marrying whom, one would find that among those under 40 years of age about 37% of Jewish men and 24% of Jewish women entering first marriages are marrying Gentile partners. These figures increase to about 55% for men and 42% for women in second marriages (whose first marriages were to Jewish partners) (Kosmin et al., 1989)

Largely because of the unrelenting increase in these numbers, intermarriage haunts the psyche of American Jews, even as they make their private peace with the marital choices of their children and grandchildren. It appears like an invisible sword of Damocles over Jewish families whose elders fear that their Jewish line will be cut off because their children are marching toward matrimony in the open society, where the claims of the heart outweigh the claims of tradition or parental authority in the selection of a mate.

The specter looms, too, over professional and lay leaders of the American Jewish community. Their careers and commitments impel them to be concerned about the survival of the group as a whole, not merely with the survival of its individual members.

However, with the virtually limitless opportunities for assimilation in America, group survival is now challenged in a uniquely intractable manner by intermarriage. The private nature of the act, along with the fact that it seems to spring from values - such as love, the desire for personal fulfillment, and egalitarianism - that are deeply cherished by contemporary American Jews, has made intermarriage a far more difficult challenge than some of the historically more familiar ones that Jews have had to face in their struggle for survival. The familiar strategies of securing Jewish survival not only cannot work with intermarriage but may even do more harm than good.

Until just a few years ago that equation between intermarriage and assimilation had been completely taken for granted, not only by those concerned about Jewish survival but by dispassionate social scientists as well. No one thought it necessary to question whether intermarriage did, in fact, threaten Jewish survival, let alone to question how or why it did so.

The 1979 American Jewish Committee (AJC) publication of my own study of Jewish identity patterns among 450 intermarried couples began to stimulate more discussion about the dynamics of intermarriages as marriages and more probing questions about how family processes relate to identity (Mayer 1979).

One of the salient findings of that study is that, rather than intermarriage causing assimilation (and thereby threatening to Jewish survival) it is assimilation that causes intermarriage in the first place.

Depending on how assimilated an intermarrying Jew is, intermarriage can result in further assimilation and the ultimate disappearance of the intermarried family from the Jewish community. However, intermarriage can - and does - also result in greater Jewish self-awareness among some intermarriers and in the conversion of their Gentile partners to Judaism. Thus, the cause of assimilation is not to be found in intermarriage alone. Rather, given a weakly grounded Jewish identity, one is more likely to intermarry. When a Jew with a weakly grounded sense of Jewish identity marries a

Gentile he or she is less able to create a Jewish home, and the family is thus less able to transmit Jewish identity to their children. It is the cultural handicap of prior assimilation that makes intermarrying Jews vulnerable to loss from the Jewish community.

In other words, one of the key problems with intermarriage is that, for the most part, it is the wrong Jews who are doing most of the intermarrying.

The first AJC study, together with others that followed soon after on the children of intermarriage (Mayer 1983) and on conversion (Mayer 1987), invalidated the wisdom of equating intermarriage with assimilation and an inexorable threat to Jewish survival.

With the hindsight of more than a dozen years of research on intermarriage and such seminal journalistic forays into intermarried life as Paul and Rachel Cowan's Mixed Blessings (Doubleday, 1987) and more recently the works of Judy Petsonk, Jim Remsen and Susan Weidman Schneider, we now know that intermarriage does not erode Jewish identity and family life in the simple linear fashion that figured so prominently in the alarmist literature of earlier decades. At the risk of exaggerating the influence of these studies, it is probably fair to say that they have helped change the climate of Jewish opinion about intermarriage, from outrage to outreach, in just a few years.

Changes in the perception of intermarriage have gradually led to change in the Jewish communal response to it as well. In 1979 the Task Force, subsequently to become the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, was created under the leadership of David Belin, whose vision of outreach is described elsewhere in this issue. Under the continuing professional direction of Lydia Kukoff, that institution served as the first modern attempt to alter the course of what seemed just a decade earlier to be the inexorable force of American Jewish history. By the mid-1980's a variety of Jewish outreach programs to the intermarried had begun to be developed in such different institution contexts as Reform temples, Jewish family service agencies, and Jewish community centers.

Even as outrage against intermarriage and intermarriers has gradually begun to give way to greater acceptance and to programs of Jewish inclusion, new questions have risen about the possible effect of outreach on Jewish survival. For example, does outreach serve as a legitimation of intermarriage, increasing its likelihood because of the more hospitable attitude of the Jewish community? Does outreach threaten to dilute the Jewish integrity of the community by including Jews-by-choice whose authenticity as Jewish is not universally accepted? Does outreach really extend the hospitality of the Jewish community to those who might otherwise not have come in, or does it simply hold open the door to those who are on their way in anyway?

There are also questions about the proper methods and objectives of Jewish outreach. Should it be undertaken with the explicit goals of converting the Gentile partners in intermarriage? Should it have other goals, such as improving the marital relationship of the couple. Is outreach essentially an educational activity or is it therapy by another name, carried out by Jews who did not go on to become licensed psychotherapists as so many of their brothers and sisters have done? These questions, in turn, touch on further issues about who within the Jewish community is best qualified to deal with the intermarried and from what institutional and ideological premises.

These questions underscore the point that the challenge intermarriage poses for the American Jewish community is not readily resolved by either conversion or outreach. Both of these solutions create further questions and tensions in the community. However, the critical questions that have been raised about outreach and conversion thus far have not addressed what I believe is a more fundamental issue: even successful outreach and widely accepted conversions challenge the Jewish community's tacit assumptions about group survival. To the extent that Jewish outreach is successful, it must inevitably challenge the Jewish penchant for social invisibility.

#### TOWARD A NEW AGENDA OF JEWISH SURVIVAL

As outreach has become an increasingly common response to Jewish intermarriage, it has raised numerous questions of strategy, practice, purpose and method. Yet, all its current forms share a number of common features.

The various Jewish outreach efforts that have been undertaken thus far are characterized by their common focus on the Jewish "internal agenda," i.e., a focus on Jewish survival issues and issues of institutional strategy. Regardless of sponsorship or purpose, they have concentrated on issues of program curriculum such as Jewish lifecycle and calendar celebration and introduction to synagogue practice and etiquette; personnel and methods of instruction; qualities of the setting; and recruitment. None has addressed the broader question of how outreach relates to the long-standing commitment of most Jews to social and cultural invisibility in the public domain.

If the outreach is to succeed, it must confront the question of how Jews as individuals and the Jewish community as an organized entity confront the wider society. That question is not about the techniques of programming or teaching style, or recruitment. It is not simply about making the "stranger" feel more welcome. Ultimately, that question is about how Jews as individuals comport themselves vis-a-vis their Gentile neighbors and how the organized Jewish community represents itself in public.

No community can depend solely on the efforts of its most exemplary members for collective survival. It must also develop

institutional strategies that bolster the abilities of its ordinary members. Thus, the challenge that remains for the Jewish outreach enterprise is to articulate a new vision of Jewish survival.

That vision must remain committed to at least two of the three principles of the traditional tripart strategy; that is, to ever broadening the climate of tolerance in society for all cultures and doing so by strong political advocacy for laws that guarantee civil liberties and social justice.

Yet, if Jewish outreach is to have more than episode relevance to just a few individuals it must finally reject the posture of Jewish social invisibility that has been the lot of Jewry in the "liberal" modern world. It must take Judaism as a religion and Jewishness as a culture and civilization public, & stake its claim to a fair share of the public's attention. How this is to be done is the challenge that lies ahead for effective Jewish outreach.

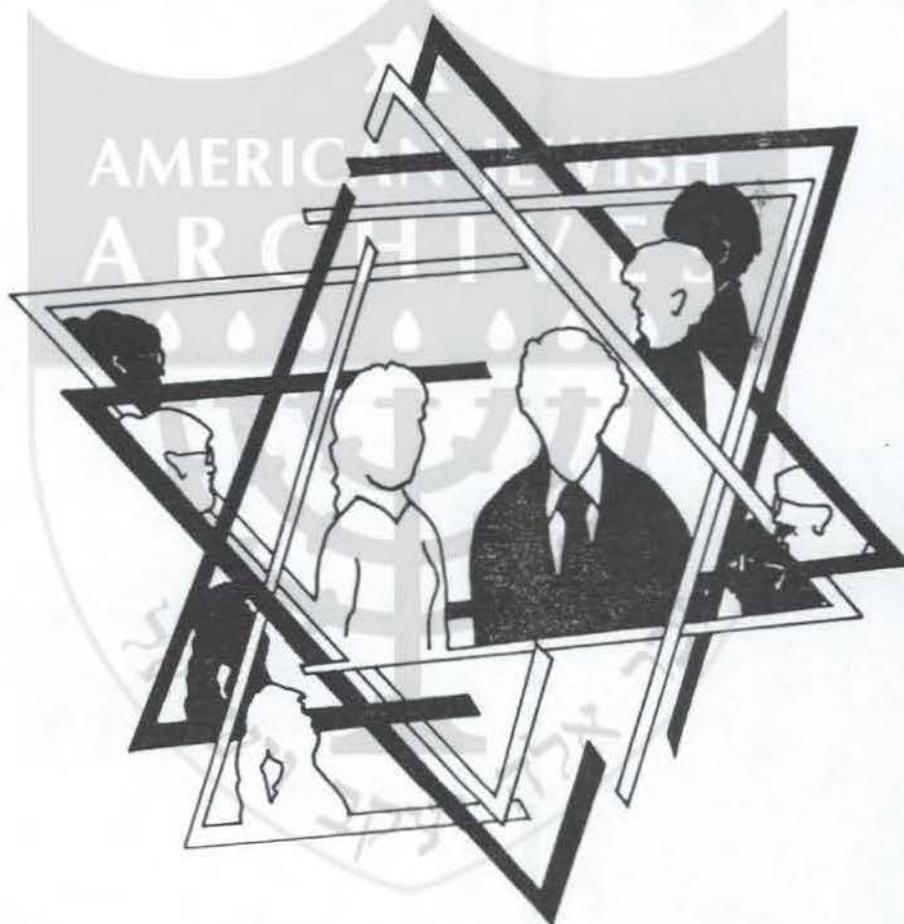
Some of the ways that Judaism might be taken more public are suggested by the struggles of blacks and hispanics to improve their image. The pressures brought to bear in recent years on advertising and media executives, the publishers of textbooks and educational policy makers have clearly borne fruit in changing the public image of those communities. Jews might will consider the following:

- \* Advocating for more positive, identifiably Jewish characters, themes and images on the major networks, particularly in major urban markets where Jews comprise a significant segment of the consumer population.
- \* Advocating for the inclusion of more Jewish cultural contents in high school and college textbooks and courses, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.
- \* Advocating for the restoration of Hebrew as a language option in high schools and colleges.
- \* Advocating for the greater inclusion of Judaica in the holdings of local libraries, in the exhibition schedules of museums, and in the programs of community-sponsored theatres and symphonies.
- \* Advocating for greater cultural exchange with Israel and other significant centers of Jewish culture around the world.

What effect these various strategies might have on the actual rate of intermarriage is impossible to predict. They may well have no impact on that issue at all. However, they are likely to enhance the self-image of Jews in ways that are public and accessible to non-Jews as well. As such, they are quite likely to provide the open door to Jewish civilization through which all who wish to come in may do so.

# Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community:

Creating an Agenda for Our Future



A Program Guide

Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach  
of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
and the Central Conference of American Rabbis

## THE STRANGER IN OUR MIRROR

Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis

Why is so much of the Jewish agenda centered around the convert? Why is so much Jewish energy spent Outreach programs, on Jews by Choice, on the proposals and arguments dealing with patrilineal descent, on the legitimacy of proselytizing agencies and procedures, on the intermarried and mixed married? Why is the major issue shaking the foundation of Jewish solidarity focussed on the Amendment to the Law of Return--a matter that has now appeared 43 times before the Knesset--and which again focuses on the convert?

Why the convert? Why the ger? is not simply a matter for Reform Judaism -- though Reform remains on the cutting edge of that issue. The controversies over the Law of Return are not simply manifestations of political power plays among religious factions within Israel or between Israel and the Diaspora. On the surface that attitude towards the ger is only a concern about the drop of Jewish numbers or the protection of the status of proselytes who make aliyah.

But the depth of feeling expressed by world Jewry on the "Who Is A Jew" issue evidenced an intuitive folk awareness that something deeper than definitions and demography is involved. Consider that even the appeal to the Holocaust, that ultimate argument for Jewish unity, failed to keep the lid on the seething cauldron of Jewish disputation. This time the glue failed to keep in check the angers and threats to Jewish unity. It was perhaps the first sign of the exhaustion of the Holocaust as the unifying memory.

We are concentrated on the ger, the stranger in our midst, because the ger has become a litmus test for the character and destiny of Judaism. How we see the ger, how we relate to the stranger in our midst, reflects the way we relate Judaism to the world around us. The ger who stands on the threshold of our home is a metaphor for our relationship to Western civilization. The attention focused on the proselyte is a paradigm of the emerging cultural struggle. Hermannn Cohen wrote "in the stranger man discovered the idea of Judaism." I would add that in the stranger Jews discover the moral ideal of Judaism.

Towards the ger there is an ambivalence within our tradition. In the words of Aaron Lichtenstein, the Rosh Yeshivah of Har Etzion, there is "encouragement on the one hand and repulsion on the other; some esteemed the ger while others approached him with cautious apprehension" (On Conversion, Tradition, Winter, 1988).

I identify two dominant strains in Judaism towards the ger, two fundamental attitudes toward the proselyte, that express two basic

philosophies of Judaism. At one end of the spectrum, is the "the Ezra strain," named after the Scribe who, returning from Babylonia, sees calamity in the intermingling of the "holy seed" with the foreign wives whose assimilated children spoke "half in the speech of Ashdod and could not speak the Jew's language."

For Ezra there is no conversionary solution for this tragic entanglement. The presumption is that there is in the ger a primordial foreignness that cannot be Jewishly assimilated. The unique purity of the people can be restored only by excluding the alienating partner. "Make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers...separate yourselves from the people of the land and from the strange foreign women" (Ezra 10:11).

On the other end of the spectrum is "the Ruth strain" that stands genealogical conceits on its head and transforms alleged genetic flaws into providential virtue. The ancestry of Davidic royalty and messianic status is doubly flawed, audaciously traced back to incestuous unions with biblically forbidden peoples. On the mother's side, David stems from the Moabite Ruth who, according to Deuteronomy "shall not enter the assembly of the Lord" and whose eponymous ancestor Moab is child of an incestuous union between father Lot and his daughter. On the father's side, David's lineage is derived from Peretz, a product of the incestuous union of father-in-law and daughter-in-law, Judah and Tamar (Ruth 4:12). The Ruth strain contradicts with a vengeance the genealogical purity of the Ezra strain. The convert is as the new-born. "Whoever brings another person under the wings of Shechinah is considered as having created him, shaped him and brought him into the world" (Tosefta Horayoth 2:7). "A ger is like a new-born babe" (T. Yevamoth 22a).

### The Body Revealed

The Book of Ezra and the Book of Ruth are both canonized Biblical texts. Each approach has its own gilgulim, its transformations. The Ezra strain is evident in the thinking of Judah Halevy, the Maharal of Prague and the School of Chabad. Its most contemporary resurrection is found in Professor Michael Wyschograd's book The Body of Faith (1983). A graduate of Yeshiva University of New York and one of the principal Jewish spokespersons in the international Jewish-Christian dialogue, Wyschograd boldly articulates the Ezra strain. Judaism is a carnal election. God chose the route of election through a biological principle. The brit of God with Israel is not an ideological, spiritual, disembodied covenant. Israel's election is transmitted through the body. God chose to elect "a biological people that remains elect even when it sins." The Jew is corporally chosen, chosen in the flesh, regardless of his spiritual or moral merit. The frontispiece of Wyschograd's book carries a statement from the Sifra, "Even though they (the Jews) are unclean, the Divine Presence is among them."

Those non-elected, those not born Jewish, will of course be hurt for they are not of the seed of Abraham whom God loves above all others. But election has nothing to do with the virtues of the person or people. Wyschograd argues a theology of the Jewish body, a metaphysical sociobiology down to the putatively Jewish facial physiognomy and culinary predilections. "There are those for whom their Jewishness means gefilte fish, bagels with lox and cream cheese, or the smell of chicken simmering in broth. Those who think of those things with derision do not understand Jewish existence as embodied existence. Just as the gait and face of a person is that person, at least in part, so the physiognomy of the Jewish people is, at least in part, the people" (p.26) "Anatomy is destiny," Freud observed. I have heard such arguments, not from philosophers, but from Jews for whom the unassimilability of the proselyte is alimentary. "De gustibus non disputandum est." The people of the Book includes an ashkenazic menu.

Following the Ezra strain, Judaism is not essentially a matter of faith, or ethics, or ideology but of mysteriously inherited traits. The Tanya, the hasidic classic authored by the founder of Chabad, Scheur Zalman, is the sacred text studied daily by the Lubavitch. Its metaphysical biologism runs throughout the text, distinguishing Jewish souls from the souls of the nations of the world which emanate from unclean husks which contain no good whatever.

All the good that the nations do is done only from selfish motives. "From the lower grades of the Klipoth, altogether unclean and evil, flow the souls of all the nations of the world and the existence of their bodies, and also the souls of all living creatures that are unclean and unfit for human consumption" (Chapter 6). Within the Ezra strain, pure, impure, clean, contaminating, are the critical categories that divide the souls of God's creation.

Still there is a felt embarrassment in the Ezra strain. If Jews inherit character, how can someone not born of that people acquire those congenital virtues by a sheer act of will? And yet there is the unambiguous legal possibility of conversion. Here the Ezra-strain feels compelled to put some limits on the elevation of the proselyte. For Judah Halevy (Kuzari 1:115), it is clear that "those who become Jews do not assume equal rank with born Israelites who are specially privileged to attain prophecy." No other nation besides Israel knows the true meaning of the Tetragrammaton, no other people has the connection with God. For the Zohar, while the proselyte receives a new soul from heaven, it is not of the same caliber as the souls of Jews-by-Birth (see Exclusiveness and Tolerance, Jacob Katz, Chapter XII).

#### The Attractions of the Ezra Strain

If I dwell on the Ezra-strain and barely mention the rabbinic traditions endorsing the Ruth strain, it is because liberal Jews

are not exposed to the Ezra tradition. The books we read, the tradition we select, the rabbis we hear have filtered out the Ezra view of Judaism. But if we are to understand the implications of our Outreach program for Judaism itself, we must understand the Ezra strain because it is more alive than we may think, and its presuppositions and implications are very much a part of the contemporary Kultur-Kampf.

The arguments I hear mostly contend that the Jews-by-Choice are hopelessly deaf to the ethnic strains of Jewishness. This is, I suspect, a more polite way of saying that Jewishness is an ascriptive not an acquired characteristic, something you are born with, or as one of my patient congregants put it, "Jewishness, dear Rabbi, comes with the mother's milk." Indeed, it seems to me that the less practicing and believing the Jew, the more insistent the contention that Jewishness is something born into. The weaker the Jews, the more powerful the attraction to make Jewishness a genetic affair.

We Ruth followers must understand the heart of Ezra. Ezra cannot be simply dismissed as bigoted or xenophobic. Ezra has no trust in the viability of a community of choice. Choice is too fragile to assure the Jewishness of his grandchildren. He seeks something independent of choice, a covenant in the flesh, a circumcision in blood, "B'damayich chayi". "In thy blood shalt thou live," is recited at the brit. The Ezra-strain seeks a genetic transmission of loyalty as certain as a transfusion of blood.

There is something reassuring in the genetic fixity applied to Judaism. So the sociologist Nathan Glazer argues "the converted may be better Jews than those born within the fold and indeed often are, but it seems undeniable that their children have alternatives before them that the children of families in which both parents were born Jewish do not--they have legitimate alternative identities" ("New Perspectives in American Jewish Sociology," Nathan Glazer, American Jewish Committee, 1987). Choice is chancy. Jews-by-Choice chose. But he who chooses for Judaism one day may opt to choose out of Judaism another day or else his child may. In halachic terms, the infant of a Jewish womb, whatever he/she may later choose, is irrevocably Jewish -- "Yisrael af al pi shechatah yisrael hu;" no theological or ritual test is called for. But a non-Jewish infant converted before his/her majority can protest this conversion. The biological infant is safe. He cannot protest and cannot revert.

#### Choice and Heresy

There is in tradition a greater confidence in being chosen than in choosing, in choosing because you are commanded rather than choosing out of your autonomous decisions. The election of Israel (Avodah Zarah 2B) took place without consultation with Israel. God overwhelmed Israel. He suspended a mountain over Israel like an upside down vault declaring, "If you accept the Torah, it will be

well with you and if not there you will find your grave." It is if God's choice not Israel's choosing that assures the irrevocable election and singularing of the Jew.

But it is precisely here that the ger in our times comes to challenge the presuppositions of the traditional society. The very title "Jews-by-Choice" challenges fate over chosen faith. It raises root questions that touch the nature of our identity and the character of our education. Is Judaism essentially a affair, a congenital matter determined by the ovum, or is Judaism an ideological, spiritual matter of faith to be chosen? While formally these alternatives are not contradictory--for Israel is both a community of birth and of choice--de facto the Ezra and Ruth strains pull at either end oppositionally. And there are pragmatic advantages for the Jewish community to retain elements of both, i.e. to accept a Jew-by-Birth without any theological or ritual tests and to accept a non-Jew as a Jew by religious and cultural decision. There are powerful theoretical and pragmatic arguments to reject the extremes of the Ezra strain that border on metaphysical racism.

Outreach to the proselyte affects our self-understanding of Judaism. In the conversion of the ger, the native born is forced to confront himself. The ger of adoption places greater weight on choice, will, faith, ideology. The contemporary calls for greater Jewish "spirituality," the growing emphasis on theological clarification within the religious movements, the disenchantment with mere belonging, all reflect the shifting of the pendulum from destiny to decision, from being chosen by an external fate to freely choosing by inner conviction.<sup>1</sup>

"Heresy" comes from a Greek word hairein, which means "to choose." In the closed society of a pre-modern world, choice was heretical. In the open society, choice has become the nobler spiritual imperative.

"Modern consciousness," Peter Berger summarizes, "entails a movement from fate to choice." In modernity, the pendulum shifts

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<sup>1</sup> The rulings of the Israeli Supreme Court offered greater weight to the subjective elements of identification that to the objective, legal genetic factors. Whereas the halachic tradition could regard the converted Brother Daniel as a Jew by virtue of his birth, the Israeli judgment places greater weight on Brother Daniel's choice to convert to Christianity which detracted from his Jewishness. (1962). In the Shalit affair (1988) Justice Zussman for the majority's opinion stated that "determining a person's affiliation to a certain religion and a certain nationality derives essentially from the subjective feelings of the particular person in question."

from Ezra to Ruth. The ger challenges the presuppositions that value biological fate over faith, that makes of Judaism a theology of the inherited body-soul and ignores the willful attachment to faith, the longing for spirituality.

All this affects the consciousness of the native born. The Jewish attitude towards the ger presents in concentrated form a clue to the Jewish relationship to Western civilization which lies at the heart of the contemporary Kultur-Kampf. The ger is the microcosm of the world outside us.

We are shaped by those we shape. The artist is revealed in his art. The ger comes to us from the outside and leads us to look inside. In the process of giyur (conversion) the native Jew is enlarged. The ger who enters a new covenant with God and us, transforms us, reminds us of the genius of Jewish universalism. The ger who brings bikkurim, the first fruit, to the Temple is entitled to declare that God has sworn to his fathers to give them the land for when God spoke to Abraham he said " I have made you a father unto the multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:8). In this sense, Abraham is transformed. For, as the Yerushalmi Bikkurim has it, while in the past Abraham was only the father of Aram, through the acceptance of the ger he has become father of all those in the world who ever became Jewish. Through the ger, the view of Judaism is enlarged. A universal community of faith is added to the particular community of birth. When the Knesset Israel turns away from the ger, knesset Yisrael turns away from the world; turning towards the ger, knesset Yisrael enters the wider world. The Kultur-Kampf struggling over our posture towards the ger entails a struggle over our attitude towards Western civilization.

### The Cave

A critical Talmudic episode evidences the depth of our burgeoning Kultur-Kampf. The Talmud (T. Shabbath 33b) records a conversation among a group of Rabbis about the year 130 C.E. when Palestine was under Roman rule. Rabbi Yehudha ben Ilai observed, "How fine are the works of these people (the Romans). They have made roads possible, built bridges, markets, and erected bath-houses." Rabbi Jose remained silent but Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai noted caustically "A" these edifices and structures they make for their own selves. The market places are to put harlots into them, the bridges are to levy tolls for themselves, the bath-houses are to pamper their bodies."

The Roman government issued a death decree to punish Simeon ben Yochai's blasphemies. He and his son Eleazer escaped to a cave and remained there praying and studying for 12 years. When it was rumored that the decree was annulled, the two left the cave and went into the world. They were aghast at the activities they saw. Men were ploughing and sowing the field, and the two condemned them: "People forsake life eternal for the business of temporal

life." Wherever they cast their eyes was immediately burned up. Thereupon, a Heavenly voice cried out: "Have you come to destroy My world? Get back to the cave!"

Chastised, they returned to the cave, there to pray and to study another twelve years. And then heard again the Heavenly Echo cry out, "Go forth from your cave."

It was on the eve of the Sabbath when the Rabbis emerged and saw an old man holding two bundles of myrtle. They asked him, "What are the myrtles for?" He answered, "They are for the honor of the Sabbath." "And why two myrtles?" One is in honor of the commandment to "observe the Sabbath." And the other in honor of the commandment to "remember the Sabbath." The minds of Simeon ben Yochai and his son Eleazer were set at ease. The myrtles are not in the cave. They are in the world among the thorns and thistles.

The retreat of Simeon ben Yochai from the world, his contempt for the culture and civilization of his day, is echoed these days in many circles -- not all fundamentalist.<sup>2</sup> It is a critical aspect of the contemporary Kultur-Kampf. Particularly after the profound disillusionment of the Holocaust era, the cave looms large as an attractive option. For the cave mind-set, there is no good in Western civilization, and in associating with it there is the risk of contamination that poisons Jewish identity and continuity. Democracy, pluralism, humanism, science, tolerance, conscience, the Enlightenment are the seductions of foreign wives that eat away at the unique holiness of Israel. The Tanya (Chapter 8) warns against those who occupy themselves "with the sciences of the world, for the uncleanness of the science of nations is greater than that of profane speech."

In the cave there are no foreign elements to intrude. Out there in the world at large there is an innate irreconcilable conflict between "them" and "us" in the very womb of Rebecca. Rabbi Elie Munk in his commentary The Call of the Torah explains that the hostility between Esau and Jacob is "pre-natal," a "providential factor in history which escapes the control of the will." The intra-uterine hostility between Esau and Jacob projected in Talmudic and medieval times onto Rome and the Christian world is not to be explained in natural terms, on economic, political, or psychological grounds. Jewish and non-Jewish hostility is an "a priori fact," something born in conception. "Two nations are in your womb and two kingdoms will separate from your entrails. One kingdom will be stronger than the other and the elder will serve the younger."

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<sup>2</sup> Further on Shimeon ben Yochai's position in T. Berachoth 35b.

The long and wicked history of anti-semitism aggravates the Ezra-strain and gives it credibility beyond its historical context. The impotence of the victim seeks compensation in the malediction that characterizes the oppressor as evil to the core. "If someone is cruel and does not show mercy," Maimonides writes in Matnat Aniyim, "there are sufficient grounds to suspect his lineage, since cruelty is found only among the other nations." The angers and resentments of the persecuted must be understood. But the indiscriminate curses extending beyond historical context and appropriate targets hurl dangerous boomerangs against us.

In the reports from Israel today there are signs of a reversion to medieval and Talmudic categorizations of the non-Jew as akkum, idolators. Such atavistic definition of non-Jews as akkuim further separates Jews and non-Jews. Yeshiva communities are still being taught that the Biblical terms of "brother" and "neighbor" exclude non-Jews and that the obligations towards the well-being of my brother or the love of my neighbor mean only to include Jews, and perhaps only observant Jews. "Who is thy neighbor?" refers to B'nei Amecha -- only Jewish kinsfolk. They are to be loved "as thyself." But who is "as thyself" but those Jews who think and pray and behave as thyself? The creeping exclusionary definition begins by separating non-Jews from Jews, but ends by dividing Jews from Jews.

Response from contemporary Israeli rabbis uphold a prohibition of selling or renting an apartment in Jerusalem. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg would, on halachic ground expel all non-Jews from Jerusalem and the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Mordecai Eliahu forbids Jews to sell apartments or flats "even to one Gentile." It is as if the Talmudist Menachem Ha-Meiri of the 14th century and Moshe Rivkes of the 17th century had never lived--as if their landmark judgments distinguishing idolators from "Nations governed by the ways of religion and committed to Godliness" had never taken place.

The conclusion of the Simeon ben Yochai haggadah repudiates his "contemptus mundi," the xenophobia that cremates the products of civilization. The Heavenly voice teaches that there is no safety in the cave, only the smothering self-incarceration of the Jewish spirit. For the Ezra mind-set there is no foreignness in the cave, no gerim, no synthesis, no challenge from civilization. But to turn away from the world and its civilization is to turn against God's gift of opportunity to us. Our task is not to escape civilization, but to refine it. Civilization is not divine and it must not be indiscriminately embraced. But neither is it the work of Satan. The land must be sowed and ploughed. The two myrtles in honor of the Sabbath, of creation and recreation, are reminders of a society that is yet to be. The rabbis would not dismiss Roman civilization in the time of Simeon ben Yochai. What then should be our attitude towards democratic Western civilization that has enriched Judaism and elevated the lot of our people?

The Ezra advocates of Jewish isolation are fond of citing the verse from Deuteronomy 33:28, "Israel dwelleth in safety alone." But they ignore the Talmudic passage (Makkoth 24a) that rejects the questionable values of Jewish insularity. In the rabbinic interpretation, Amos the prophet arose to challenge Moses' benediction. "How shall Jacob stand alone?" The Talmud continues, "The Lord repented concerning Moses' acclamation. This also shall not be, saith the Lord God." (Amos 7:5-6).

#### Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz In Our Times

Much of the conflicts between the followers of Ezra and of Ruth lie beneath the surface of the Kultur-Kampf. But for Jews for whom Ezra is outmoded and irrelevant, the Ruth strain presents its own challenges. Who is the Ruth our time? The Ruth of our era who approaches us is not the Ruth of pagan times nor even of the height of Christian dominance. The Ruth of modernity is less likely than before to come to us with church dogmas from alien theologies. She comes from a highly secularized culture, a neutral society. She seeks in Judaism the warmth of a family attached to the rootedness of tradition, the joys of festival celebration and commemoration, the sense of superordinate purpose that can overcome the shrivelled culture of secular neutrality. She seeks songs to be sung, stories to be told, choreography to be danced, memories to be relived, wisdoms to be enacted, faiths to be revered. She seeks a family of spiritual literacy and refinement.

The Ruth of modernity comes to us with great expectations. She has felt the shiver of history. She has immersed herself in mikvah and study. She comes to the promised Sabbath table of her beloved and to the Sabbath table of her betrothed's Jewish family. The table is beautifully set, but the evening is graceless and without benediction. The conversations are pedestrian, banal, materialistic, hedonistic, indistinguishable from any non-Jewish middle-class family. The native-born family is Jewishly mute. They are pseudo-universalists like those who would "speak in general without using any language in particular" (Santayana). Ruth seeks the particular language of Judaism. But there is in her adopted Jewish family no ethnicity of song or narration, no Jewish poetry or ritual choreography or theology. Ruth is prepared to pledge to her beloved: "Thy people shall be my people, thy God, my God." But where is the God and people in the native born husband and in-laws? The Jewish native-born family are neither/nor Jews, "Do you believe in God?" "No." "Are you an atheist?" "No." "Are you an anti-Zionist?" "No." "Do you observe the Sabbath?" "No." "Are you opposed to observing the Sabbath?" "No." We deal with born Jews of double negation.

Philip Roth confesses his childhood memories. "What a Jewish child inherited was no body of law, no body of learning, no language and finally no Lord." Ruth's Jewish family are in most things neutral souls, living spiritually in the naked square. They are the modern

descendants of Disraeli, who when asked by Queen Victoria which Bible he used, answered, "I am alas, dear Queen, the blank page between the Old and New Testaments."

The question is not whether Ruth, the stranger, can be integrated into the Jewish family, but whether the estrangement of the Jewish family from Judaism can be overcome. It is the foreignness, the alienation of the Jewish family, not the purported foreignness of the proselyte that haunts us. The Ruth of modernity is not the Ruth of the tradition, neither is the Boaz and Naomi of our times that of the Scriptures. The ger challenges us to think deeply of our noblest intent to reach out. Reach out--with whom? Reach out--with what? And after touching the ger, bring her home--where?

There can be no Outreach without Inreach. Outreach without inreach is not only premature, it results in frustration, embarrassment and disillusionment. Outreach must be doubly targeted. It must be simultaneously directed towards the alienation within as much as towards the stranger without. "That only which we have within can we see without. If there are no gods, it is because we harbor none" (Emerson).

You cannot reach the ger except through the native born. And especially in Judaism whose substructure is the family, it is in the private home not in the public institution that the Jewishness of belonging, believing and behaving is most effectively transmitted and lived. Outreach to the stranger must be coupled with the Jewish empowerment of the host family.

The ger cannot be converted to Judaism as a theological abstraction. The ger, as the native born, cannot thrive in the megastructure of Jewish society. The ger needs a sustaining, personal environment. Jews need Jews to be Jewish. The ger needs Jews to be Jewish. The ger needs a Jewish home. To support that home must be the primary task of our Jewish public institutions. I propose for your consideration that each synagogue, each temple, each center encourages the formation of M'chanchei mishpocha, lay and professional family educators resolved to enter the private domain, the reshuth hayachid, for the purpose of enhancing the Jewish home. The education of the ger cannot be isolated from the education of the native born. Both need to cultivate Jewish talents, competencies, and sensibilities. And that is the twin goal, the dual task of a lay and professional teaching collegiality. One law and one pedagogy for stranger that dwells among you.

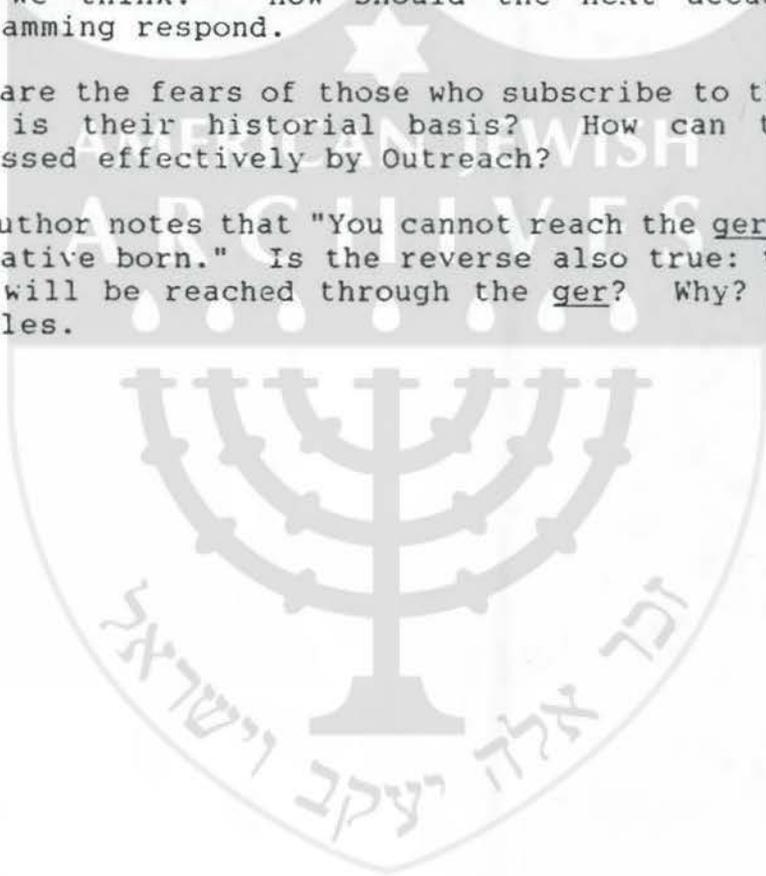
The ger is our mirror. We have only to look at it to discover that the stranger is us. Not to fear. It is a shock of recognition that holds in promise the renewal of the Jewish spirit. As we pray on the evening of Return, on Kol Nidre. "And the congregation of Israel shall be forgiven as well as the stranger that dwells in their midst."

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Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis is the Senior Rabbi at Congregation Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Rabbi Schulweis states that the Ezra strain is "more alive than we think." How should the next decade of Outreach programming respond.
- 2) What are the fears of those who subscribe to the Ezra strain? What is their historical basis? How can those fears be addressed effectively by Outreach?
- 3) The author notes that "You cannot reach the ger except through the native born." Is the reverse also true: that the native born will be reached through the ger? Why? Why not? Give examples.



READINGS FOR WORKSHOP 3  
FAMILIAL STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

12. Michael Medved, "Guess Who Is Coming to Seder", Moment Magazine, August, 1987.

Medved tells the story of a serious college romance -- and of his intention (at that time) to wed the non-Jewish girl with whom he had fallen in love. His parents steadfastly refused to give their blessing to the prospective marriage. While he hated their response then, he credits it with breaking up the romance, and ultimately, with his return to a serious, personal Jewish search.

13. Egon Mayer, "Jewish Identity and Inter-marriage", unpublished typescript.

While it was once generally assumed that intermarriage posed a danger to the survival of the Jewish community because it leads to assimilation, Mayer's research shows the opposite to be true. Assimilation leads to intermarriage, not the other way around. In this short, unpublished paper, Mayer argues that the debate about intermarriage may be beside the point. The Jewish community ought to be discussing how to fortify itself against assimilation. We ought to be looking for ways to make Jewish identity and full participation in the modern world not seem contradictory.

- \*14. Ira Eisenstein, "Intermarriage: For Jewish Parents", Commission on Synagogue Relations, New York Federation, nd.

Eisenstein, the prominent leader of the Reconstructionist movement in Judaism, gives plain-spoken advice to parents on how to raise children with a view towards encouraging an eventual Jewish marriage. He urges building a strong, multi-faceted Jewish identity, and keeping open the lines of communication.

# Guess Who is Coming to Seder

by  
Michael  
Medved

If there is one experience more than any other that pushed me toward Jewish commitment, it was my parents' refusal to accept my engagement to my Roman Catholic girlfriend in April of 1969.

They had never met Carolyn, so I decided to bring her home with me during spring break of my senior year at Yale. The fact that this trip also offered her the chance to experience Passover for the first time added a dramatic touch to the encounter with my family: We'd be playing out our own version of "Guess Who's Coming to Seder?" (I was 20 years old at the time and 20-year-olds are hardly noted for their good judgment in these matters.)

Weeks before we arrived in California, my parents made clear to me in our long-distance phone conversations that they were less than thrilled at the prospect of a gentile daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, I assumed that when they met Carolyn face-to-face they would try to overcome their prejudices. She had so much to offer that should have pleased them—she was bright, energetic, and a dedicated liberal idealist. We had met through a tutoring program in which students from elite universities (she attended Connecticut College for Women) volunteered their time to help promising ghetto kids. She shared my passionate commitment to the anti-war movement and campaigned, as I did, for Robert Kennedy. Since Adlai, Jack, and Bobby had played a more prominent role in my upbringing than had Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I felt confident that Carolyn's progressive commitment would help her fit in with the family.

What's more, as I proudly told my mother on the phone, this gem didn't even look gentile. With her dark hair, bright hazel eyes, and long, elegantly pointed nose, she was often mistaken for "one of ours." If our romance continued to flourish, my mother needn't even worry about blond

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grandchildren.

But she found plenty of other things to worry about during our trip to Los Angeles. She never treated Carolyn with outright rudeness, but instead employed the sort of exaggerated and condescending courtesy one might use with an exchange student from a central African republic. "This is the time of year when we have our holiday of Passover," she told Carolyn as she picked us up from the airport. "It coincides with your Easter. You know all those famous paintings of the Last Supper? . . . well of course you do, you're an art history major! But in those paintings what Jesus is actually doing is sitting down at a Passover dinner, or what we call a seder. Just like we'll have this Monday night, and I know you'll really enjoy it."

Whenever my mother feels unhappy or unsure of herself, she masks her insecurities by delivering a non-stop stream of disconnected chatter, and during our brief California vacation she talked without let-up, embarrassing me constantly. I didn't feel, for instance, that Carolyn needed to know the mechanical details of my parents' sex life, or the particulars of my irritating bathroom habits as an infant, or the perennially precarious state of our family finances. On our second night at home, as Carolyn showered before dinner, I quietly took my mother aside and told her that she was making my girl feel uncomfortable with all her earthy and intimate talk.

"So what do you want from me, Michael? You told me to treat her like a daughter, to make her feel welcome. So then I try to act natural, and open up, and be myself, but maybe your mother just isn't good enough for your rich little *shiksa*."

"Mom, you don't understand. I just wish you could be more relaxed, stop trying so hard."

She paused for a moment, breathing heavily, her large brown eyes turning moist with self-pity. "Just promise me one thing. You can marry whoever you want, and I know I can't control you, but if I ever have grandchildren who come talk to me about Baby Jesus, and the Christmas tree, I think I'll just die. I couldn't

stand that."

And we could barely stand her pattern of behavior, which Carolyn, on the strength of her junior year psychology course, persuasively diagnosed as "passive-aggressive". As we sat down to dinner, defiantly holding hands at the table, my mother gave us a look, tried to smile, then burst into tears and apologies. "I can't help it," she sobbed. "My feelings are my feelings."

Back in New Haven, I had tried to prepare Carolyn for the fact that my parents and my three younger brothers might seem rowdy and eccentric. "They're off the wall," I boasted, "but I know you're going to love them." Yet the same peccadilloes that had seemed so endearingly ethnic and even attractive to her when I described them from a distance now came across as threatening.

"I could never fit in with these people, and they'll never accept me," she wept, as we lay back on the beach the next day with the afternoon sun on our faces. I raised myself on one elbow and looked over at her taut, compact body so appealingly displayed in its cranberry-colored bikini. How ridiculous to think that religious intolerance should interfere with our love! Why should my parents want to destroy a connection that seemed so straightforward and so wholesome?

We had always expected problems from Carolyn's parents—right-wing Boston Irish who had made a fortune in real estate, moved out to Marblehead, and found their way into exclusive Yankee yacht clubs. When we went up to visit them for the first time, three months before our journey to Los Angeles, Carolyn warned me that her father knew nothing about Jews and still admired the late Joe McCarthy. Nevertheless, this tough old bird received me with warmth and respect, and his wife proved even more supportive.

"You know, I have a good friend named Nancy McGrath, and her daughter Cynthia just married a Jewish boy," she said as she served the turkey and mashed potatoes. "A very fine young man who's just finishing medical school. Very hard-working people, or so the saying goes. And

nowadays, it doesn't really matter what church you go to, does it?"

So why could this unschooled and old-fashioned New Englander grasp that point so clearly while my own mother, with her superior intelligence and graduate degrees in biochemistry, refuse to see it? Why did she persist in presenting herself to Carolyn as an overweight, overwrought old-country fish-wife, or some California road show version of Sophie Portnoy?

The Portnoy family was much on our minds because Philip Roth's red-hot novel had only recently mounted its assault on the best-seller lists and our national consciousness. Carolyn bought the book for me the same day it arrived at the stores and we both read it eagerly, discovering in its pages profound truths about the Jewish people and the fundamental hypocrisy of Judaism.

Carolyn had never before dated a Jewish boy and I told her that Roth's prose would give her irreplaceable insight into my origins and character. Never mind the fact that Alex Portnoy's lower-middle-class Newark boyhood was light years away from my own experience as the child of two non-conforming scientists; Roth's tormented hero offered the charm of a potent ethnic identity, and I wanted to associate myself with that mystique.

I remember the first night I went out with Carolyn, and astonished her with details of my bizarre background. My parents had sent me to Hebrew school for several years, and I actually endured the arcane rite of bar mitzvah. As I sipped at my coffee, I offered a world-weary sigh, wanting to convince her that I had somehow absorbed the wisdom of an ancient, long-suffering people. To dazzle her with the depths of my knowledge, I grabbed a paper napkin from the dinner counter at which we sat and scribbled down two letters from the Hebrew alphabet. I never revealed that those were the only two letters I remembered how to write. When you're trying to impress a woman on the first date, you'll resort to absolutely anything.

But now that strategy had backfired, as she sobbed into her beach towel, despairing of ever coming to terms with a family so different and so strange. She told me that she wanted to cut short our visit and to return to Connecticut immediately. Most of all, she wanted to avoid the upcoming Passover seder that originally had been the primary focus of the trip. It made no difference whether I pleaded that she would find our family feast fascinating and enjoyable. I had already ruined my credibility with my previous assurances that she and my parents would love each other from the moment they met. No I had to choose whether to return with her to the East Coast or to stay behind with my family. Carolyn left little doubt that she viewed my decision as a test of loyalty to our relationship.

I tried to reassure her while dodging the basic issue. Our annual seder—a time for song, wine, guest-nostalgia, and boisterous good feelings—was not only the most important religious occasion in our household, but virtually the only religious occasion. I knew that walking out on the very eve of Passover would be a cruel blow to my parents but I felt they deserved to suffer. They had never given Carolyn a chance, judging her on the accident of her gentile birth rather than evaluating her as an individual. The entire point of the civil rights movement—for which my parents had always proclaimed such fervent support—was that people should be considered on their own terms, rather than written off as members of some outcast group. If it came to a choice between my lover and my parents, I knew I had to side with Carolyn. Only because we were sleeping together every night (even in the guest room of my family's home, to which I quietly repaired after my brothers and parents had gone to sleep), but because I believed that in a fundamental sense we had truth and decency on our side.

Nevertheless, I wanted to prevent melodramatic confrontation and knew that my only hope lay with my father. When my Dad turned on

charm, no one in the world could resist him. I wanted him to apologize to Carolyn for all the tension and to give his personal assurance that the rest of the trip—including the seder—would be more pleasant for her. I idolized my father, and believed he could do anything. How many other physics professors had mastered surfing and skin-diving, rock-climbing and distance running? I called him at his lab and begged for his help in smoothing things over with Carolyn. He listened sympathetically but insisted that a series of meetings would keep him at work till late that night. The best he could offer would be a few hours tomorrow afternoon, on the very eve of the dreaded seder.

By that time, of course, it was already too late; Carolyn had packed our bags and made reservations on the "red eye" flight leaving Los Angeles at nine that night. At the very moment that my family sat down at the festive holiday table, singing songs about the Children of Israel and their hasty departure from Egypt, Carolyn and I would be making our own last-minute escape from conflicts and confusion, flying off to another sort of liberation.

My mother sobbed over our decision, but if it troubled my father in the least he managed to hide it. He burst through the door that afternoon at four o'clock—an hour late, as always—full of his customary heartiness and high spirits, hollering out my name and announcing that the time had come for us to talk.

The entire scene had the disturbing quality of a dream, in which comforting, familiar elements appear in a bizarre and frightening context. My mother toiled away in the kitchen, giving desperate orders to her cleaning lady in broken but comprehensible Spanish, preparing a meal for twenty guests; my Uncle Moish, the family patriarch, had just arrived on the scene and wandered from room to room, muttering to himself, searching for the one book he needed to complete the remarks he planned to share at the seder table; my three chubby kid brothers, brawling and noisy as usual, struggled to drag extra chairs in from the garage and to set up the folding tables in the living room. In

the midst of this bustle and chaos, it was impossible to conduct a serious conversation, and so, over my mother's vehement objections that she needed help in preparing the house, we went out for a drive, father and son.

I slouched down in the seat, sulking, while he swung the car along the broad curves of Sunset Boulevard, humming along with the Mozart violin concerto on the radio. I focused on every detail, expecting some climactic development, waiting for my father to plead with me to delay my departure. Instead, he made light-hearted small talk about the beautiful hikes in the hills that Carolyn had missed during her visit to California.

When we pulled up at Will Rogers Beach and got out of the car, I could contain myself no longer. "The problem is you refuse to take me seriously!" I exploded. "You don't understand that I intend to marry this girl."

"Oh, I understand, alright. But that doesn't mean I accept it."

"It's not up to you to accept it or not. It's my life!"

I marched off, indignant, across the sand, and my father quickly caught up to me. As we walked together toward the water's edge, I demanded to know why he opposed my relationship with Carolyn. To my surprise, he explained his position in cogent and well-organized terms.

First, he raised the issue of my age: He thought I was much too young to even consider marriage. But whatever age I happened to be, he insisted that Carolyn represented a poor choice. She seemed spoiled and self-centered and he wondered if she'd been ruined by her parents' money. I tried to rush to her defense, but he cut me off with a new and devastating attack.

"And there's another thing, Michael, and I've got to say it. When you sent us the picture, I thought, oh, she's a cutie, look at that. But then when you meet her in person—I mean, I just don't understand why you think she's so special."

"In other words, you don't think she's pretty enough. Well, has it ever occurred to you, Dad, that looks aren't that important to me?"

*If he condoned intermarriage in my case, he'd have no basis for opposing it with others.*

I was lying, of course. It mattered enormously that my girlfriend should be considered attractive, and the fact that my father wrote her off as a dog left me hurt and off-balance. I knew that his view stemmed at least in part from his utterly unrealistic assessment of his oldest son. All parents think their kids are outstanding and beautiful, and when my parents looked at me they saw a healthy six-footer and a Yale honors student who ought to be considered an outstanding catch. (But when I looked at myself, I saw a clumsy and near-sighted eccentric who had never dated in high school and had no idea how to handle himself with women. To me, the idea that *any* girl should fall in love with me—let alone a girl as accomplished and presentable as Carolyn—seemed a major miracle. With her, I felt astonished anew every day that she not only offered her body, but expressed a desire to spend the rest of her life in my company.)

My parents could never understand my overblown gratitude for Carolyn's affection, nor my deep-seated fear that if I lost her I might never again find a woman who would love me.

In fact, I felt sure they didn't care—that they would choose to condemn me to a life of loneliness rather than accept my happiness with a non-Jewish girl. My father's specific objections to Carolyn seemed to me little more than transparent excuses for rejecting the fundamental, unthinkable reality of admitting a *shiksa* into the family. He actually admitted as much as we circled back over the desolate sand, shivering against the wind that blew in from the sea. My dad reminded me of my position as the oldest of four boys; if he condoned intermarriage in my case, he'd have no basis for opposing it with the others.

But why, I wanted to know, should he oppose it at all? Religion had never played an important part in his life, and my mother constantly complained about his careless and bemused approach to even the most important holidays. It's true that we all shuffled into temple every year at Yom Kippur, but at the end of the day my father in-

variably complained about the stupidity and emptiness of the services. He felt the same resentment on these occasions that I did, and we commiserated over the pompous rabbis and interminable fundraising appeals, with the bored parvenu congregants snoring together in futuristic suburban sanctuaries that resembled the discarded sets for big budget flying saucer movies. How could my father allow this sort of shallow and hypocritical charade to dictate his response to the woman I loved?

My father sighed, insisting that I knew nothing of Judaism's true ideals.

"And if that's the case, then whose fault is that?" I shot back. "Who was supposed to be responsible for my Jewish education?"

He ignored that point and began speaking with great affection about the old-fashioned synagogue of his boyhood. We had often heard about this grimy storefront in the heart of the immigrant enclave of South Philadelphia, a Yiddish-speaking congregation filled with an air of piety and the smell of garlic. But however fondly he might recall the warmth and energy of that vanished world, it had no connection with his current life and even less relevance for me. It's true that his simple, saintly, hard-working parents—departed now for nearly ten years—would have disapproved of Carolyn, but they would have been similarly confused by every other aspect of my life. I reminded him of the story he loved to tell about his Ph.D. in physics. When he finally got the degree, his parents proudly told their neighbors that their Davey had become a doctor. My dad could explain to them endlessly that he knew nothing about medicine, that he was a very different kind of doctor, but it did no good with his folks or with their friends. They still came to him for advice and for cures. "Okay, so maybe it's not your specialty, doc, but if you could just tell me, please, about my sore foot?"

The past, in other words, might be colorful and charming, but it could hardly serve as a useful guide for the present and the future. Instead, I planned to seize the opportunity to

steer our family in a rewarding new direction. Carolyn's background—combining Irish vitality with Yankee cunning—could only enrich what we already had.

My father listened with a wry smile on his face, proud of my rhetorical and argumentative abilities even if I exercised them at his expense. "Isn't it funny how you make it all sound so great? I can't argue with you now, Michael, and I can't even stop you if you really want to get married. But I will tell you this, and you should know that I mean it: If you marry that girl, I won't be there. I'll never be a part of such a wedding. And if you have children later on, I won't want to see them either. I'll still love you, and you'll still be my son. But they won't be my grandchildren as far as I'm concerned."

I raged and pleaded as we tramped back to the car, trying to force him to see the horror and absurdity of the situation. He was cutting me off, making me an orphan through his own stubborn and wrong-headed willfulness. But try as I might to place him on the defensive, he refused to reconsider his position, or even to apologize for it.

We drove home in silence, but arrived back at the house to the sounds of shouting: My mother and my Uncle Moish were confronting each other in the kitchen, arguing with life-and-death intensity. My elderly uncle, who had recently taken up the cause of Soviet Jewry, wanted to set up an empty chair draped in black at the seder table to symbolize our brothers and sisters held against their will behind the Iron Curtain. My mother felt that this melodramatic gesture would ruin the festive holiday mood and embarrass her with her friends. They submitted the issue to my father for resolution, while I ran up to the guest room to talk to Carolyn.

She got up to kiss me as I came in. I knew she'd been waiting and worrying.

"Are you okay?"

"Of course I'm okay. What do you think?"

"You were with your father such a long time. What happened?"

"Oh nothing much. He just told me

he'd never speak to me again, that's all."

"They're just trying to manipulate you. Trying to make you feel bad so you'll do what they want." She hugged me and stroked my cheek. "We have to be strong. In just a little while we'll be done with all this."

She had already called for a cab to take us to the airport. But before it arrived, we had time to sit through the opening minutes of the seder and to introduce Carolyn to my parents' friends. These visitors, the same crowd that shared the holiday with my family year after year, knew nothing of the current situation, though it must have seemed strange to them that we were scheduled to leave that night. Carolyn sat at the table under duress, checking her watch, picking lint from the sleeves of her shiny green dress, totally ignoring what went on around her.

Meanwhile, my baby brother Harry, age 7, asked the traditional "Four Questions" which he had memorized in Hebrew for the occasion. When he had finished, my brother Ben, age 10, insisted on offering his own rendition, in much louder voice but with no better understanding of the words. Everyone listened with awe and delight, though no one at the entire long table—with the exception of my Uncle Moish and perhaps my father—had the slightest understanding of the language.

At the first break in the proceedings, Carolyn got up to check on the taxi and to wait outside; a few moments later a blaring car horn announced its arrival. I rose with a forced smile and bid a bland farewell to my family and their friends. My mother walked with me to the door, then turned to my father with a pained expression. "Come on, Dave. Aren't you going to help him carry the suitcases?"

My father looked up, feigning surprise, from his place at the head of the table. "We're in the middle of a seder. I can't interrupt now just because he's decided to leave."

I told my mother it was all right and kissed her goodbye—a quick peck on the cheek. Lugging three suitcases and a bookbag, I staggered out the door and down the front steps. I remember

the way the spring air felt suddenly cold against my face and the scattered lights of the canyon below my parents' home seemed to wink goodbye, full of sympathy for my plight. The cab driver loaded the luggage into the trunk, then opened the car door for me to get in beside Carolyn. But just as I sat down, I turned to see my father's big broad-shouldered form bounding down the steps, a smile on his face and his arms outstretched.

"I guess I couldn't let you get away like this."

I jumped out of the car and we embraced. Utterly against my will I began sobbing, my breath coming in hot painful stabs, as I hid my face against my father's neck in confusion and embarrassment. "I don't want this!" I murmured, with my eyes closed tight. "Oh God, I don't want this to be happening."

He squeezed me once with all his strength, then relaxed and softly kissed my forehead. We have always been an absurdly emotional family, lachrymose and explosive like characters in a Russian novel. I stood there hugging my father, while Carolyn leaned out the window of the cab and warned that we would miss our plane. Finally I pulled away and ducked into the car. My father stood there for a few moments, waving goodbye and watching us drive away.

On the night flight back to the East Coast, Carolyn fell asleep, nuzzling my shoulder. I took out the little looseleaf binder I carried with me everywhere and wrote an entry in my journal:

"April 3. Good God! What a horrendous mess! Already two thousand miles away, somewhere over the middle of the country, but still feeling just as agitated as I did at home. Loving Carolyn—wanting to marry her—but terrified at the thought of hurting my parents. What a soft-headed slob I am! Having decided on Carolyn, I should stand by my decision. Must declare independence from parents (and from my pathetic need for their approval!) and separate myself from their revolting tribal Judaism that puts group identity ahead of love, decency, everything. For the most part, I feel sorry for them. And

*Nothing turned out as I would have predicted in 1969.*

*I bought two candles at a drugstore and, on Friday night, lit them on the windowsill of my apartment.*

for me, until I find the strength to do what's right."

Picking up my journal and reading these words now, it's difficult to recognize the person who wrote them. I find it amusing to think how that insufferably arrogant kid might have reacted had some spectral voice warned him of the unexpected directions his life would take. Nothing turned out as I would have predicted in 1969: I never married Carolyn, nor did I sever my connections with the Jewish people.

In fact, I am today the president of a growing synagogue with close to 400 members. My wife and I keep a kosher home and do our best to honor traditional rules of sabbath and holiday observance. Our first child, my lovely Sarah, was born last December and we've already put down a deposit to secure her place in a Jewish day school. In the past ten years I've delivered lectures in every corner of the country on the renewed interest in our tradition that's touched tens of thousands of young Jews.

Whenever the audience responds after such a lecture, the most common question is, of course, "So what happened to you? You weren't raised in an Orthodox home. You said you had no Jewish connection when you were in college. So what was it that turned you around?"

I wish I had a glib answer to offer them, that I could point to some inspired teacher or lightning-bolt event that changed my life in a flash. Unfortunately, the reality is far more messy and complex, but in reconstructing my story I'm brought back inevitably to that disastrous Passover of 1969.

After returning to New Haven I raged against my parents for more than a year, regaling all my friends with tales of their stupidity and bigotry. Carolyn wanted me to eliminate all contact with home, but I couldn't do that: I had too much energy invested in the weekly shouting-and-sobbing matches I conducted with my mother over the phone. Her long distance bills grew steadily larger (since most of the time I called her collect) as we pursued a running argument concerning the essence of Judaism.

I kept trying to make the point that their inconsiderate treatment of Carolyn was somehow profoundly "un-Jewish," and to bolster my case, during the summer after my graduation from Yale I began looking through a few introductory books on our religion.

So began my Jewish education: I found myself startled and fascinated by what I discovered.

By this time Carolyn and I had moved in together, and, while sprawled across the moth-eaten sofa in our apartment I tried to share with her selections from my reading. "Did you know that the whole reason they separate milk and meat is to make a distinction between life and death?" Or, "Listen to this: 'Rabbi Hillel used to say, The more flesh, the more worms; the more property, the more anxiety.'"

My enthusiasm for this material led Carolyn to suspect that I was trying to convert her, and in fact we soon began discussing the possibility of a *pro forma* conversion as a way to placate my parents and to clear the way for our marriage. We made an appointment with the Hillel director at Yale, a Reform rabbi named Richard Israel. It is an indication of the level of my Jewish commitment at that time that I had spent nearly five years on campus and had never met him before.

As we sat in his office at twilight, this slight, sober, balding gentleman with a neat goatee asked Carolyn a series of probing questions, seeking to find out why she wanted to convert. She answered candidly and consistently that she had no independent interest in Judaism or in any other religion, and merely wanted to please me and to placate my parents. At the end of the meeting the Rabbi said he could sense a tremendous strain between us, and that at this point he didn't think Carolyn was an appropriate candidate for conversion.

Walking out of his office, I felt an overwhelming and surprising sense of relief.

My relationship with Carolyn broke up two weeks later; she blamed our split on my increasing Jewish "fanaticism." Moving into my own

place, I experienced a great sense of liberation associated with my new ability to explore Jewish life. I bought two candles at a drugstore, and on Friday night lit them on the window sill of my new apartment; borrowing a *siddur* from the university library I began trying to teach myself some of the prayers. Sorting through the "International" bin of a local record store, I discovered a recording of Theodore Bikel singing Yiddish folk songs and played it again and again till I knew them by heart.

Then came my return to California for a joyous reunion with my parents. They were astonished when I suggested that we all go to services one Friday night, and when I asked my Uncle Moish if I could try on his *tefillin*. A year and a half earlier I had been condemning them all for their benighted Jewish tribalism, for their refusal to accept higher principles of universal brotherhood; now I criticized them for their assimilationism, their compromises, their casual attitude toward their own religion.

(If you're 22, it's hard for your parents to get anything right. I believe it was Mark Twain who observed, "When I was 20, I was convinced that my father was a hopeless imbecile. When I was 30, I was amazed at how much the old man had learned in just ten years.")

Every family crisis is by definition a special circumstance, but in reconsidering my long-ago battles with my parents, two lessons come to mind that may be relevant in broader terms.

The first concerns the most appropriate response to the prospect of intermarriage. The conventional wisdom today has it that parents should accept the inevitable and try to accommodate the wishes of the intermarrying couple. The chief goal is to maintain a cordial connection between the newlyweds and the Jewish community, in the hope that this connection may intensify as time goes by, particularly when children arrive on the scene.

My parents chose the opposite approach, though they knew it was a gamble. "It was a horrible, horrible time," my mother recalled when we spoke about it recently. "I was so

scared. We thought we had lost you. We thought we would lose your respect forever. But we decided it was better than losing respect for ourselves."

For all the risks it entailed, my parents' resolute strategy—when combined with the principled response of a sensitive rabbi who crossed my path at a crucial moment—forced me to take Judaism seriously. Ultimately their passion won my grudging respect and provoked my intellectual curiosity.

Other children, in other situations, might react very differently; on the delicate issue of intermarriage it's impossible to recommend a single course of action. But my own experience powerfully suggests that the path of unbending resistance—so often derided as old-fashioned or destructive—should still be considered a viable alternative.

The second lesson suggested by the personal history I have here recounted concerns all those who, like me, are proud to have chosen a Jewish orientation more traditionally observant than the path followed by our parents. We *ba'alei t'shuva*, or "returnees," have not exactly distinguished ourselves with our humility, or our sense of gratitude to the generation that precedes us. In countless conversations, I have heard members of this "nouveau frum" crowd declare that "my parents observed *nothing*" or "my parents were real Jewish *goyim*" or "I had no Jewish background—my parents were Reform."

By minimizing our parents' commitment, we can give ourselves extra pats on the back for our novel and original discovery of the Torah. In many cases, however, such characterizations are unfair: our "non-religious" parents actually maintained an intense Jewish identity in their own terms. Hard statistics may be unavailable, but it's my strong impression that the parents of today's *ba'alei t'shuva*, taken as a group, are an unusually idealistic bunch, far more committed to Jewish survival than their neighbors.

In my own case, the debt to my parents is obvious. I can hardly claim that my attachment to Judaism is a miracle—or that I emerged full-blown

out of the void, wearing *tallis*, *tefillin* and blissful expression on my face. I am the product of parents who may not have been the world's greatest shul-goers, but whose profound connection to Jewishness determined the religious development of all four of their sons.

I suspect that most of today's returnees, after some honest reflection, would reach similar conclusions. Sorting through our memories we can find innumerable encounters that served to steer us subtly, even if at times unconsciously, in the direction of Jewish commitment. Expressing our gratitude for this legacy is not just a matter of honoring mother and father, or healing the generational breach at times created by our self-righteous certitude. It's also a means of reclaiming that sense of unbroken continuity that is, after all, the birthright of every Jew. ★

## JEWISH IDENTITY AND INTERMARRIAGE

BY DR. EGON MAYER

Mate selection patterns among American Jews since the end of the 1970's has revealed at least two important and unexpected developments. One is that the increase in the incidence of marriage between Jews and non-Jews has continued to rise inexorably since the mid-1960's, affecting virtually all segments of American Jewry, albeit unevenly. The other is that marriage between Jews and non-Jews has not been accompanied, in a simple straight-line fashion, by the uniform assimilation of the Jewish partner or his children into the larger, Christian and/or secular society.

These two trends, perhaps more than any others, have both challenged, at times frightened, and also heartened the organized Jewish community as well as individual Jewish families in their encounter with intermarriage. The challenge and the fear have stemmed from the concern that intermarriage would result in the assimilation of the individual Jewish intermarrier and his children, and thus, also result in the demographic erosion of the community. Experience with and research on intermarriage in the past decade have shown such assimilation not to be a universal and inescapable consequence of intermarriage. That has, indeed, been heartening.

At this juncture in the historical encounter between the requirements of the Jewish continuity and the free market of open mate selection (under the influence of romantic idealism and

individualism) we are, perhaps, in a better position than ten or twenty years ago to understand the complex relationship between Jewishness and intermarriage; between identity and family. Surely, it is our deepening understanding of this relationship that will help us grapple with the challenges that intermarriage will continue to pose for the Jewish future in the decades ahead.

Broadly speaking, the concept of identity denotes both an objective and a subjective dimension of the human persona. In general, psychologists tend to focus on the latter, while sociologists tend to focus on the former. In its objective sense, the concept is generally taken to refer to the social groups, ideals, and organizations with which a person links his sense of self. Thus, "Jewish identity" is often taken by sociologists to mean a person's linkage of his/her own sense of self with the Jewish peoplehood, Jewish institutions, Jewish ethnic and religious symbols, values, etc. In its subjective sense, the concept is generally taken to refer to the cognitive and affective organization of a person's sum of knowledge and feelings. Thus, to think of and feel one's self as a Jew is quite distinct from identifying with other Jews, the Jewish community, etc.

The subjective dimension of identity is clearly rooted in early childhood socialization, though it, like the objective dimension of identity, is sustained through life-long reinforcement. It is born of the primary relationships of childhood, and reinforced in the primary relationships of

adulthood. The extent to which one acquires a subjective sense of Jewishness is directly in proportion to the degree to which those primary relationships are saturated with Jewish cultural, religious, and symbolic substance. Unlike the objective dimension of identity, however, the subjective appears to be much more elusive, difficult to measure or predict, and also much more enduring.

Parenthetically, it must be noted that in order for Jews-by-Choice to acquire the subjective sense of Jewishness that Jews-by-Birth are heir to, they, too, must experience intense primary relationships (e.g. with spouse, in-laws, children, etc.) that are saturated with Jewish content. Naturally, they, just as born-Jews, acquire the objective dimension of Jewishness more easily through formal learning, affiliation, and group participation.

These two dimensions of the human persona also appear to stand in a curious, dialectic relationship, where intentional or unwitting attempts to change one, can evoke unanticipated change, repression and reaffirmation in the other.

The past decade of research on intermarriage and conversion suggests a number of insights into their relationship to both dimensions of Jewish identity.

1. Existing research tells much more about the objective than about the subjective dimension of Jewish identity.
2. The objective dimension of Jewish identity appears to be generally less well-developed in Jews who marry non-

Jews than in Jews who marry Jews.

3. Where the objective dimension of Jewish identity is well developed in Jews who marry non-Jews, it is much more likely that (a) the non-Jewish partner will convert to Judaism, either prior to or subsequent to marriage, and (b) the children will be raised as Jews.
4. Where the subjective dimension of Jewish identity is more well developed than the objective dimension, Jews in intermarriages often report the belief that intergenerational continuity can be assured even without the institutional supports that buttress the objective dimension of Jewish identity.
5. The subjective dimension of Jewish identity in intermarriers seems not to evoke enough cognitive dissonance so as to prevent their intermarriage.
6. The belief on the part of intermarrying Jews in the easy transmissibility of the subjective dimension of Jewish identity makes it more difficult for extended Jewish family and the Jewish community to help mixed married families develop the objective dimension of Jewish identity in themselves and their children.
7. Efforts at reaching out to the non-Jewish partners of Jewish intermarriers has generally not taken into account the particular objective/subjective dialectic in the identity of the born-Jewish partner, and how that might impact on his or her spouse's response to

Judaism.

8. Efforts at outreach to the non-Jewish partners of Jewish intermarriers (even where they've been successful) have been geared largely to the development of the objective dimension of Jewish identity.
9. Jews-by-Choice all too often find themselves married to Jews-by-birth whose subjective sense of Jewishness is far more strongly developed than their objective Jewishness. Yet, the conversion process by which non-Jews become Jews tends to be much more oriented to the development of the objective dimension of Jewishness. Consequently, Jews-by-Choice frequently find themselves in tension with their born-Jewish family over their understanding of what it means to be Jewish.
10. Given the break-up of geographically based Jewish communities, which made possible the daily experience of the subjective dimension of one's Jewishness through informal social networks, the routine experience of Jewishness has come to be heavily skewed toward its most objective dimensions. Yet, for the vast majority of born-Jews there persists a deep residue of subjective Jewishness.

The great challenge that lies ahead for Jews, as individuals, as well as for the organized Jewish community is how to expand the opportunities for enhancing both the objective and the subjective dimensions of Jewishness, and how to create media

and milieux within which both Jews-by-birth and Jews-by-Choice could better integrate these dimensions.

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# INTERMARRIAGE: FOR JEWISH PARENTS

*The following paper was especially prepared for the Commission's Research Committee by Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, the distinguished Editor of the Reconstructionist Magazine.*

## AMERICAN ARCHIVES

### A GROWING CONCERN

If you are at all typical of American Jewish parents, you are worried lest your son or daughter marry outside the faith. Whether you are deeply committed to Jewish survival, or merely concerned with the happiness of your children, you are aware of the fact that the statistics indicate a growing percentage of intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews; and since the chances of a Jewish person carrying a non-Jew are clearly greater than ever before, you undoubtedly give a good deal of thought to the question. This must be especially true of you if your child has gone off to college out of town (or even in town), for you know that their social contacts with non-Jews are frequent, and they occur in an atmosphere of intellectual and cultural exploration. College age is the time when young people are frequently in a state of rebellion against their parents and home influence; and this encourages them to seek out companionship among those who represent new and unfamiliar backgrounds.

Young people are equally aware of the new trends; yet they seem to be less concerned about intermarriage. They frequently point to individual instances in which intermarriages have led to happy lives. And if one calls attention to the fact that such marriages most often (the estimate is 70%) lead to assimilation and estrangement from the Jewish tradition, the answer is usually a cause of

dismay to those who care about whether Judaism survives or not. Apparently, most young people today do not seem to be distressed by the thought that a four thousand year old tradition is in danger of disintegration.

They seem to be more interested in their personal happiness than they are in the future of the Jewish people. And if one quotes to them the high percentage of cases in which intermarriages have been unsuccessful, they frequently argue that statistics do not apply to individual situations; it won't "happen" to them. Besides, they would declare, the reason intermarriages are fraught with difficulties is that the older people (yourselves, for example) are still prejudiced against persons of differing nationality, race or religion. If it were not for the social pressures which intermarriages have to contend with, many more of them would succeed. For them, therefore, intermarrying becomes an opportunity to strike a blow for human brotherhood, equality and freedom. How else, they contend, will humanity attain to unity if people of differing faiths and backgrounds refuse to marry one another?

### WHY THIS IS ADDRESSED TO PARENTS

That is why this essay is addressed to Jewish parents. You must be prepared to understand your own reluctance to condone (certainly to encourage) mixed marriages. You must be made to realize

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that intermarriage is not the only way to achieve brotherhood among men. As one distinguished Negro is said to have remarked to a white man, "I don't want to be your brother-in-law. I want to be your brother." Brotherhood is the spirit in which people treat one another, the ethical level of their relationship. It is an ideal of equality and the other, mutual recognition of dignity. It is not dependent upon establishing family relationship. Indeed, all groups have a tendency to marry within their respective groups. They find themselves more at ease with members of their own race, or religion or nationality. Even if all barriers were removed, the vast majority of people would freely choose as their mates members of their own social groups.

You should therefore not feel guilty — or allow your children to make you feel guilty — for advocating intramarriage for your children. You will in no way be impeding the progress of mankind. But, on the other hand, you must recognize the fact that rational argument with young adults on matters of this sort is not likely to be of any avail if these young people have not been brought up by you to feel the tug of attraction to their own people, and to the Jewish way of life. For this reason, it is important to divide the remainder of this essay into separate sections, each one devoted to a discussion of what needs to be done, and what attitudes need to be adopted, as they are growing up. Unfortunately, too often parents begin the Jewish upbringing of their children in a serious way only when the prospects of intermarriage threatens.

We shall address ourselves to the parents of five different age groups: the very young children, the teen-agers, the young people who are beginning to go out with non-Jewish "dates," the young people who have begun to be serious about the possibility of marrying a non-Jew, and finally the young people who have decided to go ahead and marry outside the faith. Each of these categories requires a different approach; we must confess that they represent a sequence of diminishing possibilities of success. That is to say, the influence of parents on children declines as the children grow. This is, of course, natural, and in most instances desirable. What is important in this context is that parents must begin to think about the problem of intermarriage when the children are still very young. The roots of Jewish consciousness and Jewish loyalty can never be too deep.

#### FOR THE PARENTS OF THE VERY YOUNG

If one were to ask, what is the major objective in the Jewish upbringing of children, we would say: cultivating nostalgias. It is quite apparent that the truly significant elements of Judaism as

a religion and as a culture cannot be transmitted to the very young. They have no capacity — ordinarily — to grasp the profound religious and ethical implications of the Jewish tradition. The major task, therefore, should be to create the kind of atmosphere of childhood which the growing boy or girl, and later the mature young man or woman will look back upon with genuine pleasure. Jewish living must be remembered in the years that follow with joy. It must be associated with Sabbaths and festivals that appealed to the child. This means associations with sounds, sights and tastes that spell fun, and security.

Judaism should be recalled as the reasons for getting the family together, for singing and eating and drinking and playing. These produce what might be called the "visceral" experiences, those which appeal not so much to the mind, the intellect, the reason — as to the psyche, the deep unconscious needs which are so often difficult for the individual to verbalize, and are virtually impossible for the child to articulate. These experiences, however, penetrate to the very essence of the child's personality, and account, in many instances, for the difference between a later attraction to Judaism and a rejection of it. Psychologists tell us that much of what goes for "atheism" or "agnosticism" is merely a rationalization of deep-seated antagonism to Jewish experiences associated with childhood.

This does not mean, of course, that a Jewish childhood must be a continuous holiday or party. Growing up involves discipline and study, and these are not always easy. But even these experiences must be associated in the mind of the child with love and kindness, with consistent rules and regulations, with fairness and honesty in the relations between parents and children. Rabbis and teachers, we should add, are in the same general category as the parents, symbols of authority, which the children need and want but which must at the same time be symbols of compassion and warmth. Providing attractive books, records and pictures is essential but not sufficient; the child must be surrounded by human beings who love and are worthy of love in return. What we generally call a "Jewish education" is not enough. It is not enough for parents to turn their children over to the nearest, or cheapest, or least demanding religious school and expect that they will be made into Jews. If the teachers are not sympathetic and intelligent, if the rabbi is not of the highest calibre, if the other children are not truly motivated, the "education" fails. But most important, if the parents convey — even without words — the impression that they really do not care too much about Judaism, if they intimate that they are doing what they are doing simply because it is "expected" or is the

thing "to be done," you may be sure that the children's souls will "register" these impressions; and these impressions may be decisive in the years to come.

To be somewhat more specific: if the parents insist upon certain ritual observances and do not carry out those observances in their own lives; if they preach the importance of study, but are never themselves seen reading a Jewish book; if they stress the value of going to the synagogue or temple, but themselves attend only twice a year — they are planting the seeds of future cynicism.

If the children ask questions about religion, God, the Torah, the Jewish people, or any related subjects, and are not given honest answers — that is, answers which they do not truly believe in — then they are laying the groundwork for future revolt. For children are far more perceptive than we usually give them credit for. They can detect hypocrisy long before they know the word.

It is not an exaggeration to say that antidotes to intermarriage must be applied even in the very earliest years of the child's life, at two and three. For it is then that he becomes aware of the joys of the Shabbat candles, and the kiddush and the hallah. It is then that he comes to associate Jewish events with the encompassing love of parents and family. And in the years between babyhood and adolescence, the fundamental attitudes are shaped.

#### FOR THE PARENTS OF TEENAGERS

If your children have been blessed with the sort of upbringing described above, it is likely that they will have developed a sense of identification with you and through you with the Jewish people, which will motivate them to continue their studies into their adolescent years. During this period they will truly begin to appreciate the treasures of Jewish thought, ethics, literature and custom. Provided, of course, that they are exposed to the right kind of teachers, and provided too that you maintain your concern for their Jewish studies — thus helping them to resist the distractions which they are bound to experience from their peers, who very likely will be drifting toward indifference — then your instructions to your children to restrict their dating to Jewish companions will not seem to them either prejudiced or too limiting.

A word here needs to be inserted about the whole question of dating. During the pre-adolescent years, when sex and marriage are still remote from the immediate interests of the child, there need be no restrictions at all to the companionships developed — except, of course, that the companions be decent, clean and law abiding. But during the years of puberty, "dating" begins. Parents should

not object to social intercourse with non-Jewish boys and girls, provided it takes place in groups. Couple dating, in our culture, begins quite early — and not always to the advantage of the children themselves. But we cannot hope to swim entirely against the tide; therefore, if couple dating cannot be further postponed, it should be restricted to Jewish partners. For couple dating, especially in the middle adolescent years, is the prelude to courtship; and if the parental objection to intermarriage is to be asserted strongly and effectively, it must be asserted then. Naturally, objections will be raised. Impetuous young people will at this point put up the strongest opposition; and it is precisely at this point that the parents must be firm. (Much of the problem of intermarriage — among other issues — grows out of the weariness of parents. If they grow tired too soon, they may spend many years regretting the fact.)

If, on the other hand, your children have not had the privilege of receiving the sort of education which we have outlined, then your problem is likely to be a more difficult one. Your adolescent children will not understand the reason for your "sudden" preoccupation with the future of Judaism. They will not understand why you should now start to make distinctions between Jews and non-Jews with respect to their differing ways of life or thought.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulty, adolescence presents parents with a "second chance." Intensive efforts must be made to compensate for the neglect or the failures of pre-adolescent training. (Incidentally, we must be prepared to take advantage of this second chance even if strenuous efforts were exerted in the early years, and the training did not for some reason "take.") This is the time to give your boys and girls every opportunity to see Judaism in action on the highest level.

This means a trip to Israel for a summer — or for at least a few weeks, with a group, under expert supervision. It means summer camps where the Jewish ingredient is stressed in an intelligent manner. It means seeing to it that the family watch TV programs of high calibre which exposit the ideals of Jewish religion, or dramatize Jewish historic events in a thrilling way. It means bringing books into the home — and reading them along with the children — which portray Jewish history or personalities inspiringly. It means conducting discussions at home on topics of vital Jewish concern. It means giving of oneself intelligently to some phase of Jewish communal responsibility; teaching by example the mitzvah of tzedakah. It means encouraging the children to take courses in high school — if they are available — in Hebrew; or extra-curricular courses in Judaism at the local synagogue or temple or community center. It means

taking them with you when you go to hear a lecture by some outstanding Jewish personality.

In brief, these are the years when the adolescents must be exposed to any and all Jewish influences. We must bear in mind that it is during this period that their minds begin to awaken to the culture about them. In high school they are now reading books of merit, on a mature level. They are learning history, the history of other nations, in which the Jews are rarely if ever involved.

General education has a tendency to impress young people with the small size and the allegedly small influence of Jews upon the civilization of the west. The non-Jewish curriculum does not give sufficient credit to the Jews; nor does it place Jews in a favorable light. Adolescents are strongly influenced by this kind of general education and their childhood notions of the centrality of the Jews in the world (at least in their world) are rudely shattered. Hence the prime importance of counteracting these impressions by demonstrating to them that, throughout the history of western culture, Jews and Judaism have played a vital role. If they are called upon later to make a painful decision regarding intermarriage, this knowledge may become one of the factors in the decision.

However, we cannot stress too strongly that all the external influences that may be brought to bear upon the adolescent are of little avail if the relations with their parents are not satisfactory. This does not mean that we expect smooth sailing all the time. That is beyond the realm of possibility, since adolescence is the classical age for rebellion. Young people then want to start thinking of themselves as grown up, as no longer requiring the guidance of their elders. They are beginning to feel the thrill of independence. Often they insist upon taking jobs — no matter how poorly paid — so that they can experience the satisfaction of earning their allowances.

When we speak of good relations we mean maintaining friendly channels of communication between parents and children. This sounds easier than it is — for adolescence is often the time when children stop telling their parents "everything," just as it is the time when children stop listening to everything their parents are likely to say. Parents should expect challenge — and not seek to suppress it, nor should they ridicule these immature efforts to sound grown up. And no matter how hard it may be, parents should not panic when some of the fundamentals of Judaism are questioned — even the value of Judaism and the need for its survival.

This is the time when young people go through their atheistic period. (Indeed, one distinguished Jewish philosopher has said that no man worth his salt has not been an atheist at one time or an-

other.) Parents should not resort to condemnation, nor disapproval of any kind; they should take the questions seriously and discuss them with their children.

Second, they should keep in mind — and convey to the youngster — that "atheism" is a philosophical problem which many people, Jews and non-Jews, have grappled with, and that it does not necessarily imply the need for, or a justification for, dissociating oneself from the Jewish people. One may change one's views without finding it necessary to change one's affiliation. Too often, young people associate Judaism solely with certain theological positions, when as a matter of fact it is a complex of culture, custom, language, literature, history, a system of values and religion. A complete Jew makes religion the focus of his Judaism; but if, for a longer or shorter period of his life, he is assailed by doubts about the presence of Divinity in the cosmos, he does not cease to be — nor should he cease to be — a Jew. For as long as he remains a Jew, he may at least be sure that he will not embrace an idolatrous religion.

If parents too have their doubts and questions they should candidly admit to them, and not try to pretend that their faith has been constant and unwavering. If resort to books or a rabbi will be of help, nothing would please the youngster more than to appeal jointly to these authorities.

For the adolescent is now in the stage where he no longer really believes that his parents are all-knowing and all-powerful. It is therefore best for the parents to concede openly that they too are still seeking — if they are — and that questions of religious faith sometimes takes a lifetime to resolve, and sometimes are never completely resolved.

But do not treat all such challenges with equal seriousness. Sometimes children express their rebellion against some form of parental authority in an oblique way. They do not come right out and say what is on their minds; perhaps sometimes they themselves are not entirely aware of what it is that troubles them. But in desperation they are likely to attack their parents in their parents' most vulnerable spot — Judaism; and they will vent their spleen on that. Frequently, the very sancta which children hold up to ridicule or contempt at home, they will defend staunchly away from home, to their friends or their teachers. Hot discussions at home are likely to be mere rehearsals for them of parallel "bull sessions" among their peers.

These are indeed the crucial years too, though they are different in character from the first period. In early childhood, verbalization counts the least. Then clear demonstrations of love are needed; and appeals to the senses: taste, smell, sound, sight . . . In the second stage, ideals and values must

be put into the setting of words. Adolescents are endless talkers; and seemingly endless arguers. For this parents must be ready, equipped with the proper attitudes and information. They must keep open the channels of communication, so that all questions may be thoroughly explored together. (At least, almost all — for children never tell all.) And most important, parents must not get tired.

#### WHEN THE SON OR DAUGHTER BEGINS TO "DATE" A NON-JEW

Parents set limits and hope that their children will live within them. This applies to their sex behavior, their drinking, their smoking, their spending habits — as well as to dating of non-Jewish boys or girls. What we have said about the urge to test themselves and their parents through verbal debate will now take the form of direct action. If they permit their parents to know just what they are doing, it is because they want to ascertain how far they can go, whether the limits set for them by their parents are truly fixed. Thus, going out with a non-Jew, more or less regularly, and letting the parents know that this is happening, may be their way of asking whether the parents actually have meant what they have always said about opposing intermarriage. (If the young person does not inform his parents of his frequent dating of a non-Jew, it is because he already knows the answer, and probably intends to ignore his parents' wishes. At best, he is testing himself — hoping to clarify his own feelings, without involving his parents — who, he assumes, will certainly take violent exception to his behavior.)

Parents should understand that young people frequently become infatuated with members of the opposite sex; and that these infatuations do not last. It is impossible to advise, in a generalized way, how to act in these situations. The discerning parents have to decide for themselves whether this falling in love is to be taken seriously or not. To be perfectly safe — as safe as one can be in these circumstances — the parents should express their feelings honestly — but in such a manner as not to arouse strong counter-resistance. Here too a good deal will depend upon the relations that have been built up between the parents and their children. Too great stress cannot be laid upon the vital importance of those relations.

Before long, if all goes well, the young person will have had his fill of the testing. He will know to what extent it is true that mixed couples find certain areas of conversation awkward, if not entirely taboo. They will have ascertained just how much at home, or ill at ease, they are in the company of someone of another faith with whom they are trying to enter upon an intimate relationship designed to blossom out to more than mere friend-

ship. They will have come to see to what extent they share the same system of values, the same interests and opinions regarding fundamental aspects of life — religion, family, money, social responsibility, etc.

One of two things will then happen: either the "infatuation" will wear off and the crisis will pass — perhaps not to be repeated — or the young people may discover that, despite their differing backgrounds, they are compatible. They may then confront their respective parents with the decision to proceed and get married.

#### WHEN THE JEWISH PERSON DECIDES TO MARRY A NON-JEW

What should the parents do then? We now come to the most painful, and of course the central issue of our time, in respect to intermarriages. If parents have done all that they could, in bringing up their child, to inculcate love and loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish people, if they have maintained a wholesome relation with their child, if they have demonstrated by their own example their sincere concern for the perpetuation of the Jewish tradition — and then, despite it all, their child chooses a non-Jewish partner for life, parents must first solemnly investigate, so far as it is possible, whether the decision which their child has taken is a mature decision, or whether it represents an immature gesture on his or her part.

By a mature decision is meant one which has grown out of careful and deliberate evaluation of all the problems involved in an intermarriage; one which represents neither a rebellion against parents, nor a misguided notion concerning the global significance of the marriage (e.g., its contribution to the solution of inter-faith or inter-racial questions); one which grows out of a clear recognition that their common interests and values are powerful enough to transcend the obstacles to happiness which generally stand in the way of such unions.

By an immature decision, we mean, of course, the absence of these considerations.

If the decision of the couple seems to the parents — and to those trained and concerned persons, like the doctor, the psychologist, the parents of the non-Jewish party — to be an immature one, it should be strenuously opposed — not only on the ground that it involves an intermarriage, but on the broader grounds that immature decisions of this nature are bound to lead to intense personal unhappiness. You may be sure that the young couple will assume that the objections are confined to the fact that they are contemplating an intermarriage, but parents should not be deterred from seeking to prevent the marriage. In this effort they will be supported by the most liberal persons.

On the other hand, if the two young people really

know what they are doing, and are acting responsibly, on a mature level, the parents must then exert every possible effort to react in a mature manner. This is more easily said than done; but it is necessary here to describe exactly what a mature reaction means. It means, first, being concerned for the happiness of the young couple — and not for the opinions of neighbors, relatives or business associates. Questions of social status should not enter into the consideration of this problem. What so-and-so will say about the marriage should be of little moment.

We say this because experience has again and again revealed that parents frequently recoil at the thought of having to tell other parents — whose children have married Jews in the approved manner — that they have "failed" in the upbringing of their children. They are "ashamed" of their neighbors.

Acting maturely means not using the power of money to set up obstacles to the marriage. Withholding financial support is punitive and vindictive; it is not constructive. Acting maturely means not allowing oneself to become emotionally or physically ill — to "punish" the children for what they are doing. Acting maturely means resisting the temptation to treat them like strangers, with whom one will have nothing to do. Your child is still your child, and as parents your love for them must be unconditional. This is what distinguishes parental love from all others. It is not to be proffered on condition that children make their parents happy; and withheld if children cause their parents heartache. You have brought them up. They are what they are to the greatest extent because of what you are. They cannot be repudiated at will.

Constructively, the parents of the Jewish partner should propose conversion to Judaism by the non-Jewish partner. Quite often, the Jewish boy or girl wants the non-Jew to convert, but hesitates to ask out of some vague notion that it is unfair to make this demand. The fact is, however, that a wholesome marriage — and family — requires that both husband and wife share the same attachment and loyalty to a community. In an intermarriage one of the partners has to surrender his or her former association. It is not more unfair for A to ask B to convert than for B to ask A to convert. And if the young person is reluctant to suggest conversion the parents can properly propose it themselves.

Naturally, it is better for the Jewish partner to urge the conversion. But if it becomes the job of the parents, care must be taken to raise the subject with sincerity, and wholeheartedly. We say this because, here too, experience shows that Jewish parents sometimes hold the unfortunate position that "once a Gentile, always a Gentile." As a result, they scorn the conversion as a device to "get

around" the problem of intermarriage. Such an attitude is totally alien to the spirit and the letter of Jewish tradition. In historic Judaism, one who accepts the Jewish faith and fate is to be regarded as, in every sense of the term, a full-fledged and complete Jew. The proselyte adopts Abraham the Patriarch as his or her ancestor, and symbolically becomes a true descendant of the founders of the Jewish people. Thereafter no distinction is permitted in one's attitude or behavior toward the convert. Indeed, the Rabbis of old forbade Jews even to refer to the Gentile ancestry of a proselyte; they regarded this as a form of "verbal oppression."

Second-class citizenship is not tolerated among our people. Racialism, from which we have suffered for centuries, must not be allowed to degrade the status of a non-Jew who has joined the Jewish people. Mature Jewish parents, if they wish to retain the love and loyalty of their children, and to gain the respect of their son-in-law or daughter-in-law of non-Jewish origin, must therefore in all sincerity and honesty consider the possibility of conversion as a desirable and wholly acceptable procedure.

This can lead to some embarrassment if parents, who have not been particularly concerned about the Jewish education of their children, are confronted with the challenge — both by their child and "candidate" for conversion — that they, the parents, have not theretofore displayed the proper interest in Judaism and therefore their insistence upon conversion is not entirely defensible. In such instances, the parents must, humbly and contritely, confess that they have been remiss in their Jewish duties, and that they desire their children to live a Jewish life. No other approach, we believe, will impress the young people. Blind objection to a match on the basis of anti-Gentile prejudice will not be accepted graciously by the young couple — nor should it.

#### IF THEY MARRY WITHOUT CONVERSION

We must now turn, with some regret, to the possibility that the young couple decide to go ahead with the marriage, without the prior conversion of the non-Jewish party. What can one say to parents when such a sad eventuality occurs? The grief that attends such an event cannot be adequately understood by anyone who has not himself or herself experienced it. Therefore, the following may sound hollow and gratuitous. But we believe that it may contain some elements of constructive advice.

You must not regard even this rejection of parental influence, and defiance of parental wishes, as final. Those who have observed a full generation of young people possess evidence to the effect that attitudes do change — especially when the

young couple begin to have children. For much of what we have written here remains academic and remote to most young Jews. The realities of family life may be observed in others; or read about in books. But when they themselves begin to live realities, changes occur in their outlook.

We have known of couples — intermarried — who decided at the beginning that each would retain membership in his and her religious group; and the children would be given the "choice" (as they put it) when they have grown to the age when they are in a position to make their own decisions. In several such instances, after the first child was born — and sometimes, a few months before the first child was expected — the non-Jewish party voluntarily came forward and proposed that she (most frequently the pregnant wife) study and prepare for conversion so that the child might be born of a Jewish mother.

This "happy ending," however, most often occurred when good relations were preserved between the Jewish parents and the couple. Despite heart-break and sorrow, outward manifestations of goodwill and cordiality were maintained. And so long as the parents were on cordial speaking terms with the couple, the chances of a postponed conversion were kept alive.

But even more is required: The Jewish parents must continue to reflect in their own lives the religious and ethical values which they contend they wish to see preserved in their children and grandchildren. They must carry out their Jewish communal responsibilities. They must observe Sabbaths and Holidays. They must keep alive their interest in Jewish cultural life. In other words, they must convey to the young couple that their concern for Jewish creative survival was not "put on" merely to impress their children; but that they cherish a true love for Judaism — a love which they would have preferred to transmit to their own children, but which, failing that, they are determined to make available to the children and grandchildren of their community — because they believe in the intrinsic value of the Jewish way of life.

There is no guarantee that the example of the parents will persuade the couple. Nor is there any absolute assurance that the realities of parenthood will have the same effect. But certainly, to lose

hope, to develop a cynical and bitter attitude and to lose the love and respect of the children are greater evils.

#### IN CONCLUSION

All that has been written here may seem to offer no solution to the problem of intermarriage. It should be obvious that there is no "solution." There are only approximate solutions, and some (hopefully) preventives and some ways of reacting that are better than others. We Jews entered the 20th century, in the free nations (especially our town) in an atmosphere of desegregation. We left the "ghettos" and became part of the very fabric of the general world. Inevitably, with Jews participating in the economic, political and cultural life of the nation, Jews and non-Jews were going to meet, and fraternize (would we have wanted it otherwise?) — fall in love and want to marry.

The non-Jews whom we meet on life's way are often excellent human beings, educated, tolerant, interesting, attractive. They represent a culture which we can respect. Those of our parents and grandparents who came from the old country were surrounded by cultures which they did not respect, on the whole, for them remaining within the fold was not quite the problem it is for our children.

For these reasons, we must think about the problem of intermarriage even when the children are very young. This is the major burden of this essay. It is never too soon to start training them in the way that we would have them go. We must plant within their souls deep roots of love for everything Jewish; and we cannot do that unless that love is implanted within our own souls.

Over and beyond all else, we must love our children. This may seem superfluous advice to give to Jewish parents. But it really is not superfluous — if by love is meant genuine solicitude for their welfare and happiness. Love does not consist in giving them things, in indulging their every whim. It does consist in so acting that the best in us is made available to them. We can only hope that this will elicit the best in them.

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**RABBI JACK SIMCHA COHEN** -- Jack Simcha Cohen is presently Rabbi at Congregation Shaarei Tefila Los Angeles, California. Previously, he was the Executive Director of the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, and teaching professor at St. Peter's College and Touro College. He is the author of four books, The Jewish Heart, The 613th Commandment, Halachic Questions: Responsa on Contemporary Issues and Intermarriage and Conversion: A Halachic Solution. He also writes a column entitled "Halachic Questions," for The Jewish Press. Rabbi Cohen is former President of the Queens Jewish Center and current Vice President of the Rabbinic Council of Southern California. He is the National Co-Chairman of the Orthodox Round Table and President of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California. Rabbi Cohen received his B.A. from Brooklyn College and his M.A. from New York University.

**RABBI LAVEY DERBY** -- Lavey Derby, Director of Program Development at CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, is a graduate of Columbia University and received his Master's degree in Jewish Studies and rabbinical ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Concurrent with his rabbinical studies he attended the Alfred Adler Institute of New York, receiving certification as a psychotherapist. Previously, he was Director of Jewish Education at the 92nd Street YM/YWHA in New York. Lavey Derby is a recognized authority on adult Jewish education, and consults frequently with synagogues, community centers, universities and national Jewish organizations on that topic.

**MS. ELLYN GELLER** -- Ellyn Geller is presently Director of Outreach and Introduction to Judaism for New York Federation of Reform Synagogues. Previously, she was Director of the Shaker Heights Community Development Foundation of Cleveland, where she worked to stabilize and integrate various ethnic groups into the community. Ms. Geller received her B.A. from the University of Colorado. She is currently a member of the UJA Federation Task Force on Mixed Marriage. She has been with UAHC-Kutz Camp for 17 years, where she teaches a course for Jewish teenagers entitled, But Mom We're Only Dating, which explores Jewish identity and the implications of dating and intermarriage. Ms. Geller is a resident of Woodmere, New York where she lives with her husband, Rabbi Stuart Geller and her three children.

**MS. LYDIA KUKOFF** -- Lydia Kukoff is Director of the UAHC-CCAR Joint Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach. She conducts workshops and seminars throughout North America and lectures extensively to both lay and professional groups. As director, she works with interfaith couples, their parents and their children. Ms. Kukoff also supervises the new UAHC-CCAR Task Force on the Unaffiliated. Ms. Kukoff has co-authored an Introduction to Judaism curriculum and the new Every Person's Guide to Judaism. Her book, Choosing Judaism, appeared on the B'nai Brith "Jewish Best Sellers" list for eight consecutive months. She has a B.A. in English from Beaver College, and an M.A. in Judaic Studies from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles.

**RABBI IRWIN KULA** -- Irwin Kula is director of the Am Echad program at CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. After serving for six years as a spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Amoona in St. Louis, MO., he was named the first scholar in the Wexner Heritage Foundation's Faculty Development Program. He serves on the Executive Committees of both the Rabbinic Cabinet of UJA and the National Urban League. Among his academic degrees are a B.A. from Columbia and ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary; he is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at JTS.

**RABBI DANIEL LANDES** -- Daniel Landes is Director of National Educational Projects for the Simon Wiesenthal Center and holds the Frederik and Yolante Toeters van Lennep Chair in Jewish Ethics and Values at Yeshiva University of Los Angeles. In the latter capacity, he originated and conducts classes at the Rand Institute (major strategic - health policy think tank); the Jet Propulsion Lab; the Jewish faculty seminar at the University of Southern California; and for legal, medical and entertainment professionals. He is an active writer and editor on ethical issues. He earned his M.A. at the Bernard Revel Graduate School and his ordination from the Rabbinic Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.

**DR. EGON MAYER** -- Egon Mayer is Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies of the Graduate School of the City University of New York. Dr. Mayer is author of numerous articles and research reports, and serves as consultant to several national and local Jewish organizations. He has directed major studies on Jewish intermarriage on behalf of The American Jewish Committee. His widely acclaimed book on intermarriage, Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians, was published in 1985. Dr. Mayer is also author of a book on the Orthodox and Hassidic communities of Boro Park, called, From Suburb to Shtetl. Dr. Mayer has written and lectured extensively throughout the Jewish community on various aspects of its social life, the family, the changing nature of Jewish identity, and the challenges of intermarriage. Born in Switzerland and raised in Budapest, Hungary, Egon Mayer emigrated with his family to the United States during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. He received his B.A. from Brooklyn College; his M.A. from the New School for Social Research, and his Ph.D. from Rutgers University.

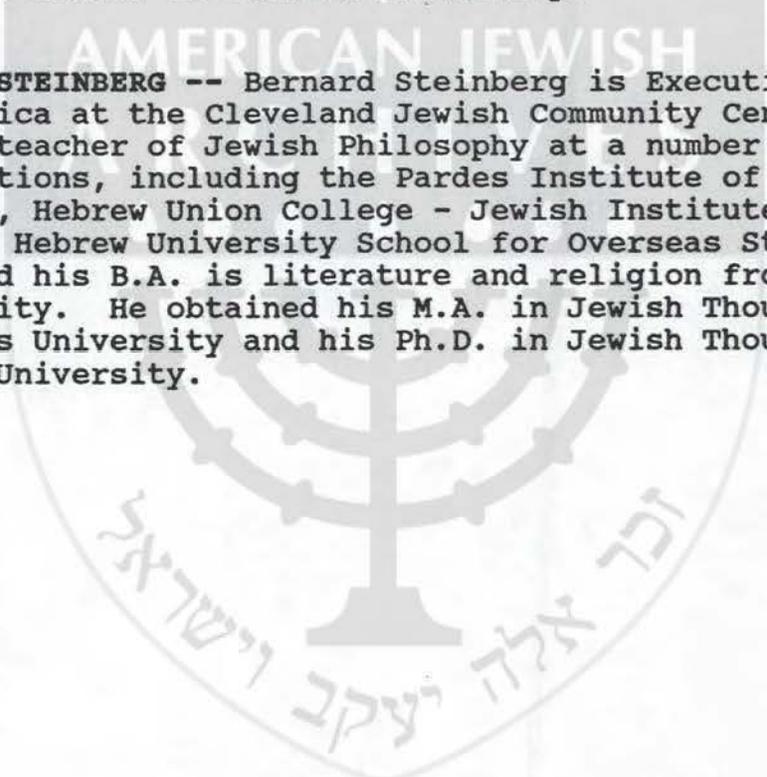
**RABBI DAVID NELSON** -- David Nelson is Senior Teaching Fellow at CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. Rabbi Nelson served for five years as a congregation rabbi in Garden City, New York. He has taught Hebrew, Bible and Judaic Studies at Adelphi University, New York University and Hebrew Union College. Through his involvement with the Reform movement in Israel, he has served as rabbi and teacher on the movement's Kibbutzim, and has led numerous summer study tours for American teens. Since joining the staff of CLAL, he has lectured and taught extensively throughout the United States. He received his B.A. in Psychology from Wesleyan University, and his M.H.L. and Rabbinic Ordination from Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. He is currently completing a doctorate in Rabbinic Literature at New York University.

**MS. ESTHER PEREL** -- Esther Perel, M.A. is a couples and family therapist in New York, who for the past several years has worked extensively on the topic of ethnic, racial and religious intermarriage. She is a training and program consultant with the Interfaith Couples Program at the 92nd Street YMHA. She lectures and conducts training for professionals on the psychology of group identity and intergroup relations. Ms. Perel has led numerous workshops in Europe, Israel and the United States. She recently completed a film documenting her work entitled "Minority on Minority: The Psychodynamics of Black-Jewish Relations." Originally from Belgium, Ms. Perel received degrees from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and from Lesley College in Cambridge, Mass. She consults for a number of organizations including the Center on Ethnicity, Behavior and Communication of the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services.

**DR. CHARLES RAFFEL** -- Chuck Raffel is currently a faculty development intern at The Wexner Heritage Foundation and CLAL The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. Dr. Raffel has held the Erna and Jacob Michael Chair in Jewish Philosophy at Yeshiva University and has published essays and reviews in the fields of ethics and Jewish philosophy. He received his B.A. from Wesleyan University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Brandeis. For the past two years, he has worked at the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center in the American Jewish Committees department of Jewish Communal Affairs, where he was engaged in public policy analysis and coordinating publications which explore the relationships between ethical values and contemporary Jewish life.

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN** -- Sholom Riskin is Dean of the Ohr Torah Institutions in Efrat and Jerusalem. He is the founder of the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City, with nearly 3,000 members today and 1,200 regular Sabbath worshippers. Rabbi Riskin also founded the urban community of Efrat, a new city 8 miles south of Jerusalem which surrounds a core of educational and religious institutions. He has written many scholarly journals and magazines in America and Israel and has published A Commentary on the Passover Haggadah and Women and Jewish Divorce: The Rebellious Wife, the Agunah and the Right of Women to Initiate Divorce in Jewish Law, a Halakhic Solution. He received his B.A. from New York's Yeshiva University and his Master's Degree from the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University.

**DR. BERNARD STEINBERG** -- Bernard Steinberg is Executive Director of Judaica at the Cleveland Jewish Community Center. He has been a teacher of Jewish Philosophy at a number of institutions, including the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion and the Hebrew University School for Overseas Students. He received his B.A. in literature and religion from Wesleyan University. He obtained his M.A. in Jewish Thought from Brandeis University and his Ph.D. in Jewish Thought from the Hebrew University.



## THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF

**RABBI HERBERT FRIEDMAN** -- Herbert Friedman is President of the Wexner Heritage Foundation. During World War II, he served as a U.S. Army Chaplain in Germany and spearheaded efforts to help Jewish survivors of the Nazi death camps. During that period, he was secretly recruited into the Haganah and worked in the illegal immigration operation called "Aliyah Bet." For two decades Rabbi Friedman served as the executive chairman of the national United Jewish Appeal. During his long service there, he pioneered many of the methods and ideas now in general use in fund-raising throughout the world; he created both the Young Leadership Cabinet and the Israel Education Fund. He and his family lived in Israel for 14 years beginning in 1971. He returned to the U.S., serving as President of American Friends of Tel Aviv University. Rabbi Friedman holds degrees from Yale and the Jewish Institute of Religion.

**RABBI NATHAN LAUFER, ESQ.** -- Nathan Laufer is Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Wexner Heritage Foundation. Prior to assuming his position at the Foundation, he directed legal and community affairs for the Coalition to Free Soviet Jews and coordinated East Coast educational activities for the Simon Wiesenthal Center for several years. He also served as spiritual leader of Congregation Ahavath Achim in Belleville, New Jersey. He is a graduate of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and the Fordham University Law School.

**RABBI RAMIE ARIAN** -- Ramie Arian joined the staff of The Wexner Heritage Foundation in November, 1989, as Associate Director of Programs. Previously, he served for fifteen years on the professional staff of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Youth Division. Most recently, he served since 1981 as national director of NFTY, (the North American Federation of Temple Youth), and since 1984 as Staff Director of the UAHC's Task Force on Youth Suicide. He holds degrees from Brown University and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

**LORI BARON** -- Lori Baron is Conference Manager at The Wexner Heritage Foundation. Prior to joining the staff in August, 1989, she served as Assistant Director of the Young Leadership Cabinet of the United Jewish Appeal. Her professional experience at UJA also includes 4 years in both the Conference and Public Relations departments. She holds a B.A. in English and Psychology.