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Attending Services of Another Faith

Issue 192: September 26, 2006

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A Loving Marriage, A Spiritual Divide

By Ellen Glazer

When Dan and I met seven years ago, one of the first things I told him about myself was that it is important to me to be Jewish. I explained to this lovely, but very “goyisha” (non-Jewish) man, that I had pretty much spent my life around Jews and had known very few people who were not Jewish. More to the point, I had never dated a non-Jewish man. It seemed important that Dan know this since it was clear to both of us that we were going to do all we could to spend the rest of our lives together.

For a long time, our religious differences felt like a “non-issue.” Looking back, this was primarily because Dan went along with what I wanted. From the start, he joined me lighting Shabbat candles, attended some Friday night services, and actively sought out Jewish museums or historical sites when we were traveling. In addition, he went enthusiastically to Jewish film festivals and other cultural events. I was delighted by all of this and saw it as confirmation that although he had no intention to convert, Dan was informally “adopting” my religion. Sure I was uncomfortable when he wanted--and had--a Christmas tree, but that discomfort quickly dissipated when he explained to me that the tree had no religious significance to him.

Now, nearly three years into our marriage, I am coming to appreciate that things are more complicated than I believed or was willing to acknowledge. Dan and I have a wonderful marriage, but we live with a spiritual divide. Although he accompanies me in some Jewish observance and seems to have a genuine interest in Jewish history, Dan does not have an emotional attachment to the melodies and prayers that make up Jewish worship. For him, the spiritual comfort and sustenance I receive from my faith is entirely unfamiliar.

Dan, raised as a Catholic, found, at an early age, that he had serious questions about the history and teachings of the Catholic church. In addition, as the child of an interfaith marriage, Dan was deeply troubled that his mother, a Lutheran, had to promise the Catholic Church that her children would be raised Catholics. After much struggle, especially during his college years, Dan worked up the courage to tell his father, whom he loved dearly, that he was leaving the Church. Once he exited, he never looked back, never wondered if he might have found something of value in his former faith. Oddly, however, Dan does remember a time when he contemplated becoming a Protestant minister, but save for this blip in time, he seems to have made peace, long ago, with living a life without religion.

I was raised in a 1950s Reform Jewish home, which meant we went to synagogue two days a year and shared Passover and Hanukkah with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Looking back, I

was hardly offered a heaping dose of Judaism, but what I got drew me in and offered something I found sustaining. Specifically, I took with me from the New Jersey suburban temple of my youth certain prayers and melodies that are etched in my heart. Probably the one that I draw upon most often is the Union Prayer book translation of the Vehahafta:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all the soul, and with all thy might and these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart. Thou shall teach them diligently unto thy children and think of them when thou sittest in thy home, when thou walkest by the way, when thou lyeest down and when thou risest up . . . They shall be for frontlets between thy eyes and thou shalt write them on the doorposts of thy house and on thy gates--that ye may remember and do all my commandments and be holy unto your God.

What does it mean for one member of a couple to have a spiritual anchor when the other does not? In almost all respects, this difference between us is invisible and seems of no consequence. However, on some Friday evenings it steps forward and suddenly feels big. After a busy week, Dan and I have different ideas of how to transition from week to weekend--Dan wants to “unwind” at home and I seek spiritual comfort at services.

It is with a touch of longing and maybe a bit of irrational resentment that I set off, alone, for temple. What am I thinking as I drive off, or more specifically, as I sit in the sanctuary, enveloped by music and prayer? I can't say that I wish Dan and I had the same faith, since the disquiet I feel is about spirituality, not faith.

However, I do wonder how he would feel if he had been raised as a Jew. Chances are he would be like so many of my Jewish friends and family members who identify as “cultural Jews,” but have no religious connection.

But maybe, just maybe, we would sit in a sanctuary and I would look over and see him filled with emotion, as I am, during the candle blessing or the Amidah. Maybe, just maybe, he would join in, with sheer joy, for Ein Keloheinu.



Ellen S. Glazer is a clinical social worker in private practice in Newton, Massachusetts. Her work focuses on infertility, adoption, pregnancy loss and parenting after infertility. She is the author or co-author of six books, the most recent being [Having Your Baby Through Egg Donation](#).

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Praying in Our Interfaith Family

By Jim Keen

Growing up a Protestant, prayer was always an important part of my life. It still is today--even as I am married to a Jewish woman and raising two Jewish daughters. Bonnie and our kids also pray, but in a different way than I do. I never really thought much about how or where we say our prayers. I just assumed that my Christian praying was unrelated, even somewhat disconnected, from the Jewish praying that the rest of my family does. One evening with my daughter's youth choir changed my thinking.

There are two places where we pray: in the home and in our houses of worship. At church, I learned the Lord's Prayer at an early age. We said it at every service. Sure, it was rote memorization, but I tried hard to put meaning to the words ever since my mom pointed out to me that I rattled the prayer off as fast as I could, trying to be the first one finished. I took to heart her suggestion that I try to understand what it was I was saying. It was a little difficult deciphering the King's English, with all the "thous" and "arts," but I had my parents help me.

The line, "[F]orgive us our trespasses," was a particularly tricky concept for an eight year old. I had always figured that it referred to me stepping on other people's lawns. By the time I realized its true meaning, we had moved to a church where this part was read, "[F]orgive us our debts." Something new to learn. Many Jews do not know that there is more than one version of this prayer. Hey, I didn't know it either. I found out the hard way--in a room full of people who I was sure were smirking at me as I recited the wrong words aloud. This part of the prayer still trips me up today, whether I say it at church or at home.

As an adult, I now attend the First Congregational Church, where my wife and daughters often go with me to keep me company. My parents and siblings also belong to this church, but it's nice to have my daughters see what their dad's religion is like. They are Jewish, and they know it. At ages 9 and 5, they're old enough and have had enough reinforcement at their temple not to be confused by occasionally attending services at their dad's church. I can't say that they understand the dynamics of an interfaith family 100 percent (I still don't). But, if you ask them, they'll tell you that they are Jewish.

Many of the prayers we say in church are to Jesus. Because Bonnie and the girls are Jewish, I don't expect them to recite them with me. Although we believe in the same God, it's contrary to their Judaism. It would make my wife uncomfortable, and only confuse my daughters. They enjoy the service, but it's not theirs. So, they mostly just sit there and look around--much like I did when I first started accompanying Bonnie to temple some 19 years ago.

In those days, the hardest part for me to get used to in our former Conservative synagogue was that the prayers were all in Hebrew. Different religion? Try different language. I couldn't even understand what was being said; that was tough. However, over time and with repetition, I eventually learned many of the prayers and their English translations. Nevertheless, I was still not thinking of my type of praying and the Jewish type of praying in the same vein. They were still separate.

Today, we are members of the local Reform congregation. Because it is a family membership, I am there whenever my family is there. I take the girls to Hebrew school, and I go to services--much like how Bonnie and the girls accompany me to my church. The biggest difference is that I actually do recite the prayers right along with them. Although I am not Jewish, I feel a part of the congregation. And, I know that I am praying to the same God. There doesn't seem to be any language that contradicts my own beliefs.

One evening, after my oldest daughter's choir concert at the temple, the similarities of our prayers struck me. There is a Jewish prayer called the Sh'ma. It is a prayer proclaiming that there is just one God. It is supposed to be recited each evening at bedtime. It is also particularly beautiful when sung in Hebrew by her choir. As this group of third, fourth, and fifth graders sang the words, I found myself singing along. I wasn't the only one in the congregation singing; the director had encouraged us to join in. But later that evening, at home, I was still singing this melodic prayer.

When I couldn't get the tune out of my head, it dawned on me that saying Jewish prayers and Christian prayers had certain similarities. I don't mean the same as far as content. I'm talking about the sameness in how we feel when we say them. It feels good. A perfect example of this is when my family says the blessings together each Shabbat (Jewish Sabbath). We often sing them. It is a time to be together. It is a time to give thanks for God's gifts to us. It is a special time.

As Bonnie and I tucked our daughters in bed that evening, we sang the Sh'ma one last time that day. A feeling came over me that I get every once in a while in our interfaith family. It was a sense of security that comes after years of experience. It was realizing that, despite our religious differences, our family would be just fine. Giving goodnight kisses, I understood that whether we are thanking God in my church, in our family's synagogue, or right here in the kids' bedroom, we mean what we are saying.



Jim Keen is a freelance writer based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He is intermarried and has two daughters. His new book, [Inside Intermarriage](#), was just published by the URJ Press. A 15% discount is available to InterfaithFamily.com subscribers if you purchase the book through the [URJ Press website](#). If you [sign up](#) today, you will receive the discount code in your confirmation email. If you are already a subscriber, visit [My Profile](#) for the discount code.

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Sharing Services

By Edith Rye

My husband is the son of a Protestant clergyman; his mother was also ordained a couple of years before we were married. I am Jewish. So we always knew that our relationship would be one where religious observance would be on a front burner, so to speak.

Early in our courtship, I began to learn a little about going to church. My husband was singing professionally in a choir in Boston at the time. The first time I heard him sing, I'd gone to a normal Sunday mass at the Episcopal cathedral, on Boston Common. I was taken aback when suddenly people in the seats surrounding me began to extend their hands to me saying, "Peace be with you." Some people *hugged*. I had no idea what was going on and responded as politely as I knew how, by taking their hands, shaking them nicely, resisting any hugs of any kind, and saying, "Thank you." How was I supposed to know that I should have responded by saying "Peace be with you!"

After the service, when I found my boyfriend, I said as much, and he apologized, laughing: "I should have warned you, but I forgot about that part of the service!" It's something that members of the choir don't do, after all; they're busy singing. I forgave him for not having warned me of the mandatory social interaction, and the story became a cocktail party standard. He's also since told me that the few times I went to the cathedral, and sort of hid in the pews hoping no one would notice me there, everyone had assumed I was just another one of the homeless people who hang out around Boston Common. "People just thought you were coming in from the cold," he says.

When he's come with me to synagogue, my husband finds it interesting socially, theologically, and musically, and he's had me right next to him to tell him "Stand up now" or what have you. Going to synagogue holds no scary element for him, but going to church creeps me out. Somehow, growing up, I'd managed to get the notion that Jesus was my cosmic opposite, that Christians who really worshipped were out to get me. A cross became a symbol nearly as scary as a swastika. I'm not saying this is logical; it was just a visceral reaction.

My husband is sympathetic, and, thankfully, he generally doesn't care about my going to church; I think he's more interested in whether or not I'll have coffee and something to eat waiting for him when he gets home. But sometimes something special's going on, and he really wants me to come hear him, even though the few times I've gone to hear my husband sing, I've been somewhat jarred by the experiences.

One such service happened two years ago: it was the Great Vigil, right before Easter. My husband

was going to sing something called the Exsultet, a long solo part, and he was excited about it. I planned to attend; this service was an especially big deal because the man presiding over the service was a big fancy bishop. Between my husband's solo and the church's Special Guest Star, I knew I had to be there. But I didn't want to politely attend the service alone--I was sure I'd do something uncouth, left to my own devices--so I enlisted a friend, the daughter of an Episcopal priest, to come with me. If I followed her lead, I thought, all would be cool.

Everything was cool, until a part of the service when the clergy and, if I remember correctly, the choir, marched around the congregation and the bishop began to toss holy water at us, to bless us. All well and good; I'm willing to accept blessings from strangers of different faiths, since I assume the blessings are given in good faith. But I was stupid enough to try to actually watch what was going on, and as a result I had holy water flung directly into my eyes not once but twice. Blinking and wiping water off my face while my friend snickered (not too holy of her, if you ask me), I thought, "Well, I guess I'm extra blessed now."

I would estimate that half of my time in churches has been spent reading novels, waiting for the service to begin so that I can be bored, confused, and then finally thrilled by recognizing my husband's voice. He's doing something he loves, that he's good at, that brings him and everyone in the building peace and joy.

My husband has come to High Holiday services with me almost every year since we moved to Connecticut. He doesn't know the pattern of the service--I still have it mostly internalized from childhood--but he is respectful and, I think, genuinely interested in how the service works. We have attended Conservative and Reform services at various synagogues, because we're trying to find a congregation we can join and be content with, but we've yet to find one. For the last few years, we've attended services at the local university's Hillel, which isn't ideal for us, but is better than nothing, and we are grateful that the rabbi there welcomes my husband.

The funny thing for us about going to religious services is that our reactions to the different styles of services are identical, whether we're in a church or a synagogue. Though we're obviously coming from totally different starting places in thinking about religious observance, it's clear that for us, at some level, it's really about aesthetics and historical respect for tradition. We can't take a religious ceremony seriously if there's someone strumming an acoustic guitar. It just doesn't feel right. It doesn't matter if it's a church or a synagogue: if there's no stained glass, we're not comfortable; we don't feel sufficiently reverent, or something, without the formality that is found at, for example, the Anglo-Catholic church where my husband works, or the Conservative synagogue I grew up attending. It's hard to tell in my case, since I'm not outwardly observant, but the truth is we are both by nature more directed toward elaborate observance, call it orthodoxy if you will, than casual or alternative worship. This may be why we are a good match, in spite of our religious differences. The religions are different but our intellectual ideas (and ideals) about religious observance are completely aligned.

I don't know a lot of other intermarried couples, at least not in my age group. I know they're out there, but somehow I don't know them. I don't know how other couples in our precise demographic--early-to-mid thirties, college-educated, religiously intermarried--have handled religious observance. But I know that my husband and I have agreed far more than we've disagreed about religion and its place in our lives. We acknowledge and encourage each other's observance and practice. If anything, my husband wishes I were more observant than I am; it is he

who spurs conversations about how we should join a synagogue. We may be unusual, but I suspect less so than one would imagine. I bet there are many couples like us out there, but we keep to ourselves and are, hence, unstudied and unobserved.

It's a shame, really. We've got some damn good stories to tell at cocktail parties.



Edith Rye is a book dealer and writer in Connecticut.

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Similarities and Differences Between Catholic and Jewish Worship

By Laura Thor

I am what one of our Introduction to Judaism rabbis calls a "JIT"--a Jew in Training, as I am in the process of becoming a Jew-by-choice. In the years of journeying from my deeply held Catholicism to a surprise landing on Judaism's front door, I've learned that although God is God and prayer is prayer, it isn't a smooth transition between the two traditions.

For one thing, there's the language. Catholics kept very little Latin after the Second Vatican Council changed everything in the 1960s. Meanwhile, my Reform synagogue is bringing back its Hebrew. When I came to Temple Micah, all I knew was how to mispronounce enough Yiddish to make my Jewish husband cringe. I still flip impatiently through the prayer book seeking transliterations from Hebrew to English. I'm learning the language, but better, I'm appreciating that as long as Hebrew is still, to me, a chant of unknown rhythmic sounds, it has a mystery for me that Latin used to have for many Catholics. There's something like a courtship in praying in a tongue not one's own: the pursuer really doesn't know the object of his attraction that well yet, as he sees her through a veil he may not yet remove. Intimacy comes only in the proper time. He has to come around often and pay attention, on her terms.

In my tentative steps at praying in Shabbat services I have noticed another difference that for me is an invitation, a relief, rather than an obstacle. It is that, unlike Catholics, some Jews sway in prayer. Catholics stand still. Last time I saw any kind of movement at Mass, I was attending a huge Charismatic conference in a crowded gym. They had their hands in the air, swayed a lot, and spoke in tongues, too, but that's another story. I was not part of that movement, but the movement did move me.

Yet here I am, in a Reform congregation where some folks do sway, forward and back, while I, the side-to-side swayer, do my Kum-By-Ya routine. No one looks at me oddly though. I like this. When they go up on tip toe or bow forward and to the left and right, I am a step behind, and never quite as bold. I don't want to copy without fully appreciating why we're all bowing. People are kind and will explain anything to me later, but in that moment, I am respectfully tentative and self-conscious.

I wonder what would happen if I prayed in a Conservative or even Orthodox congregation? And what about in an ultra-Orthodox congregation? Do their entire bodies pray? I wonder if Jews ever have devotional dance in their liturgies?

On a few occasions I've seen or been part of a small group of worshippers who gave physical witness to our collective yearning for communion with God, through a kind of pantomime set to music. As a prayer or hymn expressed our spirits' heavenward reach, a few of us in the sanctuary slowly stretched our arms and heads up, holding that hopeful pose for a long moment. An expression of alienation elicited the hiding of our faces, a turning away. Years before in college, I recall four nuns, graceful women in their forties through their sixties, stepping up the aisle as regally as brides, offering a fluid vision of praise at the start of Mass. At synagogue we danced with the Torah one evening. The kids marveled at the smiling adults who, one by one, took the scrolls as a dance partner. I imagine God finding joy in the joy of people dancing. Will there be more in my new spiritual home?

The biggest difference in prayer for me has been in whom we pray to. As a Catholic girl, I approached Mother Mary to add to any prayer I'd made to Jesus, to help sweeten the request. She was the one who had all the maternal understanding. She could tell Jesus the straight scoop about me, in case he, in his kingliness, couldn't get it. As a young woman I went to her with concerns about my purity. Jesus heard all about my faults and humiliations. God seemed to be only eavesdropping on us all. I didn't know when or if I was going to him in particular. Then there were saints: Jude for lost causes, for example. My childhood church had side altars to different saints, with plaster statues of demure-looking men and women who embodied the virtues Catholics should pray for: humility, patience, chastity, and strength and courage to endure suffering (in essence, a willingness to endure martyrdom if presented to us).

Praying as a Jew, I feel strangely shy about approaching God directly. It's easiest when I'm with my congregation joining in songs of praise, hardest when I'm alone, praying in supplication. Then the Psalms come to my rescue, and I remember I am not alone. Sitting next to me is Jesus, the good Jew, my companion in spirit, a "God-intoxicated Jewish mystic," as Rabbi Rami Shapiro once described him at a Catholic conference on contemplative prayer. I don't pray to him, but maybe we pray together to God. What a wonderful integration for me!

And so I pray in the synagogue, and in nature, and at home, in the car, in my office. The best is when my five senses let me feel the divine Presence. I feel and see sunlight, feel the density of the night between me and the stars, hear the stillness of a sacred space of brick and mortar, and there God is. Right *there*. Yet God is not contained; she is only showing a bit of Godself. To me! How awesome and humbling. Moses seeing a burning bush, Elijah hearing the still, small voice of God: this must be how Jews know the Presence, I think. If so, I'm on my way.

Coming from church to synagogue, I'm moving from a milieu of visual images everywhere in my childhood church to the paradox of emptiness and fullness in my synagogue. Only the glowing light over the Ark calls me to mindfulness of Where and with Whom I am. Somehow, the visual vacancy calls more from me, demands me to contribute my own stillness. Stillness leads to openness of heart and mind, for the Ark remains seductively closed. The eternal light is a powerful sign of God's movement. And yet, both church and temple share that light.

I remember passing through the college chapel late at night, a shortcut to my dorm in the former parish house. Only the red glow of the sanctuary candle lit the way. The huge stone place echoed the cold of winter wind outside, and moonlight sometimes enlivened the rose windows; I was so deliciously alone, just me and the light-and-dark-of God's presence. Was God there? I felt her, him, in those times. We touched in that space I passed through.

Back in the synagogue, I look toward the quiet moment when I feel the Holy One present to me in the sacred space, in the dark, in that small light which at times, like Selichot, I am blessed to be passing through. I wait for grace or maturity to awaken my five senses into the Sabbath morning presence of the Torah scroll and all it embodies. Prayer is awareness and remembrance of who we are and Who we live within. As a Catholic-becoming-a-Jew, I am feeling my way.



Laura Thor is a psychotherapist and former Catholic adult educator. She loves working with issues of crisis in faith. She lives with her husband and daughter in the Denver, Colorado area.

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Some Rabbis Using Services to Honor Non-Jewish Congregants

By Sue Fishkoff

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 17 (JTA) -- During Yom Kippur services this year, Rabbi Larry Raphael of San Francisco's Congregation Sherith Israel will invite his non-Jewish congregants up to the pulpit and thank them for casting their lot with the Jewish people.

Using a blessing ceremony written two years ago by Rabbi Janet Marder of Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos Hills, Calif., he'll tell them, "You are the moms and dads who drive the children to Hebrew school. You take classes and read Jewish books to deepen your own understanding, so you can help to make a Jewish home." Offering his "deepest gratitude" for those who are raising their children as Jews--26 percent of the parents of his religious school students--he will ask the rest of the congregation to rise and say the blessing that begins, "May God bless you and keep you."

Last Yom Kippur, the first time Raphael did this, 50 people came forward. The congregation was "in tears," says its executive director, Nancy Drapin.

As intermarriage rates continue to rise, and more intermarried families join congregations, increasing numbers of non-Orthodox rabbis are looking for ways to acknowledge the non-Jews in their midst. While Conservative and Reconstructionist rabbis tend to be more low-key about it, Reform rabbis like Marder and Raphael have come up with a wide variety of ways to express gratitude ranging from festive meals to public ceremonies.

Many chose to do their honoring during Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur services, both because of the prestige conveyed by those special days, and because that's when most of their congregation shows up. Marder did her first public blessing on Yom Kippur morning in 2004. "I'd encountered so many families through the bar and bat mitzvah process where the non-Jewish partner had been so dedicated," she says. "I thought it was important to make a public acknowledgment."

She was concerned that some people would not want to be singled out. But the ceremony, which took place in front of thousands of people, turned out to be "a far more moving and powerful experience" than she'd expected. In November 2005, at the Reform movement's biennial, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, urged Reform congregations to honor their non-Jewish members publicly, especially non-Jewish parents raising Jewish children, even as he also urged greater emphasis on conversion.

Since then, says Reform's outreach director, Kathy Kahn, public thanking of non-Jews in Reform congregations "has become more prevalent."

Rabbi David Thomas of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury River Valley, Mass., thanks his non-Jewish parents on Rosh Hashanah morning, and again on Yom Kippur. But he tries to express the same gratitude throughout the year.

Beth El member Jennifer Sarni says her non-Jewish husband, Jonathan, who is helping her raise their two children as Jews, was "really touched" when Thomas singled out the non-Jewish parents, and their extended families, for a special thank you at a kindergarten event.

"My husband was there, and my in-laws, and it was a really nice part of the ceremony, totally unexpected," she says. "My husband didn't convert, but he's been completely supportive."

Rabbi Barry Block of Temple Beth El in San Antonio held a brunch in April to honor his non-Jewish members. The food was prepared and served by their Jewish spouses.

Block considered doing a public thank you from the pulpit during High Holidays, but he got the thumbs-down from the non-Jews he asked. "They said they'd be embarrassed," he says. "Different places have different cultures."

That's why the practice is not common in Reconstructionist congregations, says Rabbi Joshua Waxman, spiritual leader of Congregation Or Hadash in Fort Washington, Pa., and a faculty member of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

Describing Yoffie's biennial call as a 'double-edged sword,' Waxman worries that "singling out someone and saying, 'look at them, they're special,' sets up a 'them' and an 'us.' "

That runs counter to Reconstructionism's view of Judaism as a civilization in which non-Jews can participate fully.

Some Jewish leaders oppose the idea of publicly honoring non-Jewish spouses, saying it conveys the mistaken impression that the Jewish community approves of intermarriage. "The fact that they're willing to raise their children as Jews is great, but that's only half the story," says Martin Schneer, president of the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Philadelphia.

Emphasizing that he's speaking as an individual, Schneer says congregations should extend a warm welcome to the non-Jews in their midst, but honoring them from the dais is inappropriate.

Schneer's opinion is echoed by Conservative leaders. Rabbi Moshe Edelman, leadership development director for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, says he hasn't heard of Conservative rabbis publicly thanking the non-Jews in their congregations.

Conservative outreach has deepened in other ways this year, he notes. Camp Ramah, the movement's summer camp, has begun admitting pre-bar and bat mitzvah-age children of non-Jewish mothers, and the executive vice president of the United Synagogue, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, urged the same policy this year at Conservative religious schools.

But these changes are aimed at bringing intermarried families closer to the community in order to encourage conversion. That's quite different than honoring non-Jewish parents who don't convert.

Rabbi Steven Glazer of Congregation Beth Emeth, a Conservative synagogue in Herndon, Va., is in the minority in his movement. For almost 10 years, he's chosen four non-Jewish spouses every year to stand on the bimah, or dais, during the Yom Kippur service and read the story of a Righteous Gentile, a non-Jew who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

"These are our Righteous Gentiles," he states. "Many are more motivated than the Jewish parent, schlepping the kids back and forth all the time."

Craig Dubois, a non-Jew and father of two, read one of those stories in 2002. "I felt very honored," he says. "Anything that's given out during the holidays, I'm proud to get."

Glazer notes that "a fair number" of the non-Jews he honors in this way go on to convert, although he emphasizes that wasn't his intention.

Dubois converted in 2003.



Sue Fishkoff is the West Coast correspondent for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Formerly a features writer and New York correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*, her first book, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (Schocken, 2003), was named one of the best religion books of 2003 by *Publisher's Weekly*.

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Peeking Behind the Church Doors

By Cheryl F. Coon

Book reviews of [What You Will See Inside a Catholic Church](#) by Reverend Michael Keane (Skylights Paths Publishing, 2002); [What You Will See Inside a Mosque](#) by Aisha Karen Khan (Skylights Paths Publishing, 2003); [What You Will See Inside a Synagogue](#) by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman and Dr. Ron Wolfson (Skylights Paths Publishing, 2004); [What You Will See Inside a Hindu Temple](#), by Dr. Mahendra Jani and Dr. Vandana Jani (Skylights Paths Publishing, 2005).

"What does it look like inside that church?" It's a question I posed to my parents when I was young; it's a question I heard from my own children as they became aware that some buildings were ones we didn't enter because they represented a different religion. I never had a good answer other than to suggest that we make a visit and, to be honest, sometimes I felt intimidated about entering the home of another faith.

This new series, designed for children ages 6 and up, is intended to help kids understand both the rituals and the beliefs of different religions. In a time when we are increasingly aware of the importance of understanding other religions and cultures, it's critical for all of us to educate ourselves about the religious beliefs and practices of Americans and citizens of the world.

The series offers a chance to look briefly at each of these faiths. Of course, it is helpful to broaden our understanding by using other books as well; for example, David Macaulay's *Mosque* (Houghton, 2003) offers a deeper look at the full dimensions of Islam. But for children of the age range for which the books are intended, there's nothing else quite like these books.

Why does it matter what foot we use to enter a Hindu Temple? (Answer: Hindus enter by first putting their right foot inside to show that they are entering with the right frame of mind.) Why are mosques often very plain inside? (Answer: because Muslims do not want to be distracted during prayer.) Why is there a small decorative container on the right-hand doorpost of every synagogue? (Answer: to remind Jews that this is God's house.) Why is a cross carried into the church when a celebration called the Mass begins? (Answer: to remind congregants to be thankful that Jesus died for their sins).

These are fascinating facts, but how much do they tell us about each of these religions?

"Enough" might be the best answer to that question, for children of this age group to understand what they are seeing when they visit the home of another faith with their religious school class or their family. By reading all four books, children will comprehend similarities in practices, such as

that some Jews wear a special head covering (kippah) and/or a prayer shawl (tallit) to show respect for God while Muslims dress modestly and cover their heads for the same reason. Similarly, by reading all four books, children will see that there is a wide difference in perceptions of God, from the Jewish God that cannot be pictured to the Hindu concept of multiple forms that each express special powers and virtues of God.

What if we simply want to share *one* of these religions with a child? The series is outstanding for this purpose as well. Each book is complete in itself. Each book covers, in 32 succinct and colorful pages, the basics about the religion. For example, for the family that wants to better understand Catholicism, covered topics include: the altar, music, the Eucharist, offering gifts, Christmas and Easter, baptism and confirmation.

A small gripe: each of the books has a foreword by a scholar of the particular religion. For the most part, these forewords are friendly and welcoming. However, the foreword for the Catholic book, written by Robert J. Kealey, Executive Director of the Department of Elementary Schools of the National Catholic Education Association, arguably crosses the line into proselytizing. With phrases that assume that the reader has already been visiting a Catholic church regularly and/or that suggest that the reader would want to know about a Catholic church "because it is such a special place" and because "Our God is a loving God. He wants his children not to fear him but to love him," this foreword made me uncomfortable. The other forewords, however, are welcoming without assuming that the reader should or would want to practice the religion it describes.

For interfaith families, the series can be very helpful. While it does not offer a sophisticated, in-depth discussion of each of these religions, what it does provide is something just as important for the interfaith family--an ability to understand some of the most fundamental rituals and beliefs of each of these important world religions.



Cheryl Coon is the author of [*Books to Grow With: A Guide to the Best Children's Fiction for Everyday Issues and Tough Challenges*](#) (Lutra Press, 2004). She lives with her family in Oregon.

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Sikh Temple Becomes Window into Judaism

By Joanne Catz Hartman

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Friday September 16, 2005 -- "We're going on a field trip to a temple," my daughter tells me, and of course I immediately think of a Jewish one and wonder why the teacher hasn't asked me--the only Jewish mother in the class--to help arrange it. When I see the permission slip, I realize I've made an assumption and also a mistake, simply because when I think of religion, I think from a Jewish perspective. It is a temple they're visiting, but it's one for Sikhs. And I know nothing at all about them.

The next day she comes home from school, begging me to please, please tell her what's going to happen to Prince Rama and Hanuman the Monkey God in the Hindu tale her teacher is telling the class. She incorrectly assumes I know this story and doesn't realize I have to do some homework to find out, for it's not one I was told when I was a child.

Stories of Buddha, too, are floating around my home. My daughter memorizes lines for a play; she's Princess Yasodhara, Buddha's wife. I find sketches of the Chinese yin-yang symbol and Sikh swords doodled on my shopping lists on the kitchen counter. There are Stars of David there, too. She draws the mishmash of religions that are circulating in her mind, connecting them to each other, and to herself.

The small East Bay public school she attends devotes at least a month every year to studying world religions. It's not a cursory look, but weeks of study, introducing religions that are not necessarily represented among the children in the class. World Religions Month is highly anticipated because it's fun. They learn through interactive and tangible means: art--painting and clay sculptures, music, storytelling, drama and field trips. They've visited Buddhists in Berkeley, Mormons in Oakland, and this time, I come along to see the Sikhs in El Sobrante.

The Gurdwara Sahib sits high in the East Bay's El Sobrante hills and is rounder and more golden than the temples we're familiar with. Aromas wafting from the kitchen set this place apart, too--definitely not that of the roasting chickens I'm used to from family Shabbat dinners in my congregation; at the end of our visit, vegetarian curries and Indian breads are shared in a communal meal.

We learn that the Sikhs believe in complete equality, no clergy or caste system, no idol worship, all points I might have answered incorrectly had there been a quiz. At Hebrew school, my

daughter had just learned the story of Abraham and the idols and made the quick connection to Sikhism.

Despite some obvious differences, what we notice most are the similarities. The religious text, laid out on a table, is being chanted in song; the written words not in English. We're ushered upstairs and shown where the book is put to bed --literally, in full-size beds, adorned with golden headboards, pillows and white bedspreads. I think about the Torah being gently put back in its cover and returned to the ark, the respect and awe for the words contained inside.

We note the absence of pews, but find familiarity watching the congregants in movement, like choreographed dance, bodies bent and raised in prayer. Like the kippot in our place of worship, head coverings are worn; we put them on too, brightly-colored fabric scarves, tied like bandanas over our hair.

The men and women who enter the temple greet each other, and us, with welcoming smiles. There's a warmth and a connection in sharing common rituals and a unifying philosophy. We've been shown Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that teaches honesty, charity, tolerance and love of family. These values, of course, are Jewish ones, too.

Without a basic understanding of other religions--their beliefs, their practices--how can we really be religiously tolerant? It's what's unknown that usually scares us, and the assumptions we hold may be completely untrue. I realize now, after our morning adventure, that exposure to other religions can give us a greater insight into our own.

Would we have visited a Sikh temple by ourselves, even with the promise of savory Indian food? Most likely not. But now that we have, I think we're more likely to venture out again, past our own sanctuary and the comfort of our own religion's doors to visit places that worship in a different way. And learn more, perhaps, about what we share than what sets us apart.



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How I Prepared My Kids for Their First Mass and Their Aunt's Catholic Wedding

By Jeri Zeder

My guys, Isaac and Dylan, eight and four respectively, had never been inside a Catholic church when my sister-in-law, Ana, asked them to be ring bearers at her wedding. The ceremony was to occur complete with a public celebration of the Eucharist, otherwise known as Mass.

Okay. I'd read parenting books ad nauseum. I knew that to raise the odds my kids would behave like perfect gentlemen, I needed to prepare them. What I didn't know, but quickly discovered, was that I had to prepare myself first.

Lurking just below my American melting pot values are fears directly traceable to the shtetl. When I encounter crucifixes, statues of Mary, and celibate priests, not to mention centuries of anti-Jewish Church doctrine the pope is only now beginning to address, I feel my Jewish sensibilities resisting all things Catholic. Obviously, if I was going to help my kids, the first thing I had to do was to acknowledge these feelings, shake hands with them, and then see them to the door, determined not to let them direct my actions.

I looked for a principle to guide me when I got stuck making decisions about specifics. One challenge for interfaith families like mine who are raising our children exclusively as Jews is how to teach them to embrace Judaism while being loving and respectful toward the faith, customs, and heritage of their non-Jewish relatives, especially their non-Jewish parent. My partial answer is that religious politics are one thing, family relationships another. I decided that Ana was lovely to honor my children with a role in her wedding, and they would reciprocate by participating. However, they would not partake in Communion or any other Catholic rituals because that would be disrespectful of both Judaism and Catholicism.

Pleased with this mature, reasonable attitude, I began preparing my kids. Ana's church was too far away, so I took them to the Church of the Sacred Heart around the corner to meet the priest, Father Coletti, see the inside of the sanctuary, and ask questions about what would happen at Mass and during the wedding. I had the impression that no one had ever asked Father Coletti to get Jewish children ready for a Catholic Mass, but he gamely agreed to see us.

When we arrived on the designated afternoon, we found that everyone expected us and helped shepherd us to the sanctuary. Dylan initially clung to me with a plaintive, "Mommy, I'm scared," but he warmed up gradually as Father Coletti gently and patiently explained the symbols around

the church, the process of Communion, and the order of the wedding ceremony. Dylan and Isaac asked about the bas-relief pictorials on the walls, and Father Coletti explained the story they told of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. I beat back the shtetl and reminded myself of all my mature and reasonable intentions.

Wedding weekend finally came. As we traveled to upstate New York, I imagined that the other trinity, child experts Leach, Brazelton, and Spock, were smiling down upon my skillful mothering. It was when we brought the boys to church that I got knocked off balance. As the processional reached the end of the aisle, the priest was requiring each person to bow or curtsy before the cross.

Hello? Open-mindedness and exceptional parenting skills? I was totally unprepared for this detail. My mind raced over the significance of the gesture. Did bowing to the cross belong in the permissible column of the ledger sheet? I didn't know what to do, but I had to do it fast. I considered Ana, so happy and beautiful in her wedding dress next to her groom, and my mother-in-law, who had informed the priest in advance that her Jewish grandsons would have a place in the ceremony right beside their Catholic cousins. I decided that bowing in front of the cross was not the same as kneeling or taking Communion, but more like a non-Jew wearing a kippah in synagogue: a sign of respect, only. I let my boys bow.

I hope my children absorbed two lessons from that day: that religious differences can make people closer, and that their Judaism is compassionate enough, warm enough, and strong enough to withstand intimate exposure to another religion.

Oh, yes, and the reception was a blast.

Jeri Zeder is a member of Temple Shir Tikvah in Winchester, Massachusetts.

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From Agony to Acceptance--Documentary Delves Into Interfaith Marriage

By Tom Tugend

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When Holocaust survivor Leah Welbel learns that her American granddaughter is about to marry a Christian, she cries out, "When this happened in my old hometown, my family used to sit shiva. Here they expect me to open my arms. I can't do it."

Leah's agony in the documentary, [Out of Faith](#), is deeply rooted in the memory of her 33 months at Auschwitz-Birkenau. But the same dilemma of rejection or acceptance is faced by other American Jewish families, half of whose children and grandchildren opt for interfaith marriages.

The film, which will have a special screening on Sept. 12 at the Laemmle Sunset, is rich in the human drama of family relationships and sharpened by the Holocaust experience, while tracing the trajectory of the American arc from immigration to assimilation.



In *Out of Faith*, Leah Welbel returned to Auschwitz-Birkenau to discuss the horrors she suffered.

Leah, deported from her Slovakian hometown at age 16 and in her mid-70s when the film was made, is the classic indomitable Jewish matriarch. Voluble, feisty, humorous, a born survivor, she ably made her way, first in Israel and then in Skokie, Ill.

She taught herself the intricacies of the stock market and prospered, even as she continued to labor over her gastronomic specialty, potato sandwiches. And she hasn't spoken to her grandson, Danny, in six years, since he married a non-Jew.

Now her granddaughter, Cheryl, has announced that she will marry Matt, a Christian, and Leah tries a different tack. If she pushes Cheryl hard enough, Leah figures, maybe the new bride can persuade Matt to convert to Judaism.

Though raised in an Orthodox home, Leah is not particularly observant, not even lighting candles on Friday evenings. But by allowing her grandchildren to marry non-Jews, she insists, "I feel like a traitor . . . we're finishing the job Hitler started. We'll become extinct like the Mayas."

Always in the background hovers her older husband, his eyes alternately dead or haunted, who worked in a Sonderkommando shoveling Jewish corpses into the crematorium. He says little but wonders, "Where was God in Auschwitz?"

Leah's son, Michael, also married a Christian, but his wife, Betty, converted to Judaism. Not an unmixed blessing, Michael observes, since "she became more Jewish than we are. We had to reel her back in."

A friend has a different attitude.

"If I didn't let my son marry a Catholic, I would have lost a son," she says. The different viewpoints toward intermarriage are reflected by the film's producer, L. Mark DeAngelis, and director Lisa Leeman.

DeAngelis, a 36-year-old Chicago lawyer, businessman and now founder of Eliezer Films, grew up in a secular home. When Leah, a family friend, invited him to accompany her on a trip to Auschwitz some five years ago, he accepted and found both a subject for his film and a new attachment to Judaism.

"I started wondering why, when I dated a non-Jewish girl, it bothered me, which seemed almost like a racist thought at the time," he said in a phone interview. DeAngelis has no doubt about his viewpoint now. "If our community is to have a future in this country, Jews must marry Jews. Only that way will their kids have a shot at staying Jewish," he said.



Leah's granddaughter, Cheryl, whose husband is not Jewish, recoils from the assertion by descendants of Holocaust survivors that Jews should never even considering marrying outside the faith.

He is now launching an outreach campaign, ["Keep the Faith."](#)

Leeman, a veteran Los Angeles filmmaker and editor, represents, in her words, "the classic American story of assimilation."

Her father, she said, was "a New York Jew," her mother, a Protestant of Scandinavian descent from Idaho. Neither parent was religious and Leeman thought little about her identity until she attended a meeting of the Conference of Christians and Jews.

"At some point, participants were asked to divide into Jewish and Christian groups, and instinctively I chose the Jewish one," Leeman said.

As the product of an interfaith marriage, Leeman has a tolerant--or ambivalent--attitude on the topic.

"I can understand that any ethnic group, Jewish, Chinese or Mexican, wants to pass on its culture and heritage to future generations," she said. "But are they willing to do it at the price of family strife and estrangement?"

The web magazine, *InterfaithFamily.com*, interacts with about 20,000 Jewish visitors a month, says managing editor Micah Sachs. The webzine is not a professional counseling service, and most questions are referred to a hometown list of rabbis and social workers.

Yet, over time, Sachs and his colleagues have accumulated some pragmatic suggestions, particularly for parents struggling with a child's interfaith relationship or marriage.

- Your child is not rejecting you but making a personal choice.
- Opposing or condemning your child's love for a non-Jew is almost always counter-productive. While parents should not hesitate to stress their own attachment to Judaism, understanding and welcoming a non-Jewish partner works out better in the long run.
- Do not insist that the non-Jewish partner convert to Judaism, unless it's his or her own decision.
- Your situation is not unique. Depending on the definition of who is a Jew, slightly more or slightly less than 50 percent of Jewish newlyweds between 1995-2000 married non-Jewish partners. Some 33 percent of these mixed households raised their children as Jewish. However, in families with two Jewish spouses, 96 percent raised Jewish children, according to the National Jewish Populations Survey.

Also read opposing perspectives on intermarriage from the film's producer, [Mark DeAngelis](#), and the film's director, [Lisa Leeman](#).



Tom Tugend is a contributing editor to the *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*.

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On *Out of Faith* and Intermarriage: The Producer's Perspective

By L. Mark DeAngelis

When I first considered producing a documentary about Leah Welbel, a woman who survived nearly three years in the infamous Nazi death camp of Auschwitz/Birkenau, I envisioned a film about her courage and tenacity. However, after spending more time with Leah and her family, the film's director, Lisa Leeman, and I quickly realized that Leah and her family were dealing not only with the residual trauma of her and her Survivor husband's experiences during the Shoah, but also with probably the most crucial issue facing the Jewish community today--assimilation through interfaith marriage. The interfaith marriages of two of Leah's grandchildren had broken her heart. And the conflicts that arose from Leah's frankness on the issue threatened to rip her family apart.

Early on in production, I agreed with Lisa that we would present the conflict regarding interfaith marriage in the Welbel family in as balanced a manner possible. Although Lisa will speak for herself in the counterpart to this essay, my reason for presenting a balanced consideration of this issue stemmed from my desire not to alienate people by lecturing them. Nevertheless, I would be remiss if I did not admit that I do want *Out of Faith* to motivate those who would normally not contemplate their individual roles in our collective survival to begin to do so. More precisely, I would like people, at a minimum, to recognize that if we care about the future of Judaism, we can only accomplish this through the creation of strong, two Jew unions.

However, prior to considering why we should each marry within our faith, it is completely appropriate to ask two questions: First, is interfaith marriage in fact leading to a decreased number of those who identify as Jewish? Does the evidence support the proposition that the Jewish population is shrinking precipitously? And second, if the evidence does support this proposition, does it really matter?

As space for this essay is limited, I will not spend a great deal of energy arguing that which should be obvious to even the most casual observers. If the comprehensive [National Jewish Population Surveys](#) do not convince you, just ask yourself how many Jews you know personally who are, for all intents and purposes, Jewish in name only? And of how many families do you know where none of the children have married Jews? Feel free to present me with evidence you feel suggests our community is not decreasing, let alone not growing proportionally with the national population.

The second question--does it even matter if we intermarry out of existence--is extremely important, but rarely considered. If our definition of Judaism is having Chinese food and going to the movies on Christmas Day and just "not being Christian," why would it matter if we go the way of the dodo bird? I do not mean to be flippant. If we truly have nothing to offer the world, and there is no greater purpose in our being Jewish, is it not merely a bigoted tribalism that compels us to believe we should persevere as a distinct people when so many other ethnic groups have already lost nearly their entire cultural uniqueness? Because for all our warts, being just an American, and not a hyphenated one, is still pretty special.

Further, Judaism cannot merely be about honoring the memory of those lost in the Holocaust and supporting Israel. Jews should do both, but it is not enough to justify limiting one's pool of potential soulmates by several magnitudes--Leah unfortunately learns this the hard way in our film. Anti-Semitism, whether it manifests itself in Holocaust denial, anti-Zionism, or in some other way, cannot keep people Jewish, especially given that our society is the least anti-Semitic in history. As Alan Dershowitz states in his important book, *The Vanishing American Jew*, "Today's most serious threats [to American Jewry] come not from those who would persecute us, but from those who would, without any malice, kill us with kindness."

So why be Jewish then? How about to preserve our special relationship with God? To mention God sends many Jews running. To mention Torah and mitzvot (commandments) makes these same people roll their eyes in condescending disapproval. However, without recognizing the predominance faith plays in Judaism, it is nearly impossible to recognize the sacred nature of marriage and justify any real reason for INTRAmarrriage. Only when we honor the religious component of marriage can we begin to recognize why marrying someone of the same faith matters. Generally, we have denigrated the importance of the two-parent family in our society to our great peril. Jews are infected with this same disease. By reconnecting marriage with its spiritual significance, perhaps we can take great strides toward eliminating our precipitous fall into demographic insignificance.

In our secularly dominated society, it is difficult enough to instill Jewish values with two strongly identified Jewish parents, let alone with only one. Nearly everything in the Diaspora in which we live--the media, the public education system (although I am a strong advocate of Jewish day school education, not all can afford it, unfortunately), and the non-Jewish symbols everywhere--work against our efforts to instill in our children a sense of how important is their "Jewishness." So if it does indeed "take a village," the village isn't Jewish.

A strong family core is essential. So although I applaud the efforts many make to compensate for the fact that the deck is stacked against us, or to motivate "half-Jewish" families to explore and enhance their Jewish experiences, it is like trying to cure cancer with a Band-Aid. Yes, do what we can to bring people back into the tent, but if we have any chance at a meaningful survival, we need to concern ourselves more with how to keep people from leaving the tent in the first place.

To read a story and review of Out of Faith, click [here](#). For Director Lisa Leeman's perspective, click [here](#).



L. Mark DeAngelis, a recovering attorney, left the Jakarta, Indonesia, firm with which he practiced law five years ago--just after September 11--to produce [Out of Faith](#) and find himself a nice Jewish girl. He and his wife Lindsey live together in the Chicago area with their two little gifts from Hashem, Esther Plia and Gavriella Leah.

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On *Out of Faith* and Interfaith Marriage: The Director's Perspective

By Lisa Leeman

My new documentary feature film, [*Out of Faith*](#), tackles the emotional subject of interfaith marriage. It follows three generations in a family headed by grandparents who are Holocaust survivors--all being pulled apart by interfaith marriage.

When Mark DeAngelis, the producer, and I began this film, we thought it would be a straightforward documentary on Leah's remarkable experiences as a survivor (she's the grandmother). However, as we began filming, I learned that her family situation was causing her great pain--her first grandchild had married out of faith and Leah had not spoken to him in six years. And just months earlier, her second grandchild had "married out." The family was wrestling with a classic immigrant dilemma--how to honor, preserve, and pass on one's own ethnicity while integrating into today's multicultural society.

This resonated deeply for me. I am a product of an interfaith marriage. I grew up familiar with both traditions, while being steeped in neither. In December, we had a Hanukkah bush--usually a towering evergreen topped by a Star of David--and in the spring we celebrated both Easter and Passover. I identified as "half and half," partially belonging to both groups, fully belonging to neither.

At first, I didn't understand why interfaith marriage had caused such a deep rift in Leah's family. Then I began to hear some sobering (and hotly debated) statistics--that almost 50 percent of non-Orthodox American Jews marry out of faith, and less than a third of the offspring from those marriages grow up to identify as Jewish.

Some sociologists predict that if those statistics continue, the Jewish population could drop drastically, to less than a million by 2076. Leah's rigidity, which I had chalked up to close-mindedness, took on a new dimension--a deep grief and concern over the possible end of her people. I began to better understand her. And yet, I felt for her grandkids--they'd married for love. And who is to say that individuals must carry the weight of their heritage on their shoulders?

We could bandy about these statistics forever--it's hard to trust statistics; they can be "spun"; social trends change... etc. Concern and anguish over interfaith marriage is at the core of Leah's position in *Out of Faith*, and equally as compelling is her granddaughter Cheryl, who says that she always thought she'd marry "a blonde, blue-eyed yeshiva boy" (she says she "got everything but

the yeshiva boy")... until she met someone she grew to like, then love, who wasn't Jewish. In other words, fate may throw you a curveball. I know that some would say that you can control who you fall in love with, but I don't think that's the case, or that life is so simple.

As we filmed, Leah's story became even more complicated. I learned that she was not an observant Jew--so just what was it that she objected to about her grandchildren's marriages? Slowly, I came to understand that Leah's refusal to accept her grandchildren's choices stemmed from a complex mix of reasons: she'd lost nearly her entire family in the Holocaust; she'd grown up in an extremely Orthodox family; when she was growing up in Slovakia, interfaith marriage was unheard of. Leah simply could not shake the feeling that if she condoned her grandchildren's interfaith marriages, she would be betraying her ancestors and contributing to the loss of her people.

When the wife of Leah's grandson Danny became pregnant during our filming, even more pressure was exerted on both Leah and Danny--would they reconcile before Leah's first great-grandchild was born? Although I don't want to reveal what happens, I will say that this film explores several themes--conflicting loyalties within families; family estrangement and how it can or cannot be resolved; conflicting loyalties between one's own tribe and the society in which one lives; issues of cultural continuity; and finally, the trajectory of assimilation in this country that seems to cause an inevitable loss of culture over generations.

I, and the film, make no judgments about interfaith marriage--indeed, if it weren't for interfaith marriage, I would not be here today! I think our producer and I come from opposite ends of the spectrum on this issue, and making this film has produced many hours of thoughtful and heated debate.

After working on this film for four years, I still feel that most of us cannot sacrifice our own lives or personal happiness for a sociological point, but at the same time, the film did make me realize that there are sobering ramifications to our "melting pot"/"salad bowl" beautiful diverse society. With pluralism and cultural mixing it up comes wonderful new things, but also a dilution and loss of culture. Making the film has made me re-examine what my own relationship to Judaism is, and what I want it to be, and what I want to leave for the future. I'm still working on it.

In addition to raising sobering questions about Jewish cultural continuity, this film also illustrates the wrenching consequences of family estrangements. When Leah's first grandson "married out," Leah chose to cut off contact. This resulted in her grandson's wife having no exposure to Leah, a Jewish grandmother, a survivor, and a living embodiment of Eastern European Jewish culture. Perhaps if Leah had chosen a different tactic, her grandson's wife and her great grandchild would have a better understanding and appreciation for Jewish life and culture.

I've been asked what the appropriate communal response to intermarriage should be--but I have no answers. I think each situation is unique and deeply personal, and each one of us must make our own decisions.

I can say that I wish my parents had given me a much deeper knowledge and understanding of both sides of my heritage. And that I would have rebelled against any "rules" about who I should date or marry. Ultimately, I think that more is accomplished through relationship than estrangement.

It's my hope that *Out of Faith* can be used as a springboard for discussion about interfaith marriage--certainly in Jewish communities, and in many other ethnic communities across the country. I hope the film stirs viewers to explore what their heritage means to them, how they want it to inform their lives, and what they want to pass on to future generations. I also hope the film can bring together people from opposite sides of the "intermarriage" divide. I hope that the film can help each "side" understand each other a little more and create a little more tolerance on each "side," so perhaps some families can avoid six-year (or lifelong) family estrangements.

To read a story and review of *Out of Faith*, click [here](#). For Producer Mark DeAngelis' perspective, click [here](#).



Lisa Leeman is an independent documentary film director/producer based in Los Angeles. In addition to directing *Out of Faith*, credits include the recent *Who Needs Sleep* (co-directed with Haskell Wexler); directing *Metamorphosis: Man Into Woman*, *Fender Philosophers*, and *Breaking Up*. She is currently editing the indie doc *Made in LA*, and producing the feature doc *Crazy Wisdom*. She directed the *Out of Faith* over a four-year period. It's a topic close to her heart, as she is the product of an interfaith marriage.

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