

Dear Rabbi Fried,

Last week, your column addressed the issue of why marrying a non-Jew not only violates several Jewish laws, but also pragmatically is likely to end up with confused children, at best, or in divorce. You also reminded the guy who wrote to you wanting to marry a Catholic woman that his children wouldn't be Jewish.

Coincidentally in another column in the very same issue, the president of a Jewish research institute argued that trying to discourage American Jews from marrying non-Jews was totally impractical and unrealistic. Rather than trying to guilt-trip Jews into marrying within the faith, which he says doesn't work, he urged the Jewish community to take its head out of the sand and instead work on proactively converting non-Jewish spouses or spouses-to-be. Isn't what he's saying more realistic and more likely to insure Jewish survival?

Ann O.

Dear Ann,

It was very painful to write what I did in that column, as I understand the emotional issues involved. By the same token, sometimes one needs to express what one feels is right even though it's not going to win any popularity contests. Intermarriage is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges to our survival. To view it as a *fait complete* is to cede our people to their inevitable demise. One letter I received from a caring Jew in response to the column you refer to, accuses me of causing a "...tragedy that could have been avoided without your input" ... if indeed the questioner should end his loving relationship with his Catholic partner due to my "...spewing the wrong message from your head, instead of a compassionate one from your heart". I assure you that my message was one that emanated deeply from my heart far more than from my head, to do my small part to divert a tragedy affecting our entire people; albeit with an emotional toll to those whom have become emotionally intertwined with wonderful non-Jewish significant others.

The other column you refer to makes the argument that we need to be realistic and not expect our few Jews in America to rule out the 98% of potential spouses of those we live, play and do business with day after day. Truth be told, there's nothing new about those numbers, and has been the case since our inception as a nation. The Torah proclaims, "Not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did G-d desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples. Rather, because of G-d's love for you...did He take you out with a strong hand and redeem you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt". (Deut./ Devarim 7:7-8). Throughout our history we have been "the few", and despite that, we have endured and remained largely immune from intermarriage until more recent times. For the last 3500 years Jewish leadership never proclaimed that we need to "get real" and not rule out the vast majority of potential spouses.

What made this possible for so long was the profound feeling of immense pride to be part of those who were chosen to be different, to be a light among the nations. Choosing a spouse was not only a choice made based upon love. A spouse was also looked at as a partner with whom you could together build a home to promulgate the Jewish values of Sinai into the next generation. The vast system of matchmakers made sure nobody remained outside the loop, matching the boy from Minsk with the girl from Pinsk. If we had that attitude, we'd all be working feverishly to match up that nice Jewish boy from Louisville to that sweet Jewish girl from Seattle, if they haven't found their "Bashert" locally. We need to create many more and more efficient organizations, perhaps providing dating counseling and other professional resources to aid and facilitate our singles' search for a Jewish partner. These organizations should be networking and working together to span geographic distances to bring these singles closer together, creating a modern "matchmaking" system. This needs to be coupled with more and meaningful state-of-the-art adult education targeting young adults as part of the dating process, which will give them the pride and desire to make a "shidduch" with a Jewish spouse a reality.

The Sages teach us that it was in the merit of the Jews who did not assimilate in Egypt during their 210 years of sojourn there, that we were redeemed. This Pesach let us make a new commitment to elevate the Jewish literacy of our community, instilling pride in our heritage, building new Jewish homes and igniting the flame of the final redemption of the Messianic times.

With wishes for a joyous and meaningful Passover holiday to you and all the readers