The Jewish Community is NOT Sufficiently Welcoming to Intermarried Families: A Response

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Related Categories: intermarriage, identity

A couple of weeks ago, I **wrote** about BJPA Director Steven M. Cohen's thesis that the obstacle to the participation of intermarried families in Jewish organizational life is not a lack of welcome but rather a lack of perceived competence.

Now, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, executive director of the **Jewish Outreach Institute**, and Edmund Case, CEO of **InterfaithFamilies.com**, have responded to Professor Cohen's claim, in an editorial on EJewishPhilanthropy: **There is Still Work to Be Done on Welcoming Intermarried Families**.

They assert that the question (and responses) on which Professor Cohen based his conclusion do not support his conclusion, and also take issue of his characterization of how the 'outreach community' has defined and understood the concept of welcoming.

Paul Golin, who commented here on this blog, has also written more extensively on this issue at Jewcy: **Continued Confusion about Intermarriage**. There, he gets into the question of what Jewish identity means and can mean, if we can sufficiently decouple it from birth status - the beginning of a deep conversation about Jewish tradition and values.

On a certain level, these questions demand us to think about some of the questions raised by my co-blogger here, Seth Chalmer, in his series on pluralism as well as his critique of Adam Bronfman: What does it mean to be Jewish - what is fundamental, what is periphery, and where are the boundaries.

Responses to this question, whether draped in the clothing of halacha or academia, can stem from a deep emotional place - and that, I think, is good. We *should* be emotional about these issues and if we can be openly emotional, maybe we can have a conversation that brings us closer together instead of farther apart.

Jewish identity, something different from national identity, different from religious identity (at least as understood by the culturally dominant Western religions), different from ethnic or racial identity, doesn't easily let itself be pinned down. It reminds of me of the question of what constitutes family. Thinking about the current manifestations of that question - political and cultural controversy over gay marriage, civil unions, open adoption, closed adoption, second-parent adoption, paternity rights, inheritance rights, divorce, and so on, I am actually somewhat comforted that maybe after all we're not doing that badly.