

From Bereishit to 2020: Responses to Inter marriage

Judah Kerbel ~ Parashat Toldot ~ Queens Jewish Center

[Alicia Chandler, JTA, August 16, 2020](#)

But more than the countless conversations I have, I am worried about the people that have just left. The couple who had a rabbi refuse to officiate at their wedding, and never walked into a synagogue again. I worry about the young professional who went to his first Jewish conference, heard a speaker say that marrying someone of another faith meant leaving the community, and decided to leave the organization. I worry about the college student considering a future in the rabbinate who learns that she will have to choose between marrying the person she wants and becoming a Rabbi in her denomination. The family who cannot find a mohel to perform a bris, and never ends up educating their child in Judaism.

The part that breaks my heart is when I meet a non-Jew who shares with me that their mom or dad was Jewish, but their parent was forced to choose between love and religion. This person is now lost to the community forever.

It is time for full inclusion of all interfaith families in the Jewish community, not just vice presidential nominees and celebrities. In 2013, [44% of all Jews were married to a non-Jew](#); 58% of those married since 2005, and the trend is seemingly on the rise.

Doug and Kamala are not a rare exception — they represent much of the American Jewish community today. We should make a greater effort to make families like them feel just as included and celebrated.

1. [Bereishit 24:2-4](#)

And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, *that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites* among whom I dwell, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac."

2. [Bereishit 27:46](#)

Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?"

3. [Ezra 9:1-2](#)

When this was over, the officers approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land whose abhorrent practices are like those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

א. נישואי תערובת בתנ"ך

1. [בראשית פרק כד, ב-ד](#)

(ב) ויאמר אברהם אל עבדו זקן ביתו המשל בכל
אשר לו שים נא ידך תחת ירכי: (ג) ואשביעך
ביקוק אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ אשר לא תקח
אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אנכי יושב בקרבו:
(ד) כי אל ארצי ואל מולדתי תלה ולקחת אשה
לבני ליצחק:

2. [בראשית פרק כז פסוק מו](#)

ותאמר רבקה אל יצחק קצתי בחיי מפני בנות חת
אם לקח יעקב אשה מבנות חת כאלה מבנות
הארץ למה לי חיים:

3. [עזרא פרק ט, א-ב](#)

(א) וככלות אלה נגשו אלי השרים לאמר לא
נבדלו העם ישראל והפנהים והלויים מעמי
הארצות כתועבתיהם לכנעני החתי הפרזי היבוס
העמני המאבי המצרי והאמרי: (ב) כי נשאו
מבנותיהם להם ולבניהם והתערבו זרע הקדש
בעמי הארצות ויד השרים והסגנים היתה במעל
הזה ראשונה:

They have taken their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed has become intermingled with the peoples of the land; and it is the officers and prefects who have taken the lead in this trespass.”

4. Ezra 10:10-11

Then Ezra the priest got up and said to them, “*You have trespassed by bringing home foreign women, thus aggravating the guilt of Israel.*

So now, make confession to the LORD, God of your fathers, and do His will, and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign women.”

5. Nehemiah 10:31

“Namely: We will not give our daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land, or take their daughters for our sons.

6. Devarim 7:3

You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.

7. Talmud Avodah Zarah 36b

And Geneiva says in the name of Rav: Gentiles' bread, oil, wine, and daughters were all decreed upon due to the concern that Jews might participate in idol worship with gentiles as a result of intermingling with them. And they issued the decree prohibiting their wine due to the fact that this leads to familiarity, and Jews will come to marry their daughters. And they issued a decree prohibiting their daughters due to something else, idolatry. And they further issued a decree on something else due to something else, Their daughters is prescribed by Torah law, as it is written: “Neither shall you make marriages with them.” The Gemara explains: By Torah law intermarriage is prohibited only with the seven Canaanite nations, but intermarriage with the other nations of the world is not prohibited, and the students of Shammai and Hillel came and decreed even with the other nations. And according to the opinion of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, who says that the subsequent verse: “For he will turn away your son from following Me” serves to include all who turn away one's son from God, i.e., all gentiles,

4. עזרא פרק י, י-יא

(י) וַיִּקְרָא עֶזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַתֶּם מְעַלְתֶּם וַתִּשְׁבּוּ נָשִׁים נְכָרִיּוֹת לְהוֹסִיף עַל אֲשַׁמַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל: (יא) וְעַתָּה תָּנוּ תוֹדָה לִיקְוֹק אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם וְעֲשׂוּ רְצוֹנוֹ וְהִבְדְּלוּ מֵעַמֵי הָאָרֶץ וּמִן הַנָּשִׁים הַנְּכָרִיּוֹת:

5. נחמיה פרק י פסוק לא

וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא נָתַן בְּנֹתֵינוּ לְעַמֵי הָאָרֶץ וְאֵת בְּנֹתֵיהֶם לֹא נִקַּח לְבָנֵינוּ:

ב. איסור נישואי תערובת

6. דברים פרק ז פסוק ג

וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם בֵּתְךָ לֹא תִתֵּן לְבָנוּ וּבֵתוֹ לֹא תִקַּח לְבָנְךָ:

7. תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה דף

לו עמוד ב

וגניבא משמיה דרב אמר: כולן משום עבודת כוכבים גזרו בהן... ועל יין משום בנותיהן, ועל בנותיהן משום דבר אחר, ועל דבר אחר משום ד"א. בנותיהן - דאורייתא היא, דכתיב: לא תתחתן בם! דאורייתא ז' אומות, אבל שאר עובדי כוכבים לא, ואתו אינהו וגזור אפילו דשאר עובדי כוכבים. ולר"ש בן יוחי דאמר: כי יסיר את בנך מאחרי - לרבות כל המסירות, מאי איכא למימר? אלא דאורייתא אישות דרך חתנות, ואתו אינהו גזור אפילו דרך זנות. זנות נמי בבית דינו של שם גזרו דכתיב (בראשית לח, כד) ויאמר יהודה הוציאוה ותשרף. אלא דאורייתא עובד כוכבים הבא על בת ישראל דמשכה בתריה אבל ישראל הבא על העובדת

what is there to say? Rather, by Torah law only sexual relations by way of marriage are prohibited, and they came and decreed that sexual relations are prohibited even by way of licentiousness. Licentious sexual intercourse was also prohibited earlier, as they decreed a prohibition in this regard in the court of Shem, as it is written: And Judah said: Bring her forth, and let her be burned” ([Genesis 38:24](#)). Rather, by Torah law applies to the case of a gentile who engaged in intercourse with a Jewish woman, as she is drawn after him toward idolatry, but the case of a Jew who engaged in intercourse with a gentile woman is not. And the students of Shammai and Hillel came and decreed that the prohibition applies even to a Jew who engaged in intercourse with a gentile woman.

8. Tur Even Ha’ezer Siman 16

A non-Jewish woman, even though she is only prohibited [to be married] under rabbinic law, and if he has casual sexual relations with her, he only incurs lashes for rebelling, and if he was alone with her illicitly, he is liable rabbinically for niddah and for the prohibition of *shifcha* and for idolatry and for illicitness, the Rambam writes...

It appears to me, that [this prohibition] applies only to the Seven Nations for we do not rule in accordance with R. Shimon ben Yochai. And even with the Seven Nations, there are no lashes for *lo titchaten* other than after they have converted. However, while they are gentiles, “marriage” is not possible.

9. Shulchan Arukh Even Ha’ezer 16:1

If a Jewish man who sleeps with a non-Jewish woman in the way of married people, or a Jewish woman sleeps with a non-Jewish man, they receive biblically ordained lashes, as it says “You Shall not intermarry with them. (Rama: some disagree whether or not this is biblically mandated).

Shulchan Arukh Even Ha’ezer 44:8

A man who betroths a non-Jewish woman or maidservant has not accomplished anything, as they are not subject to *kiddushin*. And if a non-Jewish man betroths a Jewish woman also has not accomplished anything.

כוכבים לא ואתו אינהו גזור אפי' ישראל
הבא על העובדת כוכבים

8. טור אבן העזר סימן טז

כותית אע"פ שאין בה לאו אסורה
מדרבנן ואם בא עליה בזנות דרך
מקרה מכין אותו מכות מרדות ואם
יחדה לו בזנות חייב עליה מדרבנן
משום נדה ומשום שפחה ומשום עכו"ם
ומשום זונה כתב הרמב"ם ז"ל בא על
הכותית משאר העכו"ם דרך אישות
לוקה מן התורה או ישראלית שנבעלה
לעכו"ם דרך אישות לוקה מן התורה
משום לא תתחתן במ אחד ז' עכו"ם
ואחד כל העכו"ם באיסור זה ע"כ ונ"ל
שאינו אלא בז' עכו"ם דלא קי"ל כרבי
שמעון דאמר כי יסיר לרבות כל
המסירין ואפילו בז' עכו"ם אין לוקין
משום לא תתחתן אלא לאחר שנתגיירו
אבל בעודם עכו"ם לא שייך בהו חתנות
ואינו לוקה עד שיבעול ואז לוקה עליה
משום לא תקח

9. שולחן ערוך אבן העזר סי' טז, א

ישראל שבעל עובדת כוכבים, דרך
אישות, או ישראלית שנבעלה לעובד
כוכבים (דרך אישות), הרי אלו לוקין מן
התורה, שנאמר: לא תתחתן במ
(דברים ז, ג) (ויש חולקין בזה).

שולחן ערוך אבן העזר סימן מד, ח

המקדש עכו"ם או שפחה אינו כלום,
שאינן בני קדושין. וכן עכו"ם ועבד
שקידשו ישראלית, אינו כלום.

ג. נישואי תערובת בימי הביניים

10. Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia*, p. 165

As can be seen in the legislation regarding Jewish dress, one of the greatest fears of both Christians and Jews regarding their social interaction was the potential for sexual relations between members of the different faiths. Intercourse between Jews and Christians had been prohibited since Antiquity, and laws forbidding the practice can be found throughout the royal charters of medieval Iberia. For cases in which Jewish men were convicted of having intercourse with Christian women the *fueros* ordered that both were to be put to death—often by being burned alive.³⁵ Yet the fervor with

11. Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*

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Intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews existed as a theoretical possibility in both Islamic and European Christian society. Judaism and Christianity forbade this ultimate form of sociability. Islam handled the matter more indulgently. With Qur'anic sanction, it allows the marriage of a Muslim man to a *dhimmi* woman, on the presumption that, as master in the relationship, the Muslim husband would not be susceptible to the lure of his wife's religion.²⁶ Remarkably, Islamic law requires the husband to permit his non-Muslim wife to observe her religious rituals and to pray inside their house, and it admonishes him not to prompt her (if she is Jewish) to break the Sabbath or to eat forbidden foods. Nor may he pre-

ג. נישואי תערובת היום בארה"ב

12. A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews, October 1, 2013**Intermarriage, by Year of Marriage**

Among respondents who got married in ...	NET Jewish		Jews by religion	
	Spouse Jewish	Spouse not Jewish	Spouse Jewish	Spouse not Jewish
	%	%	%	%
2005-2013	42	58	55	45
2000-2004	42	58	50	50
1995-1999	45	55	55	45
1990-1994	54	46	58	42
1985-1989	59	41	65	35
1980-1984	58	42	61	39
1975-1979	64	36	68	32
1970-1974	65	35	79	21
Before 1970	83	17	89	11
Total	56	44	64	36

Source: Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews, Feb. 20-June 13, 2013.
Jews of no religion not shown due to limitations of sample size. Figures may not sum to 100% or to totals indicated due to rounding.

Intermarriage by Religious Denomination

	Among married Jews, % whose spouse is...	
	Jewish	Not Jewish
	%	%
NET Jewish	56	44
Orthodox	98	2
Conservative	73	27
Reform	50	50
No denomination	31	69

Source: Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews, Feb. 20-June 13, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The new Pew Research survey finds that, overall, 56% of married Jews have a Jewish spouse, while 44% of Jewish respondents are married to a non-Jew. Among Jews by religion who are married, 64% have a Jewish spouse and 36% have a non-Jewish spouse. *By comparison, Jews of no religion are much more likely to be in mixed marriages; just 21% of married Jews of no religion are married to a Jewish spouse, while 79% are married to a non-Jewish spouse.*

Approach of Reform Movement

13. CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS - REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON MIXED MARRIAGE - June 19, 1973 (<http://rcrconline.org/resourc2.htm>)

Resolution Proposed by the Committee on Mixed Marriage

I. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, recalling its stand adopted in 1909, "that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged," *now declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage.*

II. *Recognizing that historically the CCAR encompasses members holding divergent interpretations of Jewish tradition,* the Conference calls upon these members who dissent from this declaration:

1. to refrain from officiating at a mixed marriage unless the couple agrees to undertake, prior to marriage, a course of study in Judaism equivalent to that required for conversion;
2. to refrain from officiating at a mixed marriage for a member of a congregation served by a Conference member unless there has been prior consultation with that Rabbi;
3. to refrain from co-officiating or sharing with non-Jewish clergy in the solemnization of a mixed marriage;
4. to refrain from officiating at a mixed marriage on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*.

14. Michael Chabon, Hebrew Union College Commencement Speech, 2018

Like our parents, grandparents and many-times great-grandparents before us, in other words, my wife and I married-in.

Leaving aside the minor consideration of my having fallen in love with her at first sight, marrying-in was, on the face of it, a strange thing for me to have done. I abhor homogeneity and insularity, exclusion and segregation, the redlining of neighborhoods, the erection of border walls and separation barriers...

An endogamous marriage is a ghetto of two; as the traditional Jewish wedding ritual makes explicit, it draws a circle around the married couple, inscribes them—and any eventual children who come along—within a figurative wall of tradition, custom, shared history, and a common inheritance of chromosomes and culture. I know that “ghetto” is a loaded word, and to the extent that one makes the choice to marry-in free from any fear of paying the price of an exogamous marriage in shame, ostracism or worse, maybe a kinder or more charitable word would be “enclave.” But you know what? I abhor an enclave, too: a gated community, a restricted country club...

Approach of Conservative Movement

15. JTS Statement (<http://www.jtsa.edu/on-marriage-and-covenant-a-statement-by-jts>)

For JTS and its partners in the Conservative Movement, *the wedding ceremony is not only a celebration of a couple, but a commitment to the Jewish covenant.* Its opening blessing thanks God for infusing our lives with holiness through the mitzvot, and its closing lines connect this marriage to the rebirth of the Jewish people in Jerusalem. *Such statements can be said truly only if both partners identify as Jews...*

We understand the arguments made for our clergy to officiate at interfaith weddings, knowing that they come from a place of genuine concern for bringing near individuals and families who are or might be estranged from the community and tradition we love. However, we believe—and the data confirm—that by far the most effective path toward building a Jewish future is to strengthen Jewish identity, beginning with the Jewish family. This is also the path which Torah and tradition command. JTS will in coming months expand our efforts to welcome all families, including those that are interfaith, to explore Judaism together with us. We will do all we can—along with our partners in the Conservative movement—to make the process of joining our age-old covenant attractive, accessible, and compelling. This is not the moment for Conservative Jews and their rabbis to abandon the profound and joyful practice of rituals and learning, work for social justice and encounter with the Divine, love of Torah and love of the Jewish people that continue to make this form of Jewish life a source of community and meaning for hundreds of thousands of Jews in North America and beyond. Let us join together in confidence about the wisdom of the path to which we are committed.

16. Jewish Telegraphic Agency – October 22, 2018

(JTA) — The Conservative movement’s rabbinical association will allow its rabbis to attend intermarriages.

The policy change, which reverses a ban of four decades, was made last week in a vote of the Rabbinical Assembly’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, which determines the centrist movement’s Jewish legal rulings.

While Conservative rabbis still may not officiate in any way at marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew, they can now attend those weddings without fear of punishment. The ban on attending an intermarriage, which was instituted in 1972, was not enforced, although many rabbis said they heeded it.

Orthodox Reactions to Pew Report – OU Jewish Action Magazine

<https://jewishaction.com/religion/outreach/jonahs-sukkah/>

17. Rabbi Steven Weil

Among our non-Orthodox brethren, the intermarriage rate has skyrocketed. If we leave out the Orthodox—who very rarely intermarry—71.5 percent of American Jews marry outside of the faith. (This number refers to no form of conversion, that is, when the spouse identifies him or herself as a non-Jew. If we included nonhalachic conversions, the number is significantly higher.) That statistic should make us all feel deeply distressed. Are we not our brothers' keepers?

18. Dr. Erica Brown

We need to learn more about the American Jewish community at large and ask what we can do to strengthen in-marriage, community building and Jewish education for those who do not share our denominational commitment—precisely because we are the best equipped to do so. We have richer and better Jewish education than the overwhelming majority of American Jews. We have tight-knit synagogues that take prayer, Israel and Jewish identity seriously. We shine at building communities based on *chesed* and responsibility. We invest in Jewish education on every level. Virtually every aspect of neglect and loss that, not surprisingly, surfaced in the Pew report has not impacted the Orthodox community.

19. Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

The Pew report yields two clear conclusions and mandates for our Orthodox community. *First, we must focus our energies and resources on outreach, recognizing that it is up to us to plug the dam that has turned from a slow leak into a full-fledged flood of intermarriage and assimilation. Kiruv must not be the domain of rabbis and outreach professionals alone.* If we are to move the needle on these statistics, we will need to make outreach a communal imperative and mandate incumbent on every Orthodox individual and family.

20. Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter

Second, I see this report as an indictment of Orthodoxy. Yes, our intermarriage rates are very low (2 percent); the median age of those who identify as Orthodox is the lowest (40, compared to the median age in the net Jewish population, 50); our fertility rates are the highest (4.1, more than double the overall Jewish average of 1.9); our retention rate in the 18- to 64-year-old categories is the highest, and there are other signs of our significant success. *However, it graphically highlights just how much we have failed to meaningfully engage and impact the broad spectrum of acheinu Bnei Yisrael in this country.*

See also: [R. J. David Bleich](#), *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, 1981.