

Dear Rabbi,

I am in love with a Catholic girl, and we want to get married, although we aren't yet engaged. My parents say "no way", but can't provide me with a rational reason why not. Just because "so many Jews died to stay Jewish" or that "my grandmother will turn over in her grave" just doesn't speak to me. I'll still be a proud Jew no matter who I marry, and my kids will decide themselves what they want to be. I still would like to hear what you have to say, as I promised my parents to do this due diligence, so here I am.

Rodney K.

Dear Rodney,

I appreciate your feeling that the "guilt arguments" of your parents are not a sufficient motivation to bypass your feelings and the woman you love. By the same token, in my experience, generally no argument under the sun will sway you from your desire once you've reached this point in the relationship. When one already has fallen in love, generally the only thing which may, perhaps, give one the strength to forego the relationship is that one's Jewish batteries are charged with many years of spiritual energy through Jewish education and observance. **Your parents should have been concerned many years ago and provided you with that opportunity. I therefore hesitate to answer your question, as it's almost not fair to expect you to be able to detach yourself from your situation and view the material with clarity.** However, since you asked, I will provide you with a few morsels of food for thought. **I hope you will take them to heart.**

For Jews, "marrying within the faith" isn't simply a cultural preference or prejudice, rather a commandment from G-d (Deut./Devarim 7:3). Its roots are at the very foundation of Judaism from the beginning of Jewish history. Abraham commanded his servant, Eliezer, not to find a wife for his son Isaac from the Canaanite women in whose land they resided (Gen./ Braeshis 24:4). Isaac later commanded his son Jacob not to marry of the "daughters of the land" (ibid. 28:1).

This prohibition is predicated on a core Jewish belief: the understanding that Jews are *not* the same as the other nations of the world. Our lineage through the patriarchs and matriarchs of our nation, coupled with our acceptance of the Torah at Sinai, has elevated us and changed us, making us different from the other nations forever. Throughout our history, it was the profound, heartfelt and proud understanding that we are truly different, that prevented widespread intermarriage. Jews were always proud of our unique calling to be a "light among the nations", our eternal mission to inspire the rest of the world to follow G-d's purpose to life.

In the words of Leo Tolstoy: "The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illuminated with it the entire world. He is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions. The Jew is the pioneer of liberty. The Jew is the pioneer of civilization. The Jew is the emblem of eternity."

To quote Mark Twain: "If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvellous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendour, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other nations pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

The gentile nations have not been successful in snuffing out the Jewish flame. Only we can snuff out our own flame, through assimilation and intermarriage. You, Rodney, are being passed the torch to continue over 3000 years of Jewish history into the next generation. By intermarrying, with one fell swoop you detach yourself as a link in that

holy chain, and cut off the next generations from being part of that timeless legacy. In Jewish law the Judaism of children depends upon their mother, and your children would not be Jewish, regardless of which practices they adopt ("Code of Jewish Law" Even Ha'ezer 8:5).

Furthermore, many studies show that when children are expected to choose between mom and dad's traditions, many deep psychological conflicts arise, often leaving them confused.

Lastly, in today's world a terribly high percentage of all marriages end in divorce, although none of those divorcees expected to be part of those statistics when they wed. Studies show that intermarried couples divorce at about *double* these already high rates, due to a number of factors. Let it suffice to say, putting all religious and cultural considerations aside, you are putting yourself at an extremely high risk of sacrificing your own happiness, as divorce can be one of the most devastating events ever experienced in one's life.

Finally, Jewish history and the Jewish people will live on - with or without you. The chain, however, is exponentially weaker if it will be missing your own vital and crucial link. Please consider staying on the train, and continue to ride with us all in our trek towards the fulfillment of the eternal goals of the Jewish people. They are your family, your people.