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Letters to the Editor

*Jewish Converts Should Be Cherished*

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The statement that "Reform Jews now recognize as Jews the children of Jewish fathers married to gentiles" is only partially correct. Children of non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish fathers are not automatically recognized as Jews within Reform Judaism. They must be raised as Jews with attendant religious training such as bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah and participation in other rites of passage.

What may not have been apparent from the article is how the Reform movement is addressing intermarriage through its "Outreach" program, based on the principle, "We reject intermarriage—but not the intermarried." It is an effort to welcome intermarried families into the synagogue. We offer their children religious training and provide ways for non-Jewish spouses to take part in the life of the congregation and create a Jewish atmosphere in the home. Conversion is of course welcomed, and "Introduction to Judaism courses" are given in scores of synagogues.

Like it or not, intermarriage is a fact of

life. Efforts to proscribe intermarriage along the lines followed by Rabbi Moline have not worked. As you observed, Jewish identity on the North American continent is no longer externally imposed by the larger society. Judaism today must be actively chosen, not only by converts—Jews by choice—but also by Jews by birth, who must discover and develop new ties that bind them to the faith of their ancestors.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER  
President  
Union of American Hebrew  
Congregations

New York



5 Herrick Place  
Durham, NC 27707  
December 2, 1992

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Thank you so much for your kind response to my letter concerning Christmas. I confess, I trembled when the letter arrived and had to wait before reading it, the fear of censure was so strong. (Confronting authority always frightens me.)

I write again because your answer, while thoughtful, did not answer my question, can you celebrate the secular aspects of Christmas and still be a good member of the Jewish community? Indeed, your response restated what my own rabbi, John Friedman, says--that Christmas is only a Christian holiday, that Jewish children will grow confused if they celebrate it, that participating outside my own home may provide some solace and would be, if not desirable, at least understandable, and finally that I have built a Jewish life. Rabbi Friedman also stated that once you convert to Judaism, you cannot formally "unchoose" it, a question I would like addressed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations itself. (We know the practical reality, that people leave a religious path every day, generally by taking an alternate one, but as I stated in my letter, returning to Protestant Christianity is not my desire.)

The leaders of the Reform Jewish Community, of whom you are foremost, have not, I feel strongly, satisfactorily dealt with this issue by holding fast to the response outlined above. Christmas and Christmas trees are a reality among a sizable segment of the Jewish community. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (published by the Council of Jewish Federations) reported that since 1985, 52% of all marriages of born Jews are to non-Jews. In communities of less than 10,000 Jews (similar to mine in Durham, North Carolina), 52% of Jews surveyed reported sometimes or always having a Christmas tree; the figure for larger communities was 35%. Furthermore, Professor Egon Mayer's recent study, "Jewishness Among the Intermarried," reported that in the households of Jews married to converts (Jews by Choice), nearly 40% had a Christmas tree. Surprisingly, this group enrolled a larger percentage of children in formal Jewish education (67%) than either born-Jewish couples (60%) or born Jews married to non-Jews (9%). Clearly, there are a large number of intermarried families who both raise their children as Jews and celebrate Christmas. Yet the synagogue's official response to such families is, "You can't do that." Clearly, Rabbi, many of them do.

When authorities condemn what a significant portion of a group finds important, something is bound to give. The Catholic Church's relentless ban on birth control, for example, drove many church members to ignore the ban, undermining the church's relevance and authority. Others left the Church altogether. What the Catholic Church's policy did not do was end the practice of birth control. Will this happen to Reform Judaism when it censures intermarried couples attempting to raise children as Jews while celebrating one parent's beloved childhood holiday? Wendy, a Jewish friend of mine, nearly hit our rabbi when he told her flat out that she shouldn't let her children celebrate Christmas with their non-Jewish grandparents. His counsel to sacrifice family closeness to ideological purity appalled her. (She also lacked the courage to tell him that she herself had grown up with Christmas.)

Last December Judea Reform held a young people's discussion of Christmas in which the rabbi inevitably stated that Jews were not supposed to take part in it. Some children were going to celebrate the holiday with their families anyway, in spite of the rabbi's counsel. What emotional choice did the rabbi's pronouncement leave them? Guilt? Alienation from the synagogue? Anger at their parents? (This is my fourteen-year-old's reaction.) The answer cannot be a happy one, either for them or for Judaism. Such counsel is especially troubling when you consider that Jewish children seldom hear outright condemnation in the synagogue of such frequently devastating actions as divorce, premarital sex, or abortion. But time and energy is spent trying to root out a day families share happily. It makes me wonder--what is our priority?

One question is, why shouldn't Jews celebrate the secular traditions of Christmas? You answer that we should not because the day is "a Christian holiday based on a major event in Christianity and can well be described as a holy day." Certainly, I agree that the holiday's origins (though not necessarily its customs) are based on a primary event in Christian history and that the day is, for many Christians, a holy one. Yet since the nineteenth century, the holiday has also taken on a second, less sectarian, more universal meaning, expressed in the secular customs of Santa Claus, the Christmas tree, even the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. Christmas has jumped the fence of religious boundaries. It is almost as if the day is two separate holidays, with two sets of customs, two sets of stories.

To illustrate: It is possible, even common, for Gentiles to enjoy a Merry Christmas without a single overt reference to Jesus: no creche beneath the tree, no midnight church services, no "Silent Night" on the stereo, no story of the Magi read aloud. This was the Christmas in my house. My adopted father was an atheist; he and my adopted mother never attended church. At Christmas we gathered as a family, set out sweets, read "A Visit from St. Nicholas," or watched "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" or Alastair Sim as Mr. Scrooge, listened to "Up on the Housetop" or "Silver Bells" on the stereo. In fact, during the three teenage years



that I attended the Pentecostal Church, my family's indifference to the religious side of Christmas quite got my goat. Didn't they see the day was supposed to be about Jesus's birth? But for them, it wasn't.

A co-worker who attends an Independent Baptist Church in Georgia reports that last year a big fight ensued over the Christmas tree. Some members protested placing this "pagan" symbol in the sanctuary. The beleaguered minister finally compromised by setting the tree in the far-less-sacred foyer. When I taught junior high school, the most determined Christian students I had were the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose parents wouldn't let them celebrate Christmas at all, let alone have a Christmas tree. How ironic that many devout Christians reject the day or the tree as un-Christian while we Jews stamp our foot and demand that they are!

In fact, Rabbi Schindler, it might be argued that Christmas now takes up such a large space in our culture precisely because it is not religious. In a New York Times article (sorry, I've misplaced the date), "Christmas Debate: To Celebrate or Not," by Brenda Lane Richardson, the author cites the stories of three non-Christian families who do: one Buddhist, one Moslem, one Jewish. None observed the day as a remembrance of Jesus's birth. The author took care to explain that the families follow their own religious practices. The Moslem wife still wore the veil, the men prayed daily at the mosque. Mrs. Higashi, a Buddhist, explained that for her Christmas was "more than just a religious holiday. It is a custom of the United States." Such a culturally broad embrace of Easter, a true religious holiday, is unimaginable. But Christmas seems to make room for anyone. Santa asks if you've been good--not if you've been Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Jewish...

Perhaps the most telling confirmation of the non-religious side of Christmas comes from a passage in The Hannukah Book by the dedicated Jewish artist and craftswoman, Mae Shafter Rockland, who wrote the book in part to counterbalance for Jewish children the pervasiveness of Christmas in our culture. Writing that cookies are a popular holiday food around the world, she mentions "Sinterklaasjes, which even Orthodox Jewish children in Holland find in the wooden shoes they set out on St. Nicholas Night twenty days before Christmas." (My emphasis.) In Holland, St. Nicholas Night incorporates many of the customs I call a secular Christmas. The fact that even Orthodox Jewish children are permitted to participate in these festivities highlights their non-religious nature. (In her diary, even Anne Frank notes the pleasure St. Nicholas Night brought her in her hideout.) Yet because the religious and secular customs coincide temporally in our culture, we are expected to forego them all. Rabbi, if I wanted a tree for Santa Claus Night in early December, would the community feel the same threat it does now? Or would we see more clearly Christmas's dual nature? (In fact, when Santa was first imported by the Dutch into New Amsterdam, his day was December 6.)



Another reason frequently cited for not celebrating Christmas is that as Jews we do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, so to honor his birthday is inappropriate. Please note that I do not suggest that Jews go to church or praise the birth of Jesus. If we converts retained a religious tie to Christmas, it is doubtful that we would convert to Judaism. While the story of the Nativity is a beautiful one for Christians, I am made uneasy by its ramifications for Jews. I don't want to put up a creche or sit down to read my son the story of the Magi. Is it not also possible that we in the Jewish community emphasize the religious side of Christmas because we worry about the Christian community's reaction if we say we don't care about it?

A third argument given is that children will become confused about who they are if they celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas. Do we honestly believe that one day outweighs what we do the rest of the year? Would we credit for a moment the notion that a Christian child who attends a Baptist or Catholic Sunday School, learns that Jesus is the savior of the world, is exhorted to seek salvation, would for a moment consider himself Jewish if he happened to light Hanukkah candles with his father or grandfather? This idea is as preposterous as its opposite--that Jewish children, given Jewish values the rest of the year, will slip the traces merely because they have a Christmas tree.

This argument reminds me of a Sunday School teacher my older sons Dylan and Gabe had years ago, a young Jewish student from Duke who cared enough about his heritage that he worked with kids in Judea Reform's religious school. Yet, he confessed to the kids, his mother was Catholic and he grew up celebrating Christmas--he really liked it--but he knew he was a Jew.

Our youngest son Noah is eight. He has grown up with more Christmas than any of his brothers: a stocking, a few presents, making Christmas and Hanukkah cookies, and hearing lots of stories. Where is his heart? We read a new book the other night, "The Berenstain Bears' Christmas Tree," which is illustrated at the beginning with a scene of the whole town. We spent a few minutes looking for menorahs or Stars of David in the windows, and Noah was disappointed that there weren't any. (We'll probably draw them in, as we've done before.) He came home excited because when he asked his music teacher if they could sing Jewish songs as well as Christmas ones, she said "Yes." In a letter to a new pen pal, practically his first sentence was, "I am Jewish." In services he always wants to touch the Torah. He already has plans for his bar mitzvah. He may enjoy Christmas, but he is excited about being Jewish. Would a tree decorated with dreidls and topped by a Star of David destroy that feeling? I don't think so.

Besides, which is worse for a child -- The "confusion" of two happy celebrations, or the anger and resentments sparked when parents fight over the propriety of celebrating Christmas or watching one parent suffer for lack of it?



My Gentile friends are often astounded when I describe the fights Frank and I have waged over a Christmas tree, especially that he once thundered, "It's me or the damned tree!" "But the tree's not religious!" they protest, rightly divining its nature, but not comprehending in the least the stumbling block it is for my husband. As I mentioned, when Frank proposed, his only religious demand was that we never celebrate Christmas. He is hardly alone in his anathema. Just recently another co-worker related the story of her Gentile friend married to a Jewish man, stunned by the reality that, while her husband offers nothing in its place, he is adamant about not letting their children have Christmas.

Frank and others have confessed the pain of being the kid who didn't celebrate Christmas, the one who was different. It was awkward explaining that you didn't celebrate Christmas and why. It was annoying that other people didn't know about Hanukkah or other Jewish holidays. Jewish kids sometimes felt the pain of longing for a forbidden pleasure (which was also a heartache for their parents to deal with). In Frank's case, his parents derided Jews who celebrated Christmas or gave into that contemptable mishmash, a "Hanukkah Bush." Such people were assimilationist, weak. Not proper Jews. As a result, Jewish kids either gave in when they grew up to the desire for Christmas, often moving away from the Jewish community (like Frank's sister) or (like Frank) coped so well with the pain that doing without Christmas became a badge of loyalty. The day was a great divider.

In her controversial article published in the New York Times in December, 1978, "Christmas Comes to a Jewish Home," Anne Roiphe, now fiction editor of Tikkun, describes her grandfather as a man who would never enter a museum because he felt there would be "so many pictures of Jesus on the walls that he would be forced to see the image of the babe in whose name his town was pillaged, his parents killed, his temple burned, and he and his sisters driven penniless to a foreign shore." What, she wonders, would he and her other Jewish ancestors think if they knew she and her children celebrated Christmas? At that point in her life, Ms. Roiphe was not an observant Jew; later she underwent a kind of conversion in which her love of the Jewish community was rekindled. One of her first acts, out of a spirit of guilt and betrayal of those ancestors, was to put away the Christmas she grew up with and loved. Her poignant case illustrates that Christmas is not a religious issue so much as one of ethnic loyalty. "My Buby and Zaidy would be horrified" is the real fear.

Other touching examples abound. Young Theodore Herzl's budding Jewish loyalty made him ashamed of his assimilated parents' Christmas festivities. Even Rabbi Friedman once confessed to me how horrified he would feel if, as a grown up, his son Josh had a Christmas tree. He didn't equate this with his son becoming a Christian but with no longer caring about his family's origins or his people. My husband also seems to fight Christmas, not because he thinks it



means we've turned Christian, but because he dreads the censure of his parents and because it seems unforgiveably disloyal.

In effect, shunning Christmas often becomes the terminal expression of Jewish loyalty. One of the saddest stories I ever read was "Why I Believe in Santa Claus," by Maurice Zolotow (Redbook, December 1987). As a young boy, Mr. Zolotow longed for Santa Claus to appear at his house, which the great elf never did. Mr. Zolotow's family was Jewish but had given up all ties to the synagogue, the Jewish community, and Jewish holidays. The only way the father consciously retained his ethnic identity was by refusing to let his children celebrate Christmas. Denying the day answered the question, "How do you know you're still a Jew?" "I don't celebrate Christmas."

Keeping Christmas out of one's life, then, has little to do with religious belief, but much to do with loyalty--to a younger self, to family, to the community.

Certainly the feeling of wanting to be true is powerful, understandable, laudable. No one wants to dishonor the pain suffered by Jews before us, at the hands of Christians and others and coincidentally at Christmastime. But we who grew up with this holiday cannot have the same emotional reaction, cannot see it primarily as a day of exclusion and pain. On the contrary, we face the very real pain of parents and grandparents who, often accepting our change of religion with equanimity, are more than a little hurt as we shun the beloved family holiday. For us, relinquishing the non-religious aspects of Christmas fosters, not feelings of loyalty toward the community, but anger, resentment, a deep sense of loss. Our pain is one reason why, between husband and wife, this issue is often resolved with kindness by celebrating both holidays. It explains the 40% Christmas-tree rate among intermarried couples, who are also sending their children to synagogue. Yet our leaders continue to couch their arguments against Christmas almost exclusively in religious terms. Is this because they fear that the real argument--ethnic loyalty--is one we recognize as best left to the individual conscience?

Frank says, "Why is a Christmas tree such a big deal? It's only a custom from your childhood." Rabbi Schindler, I cannot tell you why Santa Claus or the tree are so important to me, or why Dickens' Christmas Carol, re-read every year, moves me to tears. (Our local expert on this book, by the way, who enacts Scrooge on stage every season, is a Jewish professor named Elliott Engel...) It has nothing to do with Christianity (except for bunnies on sale, Easter barely ripples my awareness). When I think back on my childhood, one moment stands out as the exemplar of quiet peace and joy. We lived in Grants Pass, Oregon, out in the country. To my embarrassment, my father had stolen a pine tree from beside the local railroad tracks, which ran along the mountain in front of our house. On Christmas Eve, when everyone else was asleep, I stole into the darkened livingroom and stood in front of the Christmas tree, watching the colored lights and my reflection shimmer and twinkle in the glass ornaments,



enveloped by the fragrance of the tree and its transcendent beauty, perhaps dreaming of the day I would be a mother and do this for my child. I stood for a very long time. Now it makes me think of your phrase, shalom bayit, peace in the house. It hurts my heart to think I am never supposed to do this again.

When the Catholic Church spread throughout Europe, it faced the survival of pagan customs among new converts. Some sages realized that forcing people to give up dearly beloved customs would only drive them away from the church, so they wisely permitted the customs we now associate with Christmas, such as decorating with evergreens, to be incorporated into the Christian holidays. The stories explaining the customs, however, were changed to give them a Christian twist. This eased the transition for new converts and helped ensure the Church's eventual success.

For all that it was derided, the scorned Hanukkah bush of the 1950s was also an attempt to take an attractive custom and give it a Jewish emphasis, incorporating something people longed for by giving it a meaning within the community. The Christmas tree I daydream of, Rabbi, has menorahs, Macabees, grapes, candles, dreidls, Noah's arks, miniature bagels hanging from its branches (last year I even bought a German glass ornament of a pickle-- Claussen's Kosher Dills, naturally), recalling the song, "It is a tree of life to them that hold fast to it..." To transform that beloved childhood custom to a statement of what my life is today-- can that not be seen as a sign of love for the Jewish community rather than a rejection of it?

The real question seems to be, not should Jews celebrate the secular Christmas, but what does it mean to be a Jew? Do we want keeping the Christmas tree at arms' length to be the defining issue? Or is it more significant to take a child to synagogue, teach about the Torah, Jewish history, values, and customs, to participate in tzedakah, honor parents and grandparents by telling family stories, to point with pride to Jews who have accomplished much, to foster belief in the God who, as Harold Kushner writes, has chosen people "to be His language"? Perhaps because I didn't grow up Jewish, the differences between the Jewish community and the Christian one (or rather, non-Jewish one) seem so numerous that to believe they could be obliterated by a mere Christmas tree seems astonishing.

Reform Judaism began in the early nineteenth century because for many Jews the realities of contemporary life clashed uncomfortably with the strictures of Orthodoxy. Faced with a choice of too-restricted lives or giving up Jewish identity, these pioneers chose a third option: redefining and enlarging what it meant to be a Jew. Young radicals ate ham sandwiches on the synagogue steps to protest what they saw as the outmoded laws of kashrut, horrifying their elders. The radicals kicked up a fuss, not because they no longer wished to be Jews, but precisely because they did. They needed Judaism to enlarge its definition of what they could do and still remain good Jews. Reform Judaism continues to thoughtfully



change in response to the needs of the community. Witness the recent admission of women to the rabbinate, and also in response to the increasing number of intermarriages, the ruling that Jewish descent can travel from the father as well as the mother.

This is the situation that many of us (converts and others) are in today. We need the synagogue, the official community, to change. But we are problematic because we are anomolous. Years ago who could have predicted a group of people willing to participate in the community and carry on its values while clinging to what has been seen as the archetypal Christian holiday? After all, celebrating Christmas was once a way of saying, "I no longer care about the Jewish community." But that is not necessarily what it means among Jews and converts today. For my own part, my feelings for Judaism have been strong enough that, not only have I taught Sunday School and brought my three eldest sons to their b'nai mitzvot, but I've also considered becoming a bat mitzvah. Yet guilt--because I know that Christmas will always be important to my heart and which my community officially condemns--keeps me from taking further steps within the Jewish tradition. The 30-50% of Jewish households who keep Christmas need to hear something from the synagogue other than "You shouldn't do that."

How should the synagogue resolve this issue? It seems both wise and compassionate to recognize that Christmas may have a beloved secular as well as sectarian meaning, that it is an important holiday for some Jews who nevertheless wish to remain in and participate in the community. Perhaps the best answer is this: "While Christmas is an important religious holiday for many Christians, we also recognize that it has another meaning for many regardless of religion. As Jews we do not observe the birth of Christ, though we recognize and honor its significance for Christians, but about the secular customs of the holiday we make no judgment. It is up to each Jew to decide."

Such a response would allow intermarried families to peacefully celebrate the holidays with both sets of grandparents; take the pressure off Jewish kids who feel denied or guilty around Christmas; remove the rabbi from the role of grinch and allow him or her to concentrate on real moral issues such as homelessness; and ease the hearts of all husbands and wives who have ever felt themselves at war over this issue.

(The fear is, what will happen if we cross the line, if Christmas no longer is verboten? After all, it's not a Jewish holiday. As Americans, we also enjoy Valentines, Fourth of July, Halloween, and Thanksgiving without worrying that they aren't Jewish, although we take a certain pride in the Sukkot-inspiration of the last one. Didn't people once fear that giving up the laws of kashrut would make them less Jewish? Though kashrut no longer is obligatory, it is honored in folkways. How many Jews do you know who serve pork? Even us Southern Jews would never dream of toting that regional delicacy, the sausage biscuit, into the synagogue. Christmas will

not take over the community any more than pork did.)

Occasionally I find myself in a church, usually at a wedding or a memorial service, sitting in the too-quiet atmosphere, praises to Jesus ringing in my ears, and I think: this is not me, this is not my place. Not enough chatter, for one thing, no oneg, and the attitude toward the Most High is more self-concerned ("What will God do for me?") than I find appealing. Even having Christmas back would not be sufficient; I don't want to do without menorahs or latkes or dreidls either. On occasion my frustration over this issue has reached such a pitch that I've imagined leaving the Jewish community. But such a vision also leaves me with a profound sense of loss. I've learned too much. I've been part of it too long. If you yanked the Yiddish from my tongue, half the time I wouldn't know what to say. I can never again be the simple Gentile girl I was when I married my husband. I feel absolutely torn, Rabbi Schindler, for December without Christmas is a heartache, but life without Judaism would be a heartache too. Like the angry young Jew protesting the laws of kashrut on the synagogue steps, I come to you once more, the head of my community, to say, "Please, look again at what Christmas does and does not signify. Seek, if you can, some way to give my heart--and the hearts of others like me--ease."

Sincerely,

*Coventry Kessler*

Coventry Kessler

cc: Rabbi John Friedman



cc. Dine

5 Herrick Place  
Durham, NC 27707  
January 10, 1994

Religious Practices Committee  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 5th Avenue  
New York City, NY 10021

Dear Committee Members:

Last year I wrote to Rabbi Schindler twice on the subject of Jews celebrating a secular Christmas. A copy of our correspondence and my conversion certificate are enclosed.

I converted to Judaism in May 1974, three years after I married my Jewish husband. Although he did not ask me to convert, Frank proposed under the condition that I promise we would never celebrate Christmas. As I explained to Rabbi Schindler, for many years I kept that promise. Gradually, however, it became clear that ignoring my childhood holiday was turning December into an unmitigated misery.

The story of my dilemma is explained in the letters. But wherever I sought relief from organized Judaism, the response was that Christmas is inappropriate for Jews. Rabbi Schindler's final answer was not couched in religious terms but that since he was a Jew, Christmas was not part of his home or family origins.

Rabbi Schindler's answer confirmed my opinion that, for the most part, Jewish identity is less a matter of religious belief than it is of ethnic and family loyalty. After much soul-searching, I believe I can no longer identify as a member of the Jewish community. None of my reasons has to do with adopting another religious belief.

I. Judaism is not mine in the sense that it was not my family's. I cannot look back at a buby and zaidy who emigrated from Russia or Lithuania, recite harrowing tales of escape, or list sorrowful losses in the Holocaust. I have no Jewish family tradition to carry out. Indeed, emphasizing the Jewish origins of my married family has meant ignoring and slighting my own. For the past two years I've researched my own rather ordinary WASP background, discovering among other things a great-grandfather who was a Baptist minister of Scottish descent who emigrated from Canada in the 1860s. Not only do I lack emotional ties to Jewish ancestors, but claiming to be Jewish, with the ethnic origins it implies, somehow deflects a family history I'm ready to embrace.



2. After twenty years of attending synagogue, teaching Sunday School, working in the temple library, and baking challah for onegs, I am still essentially a stranger. Much of the service remains foreign. Some prayers are familiar by sound, but I must search each time to find out what they mean. The melodies are beautiful but the words a mystery. Since I am a highly verbal person, being cut off from the meaning merely reinforces how alien I feel. By contrast, last summer when I sat through a service in my great-grandfather's church, it was as understandable and familiar as my old gloves--in spite of the fact that I neither identify as a Christian nor intend to join a church. I was not a stranger there the way I continue to be in synagogue.

3. I feel no personal stake in the fate of Israel. (Unlike my parents-in-law, who visit whenever possible and fret over its future.) Indeed I disapprove of the long-time treatment of the Palestinians, although the new accords seem a hopeful sign. I have no special wish to visit Israel on my own behalf, and would be horrified if my children emigrated. I no longer feel a vested interest in my children remaining Jews.

4. Since planning and carrying out holiday activities mainly falls on the women of a family, I find myself preparing foods and rituals to commemorate a religion that, in essence, forbids me the holiday I love. You can imagine how ironic Chanukah and Passover feel. I can no longer prepare for Jewish holidays without ambivalence.

5. Although 50% of born Jews now marry non-Jews, most of whom grew up with Christmas, official Judaism emphasizes that this holiday should not be permitted within the Jewish home. Indeed, rather than emphasizing family harmony by meeting each member's emotional and ritual needs, it insists that Christmas be shunned, no matter what misery it causes.

Do you know what it feels like to have my beloved fifteen-year-old son berate me for wanting to celebrate Christmas? To know that in all likelihood I will never be able to share with him the holiday that, for me, still typifies family love and harmony? To remember my older son's struggle not to want Christmas and his sad games of "pretend Christmas" with his teddy bear? Gentlemen, when Frank and I married, I bowed to the argument that two holidays would "confuse" my children. I tried to be the good parent by bringing them up in one unadulterated tradition, only to find I could not follow it myself. That decision has come back to haunt me. I cannot tell you the rage I feel.

As you know, I am not alone in my dilemma. The 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey found that 35-50% Jewish or half-Jewish households have a Christmas tree. Those that still wish to give their children a Jewish education must play the hypocrite when attending synagogue. In December I used to hear my Sunday School kids whisper to one another, "Do you have Christmas?" Because Christmas is officially verboten, families who wish to celebrate it have no good choices. They can (1) relinquish a Jewish education for their kids, (2) force some family members to give up a dearly beloved holiday, (3) lie in the synagogue, or (4) risk the shame, alienation, or disapproval of their children. The UAHF could ameliorate this situation immediately



by declaring, "While Christmas is not a Jewish holiday, we find no harm in enjoying its secular customs." This the UAHC chooses not to do.

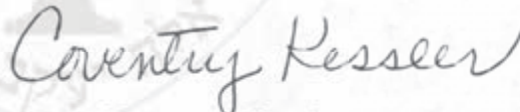
6. Finally, the organized community's continuing injunction against Christmas arouses my guilt as well as my anger. Why remain in a group whose standards you must necessarily violate? Better to leave and relieve the guilt.

Our rabbi, John Friedman, once informed me that a convert could not "unconvert."--I was in it for the duration. While this is obviously untrue in a practical sense--I could take up Christianity, for instance, or even "vote with my feet" --I prefer a formal acknowledgement of my resignation from Judaism, much as one would obtain a get for an unsatisfactory marriage. Is there a ceremony for this? Do the synagogue and family sit shiva? Is a former convert considered an apostate? Please be clear, however, that I am not renouncing Judaism but resigning from it as unsuitable for myself.

This step will not make everything "all better" within my family. There may be much hurt and anger. But it will help everyone understand how I honestly feel. For a long time I've flown under false colors. It may also become easier to participate in Jewish rituals if my family understands that I do so to help them celebrate, not because these rituals are mine. By the same token, perhaps my children and I will grasp the freedom to enjoy what I care about without us all feeling like we violate a terrible taboo. May we not help others celebrate their holidays, even if they are not our own?

Whether or not our family celebrations become easier, however, I wish to resign my conversion. Please let me know the procedures to do so.

Sincerely,



(Ms.) Coventry Kessler

(Formerly Lee Kessler, as noted on the conversion document)

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Rabbi John Friedman  
Rabbi Frank Fischer, Judea Reform Congregation, Durham, NC

*for* DRU GREENWOOD

*Overbeck*



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
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November 16, 1994  
13 Kislev 5755

Cantor Jill Spasser  
Director of Student Placement  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
1 West 4th Street  
New York, NY 10012

Dear Jill:

I have your letter and the enclosed column and I can understand why you are dismayed.

Just the same, I cannot understand your unbridled anger and assertion that you are no longer "proud to be a Jew, a Reform Jew, and a Cantor in the Reform movement." Where in the article, or anywhere else for that matter, have you read that our "movement allows Southern Baptists to be counted among our Chazzanim?" The Union of American Hebrew Congregations never designated John Blizzard as a Cantor. The congregation did, and we have no coercive power over it. We can only recommend a course of action, but temples have the right to do as they choose. That is both the strength and the weakness of Reform Judaism. We are not a hierarchical church and I am glad that this is so.

Moreover, I cannot understand your designation of Dru Greenwood's response as inadequate. She states what is a fact: That the Union of American Hebrew Congregations has issued guidelines that limit non-Jewish participation in synagogue leadership roles, but that individual congregations do not necessarily abide by them. What, pray tell, is inadequate and insensitive about that answer. Remember also that the columnist merely recited a phrase from Dru's statement and her views ought to be seen in their fuller context.

Cantor Jill Spasser  
page 2  
November 16, 1994

I think you would also do well to take a somewhat wider look, back into history at where we were then and where we are today. There was a time in American Jewish life when virtually all the choirs in Reform congregations were peopled with non-Jews and very few temples, if any, had Cantors. It is thanks and only thanks to the Union and its Commission on Jewish Music that there has been a dramatic turn in the right direction. Help us work in that direction instead of denouncing those who may have no other choice. Love and understanding rather than anger are the true marks of a good teacher.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler







HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

SCHOOL OF SACRED MUSIC

BROOKDALE CENTER  
ONE WEST 4th STREET  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10012  
(212) 674-5300

November 9, 1994

Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Enclosed you will find a duplicate of the article which appeared in the Jewish Week, October 27-November 3.

Until now I was proud to be a Jew, a Reform Jew, and most especially, a Cantor in the Reform Movement. I was outraged to read that the movement allows Southern Baptists to be counted among our Chazzanim. The answer that Dru Greenwood gave was totally inadequate as well as insensitive.

Where is our movement going? Will it soon be enough that a Gentile who is a learned scholar, a good preacher, and a healer qualify to be a Rabbi. We MUST NOT allow our clergy to come from outside our faith. This speaks to our fellow Jews in such a poor light. This speaks to our co-clergy in abominable terms. It is incumbent upon you as our leader to refute the words and meaning of this article, both publically, as well as within the Reform community.

I trust that you will respond immediately.

Very sincerely,

Jill Spasser, Cantor  
Director of Student Placement

Enc.

cc: Dru Greenwood



## IN THE BEGINNING

# A Real Shabbos Goy

He may be a devout Southern Baptist who directs the church choir, but John Blizzard can sing the Shema like a Sabra.

A teacher of singing and diction at Wingate College, a Baptist institution near Charlotte, N.C., Blizzard moonlights every Shabbat as a cantor at Temple Beth El, reputed to be the largest Reform synagogue in the Carolinas. "He sings the Jewish melodies like he was born to sing them," says Michael Rifkin, president of Temple Beth-El.

In fact, Blizzard claims that Israeli visitors to the temple have said that his Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew sounds too good for an American. "They can't believe that I'm not a full Jew," Blizzard chuckles.

Blizzard became a chazan about three years ago, when

the synagogue was searching for a new cantor. At the suggestion of his friend, the temple's organist, Blizzard auditioned and beat out several candidates for the job. "The congregants were very welcoming and open," he says, emphasizing he's had nothing but a positive experience working at Temple Beth El.

Blizzard "fell into" singing Hebrew liturgy while studying to be a preacher at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. What began as substituting one night for a member of a synagogue quartet ended as a "second job. I began to enjoy it," he recalls, adding that once he moved to Charlotte in 1988, he found himself spontaneously singing Hebrew songs come Friday night.

A choir director at Charlotte's Woodlawn Baptist

Church every Sunday, Blizzard maintains that his "week-end of worship" proceeds without conflict. "Some people have commented that it's



### Is It Aleinu or Amazing Grace?

interesting a Christian would want to do something like this," he says. But "for me to walk through the doors of Beth El doesn't mean I have to reject Jesus."

Dru Greenwood, director of outreach for the Union of

American Hebrew Congregations, says that the idea of a non-Jewish cantor "does make some people uncomfortable." But while the UAHC has issued guidelines to limit non-Jewish participation in synagogue leadership roles, individual congregations do not necessarily abide by them, particularly in areas with small Jewish populations.

For now, Blizzard continues to sing both "Amazing Grace" and "Aleinu," perfectly able to "celebrate God in both places." But he admits to occasional bouts of confusion, like when he's fervently singing a hymn in church.

"Sometimes I think, 'I better be careful or my kipa's going to fall off,'" says Blizzard. "But then I think, wait a minute, I'm not wearing a kipa."

Susan Josephs



**BELIN HARRIS  
LAMSON McCORMICK**

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October 7, 1994

Jerome H. Somers, Esq.  
Goodwin, Proctor & Hoar  
Exchange Place  
Boston MA 02109-2809

Re: Project 2000

Dear Jerry:

I read with great interest the 22 page "Working Document" enclosed with your September 28 letter. It is obvious that you are making excellent progress.

One area which I believe must be addressed in greater depth relates to the section, "How Will The UAHC Be Funded In The 21st Century?" You point out that growth over the past five to ten years has been fairly static (Item 65-page 20). A major concern I have is negative growth arising because of the rising rate of intermarriage among Reform Jews (62 percent, according to the 1990 national population census) and the rising rate of children being raised in homes where only one parent is Jewish. (See enclosed chart from page 6 of the Summer Newsletter of the Jewish Outreach Institute showing that in younger age groups, the majority of children are being raised in homes where only one parent is Jewish. This trend will continue to rise.) Combined with this is the fact that only one-fourth of intermarried families are raising their children as Jews, with about one-fourth raising their children as Christian, and with the rest not raising their children in either religion. Unless a majority of the children of intermarried families are raised as Jews, the demographic trends are very grave.

We have to be honest enough to admit that the UAHC and its constituent congregations have thus far failed to reach a minimum goal of having a majority of the children of intermarried families raised as Jews. This calls for major changes in the course and direction of the leadership of our Movement, and it seems to me that the Project 2000 long range planning committee must include as a central part of its vision of the 21st Century specific recommendations for changes in programs and priorities in order to achieve a goal of having a majority of intermarried families identify with the Jewish community and raise their children as Jews.

Instead of addressing this critical problem, we smugly talk about the fact that we are the growing Movement of North American Jewry, without admitting that a substantial part of our growth is coming from people raised in other branches of Judaism. We must be willing

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AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Jerome H. Somers, Esq.  
October 7, 1994  
Page 2

to commit far greater financial resources to this area than we have been able to do in the past. We also must be willing to make dramatic changes in the allocation of our resources.

In this letter, I will not talk about allocation and deployment of resources. However, I do want to address the issue of financial resources, and particularly raising large amounts of endowment funds. I think it is essential that we undertake an analysis of what areas of UAHC programming best lend themselves to encouraging major endowment commitments. In personal conversations with Seth Moskowitz, he has indicated that those areas most directly related to Jewish continuity and growth offer the most promise. The Project 2000 Committee ought to explore this area, taking into consideration the Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth.

The Metropolitan Museum in New York has recently established a \$300 million fund raising goal, more than \$100 million of which has already been pledged. Substantial portions of these commitments are coming from the American Jewish community, in general, and Reform Jews, in particular.

I think that under the right leadership, with the right course and direction, there is an opportunity to have \$100 million raised for a UAHC Endowment Fund over the next five years. Alex Schindler can play a key role in this and has indicated a willingness to devote substantial efforts to help raise funds. But it will also require committed lay leadership and also a vision of the UAHC which recognizes that dramatic changes have to be made from the ways of the past in order to bring back into the UAHC hundreds of thousands of unaffiliated Jews and also achieve a critical goal of having a majority of the children of intermarried families receive a Jewish education and identify as members of the Jewish community.

I have some other ideas for substantially increasing the net income of the UAHC so that more funds will be available to expand programming, but I will save this for a subsequent letter.

Best regards.

Sincerely,



David W. Belin

DWB:cs

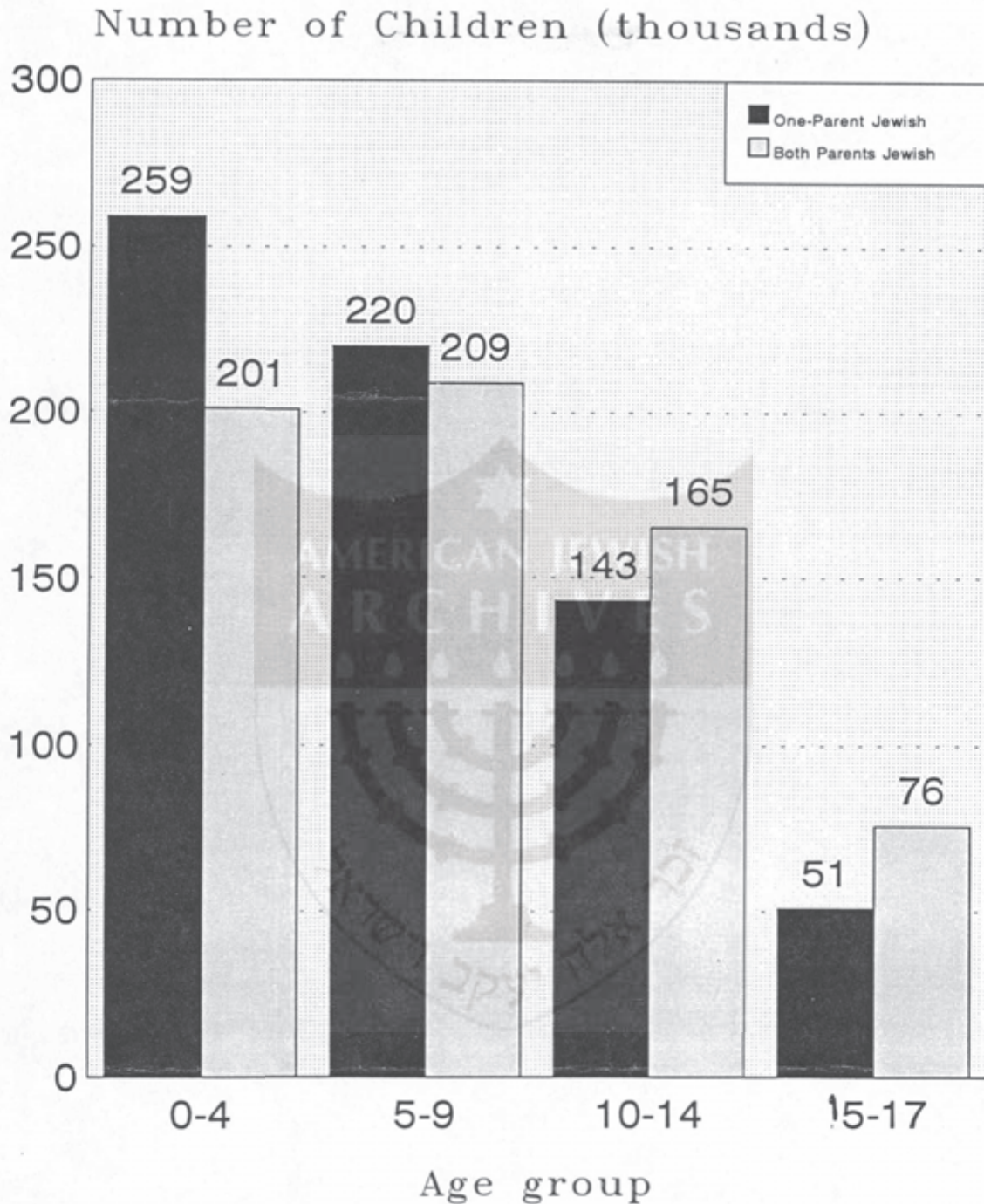
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c.c. Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Melvin Merians  
Arthur Grant



## CHILDREN IN INTERMARRIED HOUSEHOLDS INCREASING



This table includes only two parent households; at least one parent is a born-Jew or a Jew-by-choice; including those who are currently Jewish by religion and secular Jews with no religion. The trend described by this graph vividly shows that outreach to the intermarried must be a critical element of Jewish continuity and growth.

Data source: a forthcoming monograph by Ariela Keysar, Barry A. Kosmin and Jeffrey Scheckner, *Children and Adolescents: A Study of the Next Generation of American Jews*.

*Handwritten signature/initials*

November 1, 1994  
27 Heshvan 5755

Mr. Hal D. Schlenger  
4824 Smallwood Road, #13  
Columbia, SC 29223

Dear Mr. Schlenger:

On my return from meetings in Israel your marvelous letter awaited me, amidst a mountain of mail which contained the usual complaints and problems any organization receives on a regular basis. What a joy and pleasure it was to read your beautiful "success story!"

Thank you so much for sharing with me the very positive encounters you and your wife experienced with a number of Reform rabbis as well as your family, friends, and fellow congregants. You describe the kind of care, concern, understanding and welcome that is the ideal of Outreach.

As Jews we must all make choices. Those who become a part of our people through marriage must also make choices and when they determine to choose Judaism I need not tell you what that means to me! Judaism has been enriched by the many men and women who have made the commitment to be a part of our faith community and our people. And many, such as your wife, help to insure our future by becoming teachers and training our young in the way of our faith.

Please convey my warm and hearty mazal tov to your wife on her bat mitzvah. Our UAHC member-congregation directory shows Alison Schlenger as president of the Sisterhood of Tree of Life Congregation. Am I correct in presuming Alison is your wife? I do hope I will have an opportunity to meet you both some day, it would be my pleasure!

With repeated thanks and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

*Handwritten signature/initials*



4824 Smallwood Rd., #13  
Columbia, SC 29223  
(803) 736-7669

October 12, 1994

Dr. Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
UAHC  
838 5th Ave.  
New York, NY

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

Do you want to read about another success story?

On this eve of my wife's bat mitzvah, there is a happy story that brought her to this great experience.

Thanks to the understanding and insight of both mine and wife's families and Rabbi Floyd Herman in Baltimore, my then-fiancee was welcomed into the Jewish community without being told or forced to believe that her Christian upbringing was wrong. Instead, Rabbi Herman took the chance (and time) to invest in the possibility of creating a new Jewish family -- instead of pushing away an interfaith couple. You might say Rabbi Herman brought two seeds to the Jewish garden of life.

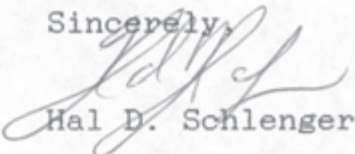
After moving to New Jersey, we found Monmouth Reform Temple's Outreach chairman Bob Koslow and Rabbi Sally Preisand willing to nurture the seeds of faith. The outcome was two very active temple members and my wife of five years deciding that she wanted to formally convert to Judaism. The seeds had taken root and were growing strong!

Now five years later, with friends like Patti Stiles and the help of Rabbi Sanford Marcus, my wife is a bat mitzvah. Like a tree, things take time to grow strong and my wife is proof! As a Jew, she has blossomed. And teaching religious school, she is helping to insure the future of our religion.

The biggest success is that of the Jewish community and its leadership who knew that the religion should not be afraid to invite in others. Our religion teaches us to welcome others in to our home, to respect others and treat them as we wish to be treated.

Thank you all for letting Judaism do its thing!

Sincerely,



Hal D. Schlenger

cc: Forum, Moment Magazine



October 13, 1994  
8 Heshvan 5755

From: Edie Miller

To: Dru Greenwood

The enclosed letter has been responded to via the telephone...as a matter of fact when I spoke to Jacqueline she reminded me we had met, knew I was a friend of Fran Hyman.

She makes a valid point...rabbis say no when they won't perform the marriage and don't take it any further. Maybe they should make recommendations so the people are directed to rabbis who are not out there doing interfaith marriages for a living, charging exorbitant fees, etc. or to "rabbis" who either bought their smicha or received same from a non accredited school.

I can understand why some rabbis don't want to suggest a colleague but it seems to be better to send the to a mensch and a principled person than to merely close the door...I think this is something we should talk about..certainly on a staff level once again.

Regards.





Jacqueline S. Guttman  
729 Glenwood Avenue  
Teneck, NJ 07666  
tel/fax 201 833 8835

Artservices

October 2, 1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Almost exactly one year ago I had the privilege and pleasure of hearing your address at the UAHC Biennial Conference in San Francisco, a major portion of which concerned Outreach, the enormous effort of our movement to embrace the non-Jewish spouse of a mixed marriage and to encourage that ever-increasing constituency to become Jews-by-Choice. As I recall, you suggested that we become even more zealous in our efforts to convert our non-Jewish relatives. However, a recent experience within our family indicates that the reality does not always match the ideology.

My son - a committed Jew - and his lovely, intelligent and sensitive Presbyterian fiancée are seeking a rabbi or cantor to officiate (alone) at their wedding. While I respect the convictions of those members of the clergy who decline to perform mixed marriage ceremonies, I have been dismayed and disappointed by the lack of assistance shown us in our search. It seems to me that what should be a major component of the Outreach movement is missing.

The wedding, planned for next May, will take place in Huntington, West Virginia. Unfortunately, the local Reform rabbi does not officiate at mixed marriages and could not suggest someone who does. My own rabbi, whom I like and admire, could offer no suggestions other than to say that perhaps the regional director in that area could help. He did not offer to find out who that might be. Ironically, her *minister* offered to try to locate a rabbi for them.

To my great embarrassment, the one person they did find was a cantor who, had he been available, would have charged \$1000 (plus expenses), which we have been advised is unusually high. Her reaction to this was, "If we have to pay that we will, but I'll have to keep it secret from my parents." I could not help thinking about stereotypes of money-grabbing Jews.

As a former vice-president of my synagogue, I would have appreciated some extra assistance in this matter. However, the real issue is that Reform Judaism, the movement that has dedicated itself to "opening our tent" and "welcoming the stranger" is simultaneously setting up obstacles to a young woman who has demonstrated her dedication to our son by willingly agreeing to have a Jewish wedding, a Jewish home and Jewish children. How dare we, as a movement, treat her this way? And what effect does this action (or non-action) have on any future possibility of her turning to Judaism?

This week I will telephone Mark Disick, in the hope that he can put me in touch with the regional director in the Pittsburgh, West Virginia or Ohio area. However, if you or someone in the UAHC office has any "leads" for us I would be very grateful to hear of them.

I close with one thought: perhaps a CCAR workshop is in order on how not to alienate our non-Jewish spouses - and our Jewish children - even before they walk down the aisle.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline S. Guttman

Do we know  
Amy  
and Richie

Shirley David



*Outreach*

October 6, 1994  
1 Heshvan 5755

Deborah Moskovitz  
330 Watergate Drive  
Langhorne, PA 19053

Dear Debbie:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter and for sharing your concerns with me. While this letter will not reach you before my visit to Shir Ami tomorrow, I do hope we have a chance to meet albeit my schedule is tight. I must leave the synagogue almost immediately after services in order to catch a train.

Be that as it may, I feel your pain and it distresses me. I so wish there was something I could do to change matters but, alas, it is not in my power to do so. Our UAHC member congregations are autonomous; while we suggest ways and means to deal with situations such as yours, we cannot demand that congregations adopt our recommendations. Each and every congregation must determine the path their community is to follow in regard to interfaith families and the ritual and governing policies of the synagogue.

I am taking the liberty of sharing your letter with Dru Greenwood, Director of Outreach. She will send you some of our Outreach pamphlets and publications which will be of interest, as well as a bibliography of pertinent reading material.

Again, I do hope we have a chance to chat even if it be for a moment. With every good wish and a hearty mazal tov on your son's Bar Mitzvah, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Ms. Dru Greenwood

October 1, 1994

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

I am a non-practicing Catholic raising three Jewish sons. My first will have the honor of being called to the Torah on November 5, 1994. The months leading up to this most important date have been very stressful, not for the usual reasons. Preparations for this event have been very easy, however my part in the service will not be.

My congregation allows the non-Jewish parent up on the beema, and they may recite and English prayer. I may not however light the candles, recite a blessing over the Torah or be touched in the passing of the Torah tradition.

I believe mothers play a significant role in making the children feel Jewish. I take this responsibility very serious. I also feel if my children could witness their mother participating fully in the service, it would reaffirm my commitment to raising them Jewish.

I have attended ritual, board, and private meetings with the hope of possible change. I was given a copy of C.C.A.R. Responsa Committee-Responsum 5754.5 - Gentile Participation in Synagogue Ritual and Mark L. Winer: "Our Vision of the Future: Personal Status and K'lal Yisrael". I do not agree with their approach on how to handle intermarriages. I realize that many issues surround this topic. I am trying to understand all of them.

If you can suggest any books, articles, or organizations that support full participation or alternative answers, I will gladly purchase them. I do not wish to leave my synagogue.

I appreciate the time you have taken to read this. I look forward to meeting you at Shir Ami on Friday.

Sincerely,

*Debbi Moskowitz*

Deborah Moskovitz  
330 Watergate Dr.  
Langhorne, PA 19053  
215-752-1028



COPY

*Outline*

September 21, 1994

**FROM:** Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

**TO:** Dru Greenwood

**COPY:**

The enclosed is self explanatory. Perhaps you can make some commentary that is helpful to Ken. He seems to be a decent guy.





Temple Mt. Sinai

From the study of <sup>letter</sup> #2 ✓  
RABBI KENNETH J. WEISS, D.H.L.

Sept. 9, 1994

Dear Alex-

I thought I might send you  
copies of a letter and (subsequent)  
7"7, 278 sermon on the theme of intermarriage,  
making a red place for intermarried couples, working  
in today's world to assure Jewish continuity  
and vibrancy. I have taken a significant (over)

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Step - I believe an authentic step - so  
that red Jewish growth becomes possible.

I'd enjoy your response, if you have  
one, and please feel free to pass this on  
to appropriate individuals and/or commissions.

Warmest wishes - נאמן ונאמן ונאמן

- Ken Weiss



# temple mount sinai

September 1, 1994

Toward The Survival and Enhancement of Jewish Life:  
A New Look at Intermarriage



KENNETH J. WEISS, D.J.  
RABBI

Dear Friends,

For the past nine months, I have seriously considered the possibility of changing my position with respect to the dilemma of intermarriage. Several factors compel me to rethink my career-long refusal to sanctify such marriages:

- there are as many as 100 intermarried families who are active members of Temple Mt. Sinai; despite the fact that one of the two partners is not Jewish, their affiliation - generally speaking - is strong and their children are being (or have been) raised as Jews. Indeed, a growing number of non-Jewish spouses within our Temple Family continue to approach Rabbi Goldfarb and me with the desire to convert.
- My job continues to be to work toward the survival of the Jewish people, the enhancement of Jewish life, and the future of Judaism as a philosophy, a way of life, a civilization. Clearly, 50% or more of young Jews in America are marrying non-Jews; clearly many of these young couples can and do live authentic Jewish lives within Temple communities; clearly - in the past - some of these well-intentioned young couples have felt turned away by their own rabbis, having to resort to a less meaningful experience before an unknown rabbi or a civil official.
- Colleagues in nearby cities who perform intermarriages for couples who do agree to meet specific standards, (of belief, intent, study and affiliation) note that some 2/3 of these couples retain a connection with the Jewish community, keep a Jewish home, see to - and participate in - the Jewish upbringing of their children.

My position - as it is evolving - is based on the following unbreakable, unbendable principles:

- I must be certain that the home I am creating will be a Jewish home to the exclusion of any other faith; in other words - a marriage performed by a rabbi is supposed to create a Jewish family.
- I will ask couples to affirm certain specific beliefs, intentions and affiliations, as well as a willingness to increase their knowledge of Judaism.
- Certain words in the wedding ceremony will be changed to reflect the reality that a non-Jew cannot "consecrate unto (him/herself a spouse) in accordance with the Law of Moses and the people of Israel."
- The stand I am about to describe reflects the continuing, total freedom of Temple Mt. Sinai's pulpit, as established and affirmed by the Board of Temple Mt. Sinai.
- Neither I, nor any rabbi of Temple Mt. Sinai, will do what we cannot do: some couples who come to us will meet the set criteria; others will not. On this issue and others, each of us will be bound by 1) our own

understanding of Jewish tradition, 2) the dictates of our own hearts, and 3) our sense of our own authenticity.

Temple Mt. Sinai has already moved creatively and enthusiastically into the delicate area of welcoming intermarried couples:

- we have offered complete pre-marital interviews for the past 14 years;
- when invited, we (as friends and rabbis) attend the nuptials;
- "Under One Roof" - a group of Temple members who are in intermarriages - has been active for two years.

My goal now is to expand that sense of welcome:

- to offer couples who accept the requisite criteria, welcome rather than rejection;
- to assure that I have a chance to be a part of their lives - to offer Judaism and Temple to them in a way that someone else to whom they might have to go, can not;
- to bring new Jews (and potential Jews) into this wonderful place which will encourage their Jewish identity, offer them chances for continuing education, and provide for them many positive models of affiliation and involvement (as seen in the 520+ Jewish-Jewish and Jewish-non-Jewish homes that comprise our Temple Family);
- to increase the number of homes in El Paso in which Judaism is taught, learned, modeled, lived.

I, therefore, affirm, that for a trial period of 2 years, beginning with the date of this letter, I will perform marriages when the husband and wife commit to the following:

- establish and maintain a Jewish home;
- raise any and all children as Jews;
- join Temple prior to the marriage and maintain membership;
- prior to the ceremony, to engage in 4 to 6 months of Jewish study and active participation in Temple (classes, services, meetings with the Rabbis, etc.);
- participate in 4-6 hours of pre-marital interviewing (so as to speak to one another and me of their shared values, experiences, hopes and dreams; to enable us all to "become friends")
- affirm that the non-Jewish partner has no other religious affiliation, and that the Jewish partner is positively disposed to Judaism as the sole faith, way of life and identity in their new home.

I will not co-officiate with a non-Jewish clergy person nor in a non-Jewish place of worship.

The Board of Temple Mt. Sinai has established the following:

- that the ceremony can take place at a home, hotel or country club in El Paso or anywhere on the Temple grounds with the exception of the Zork Sanctuary and the Krupp Chapel.



Our Bimas are reserved for marriages uniting two Jews. Intermarriages begin with a suggestion, a presumption of Jewish identity. The Bima must be reserved for people who - through acts and/or verbal commitment - have affirmed their Jewishness through the act of conversion. As a baby is presumed Jewish upon birth, but then must act on that presumption through a lifetime of meaningful Jewish acts of affirmation, so may the non-Jew in an intermarried couple decide after months or years of marriage, to complete his/her connection to our people through conversion - an ultimate act of connection. Such conversion may then be followed with a reaffirmation of marital vows on the Bima.

By this change, I wish to make the following as clear as possible:

- this decision is mine alone, and should not be construed as having any bearing on the stand taken by Rabbi Goldfarb or by any future rabbi of Temple Mt. Sinai
- I do not want to be perceived as encouraging intermarriages. Quite the opposite: I will continue to urge prospective non-Jewish spouses to convert before marriage. Intermarriages are - statistically speaking - at great risk. Statistics show that 60-70% of intermarriages end up in divorce; less than 1/3 of the children of intermarriages consider themselves Jewish; less than 10% of these children marry Jews and virtually none of the grandchildren call themselves Jews. Observably, these statistics do not reflect our Temple community, which is comprised - for the most part - of stable, loving marriages and real efforts to pass Judaism on to each succeeding generation. I, thus, hope that - in our supportive community - we will continue to reduce the negative figures cited here by providing a variety of wholesome Jewish models and family situations that will enhance the stability of, and the Jewishness in, those interfaith families that may decide to join us.

I anticipate that this policy will be revisited and reassessed as situations change and conditions warrant, and its continuance will be based on our collective experience.

I wish to thank those who have supported me in this agonizing process. With visits, phone calls, letters and patient silence, you have encouraged and enabled me to grow. I am most grateful.

While also thanking all of you, the Temple Mt. Sinai community, I must pause to seek your assistance. If, in social conversation, this new policy is discussed, be sure to affirm strongly the factors, the principles, the conditions and the commitments discussed herein. "Rabbi Weiss is now doing intermarriages" does not accurately reflect the new reality. "Rabbi Weiss is seeking new ways to welcome and encourage those who wish to create Jewish homes, raise Jewish kids, maintain Jewish affiliation and enhance Jewish life": this statement more honestly reflects the authenticity for which I constantly strive, the purpose of the policy we at Temple are setting forth.

I will be discussing this entire issue during our upcoming High Holy Days.

I invite your comments.



## Letters to the Editor

### *Jewish Converts Should Be Cherished*

\* \* \*

The statement that "Reform Jews now recognize as Jews the children of Jewish fathers married to gentiles" is only partially correct. Children of non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish fathers are not automatically recognized as Jews within Reform Judaism. They must be raised as Jews with attendant religious training such as bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah and participation in other rites of passage.

What may not have been apparent from the article is how the Reform movement is addressing intermarriage through its "Outreach" program, based on the principle, "We reject intermarriage—but not the intermarried." It is an effort to welcome intermarried families into the synagogue. We offer their children religious training and provide ways for non-Jewish spouses to take part in the life of the congregation and create a Jewish atmosphere in the home. Conversion is of course welcomed, and "Introduction to Judaism courses" are given in scores of synagogues.

Like it or not, intermarriage is a fact of

life. Efforts to proscribe intermarriage along the lines followed by Rabbi Moline have not worked. As you observed, Jewish identity on the North American continent is no longer externally imposed by the larger society. Judaism today must be actively chosen, not only by converts—Jews by choice—but also by Jews by birth, who must discover and develop new ties that bind them to the faith of their ancestors.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER  
President

Union of American Hebrew  
Congregations

New York





*copy sent to  
outreach*

COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

September 13, 1994  
8 Tishri 5755

Rabbi Norman M. Cohen  
Bet Shalom Congregation  
201 Ninth Ave. North  
Hopkins, MN 55343

Dear Norman:

That was a wonderful article on the Christensen Family.  
I am grateful to you for sharing it with me and I will,  
indeed, pass it on to the Outreach Department.

I hope all goes well with you and we convey to you and  
those you love my very good wishes for this New Year.  
May it be blessed with good health, happiness and  
fulfillment.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



Norman M. Cohen, Rabbi

201 Ninth Avenue North  
Hopkins, MN 55343  
(612) 933-8525  
Fax (612) 933-3238

September 8, 1994

Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex,

I thought you might be interested in seeing the publicity we received for the work we have done this last year with the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue.

Please feel free to pass this on to the Union Outreach Office and use it in any way you see fit.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you and Rhea a happy and healthy new year.

שלום  
Shalom,



Rabbi Norman M. Cohen



## Raised Baptist, he wants sons to be good Jewish boys

When Aaron Christensen celebrated his bar mitzvah this spring at Bet Shalom synagogue in Hopkins, his great-grandfather handed the Torah to his grandparents, who handed it to his mother, who gave it to her son "with the assistance of me," his father said proudly.

Richard Christensen is not a Jew. "I didn't handle it [the Torah]. That would be wrong. But I was part of the ceremony."

During this solemn rite of passage for a young person, which is an initiation into adulthood in the faith, the Torah, or sacred text, is passed down from generation to generation, in front of the congregation.

Richard Christensen was reared in the Baptist faith, but when his wife, Shelly, said she wanted to rear the children as Jews, he agreed.

"I just want my boys raised as good little Jewish boys and to understand there is a God and what it means to be Jewish," he said.

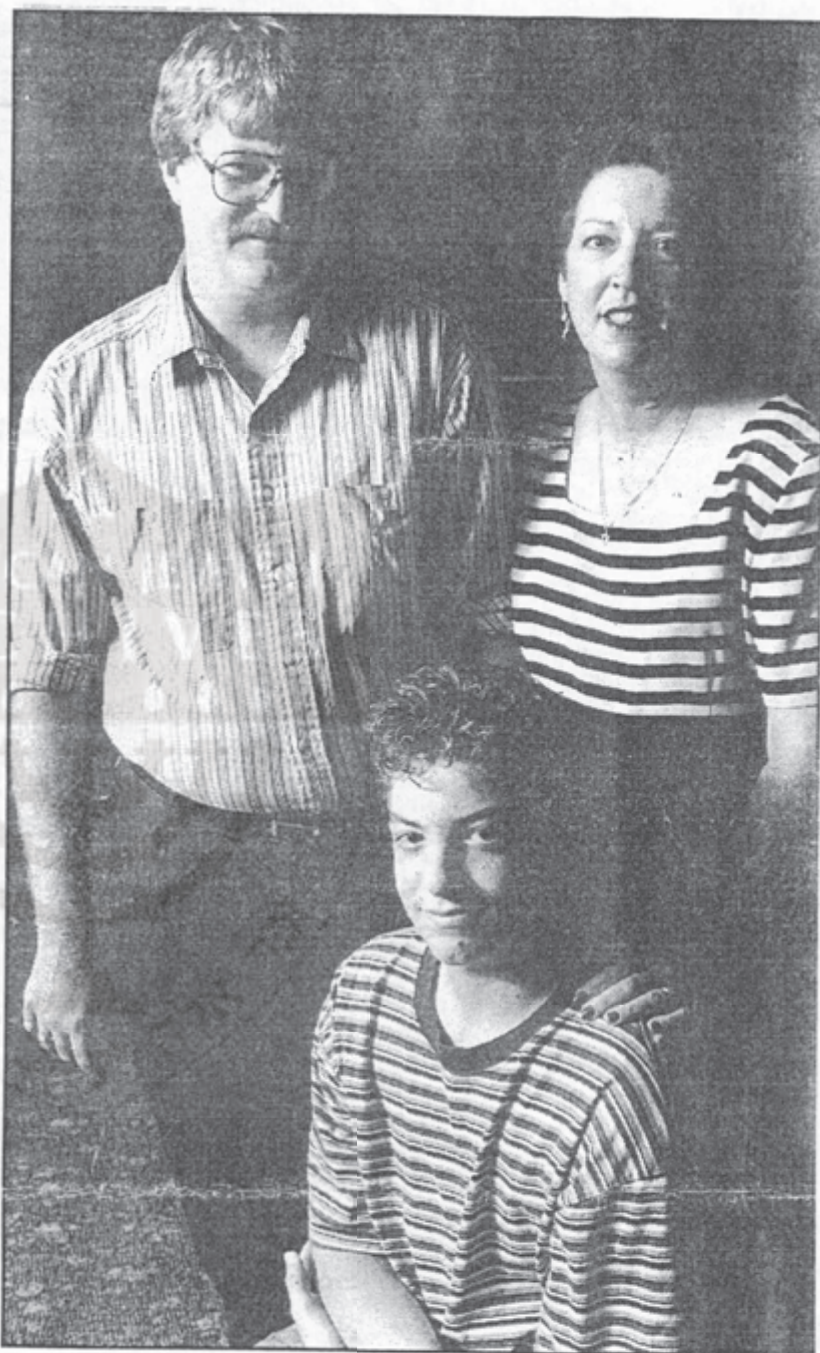
He doesn't think he could convert to any one faith right now, preferring to get his spiritual nourishment from all kinds of traditions.

All this means real adjustment at certain times of the year, such as Christmas. The three Christensen boys, Aaron, 13, Jacob, 9, and Zachary, 4, go with their parents to Christensen family events, but the boys know they're only going to help their dad celebrate his holidays. They understand that Christmas is not their holiday.

They have no tree or presents or the other secular trappings of the season in their own home. Richard says he doesn't particularly miss them, although he sometimes misses the singing and "pulpit-pounding sermons" he grew up with.

But he feels welcome at Bet Shalom. "The people are always so friendly. . . I don't have anybody raising their eyebrows when I hold a glass for kiddush [sanctifying the sabbath]. I wear a skull cap and nobody looks at me as if I shouldn't. There are a lot of things in the services I can't do, but nobody looks at me as if I shouldn't be there."

— Martha Sawyer Allen



Staff Photo by John Haselmann

Richard Christensen, top left, was raised Baptist; his wife, Shelly, is Jewish. They celebrated the bar mitzvah of their son, Aaron, in June.





# Dilemma for Jews: Family vs. culture

## Rosh Hashana marks synagogue's success

By Martha Sawyer Allen  
Staff Writer

It was Rosh Hashana 1993, the start of the series of important holy days for Jews and their New Year, and Rabbi Norman Cohen threw out a challenge to his congregation, Bet Shalom in Hopkins:

Could they welcome non-Jewish participants (usually spouses) within the active life of the synagogue and still keep the integrity of the faith and practice? And, more important, could they do it without ruining the congregation's sense of cohesion?

As the rabbi and his congregation prepare to celebrate the New Year this year (beginning at sundown today) they believe they have succeeded, but only after a lot of hard work. After hours of discussions last fall, the congregation voted this spring to change its bylaws to clarify that only Jews could hold certain offices and to outline how non-Jews could be involved in the community.

"And we didn't have to say a word," said Jan Schwartz, who had headed the education program. "What began as a really emotional issue last September ended up as a time of real healing from the issues."

For example, it is now clear that non-Jews can participate in some parts of the weekly services, but there are a few activities, particularly handling the sacred texts, or Torah, that they can't do. However, they can participate in many of the rituals and are welcome to do so.

Schwartz said many of the non-Jewish parents "wanted to put their energy into being a part of the greater community, but what they were giving up was also painful. What they were expected to do wasn't in any book."

While Bet Shalom's experience was more positive than some others, it represents the cutting edge for Reform congregations in the United States.

Bet Shalom synagogue has a membership of about 400 families, or about 1,000 people. About 20 percent of those families have one non-Jewish parent, which is common for Reform congregations.

About 30 years ago, about 10 percent of Jews in America married non-Jews. Today the percentage is closer to 50 percent, according to Egon Mayer, director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the City University of New York and widely acknowledged as the leading national expert on the issue of intermarriage.

Some people believe that mixed marriages will mean the end of Judaism in America. That may sound dramatic, but American Jews are increasingly becoming assimilated into mainstream culture and many are worried.

Judaism is a strongly family-based religion. Most of the important rituals are celebrated in the home and include meals, prayers and customs with which non-Jews are not familiar. American Jews worry that their traditions and religion will be lost if they continue to marry outside the faith.

Also, for every non-Jew in the congregation who wants to feel welcomed and part of the community, there could be a Jew who feels that the identity of the community is being diluted by including non-Jews.

"Where there were real divisions, I can imagine they occurred more because of the way in which it was handled," said Rabbi Sam Gordon of Congregation Or Shalom in Vernon Hills, Ill. "Many Reform congregations have a strong commitment to having the doors open to all who want to participate in the congregation. How that gets translated while maintaining the integrity of the congregation is the challenge for many places."

Gordon has worked nationally on the issue and came to Bet Shalom last fall to lead a discussion.

But, he said, by discussing the role of the non-Jew, the role of the Jew in the congregation's life also gets discussed, which is a good thing for everyone.

Schwartz said, "Judaism takes place in the home and it's hard to describe. We're going to describe it more. We're going to study what a Jewish home is."

Schwartz said that the discussions last fall were very emotional and each time Cohen talked about them to the congregation "he was inundated" with responses, some positive and some negative.

Cohen wrote his congregation in December that he believed part of the emotional level of their reaction from "fears that we all have about assimilation and weakening of Jewish life in America . . ."

While Mayer acknowledged these fears, he believes that American Judaism will survive and thrive. He also thinks that while Jews talk openly about assimilation, they're really worried about the fact that more and more Jews aren't active in synagogue life.

"I'm not sure I can see this as the death knell of American Judaism. The enormous challenge is to come

to terms with the American lifestyle" in which many don't take the time to participate in synagogue life (just as increasing numbers of Christians aren't active church members).

Mayer, who was born in Hungary two weeks after his parents were released from a concentration camp after World War II, said, "I'm not willing to believe that the Jewish people are suffering imminent disaster because they're living in a society which offers them more opportunity than they've ever lived in."

"It would be the height of irony and a theological joke if it turns out that Jews could survive in societies where they were killed and stoned, but when they come to this blessed country, where all the restrictions are off, they can't survive. Give me a break."

(over)



August 9, 1994  
2 Elul 5754

Ms. Coventry Kessler  
5 Herrick Place  
Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms. Kessler:

I write to acknowledge your letter of August 4 and the enclosures. There is really nothing further I can say or do beyond noting my distress over the agony you have faced as well as the final conclusion you have reached to separate yourself from our faith community.

May the years ahead bring you peace of mind.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

P.S. I have taken the liberty of sharing with Rabbi Hoffman your reply to his article on "Being a Jew at Christmastime."

August 9, 1994  
2 Elul 5754

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman  
19 Hillcrest Lane  
Rye, NY 10580-3509

Dear Larry:

Edie told me you'll call by the end of the week to set a time for us to meet. I am eager to have a chat with you and look forward to seeing you soon.

Over a period of years, I've had sporadic correspondence with Coventry Kessler of Durham, NC. The letters dealt mostly with her emotional inability to accept not having a Christmas tree in her home, albeit I believe there are many underlying, unspoken reasons for her problem.

Be that as it may, today I received the enclosed letter and her certificates of conversion, which Ms. Kessler has cut, as described in her letter. She also enclosed a response to your article on Being a Jew at Christmastime," which I had called to her attention.

There's really nothing further we can do in regard to Ms. Kessler but I thought you would be interested in her response to your article.

With warm regards I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



August 9, 1994  
2 Elul 5754

Rabbi Robert A. Seigel  
Temple Beth Israel  
6622 North Maroa Road  
Fresno, CA 93704-1209

Dear Bob:

Over a period of years, I've had sporadic correspondence with Coventry Kessler of Durham, NC. The letters dealt mostly with her emotional inability to accept not having a Christmas tree in her home, albeit I believe there are many underlying, unspoken reasons for her problem.

Be that as it may, today I received the enclosed letter and certificates of conversion, which Ms. Kessler has cut, as described in her letter. Since you participated in her conversion, and I can find no trace of a Rabbi Herbert Berger in our CCAR listings, I thought I would share this material with you. I don't know if you have had any contact with her over the years but you might want to make note of her action in your records.

There's really nothing we can do but I wanted to apprise you of Ms. Kessler's distress and the action she has taken on a personal level. My previous exchanges with her were to no avail so I don't believe there's a point in taking this any further.

I am also sharing this Ms. Kessler has copied, the present rabbi of Judea Reform Congregation in Durham, John Friedman, as well as our director of Outreach, Dru Greenwood.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

5 Herrick Place  
Durham, NC 27707  
August 4, 1994  
(919) 942-8731/489-4000

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

After a great deal of agonized thought, I hereby resign from my conversion to Judaism, which took place in May, 1974, at Beth El Synagogue, Durham, North Carolina. The reasons I stated to you in my letter of January 10. Recapitulated briefly, they are:

1. My family of origin is not Jewish, so I do not have the natural, familial, or ethnic ties that are clearly important to a Jewish identity.
2. After twenty years in the community, I am still a stranger. Prayers and songs, the heart of the liturgy, are still foreign since I do not know Hebrew or even recognize songs by heart as would a child raised in the tradition. At those moments when my heart should be most focused on the Almighty, I am left out because I do not know the words. By contrast, ordinary Protestant Christianity (in which I no longer believe) is as natural and familiar as breathing. It is mine in a way that Judaism can never be.
3. Jewish holidays are no longer occasions for joy but for extreme ambivalence, since, as the mother, I am expected to prepare for them while knowing my own dearly beloved holiday is forbidden.
4. I feel no personal stake in the fate of Israel, and in fact would be horrified if my children wished to live there. I feel no vested interest in my children remaining Jews.
5. The official Jewish community (i.e., rabbis and the UAHC) offers no official solution to the Christmas dilemma faced by many intermarried families other than, "Don't celebrate it." This puts me and many converts in a no-win situation: suppress what you love or betray the community.
6. Since Jews are not supposed to celebrate Christmas, and I clearly need to, continuing to identify myself as a Jew makes no sense. Groucho Marx once cracked that he wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have him as a member. I find it emotionally impossible to belong to a group whose cherished standard I must necessarily violate.

As I wrote before, in twenty-three years my husband and I have weathered four children, in-laws, mental illness, marginal



incomes, and thwarted career dreams. We have made it through more than our share of thin. But when I told him I planned to resign my conversion, he said, "Then we have to think about a separation."

Shalom bayit, a heen a hair, Rabbi. Where is it written in Jewish tradition that bearing children, supporting financially, standing by through illness and loss of career count for less than a pretend religious unity?

In my last letter, I asked if there was a ceremony for those who wished to resign their conversion. You responded that there was not. Yet serious occasions, even unsanctioned ones, deserve a ritual to mark their solemnity. For this reason, you will find my conversion certificate enclosed. It has been cut once diagonally, from upper left to lower right. In heraldry, I believe, the left to right diagonal signals illegitimacy, the sign that one is not a true child of the family. The diagonal also represents that the decision was not a straight one but took time and traveled across the grain. Finally, the single cut. People in a fury tear documents to shreds. The single cut clearly separates, but leaves much intact: a measure of respect, and self-respect.

I hope that my experience will raise serious questions about conversion and the experiences and expectations of converts.

Sincerely,

*Coventry Kessler*

Coventry Kessler

cc: Rabbi John Friedman  
Ms. Dru Greenwood

שמע ישראל יהוה אל' הינו

HEAR O ISRAEL THE LORD OUR GOD

יהוה אחד

THE LORD IS ONE



# CERTIFICATE OF CONVERSION

This is to record that LEE KESSLER

having sought to join the household of Israel by accepting  
the religion of Israel and promising to live by its principles  
and practices was received into the Jewish Faith

on MAY 19, 1974

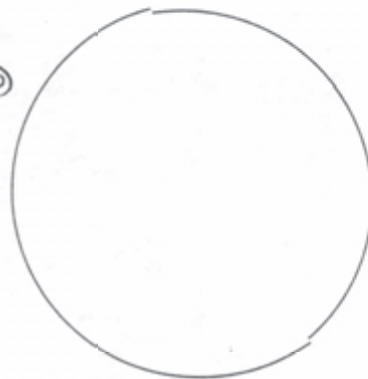
corresponding to the Hebrew date IYAR 27, 5734

at DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

Rabbi M. Herbert Berger רב מרדכי הרברט ברגר  
SIGNATURE

Rabbi Robert A. Seigel רב רוברט א. סייגל  
SIGNATURE

Bern Meckamp ברנ מייקאמפ  
SIGNATURE



THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE AND THY GOD MY GOD

BOOK RUTH



19 Hillcrest Lane,  
Rye, NY 10580,  
9/1/94

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler,  
UAHC,  
838 Fifth Avenue,  
Rye, NY 10580

Dear Alex,

As you may know by now, we have an appointment for one the "ten days" at which time I look forward to talking with you.

In the meantime, your letter of August 9 sits on my desk, having reached me only recently, as I was away on vacation. Thanks for sending me Ms. Kessler's letter. Her response is unusually acerbic. Actually, the Christmas article is one that regularly circulates, and equally regularly generates positive comments from readers.

Nonetheless, I felt obliged to respond to Ms. Kessler, who is nothing if not an intelligent critic. That there is a story behind her remarks is muva me'elay! But a nice letter from me affirming her as a person, denying the worst that she fears from us religious rabbi sorts, and trying to make peace without sacrificing principle (especially at this time of year) is certainly not out of place. I enclose a copy of the letter here.

Until we meet...

*Kol tuv. Shanah tovah umetukah!*

  
Larry Hoffman

*I assume these  
from will not  
people her letter  
to - you ought to  
share Larry's  
response with her*



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

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(212) 674-5300

9/1/94

Ms. Coventry Kessler,  
5 Herrick Place,  
Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms. Kessler,

Rabbi Alexander Schindler has graciously forwarded to me your "Reply" to my article in Crosscurrents, "Being a Jew at Christmastime." I thought it a significant, thoughtful, and altogether extraordinary response, deserving of a personal note back to you. I am grateful for the time you took to write it.

In large part, the various issues you raise can be grouped into two categories. The first is a substantive difference of opinion that we may have. The best minds and most honest souls may rightfully hold different views on important issues, so it may be that we will respectfully agree to disagree here. I mean the question (as I put it) of whether "You can't be Jewish and Christian, and you can't have both Chanukah and Christmas." You object that I mistake "can't" for "shouldn't" and you are partly right. I do not mean to say that people simply can't; many obviously do. I mean they can't without simultaneously encroaching on the distinctiveness of each faith and blurring what the proponents of each one maintain as their authenticity. So when I say, "can't," I do not mean to deny the patent fact that millions of people in fact "do," just as they do all sorts of things in practice; I do mean that what they do in practice countermands in theory the very essence of what Judaism on one hand and Christianity on the other posit as their very essence.

On that point, as I say, we respectfully differ. It is, however, a second point, the one to which I now come, that disturbs me more.

I mean the obvious references you make to your own experience in which you have been dealt with painfully by others. Here I side entirely with you in decrying the incidents you describe. I regret that some people treat converts as if they are less than fully Jewish, and I in no way hold that converts should deny their past. Were you to tell me in conversation that your great-grandparents were a Baptist minister and a Christian Scientist practitioner, it would prove to be a "conversation stopper" (as you put it) only because I would ask you to tell me more about them, in honest regard for their integrity, the spiritual legacy they have left you, and the story of your



own odyssey through life in which they play an important and valued role. Also, I do not (again, contrary to your assumption), hold that converts must adopt the patronymic "Abraham," but instead, regularly support (for instance) my students who are converts to Judaism in their desire to list on their rabbinic semikhah, their name and that of their real parents, "Z son/daughter of X and Y," even when X and/or Y are patently Christian names. I know that flies in the face of traditional Jewish norms, but I am a Reform Jew "by choice." I have only the highest regard for the spiritual background of everyone, and I never denigrate or gloss over anyone's humanity, in all its fullness.

I especially wish to disassociate myself from your unwarranted assumption that "in the quietness of [my] inner conversation, [I] feel more kinship, more tie, more innate understanding, with non-religious Jews of similar ethnic background than [I] do with most converts." That is absolutely false. In lectures around the country, I have heralded a post-ethnic age in which spiritual and ethical commitment bind us together in communities of choice.

Issues do exist between us: for instance, despite the momentary lapse of saying "antithesis" when I meant "embodiment," (if that is what happened -- I do not have the text in front of me), I portray Christmas Carol as a denunciation of rampant capitalist excess, not as its affirmation. And contrary to your categorizing my remarks as "patently self-serving," I believe they follow from my determination to pay full heed to the integrity (as I see it) of the religious definition of Christmas rather than to its cultural entanglement with capitalism. In the end, we are back again to our principled difference of opinion, for which I ask your own regard for me, equal to that which I accord to you. What you take as "self-serving" I regard as necessarily continuous with Christian theology, Christian thinkers, Christian advocacy, and Christianity itself -- I know of no interfaith dialogue partners who speak officially for either Roman Catholicism or the various historical churches within Protestantism who would disagree with my analysis. We also differ with regard to secularism -- you hold it in higher regard than I do, though we both oppose religious fundamentalism (among both Jews and Christians) that perverts what we take to be religion at its finest. You misunderstand my use of the word "myth," which I use positively, not negatively. And you err in thinking I would ever tell my children the story of Hannah, which, incidentally, rabbinic Judaism tried to squelch as I do -- it is carried first in non-Jewish sources, and then picked up (a mistake, as I see it) as an understandable Jewish response to persecution -- but I have no more use for it than you do.

I believe too -- and you may join me here -- that Judaism is in sore need of a new spiritual emphasis that will underscore its historic prophetic ethic while at the same time provide inner healing and promise to the Jews who practice it. Your instances of Jews who pursue Buddhism, for instance, are to the point here. I am also critical of whatever failures in Jewish life I encounter, and I do not shrink from castigating most synagogues for their failure to be spiritual in their very essence, not to mention in their worship. My writing on that subject is available for all to see. But I remain a determined advocate of Judaism, a proud Jew, and a believer in the Jewish Mission to work hand in hand with all humanity to perfect God's world. It is that very determination which mandates my inability to gloss over the historic differences among the world's faiths, including the categorization of Christmas as authentically Christian. But it also allows me to say, as I have here, that I extend to you my fullest regard, even as you differ from me in matters of principle; I value

you for who you are, including your background in Christianity which makes you fully the unique person you are today, and which you cannot and should not deny or denigrate.

May the new year bring you blessing and joy, and may it herald an era of peace for the world's suffering.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman





## Letters to the Editor

## Jewish Converts Should Be Cherished

Rabbi Jack L. Moline articulated an Orthodox Jewish view proscribing intermarriage ("Keeping the Faith: Marriage and Family No Longer Are Ties That Bind to Judaism," page one, Aug. 8). Such archaic views do not reflect well the mainstream thought of American Judaism. We are Americans first and Jews second, and thereby most of our neighbors are non-Jews. I have been attentive to Jewish theological discourse over a half-century, and know most learned rabbis state that the essence of Judaism is "love thy neighbor" and the "golden rule"—all the rest is commentary.

If we are to take to heart the essence of Judaism, loving our neighbor means loving non-Jews, because they are our neighbors unless we segregate ourselves in ghettos, suburban or otherwise. What Jehovah has taught and given to Jews as their responsibility, to know and obey his laws, will not necessarily end with intermarriage. For if we are to love our neighbor, what better way than to marry and to have children, and bring them up within a moral context of Judeo-Christian teaching? The Old Testament and the Ten Commandments are common to most Jews and gentiles.

It should be clarified that Jews can be divided in four significant ways, not three: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Secular. Contrary to those rabbis who require synagogues and a flock of followers to make a living, it is possible to be a Jew in the best sense of the word without participating in organized religion. The Chosen People are free to choose, and America is the Promised Land.

VICTOR BLOOM, M.D.  
Grosse Point Park, Mich.

\* \* \*

Your article underscores the unintended heartlessness of placing group "needs" over individual freedom. It's wrong to tell young people that their choice of a spouse—the most important decision affecting their own happiness—must conform to the expectations of others.

Rabbi Moline is clearly not a bigot, but his position against intermarriage builds walls, not bridges. Religious leaders have a responsibility to spread messages of love, not division, among the youths who look to them for guidance. People who marry outside their faith are not rejecting their families or their faith—they are opening their hearts and lives to another human being. I don't understand how anyone can object to that.

JOHN FINOCHARO  
Cincinnati

\* \* \*

The lack of younger Jews' commitment to their religion should come as a surprise to no one, at least not any Jew. Alienation begins when youngsters are forced to go to Hebrew school three days a week. Any outside interest is summarily dismissed. For the next six years the child is taught to read (but not understand) biblical Hebrew. Understanding none of what he is reading, he learns nothing but frustration.

At age 13 the child is then put through his or her ritual of passage, a bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah, the preparation for which consists of the worst elements of fraternity hazing and boot camp, and ends with the parents giving their child a big party—which is really used as a means to elevate the social status of the parents.

Later, if the youth desires to attend a Shabbat service, he or she must endure a 2½-hours-long service in which 80% of the service is conducted in Hebrew. I doubt Christians are any less sincere in their faith and yet their services last only about an hour and are conducted in English. God, in his (her, its?) omniscience obviously should understand our prayers in English, Hebrew or pig Latin.

Your contention that "Judaism isn't a particularly evangelistic religion" is a vast understatement. When my wife tried to convert she was discouraged from doing so, and many years after her conversion, some in our congregation still refer to her as a "shiksa." It seems to me that someone who voluntarily embraces Judaism is in fact the true Jew.

LOUIS E. KATZ

Poland, Ohio

\* \* \*

The statement that "Reform Jews now recognize as Jews the children of Jewish fathers married to gentiles" is only partially correct. Children of non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish fathers are not automatically recognized as Jews within Reform Judaism. They must be raised as Jews with attendant religious training such as bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah and participation in other rites of passage.

What may not have been apparent from the article is how the Reform movement is addressing intermarriage through its "Outreach" program, based on the principle, "We reject intermarriage—but not the intermarried." It is an effort to welcome intermarried families into the synagogue. We offer their children religious training and provide ways for non-Jewish spouses to take part in the life of the congregation and create a Jewish atmosphere in the home. Conversion is of course welcomed, and "Introduction to Judaism courses" are given in scores of synagogues.

Like it or not, intermarriage is a fact of

life. Efforts to proscribe intermarriage along the lines followed by Rabbi Moline have not worked. As you observed, Jewish identity on the North American continent is no longer externally imposed by the larger society. Judaism today must be actively chosen, not only by converts—Jews by choice—but also by Jews by birth, who must discover and develop new ties that bind them to the faith of their ancestors.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER  
President  
Union of American Hebrew  
Congregations

New York

\* \* \*

My compliments for a sensitive glimpse into my synagogue as it grapples with "Keeping the Faith." But you missed an important perspective. Judaism has been immeasurably enriched by the convert of conviction. Although not actively proselytizing, Judaism enjoins its born adherents to welcome the Ger Zedek, the righteous convert, as more cherished unto God than the most pious Jew born to a Jewish mother. The contributions of such proselytes, from the second-century Hebrew-Aramaic translator Onkelos to the charismatic Black Jewish professor Julius Lester, have ennobled a noble religion.

Agudas Achim Synagogue is no exception. Some of its most sensitive and committed members are converts of conviction whom we cherish and love. The challenge, therefore, is not just to stem the tide of intermarriage; it is to succeed in the free market of religious ideas and moral values. Only then will Judaism remain a magnet attracting converts of conviction and defeating the effects of assimilation.

BARUCH A. FELLNER  
Cantor

Agudas Achim Congregation  
Washington

## When Stalin Got Cross, Economists Vanished

Your Aug. 8 article "Believers in One Wave Theory See U.S. in Deep Trough Soon" fairly described the long-cycle theory propounded by the late Russian economist Nikolai Kondratieff.

But Kondratieff's theories probably cost him his life. It did not please Stalin to hear that Western capitalism would inevitably emerge from the economic trough that began in 1929 and continued into the 1930s. Stalin's ideology held that the Great Depression was the death rattle of capitalism and that Soviet socialism would prevail.

For this reason, and allegations of "rightist deviation," Stalin had Kondratieff arrested in 1930. The hapless economist soon disappeared within the Gulag system, where he presumably perished in the early 1930s.

Clearly, Stalin took ideas seriously.

KURT R. SCHMELLER  
President

Queensborough Community College  
City University of New York  
Glen Cove, N.Y.

## Nutrition Labeling Builds Strong Markets

You oppose nutritional-labeling laws because of cost and the claim that Americans are already well fed ("The Food Crusades," editorial, Aug. 12). Do you also oppose reporting of financial information by publicly traded companies because it is expensive and the U.S. is already a wealthy country?

In food stores, as on Wall Street, complete and consistently reported information facilitates comparison shopping and thereby promotes market efficiency. In both markets the benefits of full disclosure far outweigh the costs, even when most buyers of bread or stocks don't read all the fine print.

The only other reasons you give for opposing detailed labeling laws are that one advocate lost 50 pounds while another was deprived of sugar by his mother. These crude comments are spectacularly irrelevant.

ARTHUR LEWBEL  
Associate Professor of Economics  
Brandeis University

Waltham, Mass.

## Puzzled in La Jolla

In your Aug. 9 page-one article "Bad Bets: Many Big S&L Losses Turn Out to Be Due to a Financial Gamble," reference was made to the Wayne Angell who served as a paid consultant to Franklin Savings Association from 1981-1985, and who was termed "one of the principal architects" of the complicated arbitrage-hedging strategies.

In that same story and in Paul A. Gligot's Potomac Watch column on the editorial page, I learn that Mr. Angell has been appointed to the Federal Reserve.

I admit I don't understand the financial legerdemain that resulted in at least part of the huge savings-and-loan deficit, but can someone explain to me how Mr. Angell can progress so adroitly from disaster to reward?

ALEXANDER G. SILBERSTEIN, M.D.  
La Jolla, Calif.





COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

June 15, 1994  
6 Tammuz 5754

Bryna Franklin  
P.O. Box 17104  
Tel-Aviv 61170 Israel

Dear Ms Franklin:

Your letter of May 30 reached our office during Rabbi Schindler's absence. He is currently away from his desk for an extended period and will not have an opportunity to review your comments until his return in mid-summer. I know he will be grateful to you for sharing your thoughts and concerns with him.

With kindest greetings, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller  
Assistant to the President



May 30, 1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021  
U.S.A.

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

I am writing with regard to the article which appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of 'Reform Judaism' entitled "Why Jews Should Seek Converts."

I am 100% opposed! At the present time, the rate of intermarriage is more than 50% in the States, there are born Jews who want to be affiliated with a congregation and are unable to pay the dues required (as per the letters in the same issue), and there tends to be a lack of 'leadership' among the supposed leaders of the Movement.

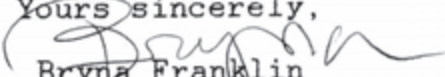
Under the circumstances, it would seem more relevant and meaningful for the future of the Movement to use any monies available to improve educational programs at all levels, have a fund available to assist those not in a financial position to pay regular dues, (if this should be a loan or grant is another issue but the recipient should be treated with the utmost respect), more intensive leadership training workshops should be developed, and young people should be encouraged to participate in a program in Israel.

If an "Outreach Program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking their roots in religion" is implemented, it will justify Christians outreach to "unsynagogued Jews" which is almost two-thirds of American Jewry. How then would we have the moral right to speak out against missionaries!

It seems that one possible reason for even raising this issue at this time is to take the pressures off of our 'leaders' who seemingly did not sound the alarm in time regarding the state of Jewish religious life in the U.S.

In addition, regarding the innocuous matter of name change, there is a full page survey sheet and we are asked to fill out a form and express our view. Yet on such a fundamental issue as prostelytizing, our opinion is not asked. Is the rationale that we are not capable of making such decisions? Are the views of members of reform congregations not relevant? Is this but one more reason why so many Jews are unsynagogued?

Your comments will be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,  
  
Bryna Franklin  
P.O.B. 17104  
Tel-Aviv 61170 Israel

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May 24, 1994

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, President  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
c/o Temple Emanu-El  
8500 Hillcrest Road  
Dallas TX 75225-4204

Re: Rabbinic Officiation at Intermarriages

Dear Shelly:

In the latter part of 1993, the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI) surveyed a group of 5,300 Jewish philanthropists, each of which had given at least \$5,000 in the previous year. (The average gifts were over \$40,000.) One of the questions asked concerned the issue of rabbinic officiation at an interfaith marriage where there was a commitment to raise the children as Jews. The research showed that 74 percent of those who identified themselves as Reform Jews and 68 percent of those who identified as Conservative Jews were in favor of rabbinic officiation. This followed an earlier 1993 poll which was not limited to "philanthropists" and which showed that 71 percent of Reform Jews and 56 percent of Conservative Jews favor rabbinic officiation in these circumstances.

These statistics are not surprising in light of the fact that the 1990 Jewish population census showed that approximately 62 percent of people raised Reform, 50 percent raised Conservative, and 25 percent raised Orthodox, who have married since 1985, have married individuals not born Jewish. My belief is that by the end of this decade, the intermarriage rate among Reform Jews will exceed 65 percent and may approach and possibly exceed 70 percent. This is approximately twice the rate of intermarriage that existed in 1973 at the time the CCAR last adopted a resolution concerning rabbinic officiation.

Concurrently with the rise of intermarriage, the Reform Movement has made a major change with tradition in adopting the position of patrilineal, as well as matrilineal, determination of Jewish identity, if children are raised as Jews. In addition, there has been another major change from prior tradition concerning the legitimacy of gay and lesbian rabbis, notwithstanding Jewish tradition rooted in the words of the Torah which specifically condemns homosexuality, calling it an "abomination."

Meanwhile, many young interfaith couples who are planning to marry desire to have the individual officiating at the marriage be someone with strong religious identity. These couples would much prefer a rabbi to a judge, even if the judge is Jewish. Since many, if not most, individuals perceive a wedding as a holy occasion, it is very natural for them to want to have a member of the clergy officiate. If a rabbi is unwilling, it opens the door for the non-Jewish partner to suggest that a minister or priest officiate.



Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman  
May 24, 1994  
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As you know, when in 1978 I was appointed as the first Chairman of the Joint UAHC-CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach, there was tremendous pressure for us to address the issue of rabbinic officiation. I discussed this with the CCAR Co-Chairman and with UAHC President Alex Schindler. We all agreed that because of the divisive nature of the issue and the concerns of the CCAR leadership, we should try and focus on all other aspects of outreach and postpone consideration of the issue until after the 1981 Biennial when the five Outreach resolutions were proposed for adoption. In order to do this, it was necessary to make a commitment that after the 1981 Biennial, the Task Force would address the issue of officiation.

You were a member of the Task Force and know that in 1982, a subcommittee was appointed to study the issue of rabbinic officiation. After months of study, the Task Force adopted a number of recommendations which were included in its October 1983 Closing Report. On page 8 of that Report, we wrote: "The Task Force unqualifiedly affirms the right of every rabbi to act in accordance with his/her religious conscience in the matter of officiating at interfaith marriage free from any external pressure." The Closing Report then discussed the complexity of interfaith marriage issues and made a recommendation for the appointment of a Tripartite Task Force of the UAHC, CCAR and HUC-JIR which would study all aspects of intermarriage, including officiation, and would report back within two years--with the target date being the 1985 UAHC Biennial. Unfortunately, these issues were not addressed in the report of the Tripartite Task Force at the 1985 Biennial, nor were they addressed at the 1987 Biennial. The Tripartite Task Force then dissolved. This failure of the Tripartite Task Force constitutes an unfortunate "record of inaction." Such a record undermines lay constituency confidence in the leadership of the Reform Movement.

Meanwhile, the rising rate of intermarriage constitutes a demographic revolution in the composition of our Jewish community. Increasing numbers of Jews are becoming frustrated with the failure of our Movement to discuss the issue of rabbinic officiation in the face of these changes. This is ironic because we have no fears of discussing all kinds of other controversial issues, particularly in the political realm where we spend such a great amount of plenary session time at our UAHC General Assemblies--most recently in San Francisco in 1993 where we spent over an hour debating health care reform and fetal tissue research. This compared with less than ten minutes discussing the Report and the proposed resolutions of the Strategic Planning Task Force on Jewish Continuity and Growth, which as you know I chaired and in which you played a major role in your presentation on your perspective of the synagogue.

Shelly, you and I both share a deep commitment to not just Jewish continuity, but Jewish continuity and growth. I believe that the North American Jewish community must come forward with an overall program to market Judaism to interdating and intermarried families and their children as well as to unaffiliated Jews. That is the primary reason I wrote the booklet for the Reform Movement, "What Judaism Offers for You: A Reform Perspective," and the similar booklet published by the Jewish Outreach Institute, "Choosing Judaism: An Opportunity for Everyone." I have summarized some of my thoughts on the importance of having a "continuity and growth" perspective in an article published in the December 1993 issue of MOMENT Magazine, a copy of which is enclosed.

As I view these issues in the context of the demographic revolution in which we are living and from my perspective as having served as the first Chairman of the Joint Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach and the first Chairman of the Joint Commission on Outreach, plus my perspective as Chairman of the Joint Task Force on Jewish Continuity and Growth, I believe that it is time for the CCAR to consider changing its 1973 resolution on officiation. Obviously, every rabbi should be able to determine, free from any outside pressures, whether or not to officiate at an interfaith marriage. However, much has changed since 1973, and the only thing approaching a collective action on the part of the CCAR has been the 1984 so-called "Committee of 100" statement, in which you and many other CCAR leaders joined. The Committee of 100 pamphlet included language (page 10) asserting that "Rabbis who do officiate at mixed marriage



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ceremonies do so contrary to the clear guidelines of their rabbinic organization." Those guidelines were enunciated 21 years ago, when the intermarriage rate was half of what it is today. One obvious possible change is a proposal for an alternate ceremony without such traditional language as "under the laws of Moses," which was alluded to in the Committee of 100 pamphlet as one of the reasons rabbis do not officiate.

The 1973 CCAR resolution on officiation recalled the stand adopted in 1909 "that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged." In light of the rationale of "tradition," the natural question that follows is: "If it is all right for the CCAR to break with tradition and support the legitimacy of the small minority of rabbis who are gay or lesbian, notwithstanding the specific language in the Torah condemning homosexuality, should not the CCAR be sensitive to the concerns of the majority of Reform people and permit officiation at intermarriages where there is a commitment to raise the children as Jews?" Is it appropriate for a homosexual rabbi to refuse to officiate at such an intermarriage ceremony on the grounds that this "is contrary to the Jewish tradition"? What would be the response of the Committee of 100 to this question?

Related to this is another matter that has been recently brought to my attention by a CCAR member who lives in Illinois. He states that there is an unwritten rule within the CCAR, which he analogizes to the old country club unwritten rules which excluded Jews, that a rabbi who officiates at an intermarriage is almost sure to be precluded from becoming President of the CCAR. He suggests that over the past twenty years, and possibly longer, no rabbi who has officiated at intermarriages has been elected as President of the CCAR, despite the fact that more than one-third of CCAR members do officiate at interfaith marriages. He also asserts the CCAR Board is disproportionately dominated by rabbis who do not officiate. I would appreciate your comments on this and also letting me know specifically who was the last rabbi elected as President of the CCAR who, prior to his election, officiated at intermarriages.

Reform Judaism has been a Movement that has been responsive to the needs and concerns of lay people. As a matter of fact, a central element of Reform philosophy appears in the opening portion of the permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York captioned "Culture and Continuity." It begins with the statement that "...Jews have been able to sustain their culture by evolving a culture that was adaptable to life in many countries and to their various conditions." Later on in the exhibit, there is reference to a wonderful comment in Zohar 1.89a where it is written that "God creates new worlds constantly. In what way? By causing marriages to take place." Today, a majority are intermarriages.

Twenty years from now, I am confident that the great majority of Reform rabbis will officiate at intermarriages, where there is a commitment to raise the children as Jews. A sage Jewish philanthropist once told me that when he was faced with an issue where he was reasonably confident that ultimately the issue would be decided in a certain way, he asked the question, "If eventually, why not now?" If the intermarriage rate were 80 percent, would the CCAR then change its stand? What about 70 percent? What about 60 percent? Well, 60 percent is already here, and we are well on the road to 70 percent and, unfortunately, we will probably be over 75 percent within the next twenty years. The overwhelming majority of Reform Jews want a change now--not twenty years from now.

Shelly, I am very much aware of the fact that you choose not to officiate at an intermarriage and that you handle the matter with great sensitivity. On the other hand, just as it took a Richard Nixon to open the doors to lead a major change in United States policy toward China, I think the ideal individual to lead a reconsideration by the CCAR on this issue would be a highly respected Reform rabbinic leader who does not officiate. Obviously, I do not suggest that you or any other rabbi should change your own personal philosophy on whether to officiate or not officiate. What I do suggest is that we are living in the age of a



Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman  
May 24, 1994  
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demographic revolution; we are members of a Movement where laity plays a major role; and the 1973 CCAR resolution grounded on "tradition" is inconsistent with the CCAR major break from tradition in its stands on patrilineality and gay and lesbian rabbis and is further in contradiction to the views of the great majority of Reform Jews.

In closing, I would ask that you think about why I am writing this letter. It is not as Chairman of the Jewish Outreach Institute, because JOI has never adopted any position on the issue of rabbinic officiation. It is not in an official capacity as an Honorary Vice Chairman of the UAHC or as a member of its Executive Board. Rather, I write because we are living in a major demographic revolution, because the Tripartite Task Force never completed its job, because I care deeply about Jewish continuity and growth in general and about the Reform Movement and our rabbis in particular, and because I am very concerned that there is a widening gulf between the rabbinate and the lay constituency of our Movement on an important issue that affects a majority of families.

The easiest thing for me to do would be to say nothing, and to write nothing, but I do not think that this would be good for the CCAR, good for the UAHC, or good for the more than one million Reform Jews in North America. Over thousands of years, great philosophical debates have occurred throughout Jewish history. The growth and the development of the Reform Movement is an outgrowth of some of these debates. Over the past several decades major changes have occurred within the Reform Movement, in part brought about by concerns expressed by our laity. Eventually, the CCAR will change its 1973 position on the issue of rabbinic officiation, where there is a commitment to live in a Jewish household and raise any children as Jews. If eventually, why not now?

As I look to the future, I think about the promise of God to Abraham that the descendants of Abraham and Sarah would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the beaches. I believe that we must help God achieve these goals, seeking both growth in the numbers of Jews as well as in the depth of their Jewish knowledge and commitment. This is the spirit in which this letter is written, and I hope that you and your colleagues in the CCAR will understand this perspective as I have shared my thoughts with you. I will look forward to hearing from you. As you know I spend a major amount of time in New York and would be happy to visit with you personally or, if you think it appropriate, I would be happy to share these thoughts with the entire membership of the CCAR Board. Finally, in light of the composition of the Tripartite Task Force, I am sending copies of this letter to the professional and lay heads of the UAHC and HUC.

My warm regards to you and your family.

Sincerely,



David W. Belin

DWB:cs

Encl.

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c.c. Melvin Merians, Chairman, UAHC Board of Trustees  
Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President, UAHC  
Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, President, Hebrew Union College  
Stanley Gold, Chairman, Hebrew Union College Board



## DAVID W. BELIN

GUEST COLUMNIST



*Continuity and survival are current buzzwords in the Jewish community. They are the wrong words.*

A mother recently brought her newborn daughter into the rabbi's study to discuss having her named in a synagogue ceremony. For the mother, it was a joyous occasion. She was the product of a Jewish family steeped in tradition, had gone to Hebrew school, been bat-mitzvahed, spent summers at Jewish camps and a year in Israel. At nearly 35, however, she had not found a Jewish man to marry. Shortly after turning 35, she fell in love with a non-Jewish man who, for personal reasons, would not convert but agreed to join his wife to live in a Jewish household and raise and educate their children as Jews.

When she talked to the rabbi about the baby-naming ceremony, the rabbi informed her that her husband would not be allowed to stand on the *bimah*. "But he has agreed to join with me to live in a Jewish home and provide a Jewish education for our daughter," she said. The rabbi was adamant. She resigned from the synagogue.

Would Moses, who married a non-Jew, have agreed with that rabbinic decision? Would the Prophet Isaiah, who spoke of Israel as "a light unto the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the Earth?"

Since 1985, more than 50 percent of marriages involving Jews involved a partner who was not born Jewish. By the end of this decade, I predict the figure will rise to more than 60 percent, and within the next 20 years it will approach 75 percent.

Some people argue that the only effective answer to this rising tide of intermarriage is "prevention"—Jewish education, Jewish camps, trips to Israel, a Jewish home life and other activities that encourage Jewish identification. I have seen too many young people with this kind of background intermarry.

Over 90 percent of Jewish college students interdate. Once there is that first kiss, a policy of prevention will have little effect on where the kiss leads. The policy of prevention is a noble idea that fails to understand the demographic revolution in American society characterized by massive social interchange between Jews and non-Jews.

Though obviously important, prevention alone is not enough. We must effectively reach out to intermarrieds.

At present the total annual national expenditures of the three major movements for outreach to the intermarried are as follows: Reform, \$419,000; Conservative, less than \$10,000; Orthodox, virtually none.

Allocations from local federations are in most cases abysmally low. The usual rationale by federation leadership for this decision is "priority": because the Jewish community has limited resources, we must give only secondary priority for funds to reach out to intermarried families because we will not have a very high success rate—or as high a success rate as might be achieved by reaching out to marginally committed Jews who have not intermarried.

Here, for example, is a recent statement of the head of the Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee:

"There are five questions that all advocates of outreach must wrestle with. First is the issue of priority. To what extent will programs targeted to mixed-marriage couples divert valuable resources from other programs that might be desirable in terms of sustaining Jewish identity in building strong and stable Jewish homes....Is it more important to have an outreach program to mixed-married couples or to assure that every young child, every adolescent, spend time in Israel?"

The answer is we can, and must, afford both. Moreover, we don't know how effective comprehensive outreach programs to the intermarried would be. They have never really been tried.

We have a wonderful product to sell—Judaism. A midwestern Jewish leader who emigrated from Vienna to the United States shortly before World War II put it simply: "Judaism is so unique...so wonderful, I can't understand why the whole world isn't Jewish."

Continuity and survival—the current buzzwords in the Jewish community. They are the wrong words. Their implications are negative. Just to "continue" and "survive" ignores our mission. In a world whose population will double in the next few decades, mere continuity and survival is the path of diminishing significance. Instead, we should be asking how we are going to grow and fulfill the mission of Israel.

Jews comprised over four percent of the American population 60 years ago. Today it is little more than two percent. The missionizing tradition of Judaism was so successful 2,000 years ago that there were somewhere between three and five million Jews then. Were it not for the legacy of the Edict of Constantine in the fourth century, which made conversion to Judaism a capital offense, our numbers today might be in the tens of millions. We now live in a land of freedom. The shackles of official antisemitism have been broken. We should no longer fear embracing our missionizing tradition.

Judaism—its universalism, its emphasis on personal freedom, the centrality of the family and the home, the concern for *tzedakah* and social justice, the tradition of education and study, the concept of peoplehood, the traditional Jewish covenant with God—offers a wonderful framework for welcoming



people into the religion.

We now have a remarkable opportunity to reach out to interfaith couples by encouraging identification with the Jewish community, Jewish commitment in the home, and Jewish education for their children.

Some will argue that by reaching out to the intermarried, we will be encouraging intermarriage. The fact is that intermarriage is going to take place, regardless of whether we commit ourselves to outreach. If we fail to embrace these people, we will be turning our back on more than 50 percent of our children. I have five children, all of whom received a Jewish education, all of whom were bar- or bat-mitzvahed, all of whom were confirmed, all of whom spent time in Israel, and some of whom may marry individuals who are not initially prepared to convert to Judaism. I don't want the Jewish community to turn its back on those of my children who may intermarry.

The American Jewish community should spend annually for outreach programs to the intermarried a minimum of one dollar for every Jewish woman, man and child—an annual total of \$6 million. This is not a huge amount when compared with the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been raised for Holocaust museums. Surely, if we can raise that kind of money to build a museum looking to the past, we can raise a small portion of that money each year as we look to the future. From a pragmatic standpoint, this is an essential investment because we will be enlarging the base from which we derive all of our resources.

In the summer of 1993, the Jewish Outreach Institute conducted a poll concerning attitudes of Jews about intermarriage. Ninety-five percent of Conservative Jews, 74 percent of Orthodox Jews and 96 percent of Reform Jews were in favor of special programs for intermarried couples to "become better acquainted with and attracted to Judaism." When asked whether or not they wanted "to see more resources devoted by the organized Jewish community to programs designed to help intermarried families be a part of the community," 89 percent of Conservative Jews, 42 percent of Orthodox Jews and 96 percent of Reform Jews said "yes." Although the majority of American Jews are very supportive of outreach programs to the intermarried, the resources being devoted on a national basis are minimal. As is often the case, the grass roots of American Jews are ahead of their leadership.


If we are willing to devote the necessary resources to this task, we will find that thousands of people will make a personal Jewish choice and follow the path of Ruth to conversion. And thousands more, though not necessarily agreeing to convert to Judaism, will join their Jewish spouses to have their children raised as Jews.

If we turn our backs on those couples, we will not only be hurting our own children and grandchildren, but we will be putting a dagger to the heart of Jewish continuity and growth. ☺

*David W. Belin is president of the Jewish Outreach Institute, which bridges all branches of Judaism and concentrates on reaching out to interdating and intermarried couples.*

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RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 30, 1994  
18 Nisan 5754

Richard England  
2832 Chain Bridge Road, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Dick:

Thank you for sending me a copy of the Washington Jewish Week article on Outreach. I appreciate your keeping me posted.

The article is reasonably on the mark, but of course I don't think that Outreach has gone far enough. We should be infinitely more assertive in seeking the conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish partner of intermarriages. I also believe that Judaism has something to offer to those seekers after truth who may not at present be married to a Jew or contemplate such a marriage.

Be that as it may, the only aspect of the article I quarrel with is the author's assertion that Reform Judaism has grown largely because of our Outreach to the intermarried. We have grown by tens of thousands of families, true. Some 250 congregations have been added to our roster in the last two decades. In fact, our growth rate has been closer to 30% (which is more than the Lubavitcher Chasidim with all of their Outreach have in all the world.) But I am convinced that our burgeoning is due not only to Outreach, but also to our Social Action program which has brought a lot of young people into our congregations as well as our insistence on the full equality of women with men in the religious life.

Richard England  
March 30, 1994  
Page 2

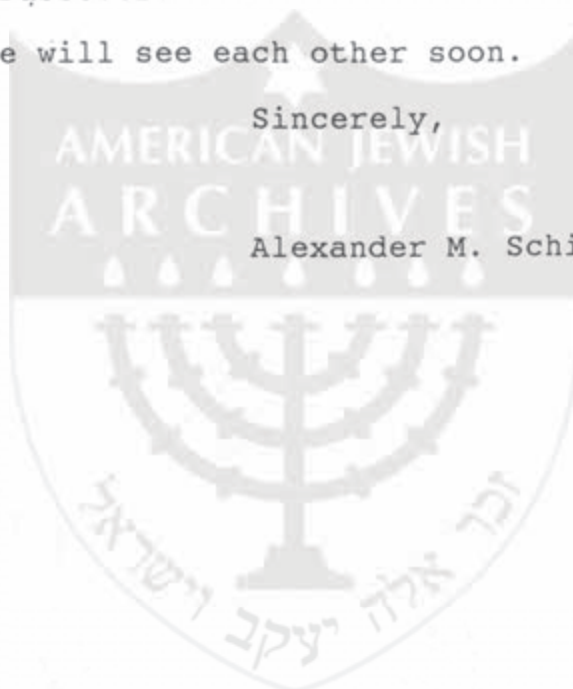
I hope that you and Lois are well. I wish you a happy  
and healthy Passover.

Hopefully, we will see each other soon.

Sincerely,

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Alexander M. Schindler





by Na'ama Batya Lewin  
Staff Writer*to Rabbi Schindler from Dick England*Does outreach threaten the fabric of  
**JEWISH LIFE?***Different movements  
adopt alternate approaches  
to intermarriage*

In 1979 "outreach" seemed to be the solution to the problems of intermarriage. It was the only way, some claimed, to ensure religious continuity in the assimilating American Jewish community.

Eleven years ago the Reform Movement began encouraging aggressive programs directed to the non-Jewish partner in an intermarriage, and the Conservative Movement followed in 1985. (The Orthodox Movement maintained its stance of not sanctioning interfaith relationships.)

The rate of intermarriage keeps growing. Today, 52 percent of American Jews intermarry. Some of the intermarried families affiliate without practicing religion and have no interest in becoming involved or observant.

Most interfaith couples do face religious issues when they start having a family and must resolve the religion of their children. Families might choose to observe a single religion at home. Others create a "dual identity" environment that incorporates both the Jewish and Gentile faith. Some couples provide alternately for Jewish and non-Jewish children.

Often these families ask to be accepted by the community as they are, without the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse.

According to a *Washington Jewish Week* survey, an average of 15.4 percent of those who regularly attend Reform congregations in the metropolitan Washington area are non-Jews. All area Reform congregations provide family memberships for intermarried couples, under which the non-Jewish spouse joins the synagogue. Ninety-three percent allow the non-Jewish spouse to seek representation on synagogue committees, and 40 percent allow non-Jews to be synagogue officers. Forty-three percent of Washington Conservative congregations suggest that the Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple join under a single membership, while 57 percent have arranged special family memberships. An average of 7 percent of non-Jewish spouses attend weekly Shabbat services.

Synagogues, Jewish community centers and social service agencies are trying to make intermarried couples feel more comfortable with Judaism. They believe that if interfaith families have a positive Jewish experience, they may choose to build a Jewish home or send their children to Hebrew school.

Competition among the outreach programs has become fierce. Which organization is more accepting toward these couples? Which is more flexible? Who is more successful in bringing families into the Jewish fold?

Conversion to Judaism seems no longer to be the focus of outreach. In synagogues, rabbis who find they have a growing number of non-Jews attending services regularly refrain from portraying interfaith relationships as a misfortune so as to avoid offending interfaith families. In some cases, interfaith groups have even become strong forces in dissuading non-Jewish spouses from converting.

A recent study published by the American Jewish Committee showed that even as the number of outreach programs abound, the rate of conversion has dropped. About 100,000 Jews continue to intermarry

every year. And three-fourths of the families do not raise their children as Jews.

Now many people are asking whether outreach has reached too far out.

"It is a delusion to believe that with outreach and intermarriage you can enlarge the Jewish community," insists Steven Bayme, director of the Jewish Communal Affairs Department for the American Jewish Committee.

Outreach, Bayme continues,

is a way to "teach families how to raise the kids Jewishly, how to preserve Judaism. But," he adds, "Judaism is a minority religion in America. The minority faith cannot be preserved if it is not the only religion in the home."

Rabbinic leadership in both the Reform and Conservative movements now have serious doubts about the success of outreach programs. The past president of the Reform Central Conference of American

Rabbis (CCAR), Walter Jacob, warned members in a paper presented to the top echelon of the movement — which was circulated privately outside Reform circles and provided to the *WJW* — that non-Jewish spouses of interfaith couples should not be allowed to become members of Reform congregations. And Rabbi Avis Miller, chairman of the Committee for *Kiruv* and *Giyur* for the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism, recently

published a paper suggesting that Conservative rabbis should no longer welcome intermarried couples into the congregation "without qualification." Miller reminded her readers that "the idea" of outreach "is to encourage not just entrance but long-term participation in an ongoing Jewish community."

**In practice**

Within synagogues "outreach" typically means accepting interfaith couples as eligible participants in religious life. Rather than treating Jews who intermarry as betrayers of the faith, synagogue congregations pull these couples into the community and teach them about Judaism.

By contrast, secular outreach programs are more like therapeutic "rap" sessions. Intermarried couples meet to discuss issues that come up in daily life. In Washington, the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington and the Jewish Social Service Agency have been able to attract a large number of intermarried couples because of a welcoming response to interfaith relationships. These institutions reach couples that synagogues might never see.

There are no prerequisites for joining the interfaith program at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington. Lisa Shapero, who runs the program founded just over a year ago, does not ask anything of couples who come to her classes. She doesn't question their home-life or religious intentions. Her program is run like a class in basic Judaism.

"We show people what it is like to be a Jew," says Shapero. The 28-year-old does not attempt to "persuade" participants to convert. "We try to be welcoming and not judgmental. If we don't reach

See OUTREACH, page 49





## OUTREACH

From page 29

out to people who may be potential Jews, then where can they turn?"

Erika Engelmann, who has been running interfaith workshops from the Jewish Social Service Agency of Greater Washington for almost 23 years, is expert in making interfaith couples feel comfortable. She explains that she teaches the couple how to relate better.

"I open the doors for dialogue," Engelmann says. "Couples come to me to discuss issues — their own religion and heritage. I encourage them to talk about their feelings. I help the couple with communication and the skills of listening." Engelmann suggests that individuals usually battle over religious issues the same way they argue over buying a new couch.

When couples come for advice, Engelmann will not suggest that they join a synagogue or send children to Hebrew school. She will not advise family members to light Chanukah candles rather than decorating a Christmas tree.

### Convert addition

The Reform movement claims to have grown by 15 percent in the past decade, largely because intermarried couples are counted as new members. Last year Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), suggested that the movement's outreach program become more aggressive. Schindler proposed that Judaism convert "non-church-going Christians" as well as non-Jewish spouses of interfaith couples.

In 1979 Schindler first suggested that Reform Judaism should welcome interfaith couples into congregations in hope that "the non-Jew would find Judaism a wonderful religion, decide to convert and bring up their child Jewish," explains Robin Farquhar, the Washington region outreach coordinator for the UAHC.

Since that time, intermarried couples have been allowed to join Reform congregations as family members. The UAHC has hired regional outreach directors. Farquhar is one of 14 such personnel from across the United States and Canada. "All we do is make it clear that we welcome intermarriage," she says.

But a few months ago Jacob, outgoing president of the CCAR, told his colleagues in a paper presented to the UAHC Executive Board: "It is wrong to have a non-Jew leading us in prayer. If we take prayer and these words seriously, then we cannot have a Gentile mouth what they clearly do not believe." The rabbi explained that there should be boundaries between Jew and non-Jew in the synagogue. "Outreach," he added "can never become Overreach."

Jacob argued that a non-

Jew should not be a member of a synagogue. "The synagogue is not a golf club or a spa which we may share with others," he said. "The synagogue seeks to further very specific Jewish ideals and goals through a community which accepts them .... If individuals want to become members, they should become Jews. Our doors are always open."

Rabbi Joseph Glaser, CCAR's executive vice president who sent copies of Jacob's paper to Reform rabbis across the country, attached a cover letter stating: "I believe it is time to examine the whole phenomenon closely. Outreach, which is an essential program in times like these, nevertheless has taken on a life of its own."

The Conservative movement, which does not allow the non-Jewish spouse to be a member and forbids its clergy from performing an intermarriage, has also been reconsidering its outreach programs. Rabbi Miller of Washington's Adas Israel Congregation said in a recently published American Jewish Committee paper that Judaism's "first line of defense" must be "to emphasize the *mitzvah* of endogamy." The message that Jews should marry other Jews must be transmitted "with firmness but without rancor."

"The goal of outreach is conversion," insists Rabbi Robert Abramson, director of education for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. "Efforts only to make people feel comfortable do lose sight with where we are coming from."

In 1985 the Conservative movement developed a three-tiered response to intermarriage. When prevention fails, the movement encourages the non-Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple to convert. If the spouse has no interest in conversion to Judaism, the Conservative community provides an outreach program with the hope that the non-Jewish partner will eventually choose to convert.

The non-Jewish spouse cannot become a synagogue member, join groups like a sisterhood, or perform ritual acts like *aliyyot* to the Torah-reading. But everyone is welcome to attend services and adult education programs. Some Conservative congregations address synagogue mail to the entire family.

Miller acknowledges that total acceptance of non-Jewish spouses would be "very successful" in the short term, but she argues that it would "dilute our community with one-generation Jews who, like cut flowers, may bloom brightly for a while but do not have enough Jewish nourishment to last beyond their own lifetime, to pass on to the next generation." Calling for outreach that does not "sacrifice our standards," Miller suggests that the process be renamed *kiruv* — the Hebrew word for bringing someone close, used in the Orthodox movement to describe efforts to increase observance among non-religious Jews.

The Orthodox community has no structured program for reaching out to interfaith

couples. "Anyone who is not Jewish who wishes to explore the option of becoming Jewish or studying about Judaism is warmly welcome," says Rabbi Joel Tessler of Beth Shalom Congregation in Potomac. "But Jewish law in no shape or form sanctions intermarriage," he adds. "Intermarriage is seen as that which can destroy the Jewish community."

The number of interfaith relationships is comparatively low in Orthodox circles. Some surveys report that six percent of Orthodox Jews marry non-Jews. "As a result, outreach is not as immediate a problem for Orthodox rabbis as for others. Instead, Orthodox rabbis reach out to Jews who want to learn more about Judaism. That is the pressure point."

Even so, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), an Orthodox rabbinical organization, recently started an outreach program. Its Commission on Intermarriage is described by the RCA as a *kiruv* program designed to discourage interfaith relationships. The RCA, says Rabbi Max Schreier, decided it could help prevent intermarriage if it scheduled Judaism workshops on college campuses.

"The highest rates of intermarriage come from college campuses," says Schreier. "We decided that was where we could make a difference." The RCA's program is designed to "show students the relevance of Jewish ideas. The result should be," he says, "that they should choose not to intermarry."

### Educational approaches

All Conservative and Reform synagogues accept children of interfaith couples in their Hebrew schools on the principle that the children of interfaith families should not be rejected because of the parents' relationship. Seventy percent of Washington Conservative congregations ask that a student with a Jewish father undergo conversion before he or she reaches bar or

See OUTREACH, page 59



# OUTREACH

From page 49

bat mitzvah age. Some area Reform congregations — which accept patrilineal descent — only ask that a child not attend another school that teaches a non-Jewish religion.

Does the presence of these children affect the content of the Hebrew school curriculum? Can teachers comfortably tell their students that Christmas is not a Jewish holiday if a significant number actually celebrate it with the approval of both parents? Will intermarried parents remove their children from synagogue Hebrew schools if Judaism is advocated too ardently?

One local rabbi, who asked not to be named, pointed out that clergy are not only afraid of offending these families and losing them from the Jewish community but also fear losing membership and tuition funds. "It comes down to money," the rabbi bluntly said.

Many Jewish leaders believe that intermarriage results from inadequate appreciation of Judaism in the home. Therefore, they question whether the Jewish community should spend time and money for interfaith programs that do not influence the home environment. The JCC allocates about \$60,000

annually for an interfaith program.

Executive director Lester Kaplan says that including JCC special holiday outreach programs, the figure reaches almost \$100,000 a year. JSSA sets aside about \$5,000 for its program. Critics believe that the Washington Jewish community could better spend these funds on programs such as outreach to the non-affiliated Jew, Jewish education, or assistance to Russian Jewish immigrants.

Phyllis Margolius, president of UJAF, insists that the expenditure is minimal in comparison to what is spent on other Jewish programs. Funding for outreach to interfaith couples must be considered, she says, in a broader context.

"The reality is there are a lot of people in the community — some of whom are in all-Jewish households and others in interfaith households — who have a desire to be Jewish and pass on their Judaism," Margolius insists. "We need to open doors rather than close them. And when someone reaches out, we want to have a hand there."

"It's most important to maintain Jewish identity even among Jews who have a non-Jewish parent," says Rabbi Arthur Blecher of Congregation Beth Chai — a Humanist synagogue in Fairfax, Va. — who is one of a few Washington-area rabbis who

co-officiates at interfaith marriages. "If you tell them they are not Jewish, they will be lost. If you tell them they are Jewish, they may want to learn something more."

Traditional rabbis, says Blecher, mislead the Jewish community. They say that if parents have a Jewish home and keep kosher, their children won't intermarry.

"That," he says, "isn't true. By saying that, rabbis make the whole situation worse. When a couple's child does intermarry, the parents will feel that they have failed."

Blecher was ordained as a Conservative rabbi in 1975 at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. But he now feels that intermarried couples need not be urged to send children to Hebrew school or raise them Jewish. Before Blecher agrees to marry an interfaith couple, he schedules to meet with the parties a few times.

"I only want to make sure they are an appropriate couple. That they love each other and take the commitment seriously. I don't have any preconditions," he adds. "I don't have a hidden agenda."

Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements, says Blecher, "are not adapting well to the decline in the importance of religion in society. Quoting Torah just isn't going to cut it in this generation."

# MEMORANDUM

COPY

March 28, 1994

*Dru*

**FROM:** Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
**TO:** Dru Greenwood  
**COPY:**

The enclosed is self explanatory. I don't know really whether we can do something here, at least we ought to try.



**Union of American Hebrew Congregations**

**SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA**

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100





COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 28, 1994  
16 Nisan 5754

Mrs. Samuel Yochelson  
Apt. 824 East  
4201 Cathedral Avenue  
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Mrs. Yochelson:

I am turning your letter over to the Director of our Outreach Division, Dru Greenwood. We do have a Regional Outreach Director in the New York area, and perhaps the "gentle, tactful," approach can be made. I really can't promise this, but in any event we will make certain that your name will not be involved in this approach.

It may well be that we won't be able to make contact without being too obvious, but certainly a try will be made.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

CC: BOTH LETTERS TO DRU GREENWOOD

Mrs. Samuel Yochelson

Apartment 824 East

4201 Cathedral Avenue

Washington, D.C. 20016

March 21, 1994

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

To identify myself - I am a friend of Donald and Edie Day of Buffalo, New York. They are my closest friends - and Donald can tell you why, and of my deep dedication to Judaism. You will find me in Who's Who in the East, Who's Who of American Women, etc. (latest editions). Reading the latest edition - "Spring, 1994" - inspires me to ask your guidance and help.

My brother in New Haven Conn. has an only son, Ezra Mersey, a brilliant and gifted young architect. He is married to a lovely young woman who aspires to be a Metropolitan Opera singer. For me, sadly, she is Catholic - of Italian background - Religion has never been brought up. Do you think there is any one who might, perhaps, gently, tactfully bring the delicate subject of conversion (without offending anyone) to their attention? Can this be done without bringing my name or my identity out in the open? - That might create havoc because this is delicate - I could not go to the wedding because it grieved me - and I knew how deeply



it hurt my brother who is very ill - but...  
he has been an enormously active person  
in Jewish affairs - a scholar in his reformed  
synagogue, etc. in Woodbridge, Conn.

Here is Ezra & Carol Mersey's address.

Ezra and Carol Mersey  
225 Rector Place  
New York, N.Y. 10280

I think this is in Battery Park area -

Also, may I please have another  
copy of this last edition - specifying "Seek-  
ing Converts" It is beautiful!

Thank you with all my heart.

Sincerely,

Kathryn M. Yochelson  
(202) - 244-1166

P.S. I am a senior, senior citizen.

My husband, Dr. Samuel Yochelson,  
was famous psychiatrist. Sadly, he died in  
1976 - His work in the criminal personality, etc.  
is a land-mark. Both of our children are in  
Who's Who of America. It would mean so  
much if we could be together on religion!  
It troubles me - only because I know  
how much it means to my brother etc -  
and to me. If they have children, it gives  
us all a unity... an identity. ✕

Thank you again -

I may even send you an article on  
Israeli art - That is my "expertise" - Thank  
you again!



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 28, 1994  
16 Nisan 5754

Mr. & Mrs. Donald S. Day  
Saperston & Day  
1100 M & T Center  
3 Fountain Plaza  
Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Don and Edy:

A Mrs. Samuel Yochelson of Washington, DC contacted us with regard to some kind of sensitive problem in re a nephew of hers who intermarried. We will try to do what we can in this connection, although it is difficult to make contact since there is apparently no affiliation with any institution and it is difficult to drop in on someone out of the blue, as it were. Be that as it may, we will give it a try. Who can say no to someone who is so close to our Donald and Edy.

We hope that you had a joyous holiday and that both of you are well. We, and that means Rhea and I, continue to hold you in our highest affection.

Fondly,

Alexander M. Schindler



*Outreach*

March 8, 1994  
25 Adar 5754

Judy Simms  
400 Hurlingham Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94402

Dear Judy:

On my return from my travels, I had an opportunity to review the two proposals you were kind enough to share with me. I thank you for so doing, even as I thank you for your years of excellent work in outreach, a most critical area of our doing. I know your congregation honored you last year, and deservedly so, to give public expression of appreciation for all your efforts.

In regard to your proposal on unaffiliated Jews, you should know that even now our Committee (formerly a Task Force) on the Unaffiliated is actively looking into the issue of finances in conjunction with other barriers to affiliation for young adults. You undoubtedly are aware of our "Taste Of Judaism" program, a free, three session introduction, which is being piloted on one college campus this Spring.

As to our proselytizing in the non-Jewish world, we are really just beginning to look at the path this effort should take. As a very small beginning step, we are now teaching courses on Outreach at the New York and Cincinnati campuses of HUC-JIR, so that the future rabbis and other professionals of our movement understand their role in assertively inviting the choice of Judaism.

Beyond these early stages we still have much planning to do. I assure you that your proposals will be shared with the Outreach Commission and the Committee on the Unaffiliated.

Judy, do continue the fine work you do in Outreach. It is important to Reform Judaism. With warm regards and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS — CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

## William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

March 7, 1994  
24 Adar 5754

*Yd'e  
please respond  
as soon as  
possible*

### MEMORANDUM

To: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

From: Dru Greenwood *[Signature]*

I looked over the proposals that Judy Simms sent to you. (She had also sent a cc to me and to Alan Berg.)

First, as she says, she has contributed significantly to Outreach efforts over the years. She was honored by her congregation last year for all the wonderful work she has done.

Second, the two proposals are interesting in their concept, particularly in the emphasis they put on researching the techniques of others who have been doing active proselytizing more aggressively and recently than we have. The Committee on the Unaffiliated has been actively looking at the issue to money in conjunction with other barriers to affiliation for young Jewish adults and the "Taste of Judaism" program--a free, 3-session introduction--is being piloted on one college campus this spring.

With regard to the second proposal, you might mention the courses on Outreach that are currently being taught at HUC in New York and Cincinnati. While they do not focus on the teachings of Christianity, they do emphasize the role of Jewish professionals in assertively inviting the choice of Judaism.

Finally, I would thank her for her great work and excellent suggestions as we move into a new phase of Outreach and let her know that her proposals will be shared with the Outreach Commission and the Committee on the Unaffiliated.

Chairperson  
Harris Gilbert

Co-Chairperson  
Rabbi Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons  
Elizabeth Linkon  
Pamela Waechter

Director  
Dru Greenwood



# MEMORANDUM

COPY

March 3, 1994

**FROM:** Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
**TO:** Dru Greenwood  
**COPY:**

I received the enclosed from Judy Simms of San Mateo, California. As you see, she indicates you are very familiar with the work that she has been doing these past 10 years.

I would be grateful if you would read the two proposals which she has shared with me and let me have your reaction so that I can respond to Judy.

Many thanks.



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 1, 1994  
18 Adar 5754

*He has to  
evaluate to  
I can  
respond*

Judy Simms  
400 Hurlingham Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94402

Dear Ms Simms:

Just a note to advise that your letter of February 23rd was received during Rabbi Schindler's travels out of the country. He will be returning to his desk for but a few days before leaving for another trip in behalf of the UAHC. Your letter will, of course, be brought to his attention and I know that he will read your material with great interest and provide his comments and suggestions at the earliest possible time.

With kindest greetings, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller  
Assistant to the President



400 Hurlingham Ave.  
San Mateo, CA 94402

February 23, 1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
President,  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations,  
838 Fifth Ave.  
New York, NY. 10012

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

Having been involved very deeply with Outreach since you first called for such a program back in 1979, I was intrigued with your most recent call in its continuing evolution. I recall that at that time you planted the seeds for what you have now openly proposed in your speech at the Biennial this last year here in San Francisco; that of proselytizing not only the secular Jew but also extending it to the Non-Jewish populous, or to use your own words, "the unchurched".

Before I put my thoughts on paper as to "the approach" on both fronts, I would like to give you a short background of myself. I am a "naturalized" Jew. My husband, Ben, and I are members of Peninsula Temple Beth-El in San Mateo and have been for 25+ years. All our four children went through Religious school and confirmation here. Our two sons had their B'nei Mitzvot - one by Rabbi Sanford Rosen and the other by Rabbi Peter Rubinstein. I got involved in Outreach as early as 1981. We developed and piloted many programs some of which became integrated into the national program of the UAHC's Commissions on Jewish Reform Outreach which was under the directorship of Lydia Kukoff. Dru Greenwood who took over Lydia's post is very familiar with the work we have done over the passed ten years. We have willingly shared all our knowledge with the various branches of Judaism through our membership on the Council on Inter-Faith Families, established by the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation's Department of Community Development. About a year ago, I retired from Outreach. Although we do assist when needed in the transition, we felt it time for new blood to be infused. It takes dedication and continual energy to make Outreach functional and successful. Outreach is taking on renewed emphasis at our synagogue, under the guidance of our senior Rabbi, Alan Berg.

Attached are two proposals I have written on the approaches I believe should be studied and evaluated on the aforementioned subject.

- a) Proselytizing in the secular/unaffiliated Jewish world
- b) Jewish Proselytizing of the non-Jewish world

I look forward to your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

  
Judy Simms

## INTRODUCTION: (One person's view of History)

One can see similarities in what transpired at the end of the 18th century and on into the 19th century, and today. With the explosion of the Age of Enlightenment, the doors to the European ghettos were opened and the Jewish community was exposed to the provocative writings and philosophical thoughts of such notables and Kant, Rousseau, Nietzsche. The battle to retain the Jewish religious soul and community was on.

Towards the latter part of the 20th century we have experienced once again an explosion as great or even greater than that particular period in history. It is the Age of Global Communications and Technology. Through the electronic media, the instant availability of all forms of information available to everyone around the world is awesome and often overwhelming and confusing. It is no wonder then that we are having to constantly restructure our approach to ourselves first in order to survive, before we are able to approach the non-Jewish populous. The ever increasing numbers in our midst of marginal Jews, many of whom we have lost to indifference or secularism, are screaming at us. We are having to find new ways of showing this segment of our Jewish family the value of the heritage they have thrown aside for something more immediate and intriguing for the moment, often easier to emotionally and socially handle. This is the Era of Choices ad infinitum (e.g. already at our doorstep, 500 TV Channels to choose from!). Through all this, Judaism is having to retrench and compete in order to fight for the Jewish soul.

### THE APPROACH

#### A) Proselytizing in the Secular/Unaffiliated Jewish World

The "how-to's" are many with prototypes staring us in the face every day. Observe the techniques of the small extremist/fanatical religious groups operating abundantly on our college campuses. These people know the subject they are going after (for our purpose, a marginal Jew). They have studied the Jewish philosophy and belief system, and know well their approach to proselytizing. Observe the Jews for Jesus technique (soft sell). I suggest that one should look at the tools and techniques of various groups that are successful. Learning what works helps us develop our own strategy, one of which I would like to talk about.

How does one go about reaching the minds of our young Jewish population - the Jews of tomorrow? By establishing beachheads on campuses using a pod system. To start with, secular Jews or Jews who do not identify any longer with their heritage and who declare themselves as agnostic or atheists, will immediately shy away from anything that smells Jewish i.e. religious personage, synagogue, Hillel House, Jewish organizations (donations!). Many of these Jews are turned off by the aspect they have convinced themselves is typically Jewish, that of money. Talk to many and they will tell you that is all synagogues and Jewish organizations are about and that they cannot afford it! To reach these people at campus level it will take another contemporary also on campus who is Jewish; that has been trained through a In-Reach course offered by the UAHC at their respective synagogue on how the approach such Jews once they are themselves in college. The teaching of such a course can be started as early as Junior and Senior grades of High school levels. Such techniques as the following are good initial points of contact. Invitations to dinner, a quiet get-together, going to a game with others of the same genre, are some of the ways one can use



break ground. From there in a non pressured unobtrusive manner and with time, develop a friendship to where one can draw out the person and make him/her start questioning themselves as to who they are and what they stand for. Often one can point out to them that much of who they are is Jewish. It is the attempt to start a thought process within that person which will carry on a lifetime. It is the "Wake-Up Call". However, the way to success lies with the training and strength of the Wake-Up Caller's own Jewish knowledge and belief. It may sound a hard road to attempt, however, we must start in a small way - yes, ONE person can make a difference through the ripple effect. I don't believe a grand scheme or battalion sized programs will have the same effect as the non pressure, one-on-one approach. It can pyramid through time. It is a program using lay persons, contemporaries, of those one is attempting to reach. Developing pods of Jewish In-reach on our college and university campuses is the right place to start in my view. Most students are vulnerable at that age and ready to explore new ideas and other "-isms" they are suddenly finding themselves exposed to. How can one measure this kind of program's success or failure - not for years! To use an oft used but relevant expression - to save one Jewish life is to save a world. In our society we have paralegal, paramedic, para-rabbinic persons - why not have a Jewish lay para-Inreach corps??

#### B) Jewish Proselytizing the Non-Jewish World

Before getting into the Jewish approach of proselytizing the non-Jew or unchurched, it is important to make the following observation. Whereas the Christian clergy have a profound knowledge of the Old Testament (part of the Christian Bible), which are also the Jewish Holy Scriptures, most of our clergy not having been exposed to it, know little or nothing about the Christian Bible's New Testament, unless they have individually come to know it due to personal curiosity. In today's world, one cannot even think of proselytizing without having a minimal foundation of it since most of the population on this continent come from a Christian heritage. Therefore, before attempting to enter this work, our clergy have to also have a strong knowledge of Christian theology so they know something about who they are approaching in order to be able to debate the issues as they are presented. Above all they have to be able to correct in a logical manner the many misconceptions about Judaism which are built in to the Christian dogma. Some of our clergy are quite lost in such instances as during an ecumenical debate, because they do not have the knowledge or idea of the source being used by the Christian, in the debate. I realize that learning or reading someone else's Holy Scriptures runs counter to Judaism. We are going to have to abandon that philosophy if we are to actively enter and engage the non-Jewish world. Rabbis whom I think of as having a sound background in Christian theology are among the likes of Rabbi Davies, resident Swig Chair of Jewish Studies at the Jesuit University of San Francisco. There are other Rabbis who out of their own interest in order to keep abreast of the competitive religious marketplace, are knowledgeable about Christianity (e.g. Rabbi Peter Rubinstein of Central Synagogue for instance). These are the kinds of persons who could well assist in developing a required course to be taught to all Rabbinical students. Eventually, I believe one will also have to include a course on Moslem studies. Today, in this challenging era, our clergy have to be armed with as much knowledge as they can absorb in order to help them stave off the growing loss of numbers within the Jewish population. One has to be able to go on the attack in order to defend. The Christian world is doing the same thing in order to capture the Non-Christian partner in a mixed Jewish marriage. We are missing the boat! Their welcome to the Jewish partner in the church community is no less warm, attractive and inviting as ours may be to the Non-Jew in the

synagogue. The big edge they have is their knowledge of Jewish Scriptures through the Old Testament, often used as a drawing card.

The next question is - should we **soft sell** or **hard sell** Judaism? I believe that **soft sell**, such as the **Mormon approach** is the least offensive, yet the most productive. Have you ever seen any of the ads they run on TV. on Sunday mornings? They are about the values of Family, Customs, Morality and Ethics - one only knows that "this moment has been brought to you by Christ's Church of Latter Day Saints, the Mormon Church." at the closing of the ad. In that 30 second spot they have given us a small peek into their world. The Jewish community could have something along those lines in order to expose and teach the non-Jewish public about **who we are**. **We should require all our synagogues to become as involved as possible in their respective secular communities**, doing mitzvot and not hesitating to mention that such ongoing acts are required of Jews during their lifetime. I believe that at the inception of becoming visibly active in the non-Jewish world, **we are going to have to do some studying ourselves first**, so that we can learn to talk about with pride (yes, even brag) about who we are, culturally, philosophically, and religiously. We have to learn **how to dismantle the negative Jewish myths entrenched in the Non-Jewish World**. *But most critical to the success of this venture is to first learn and know about whom we want to approach and address.*

#### SUMMARY:

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Before tackling any of these programs, we are first going to have to learn a great deal about those we are attempting to reach, in order to act. It is my earnest view, that the approaches I have presented are some of the ways one is going to be able to start achieving the goals Rabbi Schindler first called for in 1979 and upon which he has further amplified by calling for their renewal and expansion, during the 1993 U.A..H.C. Biennial in San Francisco, CA.

\*\*\*\*\*

Respectfully submitted for exploration and evaluation in the ongoing development of InReach for the 1990's.

By: Judy Simms,  
Member of Peninsula Temple Beth-El, San Mateo, CA 94403

400 Hurlingham Ave.  
San Mateo, CA 94402  
Phone: 415-344-2877

CC: 1) Rabbi Alan Berg, Peninsula Temple Beth-El, San Mateo, CA 94403.  
2) Dru Greenwood, Director, UAHC Commission on Jewish Outreach, NY.





איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS — CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

## William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

*[Handwritten signature]*

*when you leave  
time to write  
for*

March 1, 1994  
18 Adar 5754

### MEMORANDUM

To: Edith J. Miller

From: Dru Greenwood *[Handwritten signature]*

My read on the supposed trend among rabbis with eight or more years experience is that what they've "been told" is made up. While I know of no studies that have been done to measure attitudes or practices in Outreach among rabbis, my experience is that no such generalization is possible. Efforts of Outreach are very complex and are handled by different rabbis differently. They need to be evaluated individually.

I also wonder if the comment was meant to be "eight years or less". I've heard complaints that the newer rabbis are less likely to officiate at intermarriages (which is not what the question asks.) Again, I believe it is individual. You might mention the Denver Outreach Internship and the Outreach class at the New York school. In both cases, we enable students to see very positive models of active Outreach and to grapple personally with the decisions they will make.

Hope this is helpful.

Chairperson  
Harris Gilbert

Co-Chairperson  
Rabbi Leslie Guttman

Vice Chairpersons  
Elizabeth Linkon  
Pamela Waechter

Director  
Dru Greenwood

# MEMORANDUM

COPY

February 28, 1994

FROM: Edith J. Miller

TO: Dru Greenwood

In a recent communication, someone made the following comment:

"It is interesting to note that in the process of searching for a new rabbi, we have been told that those with eight plus years experience tend to be more 'conservative or traditional' about not only religious practices, but in their willingness to actively participate in bringing in children of interfaith marriages, and/or the Jewish spouse. *(This is undoubtedly a mistake, it should be non-Jewish spouse.)* I hope this is not the case and that your efforts will result in a swing in the opposite direction, so that new rabbis graduating today have a better grip on reality, at least as that reality exists on the West Coast."

Can you give me some data on this? Any information you can provide will be most helpful.



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100





COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

*ms furs*

February 28, 1994  
17 Adar 5754

Judy H. Hersher  
President - Congregation B'nai Israel  
3600 Riverside Boulevard  
Sacramento, CA 95818

Dear Ms Hersher:

Your letter of February 14th has reached our office during Rabbi Schindler's absence. He is overseas for a number of meetings and will not return to his desk until next week. Be assured your letter will be brought to his immediate attention.

I know he will be thrilled by your comments concerning Judy. She is a wonderful young woman and will undoubtedly be a superb rabbi. You have very good taste!

Your comments about the difference between rabbis who have been out in the field for eight years or more and their younger colleagues are very interesting. I don't know who conveyed these comments to you, but I shall certainly try to find out what the reality is across the country. I can think of many rabbis who tend to be more "conservative or traditional" about religious practices, but that does not mean that they are unwilling to participate in bringing into Judaism children of interfaith marriages and/or the non-Jewish spouse. I am going to ask our Outreach Department if they have any information on the difference in approach to outreach among our younger rabbis and those who have been out in the field for some years.

Again, let me assure you that your letter will be brought to Rabbi Schindler's attention on his return.

With kindest greetings and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller  
Assistant to the President



## Congregation B'nai Israel

3600 Riverside Boulevard  
Sacramento, California 95818  
(916)446-4861

February 14, 1994

JUDY H. HERSHER

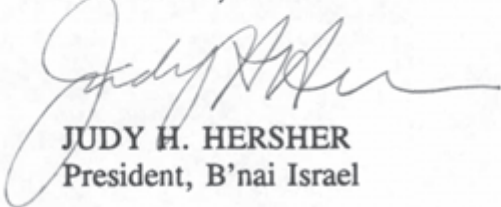
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

I have been meaning to respond to your letter of November 9, 1993, but with little success until today. While we have now begun the process of searching for a new senior rabbi, it is likely that two years from now we will be looking for an assistant or junior rabbi and, at that time, perhaps your daughter Judy, whose name I like, would be willing to apply.

It is interesting to note that in the process of searching for a new rabbi, we have been told that those with eight plus years experience tend to be more "conservative" or "traditional" about not only religious practices, but in their willingness to actively participate in bringing in children of interfaith marriages, and/or the Jewish spouse. I hope this is not the case and that your efforts will result in a swing in the opposite direction, so that new rabbis graduating today have a better grip on reality, at least as that reality exists on the West Coast.

Best wishes,



JUDY H. HERSHER  
President, B'nai Israel

JHH:pv  
WEST-81998



*Edie*

*Lois Goldrich*

March 1, 1994  
18 Adar 5754

From: Edie

TO: AMS

Page 3 of enclosed release very upsetting. Dan F called Lois Goldrich at United Synagogue and she apologized for not editing release .... will speak to Abramson to re-write scenario and use more care in future... we don't want to send out a release to respond, we have to work together with more care and concern for one another... an error in judgment..





איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS — CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

## William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

February 25, 1994  
Purim!!

### MEMORANDUM

To: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

From: Dru Greenwood *Dru*

cc: Rabbi Dan Freeland

Don't know if you saw this, but I thought you'd be interested. Unfortunately, I don't think it's meant in the mode of Purim.

See particularly the marked scenario on page 3. Would you like me to call/write Jerry Epstein or anyone else? I'm sure they didn't realize how offensive such wording would be to the "Reform (intermarried)" movement.

Chairperson  
Harris Gilbert

Co-Chairperson  
Rabbi Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons  
Elizabeth Linkon  
Pamela Waechter

Director  
Dru Greenwood





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JUDAISM

The Association of  
Conservative  
Congregations

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:  
LOIS GOLDRICH  
EXT. 2601

*interview to Dan*

**FEBRUARY 9, 1994...FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**TRAVELING WORKSHOPS STRESS INTERMARRIAGE PREVENTION**

Insisting that intermarriage can be countered only if we take active steps to prevent it, three leaders of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism visited targeted areas throughout the United States and Canada early this month to spread their message. Inspired by the success of last year's workshops, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, Executive Vice-President, Rabbi Robert Abramson, Director of Education, and Jules Gutin, Director of the Youth Department, once again met with educators, rabbis, youth leaders and lay leaders in major cities throughout North America.

According to Marc Sternfeld, Chairman of the Commission on the Prevention of Intermarriage, which sponsored the workshops, "taking the show on the road" has proved an effective way to reach large numbers of people on their home territory. Said Mr. Sternfeld: "The effort must be ongoing. We must continue to emphasize the fact that those who work with our youth must make an active effort to inhibit intermarriage both by speaking out against it and by giving our youngsters positive reasons to remain Jewish."

The strategy appeared to work extremely well, according to Rabbi Abramson. Far from being intimidated, participants were "extremely honest and comfortable discussing

these issues." He also noted that attendees at every session were serious in their commitment to deal directly with the subject matter.

Using demonstration lessons incorporating techniques ranging from open discussions to role playing exercises, the speakers elicited enthusiastic participation from the rabbis, lay leaders, educators and youth directors who attended the sessions. According to the speakers, the concerns and questions that arose in each city were remarkably similar. For example, one commonly asked question concerned the charge that a refusal to interdate somehow constitutes "discrimination."

"People need a forum in which they can discuss these issues openly and honestly," suggested Gutin. "They also need to know that someone has thought through these issues and is working to produce materials they can actually use in their work. It is obviously not an easy thing to speak against intermarriage in a classroom or group situation where there are children who are themselves the product of intermarriage." For this reason, participants were "extremely gratified" to find that materials addressing these difficult issues are already available and geared to the appropriate age group.

In an exercise designed to sensitize participants to the notion of "consequences," the Director of the Youth Department led attendees through a series of questions intended to convey the message that no action is taken in a vacuum; rather, every act entails a series of consequences. For example, participants were asked, first, if they would date someone from out of town and, second, what the ramifications of such a relationship would be. According to Gutin, it then became clearer to participants that interdating, as well, is not an isolated act but one that necessarily involves a whole range of consequences.

In another exercise, characterized by discussion of several open-ended hypothetical scenarios, Rabbi Epstein challenged lay leaders to talk about the issues directly rather than "leaving them solely to the professionals."



"It is vital that our lay leaders confront the challenges produced by the rising rate of intermarriage," he stated. "These scenarios are designed to raise important questions, so that our congregational leaders can begin to understand the implications of their actions and choose between alternatives as they formulate synagogue policies."

Finally, Rabbi Abramson proposed for discussion a holiday scenario in which a Reform (intermarried) family that celebrates one *seder* has to choose between observing the *seder* and celebrating Easter, which that year happens to fall on the same day. According to the presenters, definitive answers were in short supply. Rabbi Abramson also worked with participants on an interactive theater technique to empower parents to take a stand against interdating. The technique combines elements of support, rehearsal, and enabling.

Noting that there are no easy answers to any of the problems posed at the sessions, Rabbi Epstein stressed that we nevertheless must use our classrooms and our youth programs to address the issues in a proactive manner. In other words, teachers and youth directors must not be afraid to take issue with and dispute the growing conception that intermarriage is a "fact of life."

The Commission on the Prevention of Intermarriage was established in 1991 to develop programs to help strengthen Jewish identity. For further information on the workshops or on materials published by the commission, call 212-533-7800, ext. 2207.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, established in 1913, is the association of 800 Conservative congregations in North America. With 2 million members, the Conservative Movement is the largest branch of the Jewish faith.