

## Two Jews, one denominator

I have read the three recent articles in the Jewish Standard regarding intermarriage and its affect on the future of Judaism. The three professionals all had interesting perspectives supported by facts and professional opinions. There are several points that were omitted however, that are integral to the vibrancy of modern day Judaism that I will elaborate on.

Mr. Cohen is correct in stating that inmarrieds are the strength of Judaism. We would hope that inmarrieds are the committed Jews, the knowledgeable Jews, and the ones teaching their children about what it means to be a Jew. These are the parents that have invested in a Jewish education, Jewish camps, support of Israel, and supported their local synagogue as well. These loving parents are also the ones who are encouraging their children toward a Jewish marriage. We teach our children about love, respect, and we educate them on our Jewish values. When they go out on their own they will cherish their upbringing forever. Some values may be lost in the memory bank, and others will be practiced in their everyday lives.

Are the intermarried a threat to Judaism or potential Kerovei Y'sroel, friends of Israel and the Jewish people? I see the potential, and not the threat. The realities of the day, are that all of our lives are much more engaged with all the cultures of the world, and not at all as homogeneous as each previous generation. I dare say, that everyone reading this newspaper has interacted today, with many more people of different cultures than we did 20 years ago! Intermarriage is a function of our global society today. Intermarriage is nothing to teach in our synagogues as an alternative lifestyle, but nor is it something to sweep aside.

Conversion as an objective has not worked in the past in a more structured society, it will not work now, in a more open society. In acknowledging the new reality of intermarriage, we have to find points of entry to encourage supportive non Jewish spouses, SNJS, to be welcome in our Judaism. There are so many ways we can encourage SNJS in our shuls through participation in Men's Club, Tikkun Olam, Adult Education, Children's programs, Chesed/Lovingkindness, and others. Perhaps conversion may not be the path some may choose for many reasons, but it may encourage our SNJS to assist in raising our children in a Jewish environment, and maybe even interest these SNJS in Judaism, rather than alienate them. If a SNJS has gravitated towards Judaism, he/she will then know how to seek conversion, on their own terms.

A group that neither Mr. Cohen, Mr. Case, or Mr. Sachs referenced was our existing congregants. Because of the realities of our time, many of our congregants have non Jewish family members that share in the Jewish family's life cycle simchas, and holidays. It is important to remember these family members. Do we have the same seders as we always have, or do we recognize the changes in our family and alter our seder to be of interest to our non Jewish extended family members? Are there ways to involve our SNJS and family members at our Jewish life cycle celebrations without compromising

our Halachic values? I would say yes, and instill our Jewish family values at the same time.

I think we should spend our precious resources on educating all those who are drawn to Judaism, whether or not conversion is part of their personal journey. We certainly should devote a lot of our resources toward a Jewish education for our children, both pre and post B'nai Mitzvah. We are losing too many Jewish families from membership after their young adults' B'nai Mitzvah. We have to devote more resources towards keeping these families active Jews; we have to remember our senior members whose children have left them and are now empty nesters. These Jews are part of our community and are terrific role models for our community. We should devote more resources towards outreach to the unaffiliated Jews that are here in all of our communities. Are they looking for a spiritual home, have you asked them? We have to devote more resources toward our local colleges/Hillel's for those students we know who are away from home.

And yes, we have to also reach out to our intermarried Jews. Like it or not, this is too big a population to leave behind. These intermarrieds have children that perhaps we can teach indirectly by reaching their parents. For every intermarried family there is at least one Jew. Let's not leave him/her behind. Let us welcome these Jews and their spouses as we would any other Jew, and without strings. Many of these intermarried Jews want to affiliate, but the task will be harder if we put up unnecessary roadblocks for their non Jewish spouse.

There are many great programs to reach out to intermarrieds, and web sites such as [interfaithfamily.com](http://interfaithfamily.com), and the Keruv program supported by Rabbi Chuck Simon of the FJMC, which I am proudly affiliated with. There are over 60 Conservative shuls with Keruv programs around the country now. These programs bring about an awareness of the current realities of intermarriage and create an environment to bring Jews and their families together in the Jewish community. As Jews living in a changing world, we must find ways to find the common denominators for inclusion of SNJS in a Jewish lifestyle.

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