

## Keeping Our Religion Pure – Or Not

The telephone rings in a Jewish home and the mother answers. It is her daughter who is in her early 20's.

"Mama," she says, "I'm engaged."

"Mazel tov!" the mother screams with excitement.

"You have to know something, though, Mama. John isn't Jewish."

There is dead silence on the phone.

"Also," the daughter continues, "he's looking for work. At the moment, though we have no money."

"That's no problem," the mother says, "You'll come live here in our house and me. Papa and I will give you our bedroom."

"But where will you stay?" asked the daughter.

"Papa will sleep on the couch in the living room."

"And what about you, Mama?"

"About me you don't have to worry, because as soon as I get off the telephone, I'm jumping out the window."

This story is a vestige from the days when intermarriage was uncommon and those who did intermarry were seen as abandoning the Jewish people. In certain quarters (even today in certain orthodox communities), the parent might even go into formal mourning and sit shiva for the child who married a non-Jew. Such a union was seen as a stain on the purity of the Jewish people. Better to excise this impurity than to tolerate it.

I think that most of us would disagree with those emotions. Today, we see the intermarried couple who chooses to affiliate and raise their children as Jews as a benefit, not a detriment to the greater Jewish community. We are learning that we are becoming strengthened by our diversity. The old mode of thinking, of keeping the people pure of outside influence, is fading away in much of the Jewish world.