

semi-sacred convictions.

It thus appears that the religious differences are less religious, per se, and more emotional issues, the kind of issues present whenever two people come from different cultures. The resolution of any of these issues requires seeing them with a certain neutrality. Individuals who see themselves as being bound by religious strictures do not view their own convictions as personal preferences, even in the context of a marital relationship. That so many people hold these issues to be doctrinaire would indicate that there is a general trend to invoke authority to bolster one's own inner feelings. Any *shul* meeting is sufficient proof of this common malady.

In our case the Orthodox lifestyle first stood for stability, family centeredness, and continuity with the past. The alternate side of Orthodoxy, which can be limiting and stifling, was the source of argument when things did not go well. The virtues of an open and accepting Conservative lifestyle likewise became at times too uncertain to sustain religious convictions in the presence of the relentless pressures of earning a living and meeting daily schedules.

The melding of a family consensus continues to progress, even as we remain individuals. We currently belong to an Orthodox synagogue and an egalitarian *havurah*. Our children attend an Orthodox day school, a summer day camp run by the Conservative movement, and we have attended the Havurah Institute, a weeklong study program for adults and children, for the past few years.

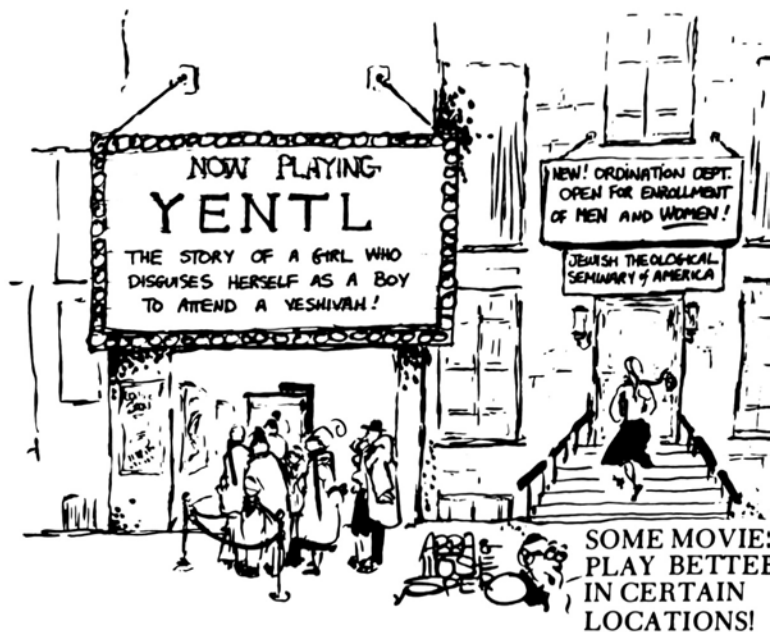
It is heartwarming to think (hope) that our children will have a role model of resolution of religious conflicts as one of their positive parental-related memories. ●

Sephardic-ashkenazic intramarriage

Marc D. Angel

I am Sephardic and my wife is Ashkenazic. My grandparents came to the United States from Turkey early this century, and her grandparents came at about the same time from Russia. We are both American born and educated and come from religiously observant homes. When we were married in 1967, we knew that we stemmed from different cultures, but that knowledge was no

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obstacle to us. On the contrary, it was seen as an interesting sidelight to our marriage, an added challenge and excitement.

In half jest, I often say that the difference between me and my wife is that I do not speak Judeo-Spanish and she does not speak Yiddish! In other words, we are both "assimilated". Even though our grandparents might not have been able to speak to each other, we have no problem at all by this generation.

Having said this, there is still no question that different cultural backgrounds have a profound effect on life and marriage. Gilda told me that she did not realize that I was *really* Sephardic until I chanted *kiddush* the first Friday night after our marriage. She was not used to the Sephardic melody. And I wasn't sure that she was *really* Ashkenazic until she served gefilte fish, which she enjoys so much— and which was new for me.

All marriages require accommodation, compromise, openness, and a good sense of humor. Having these ingredients, all in a spirit of love, intramarriage turns out to be a wonderful experience. Gilda has become a marvelous Sephardic cook, and I sing Ashkenazic *Shabbat zemirot* (hymns) with pleasure. In our Passover *seder* last year, we sang parts in Judeo-Spanish and some in Yiddish.

How to Name the Children

Generally, I think that people who intra-marry are already culturally predisposed to do so. The individual who marries someone of a different cultural background has already moved away from the social confines of his own group. He/she is receptive to new experience, and is willing to change and compromise. The more rigidly tradi-

tional a person is, the less likely he will be to marry someone from a different cultural background. And if he does marry such a person, the couple will probably have serious adjustment problems.

There are, of course, issues which have strong emotional overtones which lead to conflict in a Sephardic-Ashkenazic marriage. For example, many Sephardim have the custom of naming children after living grandparents. Many Ashkenazim are troubled by the idea of naming children after living people, preferring to name them after deceased relatives. I made a study of American Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish origin (published in the American Jewish Year Book of 1973) in which I learned that almost 80% of respondents who were married to Ashkenazim succeeded in convincing their Ashkenazic spouses to go along with the Sephardic custom of naming children after the living. This is sometimes accomplished by means of a compromise: the child is given the Hebrew name of the living grandparent, while the English name will differ.

Sephardim and Ashkenazim have differences in customs, foods, holiday observances etc. Yet all of these factors can be handled by incorporating aspects of both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions into married life. Often, the most serious problems in these marriages stem from in-laws, rather than from the marriage partners themselves.

Criteria For Success

There are also different world views which may be brought into a marriage by individuals of different backgrounds. Sephardim from traditional homes are generally imbued with family loyalty, Sephardic pride and non-Western patterns of thinking. Unless the Ashkenazic partner is willing to become part of the Sephardic family and communal setting, such a marriage will be filled with problems. Traditional Sephardim are characterized by dedication to family and community; individualism— which is the dominant culture mode of Western society, including many Ashkenazim— is considered a far lesser virtue than family and communal loyalty.

When evaluating intramarriage, it is important to know how each of the partners identifies himself/herself. Are they fixed in their own tradition and unwilling to change very much? Are they non-traditional in orientation, so that they might willingly accept the patterns of a spouse of a different cultural background? Over the years, my

experience has shown that most couples from Sephardic-Ashkenazic backgrounds have already reached the level of openness that each is willing to compromise something of his/her tradition for the sake of the marriage. The two cultures are blended rather than poised one against the other. In only one instance of interviewing a couple before marriage did I find that the Sephardic and Ashkenazic dimensions were posing a serious problem to the couple. In that case, the groom (who was Sephardic) was deeply tied to his family and expected his wife-to-be to give up her own identity and become an integral part of his family. But she was quite unwilling to make this sacrifice. She was brought up in a Reform Ashkenazic synagogue, in a small family where the emphasis was on individual achievement rather than on extended family ties. Even after spending many hours with the couple, it was fairly obvious to all of us that the problems were not going to go away by themselves.

Intra-Sephardic Intramarriage

The extent of intramarriage is itself an indication of the extent of loosening of tight traditional social settings. When my parents were married nearly fifty years ago, their marriage was considered to be an intramarriage. My father's parents came from the Island of Rhodes and my mother's parents came from villages outside of Istanbul. Both were Sephardic, both spoke Judeo-Spanish, both were born in Seattle, Washington, both attended the public schools of the city, both lived in the same neighborhood. Yet in those days it was still remarkable for a member of a family from the Island of Rhodes to marry a member of a family from Tekirdag. My mother never forgot that one of the relatives of Rhodes background told her that she was an *ajena* (a foreigner). As time progressed, though, and the Americanization process began breaking down the old social structures, it became much more common for Sephardim of different backgrounds to marry among themselves, and also for Sephardim to marry Ashkenazim. By the third generation, Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish background who marry Jews mostly marry Ashkenazim rather than other Sephardim. In fact, the rate is about 75% by now.

By contrast, Sephardim of Syrian background who live in Brooklyn still retain a strong traditional family and communal setting. Syrian Sephardim tend to marry other Syrian Sephardim. When one of my cousins (of Judeo-Spanish background) married a Syrian, that too was con-

sidered an intramarriage, and had its attendant problems among the family members in Brooklyn. Yet, as communities become less insulated and more receptive to change, intramarriage is an inevitable part of its experience. And in general, it is those who are most ready for the step away from the confines of their community who are the ones who will become involved in intramarriage.

While these marriages have their share of additional problems which need to be solved, they also have the added dynamic of blending two traditions, confronting different ways of thinking and doing things.

The Jewish people, as a people, is heading away from insular communities and towards a broader Jewishness. Intramarriage is a symbol of the change which is going on within our people. We are blending different traditions and histories and gradually merging into a new people of Israel. And I think that the Jewish people will be stronger, more open and more dynamic than before. ●

Accommodating to an intramarriage

Malka Drucker

The young woman had just set the table. She frowned. It seemed ridiculously fancy for two people— white damask tablecloth, silver, crystal, china, candlesticks. And because nearly everything on the table was brand new, the dinner table exuded the warmth of a department store display. Only the glowing brass candlesticks which had belonged to this newly married woman's great-grandmother softened the cold table.

It was Friday, 4:28, and time to light the candles. She knew this because she had dutifully checked the Jewish calendar given to her by her in-laws. After ten minutes of squinting and finally resorting to a ruler, she had lined up 4:28 with Los Angeles. Taking a deep breath and nervously shrugging, she covered her head with a scarf and lit the match. She'd only seen the ceremony a few times. The blessing emerged haltingly as she resurrected it from her days in Sunday School, and when the ceremony was over she felt self-conscious and foolish. She was glad no one had heard her. In her hand she still held the burnt match, because she didn't know what to do with it.

By now you may have guessed that I was that

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awkward bride seventeen years ago. I've come a long way— I've learned to rest the match on the candlestick and if you look carefully you'll find wine stains on the tablecloth— but first I'd like to describe my beginnings, because it is my past that lends significance to my present.

I was raised brave-new-world Reform, with a strong emphasis on ethics. Ritual was for ignorant people or hypocrites. All one needed to be a good Jew was to be a good person: ham was irrelevant. No one I knew lit *Shabbat* candles or kept kosher. I grew up thinking that *Shabbat* and *kashrut* were part of some ancient time. My family did celebrate *Chanukah* grandly, Passover a little less so, and the High Holy Days sort of.

Searching for Spirituality

By the time I was in college I began to have yearnings for a religious experience. I wasn't sure what that would be, but it would have something to do with helping me to feel the sense of the world. I didn't want a rational explanation; I wanted something I could feel, like love. I went to Hillel a few times, but found it dispirited and boring. So I put my longing aside, went back to reading Byron and scouting boys.

I found one, a good one, and I fell in love. Part of what I liked about this guy, besides his blue eyes and smooth talk, was his background. He was a day school boy from an observant family. He knew things I wanted to know. He would teach me the path to enlightenment. Wonderful! I was ready to live happily ever after. Not quite. What I didn't realize was that his commitment was permanent, not like my sporadic searching. It wasn't optional for him. He never ate lobster. I liked to do things when I felt like it.

The next surprise about being observantly Jewish came when we sent out our wedding invitations. Dishes from his family began to arrive. In the end, I was the proud, if bewildered, possessor of six sets of dishes.

Going to a kosher butcher for the first time was another revelation. I was one of those kids that never connected the plastic-wrapped stuff in the supermarkets together with the feathery creatures in barnyards. Imagine my surprise (and horror) when an unshavened old man in a bloody apron shouted at me in barely comprehensible English, "Chicken? You want chicken? Look at this beauty!" He thrust this obscenely bald fowl inches from me and asked how I'd like it prepared. I answered broiled and he shook his head, disgusted. He cut it up and thoughtfully included