

APPROACHES TO INTERMARRIAGE

Areas of Consensus

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FOREWORD

Intermarriage reflects the tension between distinctive Jewish identity and modern culture. Its increasing occurrence testifies to the broad acceptance of Jews into American society. Conversely, declining Jewish identity within mixed-married homes poses serious challenges to future Jewish continuity.

Intermarriage clearly is on the rise. The 1990 National Jewish Population Study demonstrated that current rates of intermarriage exceed 50 percent. To be sure, that percentage includes children of mixed-marrieds who themselves marry out at rates exceeding 90 percent. Children of two Jewish parents continue to express a clear preference for marriage to other Jews. Nevertheless, intermarriage clearly has increased dramatically, and as intermarriage has become more pervasive in American society, the incentive to convert to Judaism has diminished remarkably. Absent conversion, over three-fourths of the children of mixed-marrieds are raised outside the Jewish faith.

These findings present clear policy challenges: What, if anything, can be done to reduce the incidence of intermarriage and encourage Jews to marry other Jews? How may conversion be encouraged? Absent conversion, what forms of outreach to mixed-marrieds stand a real chance of preserving Jewishness within the home?

Different sectors of the Jewish community are struggling with these policy questions in different ways. The three papers contained in this publication represent different responses from within the respective religious movements and from within the American Jewish Committee, which has long specialized in this area. Although there are numerous differences of emphasis and nuance among these three papers, wide areas of agreement persist. All three authors insist upon the importance of outreach to mixed-married couples and are struggling to find criteria and qualifications that will permit effective outreach to occur. None, however, is willing to surrender the message of endogamy or in-marriage as the primary connection to today's young people and Jewish singles. Finally, all the authors favor the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse as the goal of communal policy once mixed marriage has occurred.

These papers do not claim to represent official statements of the Conservative or Reform movements. Individuals and groups within each of these movements may well find areas of disagreement. The papers do represent personal statements by Jewish leaders with extensive experience in addressing intermarriage, challenging the community to develop a multitrack strategy of prevention, conversion, and outreach. In that respect, the publication

symbolizes the broad range of agreement within the community on policy strategy and serves as a coalitional statement underscoring the potential for effective communal action.

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OUTREACH TO INTERMARRIEDS: PARAMETERS AND OUTLINES

Avis Miller

In the wake of the National Jewish Population Study commissioned by the Council of Jewish Federations, our American Jewish community has been grappling with new urgency with questions of Jewish continuity. The survey confirmed a trend toward intermarriage that Jewish leaders had been observing in their own communities: intermarriage is occurring among all segments of our community, and it is on the increase. The rate is higher among unaffiliated Jews than among those with ongoing religious affiliations, and it is highest of all among the children of those who have intermarried. In these times when we have exhausted our ethnic capital, affiliation with an ongoing religious community seems to be essential for Jewish continuity, and the institution that offers the setting for such religious commitment is the synagogue.

Only a few short years ago, some made the case that intermarriage could actually benefit our community. If two Jews married non-Jews rather than each other, went the argument, then we would have two potentially Jewish families instead of one. But today, no one can pretend any more that intermarriage is "good for the Jews."

We now confront without hopeful illusions the question: Given the rate of intermarriage, and our recognition of its personal pain and communal destructiveness, what do we do? If a solution can be found, then the synagogue will have the major role to play.

The Conservative movement has developed a three-tier strategy to confront the challenge. Our first line of defense is to emphasize the mitzvah of endogamy. We must continue to articulate that it is important for Jews to marry other Jews. This means that we must be willing to discuss the issue forthrightly from our pulpits, in our schools, and in our youth groups, with firmness but without rancor, sensitive to the pain borne by growing numbers of congregants who have intermarriages in their families. Our young people and their families must comprehend the direct relationship between interdating and intermarriage. If the message of the necessity for endogamy is not heard from the rabbi and the synagogue, then it will not be taken seriously anywhere.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is to be applauded for its timely development of teaching materials and programs devoted to promoting Jewish endogamy. Included among their publications on the subject are: *Intermarriage -- Our Grounds for Concern: 14 Questions, 14 Answers*; *Interdating--Intermarriage: Intervention*; *Intermarriage: What Can We Do? What Should We Do?*; *A Return to the Mitzvah of Endogamy*; *Principles and*

Compassion: Guidelines and Casebook for Teaching Children of Intermarried Parents in our Synagogue Schools; and Future Thinking: The Effects of Intermarriage. The National Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs has also produced a booklet on the pitfalls of raising children in a home in which both Judaism and Christianity are practiced.

If, despite efforts at prevention, an intermarriage seems likely to occur, we must encourage the option of conversion to Judaism. Sincere Jews by choice add enthusiasm and strength to our community. They enrich us by their adult understanding of Jewish values, by their open quest for spiritual sustenance, and by their commitment to living a Jewish life. Unfortunately, many people, Jews as well as non-Jews, are unaware of what it takes to become a Jew by choice. To this end, the Rabbinical Assembly has begun producing materials, including a fine booklet entitled *Are You Considering Conversion to Judaism?* Available in quantity, these booklets are for distribution to those already engaged or married to Jews.

Finally, if an intermarriage does occur, our third line of defense is outreach to the intermarried, in the hope that a Jewish family will result.

It would be easy for us to open our doors wide, and welcome intermarrieds without qualification. The American climate of political correctness rejects the notion of boundaries that separate people into groups, and endorses policies of inclusivity. If we were to open our doors without limits, the numbers affiliated with our institutions would surely balloon with those seeking Jewish legitimation in the face of intermarriage, and in the short term we would likely be very successful. But in the process, we would lose our integrity and 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.

We have a considerable challenge educating offspring of endogamous marriages to choose a Jewish lifestyle over the competing lures of secular life. *Kal vahomer*, how much more of an uphill battle will we have with the products of intermarriage, who we know intermarry at a rate approaching the random selection of a mate, without reference to religious background. Opening the doors of our synagogues will result in short-term communal gains more than offset by long-term losses.

In the interests of long-term continuity, we cannot afford outreach that sacrifices our standards. In this regard, Rabbi Alan Silverstein has suggested that we reconsider our terminology to reflect what we are really trying to bring about: "In contrast to the notion of 'outreach' in which we change our self-definition in order to count the mixed-married among our numbers, *keruv* connotes the attempt to bring Jews and their non-Jewish spouses closer to us and to our established communal standards."

We cannot offer membership in a Jewish institution to non-Jews who cannot subscribe wholeheartedly to the purpose of that institution. Offering membership to non-Jewish spouses would not avoid the problem in any case, since the line would have to be drawn elsewhere, causing congregational conflict by disallowing them a voice on the ritual committee, for example, or a committee chairmanship, or membership on the board of trustees. Our American ideal of democracy tells us that we cannot grant people institutional membership,

on the one hand, and deny them the rights and privileges of membership, on the other.

Likewise, in the realm of the ritual life of the congregation, there are Jewish rituals and mitzvot which are inappropriate for non-Jews to perform, just as it would be inappropriate for a non-Catholic, for example, to take part in certain sacraments of the Catholic Church. An aliyah to the Torah or the wearing of a tallit makes no religious sense for a non-Jew, who is not bound by the covenant to observe Jewish practices. It is also not reasonable to expect a Conservative synagogue, as a Jewish institution that recognizes the communal dangers of intermarriage, to acknowledge formally and congratulate families when such marriages take place. We must distinguish between personal wishes for a couple's happiness, which individuals may choose to extend, and public expressions, which indicate communal endorsement.

With these standards in mind, we ask ourselves: In what context shall we pursue a policy of *keruv*? Our first answer is that whenever possible, within our standards, our synagogues should reflect our concern that we not reject any Jew or any family sincerely trying to be part of our community. Without violating any halakhic principles, we may certainly address mail to an entire family, even if that family includes non-Jews. In life-cycle events, some may include a non-Jewish parent or spouse in some meaningful but nonritual way. We may offer non-Jews in our midst free High Holy Day tickets. We should make special efforts to invite non-Jewish spouses to participate in adult-education offerings such as Hebrew Literacy or Learners' Minyan, in the hope that exposure to the Jewish way of life and friendship with Jewish families will bolster them in their attempts to create a Jewish home and raise a Jewish family, and may even result in conversion.

Many Conservative congregations around the country are offering entry-level courses in Jewish living, explicitly inviting intermarried couples trying to raise a Jewish child along with others who may be interested in increasing their Jewish literacy. Targeted along with intermarrieds are Jews who never went to Hebrew school and those who have forgotten everything they ever learned there; those with Jewish ancestry, usually young adults with a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, who want to explore their Jewish heritage; and those considering conversion who want to know a little more before committing themselves to the conversion process.

Wherever these courses in Jewish literacy are offered, they have a number of features in common. First, the course is announced in the secular media. Second, and very important, the outreach to intermarrieds is explicit but not exclusive. Intermarried couples are welcomed along with others who are within the orbit of the Jewish community. Usually these courses attract substantial numbers of synagogue members who want to learn more, as well as unaffiliated and marginal Jews looking to enter the institutional Jewish community. Third, the courses provide not just information, but affect and social contact with Jews as well. Teachers are encouraged to share their own personal enthusiasm for Judaism. Other committed members of the community join the classes to socialize with those hesitating on the fringes of Jewish life. Fourth, documentation is kept concerning who joins these classes and why, and what kinds of Jewish opportunities they are seeking. Finally, follow-up courses are offered, in areas of interest to the participants. The idea is to encourage not just entrance but long-term participation in an ongoing Jewish community, which appears to be the *sine qua non* of Jewish continuity.

We have discovered that, contrary to popular wisdom, many intermarried and unaffiliated Jews are willing to come into a religious institution if the right program is offered and the right atmosphere prevails. We have learned lessons in *keruv* from experiences such as Project Link, in northern New Jersey: that Jewish study can lead to conversion; that *keruv* programs can result in other outcomes that are important to us, including raising Jewish children and integrating mixed families into synagogue life, as we try to draw them closer to us. Our communal resources are finite, and those already committed to raising Jewish children, particularly those who are willing to come directly into the synagogue, are the most accessible targets for successful *keruv*.

We have also discovered that groups exclusively for intermarried couples may develop in directions not compatible with the synagogue's interest in integrating such families into congregational life. The limited resources in a synagogue should be devoted to the encouragement and enrichment of Jewish life, not other social and psychological purposes. Some couples, for instances, may wish to focus on how to accommodate two religious traditions in the home, an issue in which the synagogue has no vested interest.

The dynamics of congregational life suggest that groups set up to deal with issues of intermarriage and outreach be composed not just of those with an immediate, familiar connection with the problem, but also of those from the mainstream of congregational life, who may represent a broader perspective of community norms and goals.

We have seen the success of sensitive synagogue *keruv* within fixed parameters. Such efforts *can* succeed, and they *must* succeed, if Jewish continuity is to be assured. The day is short, and the work is great.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON
REFORM JEWISH OUTREACH

Janet Marder

A colleague of mine got a phone call in early December last year. The man on the phone said, "Rabbi, you'll have to excuse me. I'm not Jewish but I'm in need of some guidance. The other day at a garage sale, I bought two boxes of Christmas lights. And this morning I was out on the front lawn, stringing the lights up on my house. My neighbor happened to come by, and when he saw what I was doing, he got all upset. 'You can't put up those lights!' he said. 'The ones in *that* box -- with all the different colors -- those are fine. But the ones in *this* box -- the blue and white ones -- these are *Jewish* lights! You can't put these on your house!' So, Rabbi," the man concluded, "Tell me: is it religiously acceptable for a Christian to put up blue and white lights for Christmas decorations?"

I guess you could say the message of this story is: 'Tis the season to be confused. The image of those two competing strings of light -- one multicolored, one blue and white -- and the message they convey about confusion of identity, the collapsing of boundaries, the blurring of distinctions, seem to me poignant symbols of the phenomenon we've gathered today to discuss: intermarriage.

I bring to this table the perspective of a Reform rabbi, a rabbi whose national movement thirteen years ago initiated an experiment known as "Outreach." The experiment was born in a speech by UAHC president Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who announced that it was time for us to "take intermarriage out of the house of mourning and bring it into the house of study."

By that he meant, I think, not that intermarriage was cause for celebration, but rather that worrying and complaining and condemning intermarriage had thus far proven to be unproductive, for Jews were continuing to date and marry non-Jews in ever-greater numbers. He called on the Reform movement, therefore, to cease bewailing a pervasive sociological phenomenon and begin instead to devise ways to cope with it.

Outreach was never intended to stem the tide of intermarriage, and indeed it has not done that. It was designed, rather, to make the best of a difficult situation, to throw a net out into the sea of intermarried couples and to pull in as many of them as possible, to retain them and their children for the Jewish people.

Outreach set out to change the way Reform Jews looked at those who had intermarried. It asked us to see them not as objects of scorn or lamentation, as renegades who had turned

their backs on our community, but as opportunities, as potential members of the community who needed only to have a hand stretched out to them.

Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages, which originally appeared as an article in the 1992 *American Jewish Year Book* and has been issued as a separate pamphlet by the American Jewish Committee, in a sense answers the challenge Rabbi Schindler laid out thirteen years ago. Like other comprehensive analyses of recent years, it brings intermarriage into the house of study. The question I asked myself while reading it was: What implications does this study have for our Outreach program? Do its findings suggest that we ought to reconsider some of the fundamental premises and techniques of Outreach, or do they suggest that we should simply keep doing more of the same?

In fact, this kind of re-evaluation of Outreach has been going on for some time already, prompted by the results of the CJF National Jewish Population Survey of 1990. The AJC-sponsored article simply intensifies some of the sobering messages of the 1990 survey.

What should Reform Jews make of an intermarriage rate that has doubled in the last twenty years, of the fact that only one in fourteen intermarriages results in a conversion to Judaism, and of the bleak picture this study paints of Jewish identity in mixed marriages? More disturbingly, what are we to conclude from the fact that almost three-quarters of young mixed-married couples who define themselves as Reform have established dual-identity households, where Christian symbols and observances coexist with Jewish ones -- and that almost a third of *conversionary* Reform families still maintain dual-identity households?

We ought to respond first, I think, with a caveat. As the authors of the article -- Peter Y. Medding, Garry A. Tobin, Sylvia Barack Fishman, and Mordechai Rimor -- point out, all denominational labels in the study are based on self-identification. Thus people who call themselves Reform are not necessarily identical with the members of Reform synagogues, and they may, in fact, be the products of Orthodox or Conservative upbringing who, for whatever reasons, no longer identify with these movements. It seems likely that the term "Reform" in this study includes large numbers of unaffiliated Jews who mistakenly view "Reform" as a catch-all term for those of minimal Jewish activity.

Having said that, I am nevertheless convinced that the findings of this study are cause for concern. It is true, as I said, that the Reform Outreach program was never meant to put an end to intermarriage; its goal was quite different. Neither, however, was it meant to encourage intermarriage. Certainly, no Reform rabbis or lay leaders give speeches urging Jews to intermarry. Just as certainly, as the study says, "the structural realities of American Jewish life predispose young American Jews to meet, date, and marry non-Jews." Obviously our movement's Outreach program is not responsible for the proliferation of intermarriage.

But it seems to me worth asking if we have unintentionally helped to create a climate in which intermarriage is increasingly taken for granted, accepted as normal and inevitable. By going out of our way to accept the intermarried, have we unwittingly conveyed the message that intermarriage is merely one option among equally valid family constellations? By working hard to make our synagogues comfortable environments for intermarried Jews, have we inadvertently become too comfortable with intermarriage?

At the most recent biennial convention of the Reform movement, Rabbi Schindler gave voice to similar concerns. Extending our arms to embrace the intermarried, he said, is an essential component of Reform Jewish Outreach, and we have no wish to abandon it. But we have neglected to emphasize as vigorously the other side of outreach: an unapologetic advocacy of Jewish marriage and of conversion to Judaism. It is not enough to be a movement of Jewish acceptance and accommodation, said Rabbi Schindler. We must also be a movement of Jewish affirmation and assertiveness.

A little brochure entitled *Inviting Someone You Love to Become a Jew* is a modest beginning of what I hope will be a new trend in Reform Outreach. Targeted at young Jews who are seriously involved with non-Jews, it asks them, gently and sensitively, to consider "beginning to explore the path toward Judaism, one step at a time."

This brochure is written with full awareness that, as the AJC study says, conversion is not an act but a process. Often it's a process that takes much time and patient encouragement. All of us, I'm sure, know men and women who convert after many years of marriage and gradual absorption into synagogue life. Perhaps, then, we shouldn't let ourselves be unduly discouraged by the low rates of conversion in this study, for the story isn't over yet for many non-Jewish spouses. Contact with an inspiring rabbi and a warm synagogue community can move people steadily to ever-higher levels of Jewish engagement. Outreach is not a wonder drug; it is a prolonged and painstaking course of treatment.

Perhaps the essential question this study forces Reform Jews to ask is: does it still make sense to reach out to mixed-married couples, given the discouraging picture this study paints of Jewish identity in these families? If, as the authors say, "mixed marriage must be regarded as a virtual bar to the achievement of a high level of Jewish identification," is it wise for us to invest our limited resources in efforts to attract the intermarried? Shouldn't we focus instead on strengthening the core group of in-married Jews?

That logic is tempting, but I believe it would be a dangerous mistake to use these statistics to justify abandoning outreach efforts altogether. With 40 percent of couples under 45 that include one Jew and a spouse not born a Jew, the stakes are just too high. Simply put, we cannot afford to adopt a "triage" approach by pulling our wagons into a circle and declaring mixed-married couples a lost cause.

Rather, we must redouble our efforts to bring such couples into the synagogue and, more importantly, to ensure that our synagogues not only welcome the intermarried but offer them meaningful Jewish experiences carefully designed to meet their needs.

I am speaking of the kind of targeted outreach efforts that already exist that focus on couples who show a genuine desire to make some connection with the Jewish community. There is, for example, Times and Seasons, a discussion group for interfaith couples (married or not) that offers a supportive, noncoercive environment in which they're encouraged to make Jewish choices for their families, and made aware of the dangers of maintaining dual-identity households. Or Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me, which offers a special tuition-free two-year religious-school program to the children of unaffiliated intermarried couples. There is also a new UAHC program which organizes special trips to Israel for intermarried families. Though these programs are still in their infancy, they have shown some promising results; it

will be ten or twenty years before we can assess their full impact. In the meantime, I'm convinced that we have to try -- unless we want to kiss our grandchildren good-bye.

The new stance of Reform Jewish Outreach that I've described is certainly not an easy one to maintain, but I think it is the only viable approach today. It asks us to welcome the intermarried warmly into our synagogues without giving the seal of communal approval to intermarriage. It calls on us to advocate for conversion and to maintain our opposition to mixed marriage without rejecting those who have chosen mixed married -- that is, to observe the distinction between a priori and post facto judgments (in Hebrew, *lehatchila* vs. *be di'avad*). All rabbis who do not officiate at intermarriages and at the same time struggle to bring intermarried couples into the orbit of the synagogue know it is a challenge to walk this tightrope, but they know also that for them it is the only path they can walk with integrity.

In the final analysis, I think the real lesson we learn from studies of intermarriage like *Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages* is that successful outreach requires intensive inreach. That is, if we want to bring non-Jews and marginal Jews closer to Jewish life, closer to the synagogue, then we had better make sure we have something of value to offer them. We had better make sure that our rabbis are gifted men and women of deep faith and commitment, teachers, role models and *mentschen* of the first order. We had better see to it that our synagogues are warm and vibrant religious communities, not centers of shallow materialism, gossip and apathy. And most important, we had better realize that it is too late to start reaching out to our young people once they intermarry. If we cannot convince Jewish teenagers and young single adults that Judaism is of ultimate significance, and the synagogue has something precious to give them, then maybe we do not deserve to win the battle against intermarriage.

Perhaps that is the message of the Jewish lights with which we celebrate the winter holiday season -- not the pathetic string of blue and white Christmas bulbs, but the Hanukkah menorah. Our sages tell us to set the menorah in the window of our home to fulfill the essential mitzvah of Hanukkah: *parsumei nisa*, to publicize the miracle. And so our ability to prevail -- as the Maccabees prevailed -- against the Hellenism of our own day depends on our sense that there is indeed a "miracle" to publicize -- that we have in Judaism a wonderful, life-enhancing treasure worth sharing with others.

INTERMARRIAGE AND COMMUNAL POLICY: PREVENTION, CONVERSION, AND OUTREACH

Steven Bayme

Jewish communal policy toward intermarriage has become the question of the day. Facts are no longer in dispute: Rates of intermarriage in the United States are at an all-time high. What is in dispute is what we should do about intermarriage. What are appropriate Jewish communal responses and policies that will enable the community to deal with the current intermarriage crisis?

The rational approach to communal policy on any problem is often inhibited by the emotional needs of Jewish communal leaders. Frequently, policy discussion is colored by well-intentioned desires to provide human consolation to those affected. These, to be sure, are noble sentiments. They form, however, a disastrous base on which to formulate communal policy.

On the intermarriage problem, the Jewish community must continue to pursue a multitrack and nuanced approach consisting of prevention, conversion, and continued outreach to the mixed-married.

There are at least five reasons for pursuing a policy of prevention. First, we do it because we must. Throughout history, no generation of Jewish leaders has ever failed to resist intermarriage. Therefore, no matter how unsuccessful prevention policies may prove to be, it remains our historical mandate to continue to encourage Jewish in-marriage.

Moreover, were we to abandon prevention policies, the results would be even more disastrous. A climate in which there are no constraints against intermarriage would result in even higher intermarriage rates since Jews are a mere 2.5 percent of the total U.S. population. It is precisely because we have continued to maintain the Jewish communal preference for in-marriage that intermarriage rates have not risen even further. Italians and Irish already experience out-marriage rates in excess of 60 percent, while Lutherans and Methodists marry outside their respective faiths at rates exceeding 70 percent.

In this context, it must be acknowledged that statements by some social scientists have been extremely harmful. Pronouncements in the media to the effect that "the battle against intermarriage is over -- now is the time for a new focus on outreach" proclaim loudly that the Jewish community no longer resists intermarriage. That itself contributes to the ever-increasing intermarriage rate.¹

Third, it must be acknowledged that certain forms of prevention *do* work. We know, for example, that intermarriage rates are lower among those who have gone to graduate or professional school. This runs counter to traditional assumptions that intermarriage increases as social and educational attainments increase. But in fact the concentration of Jews is greater in graduate schools than in undergraduate colleges. There is a clear policy implication here: send our children to colleges where a significant proportion of the students are Jewish.²

Recent research by Sylvia Fishman and Alice Goldstein focuses upon the relationship between Jewish education and intermarriage rates. In general, the authors conclude that "the more the better" -- meaning that higher levels of Jewish education are closely correlated with more intensive Jewish affiliation and lower rates of intermarriage. For example, only 20 percent of Jews aged 25-44 with six or more years of day-school education have intermarried. In contrast, 70 percent of those with no Jewish education at all have married outside of the faith.³

Nathalie Friedman has shown this to be true for graduates of the Ramaz Day School in New York City. Only 6 percent reported that their spouses had come from non-Jewish homes, and half of these had converted to Judaism, making for an effective in-marriage rate of 97 percent.⁴

Fourth, there is a real question of who will articulate the message of in-marriage if we do not. Jonathan Sarna has argued that if Jews are serious about resisting intermarriage, they must recognize that they are unique in American society.⁵ Thus it is becoming increasingly unpopular for Jews to make the case for endogamy. This was recently illustrated in an article in *Moment* magazine by Rabbi Rachel Cowan, a prominent advocate of outreach to mixed-married couples. A woman approached her at the conclusion to a weekend program and expressed gratification that her son had been unable to attend. Had he been present, the woman said, he would have heard from Cowan only the message of outreach and nothing at all about the importance of marrying a Jewish partner. Cowan writes that she considered the subject and the woman's thoughts but concluded that, were she to do it over again, she would say exactly the same things.⁶ Similarly, the director of outreach for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, in responding to an address I delivered to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, criticized my underscoring the importance of intermarriage prevention. As she put it, "Prevention is the wrong goal and the wrong focus."⁷ In other words, intermarriage prevention is becoming a politically incorrect term. If the Jewish community lacks the courage to say that intermarriage threatens the Jewish future and that every effort must be made to discourage it, then the message that Jews in fact encourage marriage to other Jews will simply no longer be heard.

Finally, those who argue that prevention has been a failure ignore its successes. The 52 percent intermarriage rate reported by NJPS is an overall average only. Among children of mixed-married couples, the intermarriage rate exceeds 90 percent, for in that sector of the population there are no constraints whatever against intermarriage. In other sectors -- particularly children of two Jewish parents affiliated with a synagogue -- the odds of an intermarriage occurring are considerable but by no means overwhelming. For example, the 1986 Cleveland Jewish Federation Study indicated that among parents affiliated with an Orthodox synagogue only 15 percent had known the intermarriage of at least one child. For parents affiliated with Conservative synagogues, the rate was 31 percent, and for parents

affiliated with Reform synagogues 36 percent. Those who counsel against a policy of prevention seem willing to sacrifice those who are marrying in for the sake of outreach to those who are marrying out.

The second pillar of Jewish communal policy toward intermarriage is conversion to Judaism. This has been our primary response to the reality of intermarriage. The policy imperative appears clear -- to overcome remaining barriers that may inhibit conversion.

In this regard, there appears to be at least three initiatives that may be undertaken. First, we need to underscore the Jewishness of the Jewish partner. When the Jewish side of the family cares about Jewish identity, the likelihood of the non-Jewish partner converting to Judaism is all the greater. Egon Mayer's research on the dynamics of conversion, conducted under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee, has been most helpful in detailing the factors that are likely to lead to conversion to Judaism.⁸

Second, there is the issue of the communal reception of converts to the Jewish faith and fold. Our tradition here is very clear -- make no distinction between those who are born Jews and those who have accepted the Jewish covenant. A policy that is serious about conversion must challenge the Jewish community to adopt a receptive and positive attitude toward converts to Judaism. Great credit must be given to the Reform movement, which reintroduced the value that Judaism historically placed upon conversion, a value that Jews could not express in the Middle Ages and that they generally refrained from expressing in modern times.

Finally, however, serious discussion is necessary concerning the absence of a uniform conversion procedure acceptable to the various religious movements in North America. In the absence of a uniform procedure, we are creating both personal and communal tragedies when people converting to Judaism in good faith find their conversions invalidated by other sectors of the community. The failure to develop a uniform procedure signals that our primary response to intermarriage -- namely, conversion -- can never really succeed.

To be sure, we do have questions concerning conversion. NJPS refers to "self-declared converts" -- 30 percent of those currently practicing Judaism but not born Jews did not undergo any official conversion ceremony or procedure. It is hard to avoid skepticism about the commitment of such self-declared Jews by choice.

Similarly, we have concerns regarding "one-generation converts." Joseph Tabachnick and Brenda Forster, in a recent study of converts to Judaism in the Chicago area, underscored the weakness of Jewish identity among converts to Judaism in their failure to oppose the intermarriage or interdating of their own children. Fewer than 50 percent of the Jews by choice in the Chicago area sample placed importance on their children marrying within the Jewish faith. Only 28 percent felt that it was important for their children to limit their dating to other Jews. Tabachnick and Forster rightly conclude that a serious conversion policy must explain to those entering the Jewish fold the importance of marriage to other Jews and the building of Jewish families. Otherwise, conversion only postpones the ultimate dissolution of Jewish identity through the out-marriage of one's children and grandchildren.⁹

The most sensitive and difficult area is that of continued outreach to mixed-married

couples. At least five questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness, appropriateness, and priority level of outreach programming to mixed-married couples.

First, there is the question of respective costs and priorities. Is more to be gained by working with those who are outside the community or by attempting to enrich those who are already committed to leading a Jewish life? It is not enough to say that we must do both. In an age of limited resources, serious questions arise as to what is the most effective channeling of the resources available to us.

Second, there is a serious question as to whether outreach when successful will undermine the community's capacity to discourage interfaith marriage. Tensions have already arisen on this issue within the Reform movement. Stephen Fuchs, a Reform rabbi from Nashville, Tennessee, argues in a recent issue of *Sh'ma* magazine that the very success of outreach to mixed-married couples makes it difficult if not impossible to communicate the Reform movement's stated opposition to mixed-marriage.¹⁰

Third, we must ask whether the community really has the capacity to reach mixed-married couples. Do they wish to be chased by us? Or do we waste valuable communal resources in a vain pursuit of people who have no desire for contact with the Jewish community? Actually, we do not even know if our costly advertising to mixed-marrieds even reaches its intended audience.¹¹

Fourth, we must address the question of tension between outreach efforts and efforts designed to insure the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, in an important address to the UAHC Biennial in November 1991, criticized the tendency of outreach efforts to become neutral toward conversion. Very often, in a well-intentioned desire to build bridges to mixed-marrieds, outreach advocates do not make strong cases for conversion to Judaism. When mixed-married couples tell the community they want involvement but not conversion, a serious question arises as to how effective outreach has been.¹²

Finally, there is the question of the sustaining power of outreach. Absent conversion, can outreach sustain the Jewish identity of the mixed-married family in the second and third generations? Thus far, the evidence is negative. Research conducted by Peter Medding of the Hebrew University points to the importance of an "unambiguous Jewish identity" in preserving the Jewishness of the home. The Jewish identity of a mixed-marriage home is often highly ambiguous, due to the presence of Christian symbols and the observance of Christian holidays. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that absent conversion to Judaism mixed-marriages result in "terminal Jewish identity" by the third generation.¹³ Medding's research corroborates the earlier findings of Egon Mayer in research undertaken by the American Jewish Committee in 1983.¹⁴ It also corroborates the findings of the NJPS that 90 percent of the children of mixed-married couples themselves marry out.

Given these five questions, it still remains necessary to advocate outreach on both human and demographic grounds. On the human level, these are all members of our families, and the Jewish community clearly is not about to turn its back on them. On the demographic level, mixed-marriage poses serious dangers of significant demographic losses within a generation.

Therefore, outreach must be carefully targeted to those mixed-marrieds who are interested in leading a Jewish life. Steven Cohen's analysis of the Jewish community differentiates between the 20-25 percent of who are core activists, the 15-20 percent who are totally disinterested, and the 50-55 percent who form the "middles" of Jewish life -- those who are interested in Jewish continuity in the form of Jewish grandchildren but are unsure how to attain it. Cohen, as well as Jack Ukeles, has argued that outreach efforts ought be targeted to those middles -- to those who have already expressed some interest in leading a Jewish life. Our goal ought be to enlarge the core by shrinking the middle.¹⁵

To be sure, that route presupposes that some losses become inevitable. Moreover, it is probably only a minority of mixed-married couples that actually fall among the middles. The majority have already signaled by their decisions to raise their children outside the Jewish faith that they have little interest in the Jewish community. Here again it becomes a question how we utilize limited resources to the best effect.

Moreover, and this is of equal sensitivity, outreach must be appropriately designed so that the overall message of the Jewish community regarding Jewish marital values, the importance of building a Jewish home, and the importance of finding Jewish mates are clearly communicated. Is that a message that mixed-married couples can hear? Some can and some will not. Our task, while respecting the personal choices of individuals, must be to articulate communal norms that are seen as being the preferred model for Jews generally. To quote Charlotte Holstein, past chair of the AJC's Jewish Communal Affairs Commission,

Certainly, on a personal level, I felt touched by the new research findings and revised policies. However, it was necessary to draw the distinction between what I felt emotionally and what rationally was good for the survival of the Jewish community as a whole. . . . The basic question was at what point do one's personal experience and one's communal responsibility blend or act in concert and when do they conflict or cause tension?¹⁶

To be sure, that distinction is difficult to make and will often get lost. Failure to make the distinction, however, runs the risk of communicating a vision of intermarriage as simply one acceptable option among others. It is at that point that we have abandoned our responsibility as Jewish leaders and have fallen into a trap of moral relativism that anything that Jews happen to do automatically becomes legit:mate.

Recently some initiatives have been launched to address these concerns. The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture has started programs in the Metro-West New Jersey and the St. Louis federations focusing on outreach to "underaffiliated" Jews, including mixed-marrieds within a broader population of those who are only marginally affiliated.¹⁷ Those programs wisely identify the underaffiliated rather than the mixed-married as the problem. They target outreach to those who have expressed some desire to lead a Jewish life. And by including mixed-marrieds within a broader outreach program they do not blur the crucial message of endogamy.

In conclusion, we face four pressing tasks, and we must confront them with candor and honesty:

First, let us acknowledge that this is a disaster in the making. Left unchecked, intermarriage will dilute both the quantity and quality of the Jewish community. Pretending that this is not a problem will succeed only in providing false comfort to some.

Second, Jewish leaders must distinguish between their personal needs and those of their families and the good of the community for which they have responsibility. Comforting statements are important, but they are a poor basis for framing communal policy.

Third, the community of social scientists must realize that what they say and do creates a cultural climate and communal norms affecting intermarriage. Statements of "pure" social science often get translated as prescriptive advocacy. Some statements, as I have indicated, have already proven harmful. The Talmud's advice to sages, "Watch your words," is no less applicable to contemporary social scientists.

Finally, outreach advocates must lower their sights, avoiding messianic claims and focusing upon what is doable and realizable rather than holding out false visions to the community. Statements to the effect that outreach will "transform the intermarriage crisis into the greatest opportunity of modern Jewish history"¹⁸ are simply irresponsible. We must acknowledge that the core of the Jewish future is not likely to come from the ranks of the mixed-marrieds. Nevertheless, we should pursue outreach with the objectives of preserving Jewish identity and enabling mixed-married couples to incorporate a sense of Jewishness within their homes.

Notes

1. See, for example, Egon Mayer, cited in the *New York Times*, June 7, 1991.
2. Steven M. Cohen, *Alternative Families in the Jewish Community* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1989), pp. 9-10, 30.
3. Sylvia Fishman and Alice Goldstein, *When They Are Grown, They Will Not Depart: Jewish Education and Jewish Behavior of American Adults* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Council of Jewish Federations, and Jewish Education Service of North America, 1993), pp. 10-11.
4. Nathalie Friedman, "The Graduates of Ramaz: Fifty Years of Day School Education," in Jeffrey Gurock, ed., *Ramaz: School, Community, Scholarship, and Orthodoxy* (New Jersey: Ktav, 1989), p. 102.
5. Jonathan Sarna, "Interreligious Marriage in America," in *The Intermarriage Crisis: Jewish Communal Perspectives and Responses* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991), p. 4.
6. Rachel Cowan, in *Moment*, April 1992, p. 14.
7. Dru Greenwood, Commentary on Steven Bayme, "National Jewish Population Survey -- Implications for the Rabbinate," Central Conference of American Rabbis, National Convention, April 6, 1992, privately circulated.
8. Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, *Conversion Among the Intermarried* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987), pp. 9-22.
9. Brenda Forster and Joseph Tabachnick, *Jews by Choice* (New Jersey: Ktav, 1991), pp. 100-102. See also Jonathan Sarna, "Reform Jewish Leaders, Intermarriage, and Conversion," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Winter 1990, pp. 1-8, which also raises the specter of "one-generation converts."

10. Stephen Fuchs, "Reach Out -- But Also Bring In," *Sh'ma*, Mar. 8, 1991, pp. 69-70.
11. Jacob Ukeles, "Does Outreach Justify Investment? Alternatives to Outreach," in *The Intermarriage Crisis*, pp. 17-19.
12. Alexander Schindler, "The Reformed Jew: Values, Practices and Visions," Presidential Address, 61st General Assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Baltimore, Md., Nov. 2, 1991.
13. Peter Medding et al., *Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1992), pp. 37-38.
14. Egon Mayer, *Children of Intermarriage* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1983).
15. Steven M. Cohen, *Content or Continuity: The 1989 National Survey of American Jews* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991), pp. 51-52.
16. Charlotte Holstein, "When Commitments Clash: One Leader's Personal Dilemma," in *Intermarriage Crisis*, p. 35.
17. Steven Bayme, *Outreach to the Unaffiliated: Communal Context and Policy Direction* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1992), p. 15.
18. See, for example, David W. Belin, "Confronting the Intermarriage Crisis With Realism and Effective Action," in *Intermarriage Crisis*, p. 39.