

## Linda's Column

The Interfaith Committee of JFCS, along with members of our community, were recently in attendance for a program hosted by Eve Coulson and led by Rabbi Samuel N. Gordon of Congregation Sukkat Shalom in Wilmette, IL. He's had over 25 years of experience as a rabbi in the Chicago area, and has devoted himself to outreach and unity among the interfaith population in his community and beyond. The discussion was entitled, "**Beyond the December Dilemma: A Conversation with Rabbi Sam Gordon about Diversity and Intermarriage in the Jewish Community.**"

In his discussion, Rabbi Gordon provided us with some insights on intermarriage and the traditional Jewish response to it. Below are some excerpts taken from a sermon of his that include some of his key points.

The family therapist and author, Esther Perel, has used the metaphor of the immigration experience to better help us understand the cultural dynamic of marrying someone of a different faith. Imagine that instead of marrying a person of another religion, yours was a marriage to a person of another country and culture. In this exercise, imagine that instead of marrying a Jew, pretend you are marrying someone from France. You decide that it will be fine to move to France and raise a family there. France is a nice place. It is civilized, cultured, and the food is good. You study French language and become proficient. You read all the books you can about French culture, literature, and art. You begin to feel comfortable living in France, though you may never choose to become a citizen and give up your American background.

Things go well, but there are some problems. You may begin to feel that you take French culture and life more seriously than your French born spouse. You say: "You've lived in France all your life, and you mean to say that you've never been to the Louvre?" As hard as you have tried to learn how to cook in French style, you know that your mother-in-law will never think that your *casoulet* is very good. Your children love being French, and that is fine with you, but you can't believe that they like to put chocolate sauce on toast and that they cannot stand peanut butter and jelly. They sneer at hot dogs. You enjoy their delight on Bastille Day, but you wish they could celebrate a typical small town America Fourth of July. Most of all, you become seriously homesick on Thanksgiving, and your spouse really doesn't understand why. When there is a crisis at home or with your family, you might want to go back home to America. Sometimes you just want to speak English. You want to take your kids to America for a visit without feeling that you are being disloyal to your spouse.

Now think not of France, but of Judaism. The person marrying into the Jewish

world is moving into a new culture—almost a new country. That person is becoming an immigrant. The person can choose to become a citizen, but one can also decide to remain a resident alien. In the American immigration model, it is as if the non Jewish partner is carrying a Green Card but has not taken an oath of citizenship.”

Think about the holiday of Thanksgiving. In America we do not claim that the descendants of the Mayflower are the only people who have a right to celebrate Thanksgiving. That would be absurd and completely contrary to our American values. Though Gordon’s own family was far from these shores in the 17th Century, he feels completely at home at the Thanksgiving dining room table. “The celebration is mine, and the history is mine. My political ancestors from 1776 are Jefferson, Madison, and Washington. It doesn’t matter to me that my own family members were in Eastern Europe at the time.” That is the nature of immigration and becoming a citizen of a new country. So too with Jewish life, culture, and ritual. The new entrant into Jewish life has as valid a claim to tradition as the one who claims to trace his or her roots back to the line of King David.

Our family traditions are rich but often complicated. Living with diversity we integrate multiple experiences, but our religious quest is most meaningful if we allow ourselves to use these times to tell our family narratives and stories.

*(excerpts taken from the JOI News & Events Blog.)*

Please contact me with any questions or suggestions you may have. If you would like to be added to our interfaith eNewsletter distribution list – please call or email me.

Thank you,

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