



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

## This Issue Contains:

1. Intermarriage
2. Yiddle Riddle
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## INTERMARRIAGE

Names@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*I am in love with a Catholic woman. I want to marry her. She loves me as much but religious beliefs are getting in the way. Please tell me what I should do, my parents say "no way." Help.*

Dear Rabbi,

*I'm getting married in October to a girl who is not Jewish (she is Hindu, born in India) and we're having a difficult time finding a Rabbi who will marry us. Why is this? And do you have any recommendations for Rabbis that would consider performing the ceremony. It's important to me and my family that we are married by a Rabbi. Thanks.*

Dear Rabbi,

*I will be married (very soon) to a Jewish woman. I am not Jewish, but would very much like to include several of the Jewish traditions in our wedding, to embrace her heritage as well.*

Dear Names@Withheld,

For Jews, "marrying within the faith" isn't a cultural preference or prejudice. Rather, it is one of the commandments G-d gave us at Mount Sinai. A Jew who marries a non-Jew transgresses a Torah prohibition.

The practice of not "intermarrying" is in fact one of the oldest features of Judaism. It dates back to Abraham telling Eliezer, his servant, not to find a wife for his son from the Canaanites. It continues with Isaac's command to his son Jacob not to marry the "daughters of the land." The practice is mentioned in the Bible as a legal prohibition, and is also part of the covenant that Ezra the scribe had the

Jews make when they rebuilt the Temple after the Babylonian Exile.

In all the above cases the underlying idea of the prohibition seems to be ideological. As Jews, we have a unique identity that is connected to our purpose in the world. We are the "chosen people." We were chosen to propagate the ethical monotheism of Judaism.

In the words of Leo Tolstoy:

"The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illumined 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 religious. The Jew is the pioneer of liberty. The Jew is the pioneer of civilization. The Jew is the emblem of eternity."

We were chosen as a permanent protest group against idolatry and immorality. Intermarriage is therefore antithetical to the Jewish purpose and to the Jewish identity.

Can we prove that we are chosen? Do we have evidence? Yes. In a brief look at history we can see the antiquity, survival and impact of the Jewish people as unique and remarkable. I don't think that I can put it better than Mark Twain, in his famous description of Jewish history, "An Essay Concerning the Jews":

"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

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list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away 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 the 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?"

Intermarriage is a betrayal of our task and of our "choseness." It is also a guarantee against Jewish continuity.

Let me illustrate with a conversation heard on the Dr. Laura Schlessinger show in the US:

A woman calls Dr. Laura: "I'm Jewish," she says. "My husband is not Jewish, but he is very active in the Jewish community. We are trying our best to raise our children as Jews and give them a Jewish education. Now my son is almost thirteen, and he tells us he doesn't want a *bar mitzvah* (celebration of the acceptance of one's Judaism). What can we do?"

"Let me get this straight," Dr. Laura says. "You say your husband is not Jewish?"

"That's right," the woman answers.

"How do you expect your son to follow Judaism when you don't?"

Being Jewish isn't a cultural affiliation or a tradition. It's being part of the Chosen People. That means a commitment to the responsibility given to us by Hashem at Sinai. Someone who understands this will obviously choose a partner who is likewise committed. Otherwise, it's entering a relay race, but choosing a partner who's running towards a different finish line.

Who you marry affects every single aspect of your life. It affects your community. It affects your children. It affects all future generations. The Jewish home is the single most important establishment in Jewish life. It outweighs any synagogue or temple, even the Holy Temple built by King Solomon. By marrying a non-Jew one thereby ends over 3,000 years of Jewish continuity, effectively cutting oneself and one's offspring off from what it means to be Jewish.

There have been many other arguments offered against intermarriage, below is a summary of some of the most famous.

1. Six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, 12 million were left afterwards. Today there are only 13 million Jews in the world. Where are the rest that by natural increase should number close to 20 million? The answer is that the silent holocaust of assimilation has caused them to disappear as Jews.

Intermarriages are twice as likely to end in divorce as same-faith marriages (75% divorce rate!). Some reasons for this are the different identities of the spouses and the differences in culture and family. For example a Jew will naturally turn their head at the mention of "Israel" and "Jew." A gentile who converts in superficial and insincere conversion only for the sake of marriage does not create a new identity that is now Jewish.

3. One is granting a victory to anti-Semites who seek to destroy the Jewish people. Think of what has been sacrificed in the past by our own ancestors to keep their Judaism. And think of the heritage that is being sacrificed for the sake of personal reasons.

Ultimately, however, all Jews must have a sense of pride in their own identity. We cannot define ourselves by foreign ideologies, nationalities or religions. As a great author once wrote:

"Pride is faith in the idea that G-d had, when He made us. A proud man is conscious of the idea, and aspires to realize it. He does not strive towards a happiness, or comfort, which may be irrelevant to G-d's idea of him. His success is the idea of G-d, successfully carried through, and he is in love with his destiny... People who have no pride are not aware of any idea of G-d in the making of them, and sometimes they make you doubt that there has ever been much of an idea, or else it has been lost, and who shall find it again? They

have got to accept as success what others warrant to be so, and to take their happiness, and even their own selves, at the quotation of the day. They tremble with reason before their fate."

Let us not live by the "quotation of the day" but rather by our own heritage, the Torah. When Jews study Torah, and identify as Jews they are really just returning to their true selves.

In the words of the Rebbe of Kotzk,

"If I am I *because* you are you, and you are you *because* I am I; then I am not I and you are not you. However, if I am I *because* I am I, and you are you *because* you are you; then I am I and you are you."

Sources:

- *Genesis 24:3-4 & 28:1*
- *Deuteronomy 7:1-5*
- *Nechemiah 10:30-31*
- *Exodus 19:3, 6; Deuteronomy 4:20, 26:17-19; Isaiah 61:6.*

- *Leviticus 22:32; Maimonides, Book of the Commandments 9*
- *A Book of Jewish Thoughts, compiled by Rabbi J. H. Hertz*
- *Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer 16:1*
- *Maimonides Hilchot Issurei Biyah 12:1*
- *Isak Dinesen, Out of Africa*
- *Siach Sarphei Kodesh*

## Yiddle Riddle

Women customarily light two Shabbat candles every Friday afternoon before sunset. The *Mishnah Berurah* (263:7) says that if a woman forgets to light Shabbos candles, she has to light an extra Shabbos candle for the rest of her life. So, if she forgot to light candles the first week, she would have to light three candles the next week. If she forgot the next week as well, then she would need to light four candles the third week. If this continues over a period of 10 weeks, what is the total number of candles she will have used during this 10 week period?

*Riddle submitted by Lev Seltzer <levs@virtual.co.il>*

## THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

*Comments, quibbles, and reactions  
concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features.*

Re: Moshe's birth certificate; Regarding why the Torah chose the name "Moshe," being that it is not the name given him by his mother (Ohrnet Tetzaveh):

*Moshe was drawn from the water and in turn draws all the world from the water. The Talmud asks, "From where do we see Moshe in the Torah?" meaning "What is the source of Moshe in creation, where is his essence defined?" The Talmud quotes the verse (Bereishis 3): "Lo yodun ruchi ba'adam*

*l'olam beshagam hu basar," describing G-d's patience before bringing the Great Flood. Moshe has the numerical value of the word in this verse, "beshagam" (see Daas Zekanim ad. Loc.). The lesson is that Moshe — and the Torah that he brings down to earth — is the force that holds back the waters that threaten to flood the world. It is he who splits the sea and brings the People of Israel across. It is he who hits the rock and draws forth the water that sustains all life. What name could possibly fit better?*

Heshy Grossman <grossman@actcom.co.il>

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