

the combined 113 years interim, it was the little matter of the surnames. Both sets had changed them after their marriage and before our births. So now just days before the happy occasion, proof of name change by deed poll had to be procured. Shavuot was in sight, post was on a go slow and David asked if they could be faxed through. Though I am the apple of his eye, my father rather drew the line at rushing out to buy a fax machine. Instead he drove 15 miles with the document to my cousin who then took it to his business where it was successfully faxed to David, who then faxed it to the Chief Rabbi. The Bow Street Runners have nothing on the Harwoods née Hoffstadters or the Gilberts née Isaacs! Well at last

everything seemed set. Freezer bulging with food, friends preparing their 'simcha' contributions, and the mums' panic buying of flowers, lest the house failed to stand up to the floral scrutiny of a funeral director (actually I did the panicking, they did the paying).

K-Day had at last arrived. Ring at the door. 'What a lovely surprise. An enormous bouquet of flowers from my 'fiancé'. Would a tastefully decorated bucket do?

The telephone rings about two hours before the ceremony. 'David, how lovely to hear from you. Do I have a what? Well I have a hat, but a veil! I'm sure I'll come up with something' I say lying through my teeth. Ancient hiding places were excavated and I emerged tri-

umphantly with the original veil, albeit complete with 30-year-old coffee stain.

Despite my less than reverential account of the lead up to a very important event, I would like to say that David made the ceremony a very relevant and moving occasion. There was just the right amount of seriousness mixed with just the right amount of humour. What could be more amusing than Anthony stepping on an exquisitely wrapped test tube, or us demurely retiring for five minutes to 'get to know each other?'

It was a truly memorable afternoon, and I am proud to relate that I am now a fully paid up member of the K-Club, and an orthodox one at that.

## INTERMARRIAGE / Micheline Brannan

"The marriage of a Jew with a non-Jew has no binding force under Jewish religious law and is not recognised as religiously valid even if performed and blessed by a hundred rabbis."<sup>1</sup>

That is the position under Jewish law, but it does not act as a deterrent to some one-third of Jewish men and women in the UK, who marry non-Jewish partners. The option of conversion is rarely chosen by these partners. It takes a long time and demands a sincere belief in Judaism, as conversion may not be pursued for an ulterior motive. It is a hard road to travel.

In addition, a Jewish woman can reassure herself and her partner that any children will be Jewish and will gain almost the same acceptance in the Jewish community as the offspring of a Jewish marriage. I say 'almost' because sons will not be able to have a *Pidyon Haben* and will not be called up to read the law in their father's name. To prove they are Jewish at the time of marriage, such children will have to hunt around for the *Ketubah* of grandparents to prove that their mother is

in fact Jewish as there is no Jewish register of births.

A man who 'marries out' will tend to have 'burnt his boats' religion-wise. His children will not be Jewish and will be treated in the same way as any other non-Jewish child with respect to *cheder* attendance, participation in synagogue services, and future marriage. The answer in most communities will be 'no' to all three, although some schools may make Jewish education available to non-Jewish children who are being brought up as Jews, in the hope that they will convert as adults. I have heard of men who decided to keep their children well clear of synagogues in order to spare them from being hurt, and this seems a wise decision unless some changes are made.

There are disabilities for adults of either sex in some communities, following from intermarriage. For example they may not be allowed to exercise public duties or teach in the *cheder*. In addition, a man who has 'married out', whether with children or not, may be put under disabilities with regard to his own synagogue participation. I imagine this is very painful for a man - for

example if he cannot have an *Aliyah* when attending a *Bar Mitzvah* or '*Aufruf*' for a close relative. It is hard to understand special rules, which are not based on *Halachah*, allowing a man with a non-Jewish wife to sing in a Shul choir or have the honour of lifting or binding the Torah, but not allowing him to say a *Brachah*.

Not everyone will have children but children can add to the tensions. I would advise anyone who is thinking of marrying out or has done so to consider very carefully the status of their children and discuss it with their future husband or wife.

A woman can choose whether to try to bring up her children as Jewish or not, but it is important that her husband knows what to expect. It is not fair to introduce the Jewish religion suddenly into the life of a man who has no experience of what is involved. The problem starts very early, with the law of circumcision, which some Jews nowadays find hard to reconcile with modern ideas of human rights, let alone non-Jews. The few days just after a birth are very stressful, and the need to circumcise a boy is something I

<sup>1</sup>To be a Jew, by Chaim Halevy Donin

would advise any Jewish woman to discuss with her non-Jewish husband well in advance. I would extend similar advice regarding a *Bar Mitzvah*, since the boy will be caught up for several months in preparations of which his father will have limited understanding.

As Tolstoy observed about unhappy families, all intermarried families are different. There are families, whether the man or the woman is Jewish, who have simply abandoned religion. They may occasionally be invited to someone's *Seder* or *Simchah* but that is all the contact they have. There are families where the non-Jewish partner goes along with, or even actively supports, the Jewish partner's adherence to his or her own religion. And there are families where the non-Jewish partner actively pursues another religion.

My own experience is of a family where both of us are actively trying to pursue different religions to some extent. The most moving speech at my son David's *Bar Mitzvah* was when my husband, then rather ill, rose to say that he regretted that David had not followed his religion. He felt that it would be hypocritical to congratulate David on his achievements as a Jewish boy without making this point, and most people who heard the speech appreciated his feelings.

Our family is an almost daily Council of Christians and Jews. We are always explaining to each other aspects of our respective faiths. My husband does not feel particularly at home in *shul*, but I can say that Rabbi Sedley visited him in hospital and this was greatly appreciated by all of us. Some Christians I meet express an almost embarrassing admiration for the Jewish people. I suspect that this is driven by post-Holocaust guilt although the interest goes back a long way in some cases. One of the hymns in the New English Hymnal is called 'The God of Abraham Praise' and the tune is quite recognisably *Yigdal*, adapted after a visit to a Friday night service by an English clergyman, T. Olivers, in the 1700s! When the late

Cardinal Winning talked to the Council of Christians and Jews last year, my husband took the chance to ask him what advice he would offer to a family where the parents were pursuing different religions. The Cardinal said that he was less worried about our family than he was about families where no religious values were being taught at all.

There are positives, but I am not going to advocate intermarriage as a life choice. What I would like to see is more open discussion of the subject, and I welcome the editor's invitation to write about it. I would like to see Jewish communities approach the subject according to *Halachah* and not embroider the requirements of Jewish law. In particular I do not understand why members of the community should be put under particular disabilities which are presumably meant to shame them or deter others. They have broken one Jewish law, but there are other people breaking other Jewish laws all the time. We are not supposed to calculate the reward or punishment for the different *mitzvot*.

Secondly, I would like to see some Jewish education offered to people who are not technically Jewish but who have thrown in their lot with the Jewish people. It was wonderful when Alit Sedley ran her crash courses in Hebrew and the non-Jewish fathers were welcomed to these. There is of course our Literary Society and the Council of Christians and Jews, where non-Jewish members are encouraged, but that is not the same as reaching out to individual families. Recognising that someone is trying to bring up children as Jewish, or even just wanting them to understand their heritage, could do with some help.

Thirdly, I would like to see more understanding shown to men who have married out. Such men often have an intense sense of Jewish identity and are great supporters of the community. They can still join a *Minyan*. They still say *Kaddish* for parents and siblings. They still have

Jewish relations who have *simchahs*. So why have special rules that exclude them from honours and *mitzvot*?

Lastly, I would like to see more open discussion with the children themselves. The message they are receiving in their schools and from politics in Scotland today is one of equality and social inclusion. How can we reconcile that with a message from our own religion that the worst offence is to marry 'outside the tribe'? The usual explanations sound false to many young people. They don't believe that mixed marriages are more likely to break down, that our religion is 'right' and someone else's is 'wrong', that the non-Jewish partner will be the first to turn against them should there be a wave of anti-Semitism. Our young people are very similar to the teenagers they meet around them and these fears don't ring true to them.

What dialogue are we to have with children in a *cheder* where there is a massive imbalance between girls and boys? Is it realistic, in 2001, to ask children to wait until they leave Edinburgh completely and hopefully go to Manchester, Leeds, London, or further afield before they start any relationships? As my son recently said, "If G-d had wanted us to go out with Jewish girls he would have provided some!" These issues are painful, but they must be discussed. Otherwise children will grow up seeing the Jewish religion as a nice social club or a little game they play to please adults, but as having very little genuine connection with their lives.

*With Compliments*

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