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Intermarriage: I Do
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There are times in life when we seek forgiveness for things we've done that we know were wrong. There are also times when we're asked to apologize for something we've done that we believe was right. Then there are times when we stand in the liminal space of doing something that we aren't yet sure is right or wrong, but that we believe is worth the risk to find out, and so we respond to the call to act, to that deep inner instinct that moves us to take a chance. This is the place I stand in today, a place I want to tell you about. I want to explain how I got here and where it is I hope to go.

In 1988 while in rabbinical school at JTS, I used to think I'd be the first Conservative rabbi whose sons wouldn't be subjected to circumcision, and who would one day rewrite the rules on intermarriage, struggling as I did with my right to tell a Jew whom they could or could not marry. Twenty-six years later I am no longer a Conservative rabbi, my three sons are circumcised thanks to copious amounts of Manischewitz given to them and to me at their brises, and I am about to perform my second intermarriage.

Like many in the Jewish world, I was raised and trained to promote the beauty and importance of endogamy – of Jews marrying other Jews – in order to preserve Jewish tradition, secure Jewish continuity, and grow, in both breadth and depth, the vitality of the Jewish family and the Jewish people.

There's great wisdom in leading the next generation of young Jews to partner with someone who shares their Jewish identity. Aside from strengthening our community, both partners being Jewish helps to mitigate the inevitable tensions around bringing two lives and two families together. And for most children, growing

up with one identity they share with both their parents is experienced as most grounding and is easiest to sustain. Multiple generations of Jews reap the benefits of two Jews marrying one another as Jewish tradition is given a greater chance to endure and thrive.

And let's be clear: while some may express their own prejudices, the primacy of endogamy has nothing to do with rejecting non-Jews. It was and is about prioritizing Judaism and the Jewish community.

This view was so prevalent for so long that until recently anyone who chose otherwise was assumed to be rejecting their Jewish identity, having little regard for Judaism or the future of the Jewish people. While society continued to be shaped by clear boundaries between religious and ethnic communities, this wisdom was little challenged. Those who deviated generally left the community.

But as the world changed, so did we. Over the last few decades traditional hierarchies in business, technology, natural resources and socialization have given way to platforms that promote collaboration, accessibility and power sharing. The unimaginable levels of mobility – literal and digital – bringing people from all corners of the world together for work and pleasure have opened us up to one another as never before. Facebook, Snapchat, BuzzFeed, smart energy grids, Zipcars, Uber, and Airbnb aren't just innovative ways of connecting people to make money. They are reflections of a world no longer segmented by the historic walls that divided companies, consumers, communities and cultures.

The effects on intermarriage are not hard to understand. Jeremy Rifkin, in his remarkable book, [The Empathic Civilization](#), documents how the changing paradigms in our world have created increasing empathy amongst people.

As Rifkin states, “A complex, globally structured civilization made up of hundreds of millions of individuals interacting in vast associational networks – social, economic and political – requires a sense of openness, a nonjudgmental point of view, an appreciation of cultural differences, and a desire to continually find common ground among people.”

It should not be shocking to us, Rifkin says, “that in the most technologically advanced countries, where self-expression is high, the older theological consciousness, with its emphasis on strict external codes, the communal bond, and a hierarchically organized command and control, is losing its hold. Religious hierarchies make less and less sense in a flat, networked world.”

When we, our children and grandchildren study, work, play, eat and travel with people from all different backgrounds, when society now welcomes us as we are without asking us to diminish or conceal our particular identities, when we celebrate the possibilities of living as a proud Jew in the big, diverse world out there, it wasn't only a matter of time before Jews would begin meeting and falling in love with people from different religious or cultural communities, but it was also only a matter of time before Jews would feel that they could enjoy those relationships without sacrificing their own Jewish identities and Jewish lives.

Of course there are Jews who care little about their own heritage and feel no responsibility for Judaism's future. What we can do to stem the tide of disaffection among that demographic is the subject of another talk. What I want to share with you are my feelings about what to do with those who genuinely care about being Jewish, living in a Jewish community, and participating in Jewish life, even as they find themselves in deeper and deeper relationships with people who aren't Jewish.

For the first twenty years of my rabbinate, that is, until about 18 months ago, I would turn away interfaith couples that would call asking me to marry them. While I did so believing it was my duty to uphold the standards of the movement that ordained me as well as my own values, telling someone that you—as a rabbi—won’t marry them, meaning, that you disapprove of their choice of life partner and won’t grant them the presence of community or tradition at one of the most important moments of their lives, is not the same as saying to a caller, “Sorry, we don’t carry televisions.” Love and tradition are not commodities we do or don’t sell. Love is about our most private and intimate choices. And truthfully, Judaism is not mine to offer or withhold at will. I don’t own it. So as clear as I may have been in my policies, saying no always caused pain for the couple and for me. For me it felt like a betrayal of my rabbinic mission to bring Jews closer to their Judaism. For them, my refusal was often experienced as rejection by Judaism itself and in many cases led to their rejection of Judaism in turn going forward.

There were those who called simply wanting a rabbi to bless their marriage to a non-Jew, having reached their decision to marry with little struggle or consideration of how it may affect their Jewish lives. They did not move me. Our response to them needs to address the larger issue of disaffection I referred to before.

But there were those whose calls did move me, who made me begin to think that our line in the sand is serving those of us who are charged to be the gatekeepers of Judaism, but that on a deeper, fundamental level, keeping all those couples at bay is eroding Judaism’s capacity to speak with relevance and courage to the changing realities of Jewish life.

We know we’ve rejected so many – not just the couples and their future children but also their parents, grandparents, relatives and friends – as a result of a non-negotiable policy that condemns a Jew for living in the open society we fought, and

even died for, and discovering one of the unintended, often uncontrollable consequences: falling in love. I can't judge someone for whom they love. I've been so judged. As a human being and as a rabbi, I can't, and won't, justify that.

I began to teach about the evolving landscape of Jewish identity: the move to patrilineal or now unilineal descent in Reform and Reconstructionist communities; the expanding definitions of parenthood and the transmission of Jewish identity arising from the growth of surrogate motherhood and innovative reproductive technologies; about same sex marriage; non-religious conversion ceremonies, secular Jewish communities, alternative Jewish synagogues and other modern phenomena.

The trend was obvious: the clear lines that once delineated who was in and who was out, and what was in and what was out, were becoming increasingly blurry. Spiritual and ritual diversity in the Jewish world was growing, and there was no turning back. Our task was not to figure out how to tame all the creative Jewish energy out there and make it conform to traditional standards. Sustaining Judaism doesn't require us to deny pluralism and promote one Jewish path over another. Our challenge was, and is, how to harness the unmistakable, if varied, Jewish yearnings for meaning, for connection and for authenticity and lead them to deepened and sustained Jewish commitment, thereby creating robust and vital Jewish communities. That is, in a nutshell, my rabbinic calling and the mission of Sha'ar Communities.

While delving more deeply into the dramatic shifts that were taking place in the Jewish world, the statistics became equally alarming, as recorded in the Pew study of American Jews in 2013:

- Amongst non-Orthodox Jews marrying since 2000, 72% are marrying non-Jewish partners.
- Amongst intermarried Jews, roughly 1/3 are not raising their children as Jews, only 20% are, and 25% are raising them partly Jewish.

- Intermarriage is much more common amongst the children of the intermarried: Among married Jews who report that only one of their parents was Jewish, just 17% are married to a Jewish spouse. By contrast, among married Jews who say both of their parents were Jewish, 63% have a Jewish spouse.
- The adult offspring of intermarriages are also much more likely than people with two Jewish parents to describe themselves religiously as atheist, agnostic or just “nothing in particular.”
- But the Pew study also reported this: “When we look at all adults who have just one Jewish parent – including both those who identify as Jewish and those who do not – we see that the Jewish retention rate of people raised in intermarried families appears to be rising. That is, among all adults (both Jewish and non-Jewish) who say they had one Jewish parent and one non-Jewish parent, younger generations are more likely than older generations to be Jewish today.”

So there you have it: intermarriage rates are soaring, and yet more and more people growing up in intermarried homes are seeking to live as Jews. What that indicates is that increasing numbers of Jews who are intermarrying are not rejecting their Judaism as did those who intermarried generations ago. More and more are seeking to integrate their Jewish identities into the lives and families they are building with their non-Jewish partners. That being the case, so long as rabbis reject these couples, we may be holding the line on intermarriage but we’re also losing the opportunity to engage these couples and their families and encourage their continued desire to participate in Jewish life.

Yes, some rabbis say, “I’m sorry I can’t officiate at your wedding but please come in the next day and we’ll gladly welcome you into the community.” That’s a far cry from the days when synagogues would only address mail to the Jewish partner in an

intermarried home. And it's quite something that in a nod to the changing Jewish family, three years ago the Conservative movement approved burying non-Jewish spouses and non-Jewish children of Jews in Jewish cemeteries. Still, while some interfaith or intercultural couples will abide the rejection around the wedding and still seek out a shul at a later date, many won't accept the perceived hypocrisy of those who would welcome their membership dollars after someone else does the "dirty work" (i.e. takes responsibility for) consecrating their marriage.

For a few years this was a struggle that I spoke about in classes, debated with colleagues and ruminated about on long runs. But what began to keep me up at night was a request I found myself struggling to refuse.

A divorced Jewish woman with two grown kids, both of them products of Jewish day school, reached out to me about her upcoming wedding to her non-Jewish fiancé. I had been her rabbi for many years by that time: I had bar mitzvah-ed her son, buried her mother, and led the community she enjoyed. Knowing her and her fiancé well, I had no doubt about how perfect they were for one another. I also had no doubt about her ongoing pride in being Jewish and her intention to continue to live as a Jew. Her Orthodox Jewish upbringing was long in the past, but her Jewish soul remained fully formed.

Though I engaged him in several conversations about converting, her fiancé, a man raised Catholic but no longer practicing and the father also of two adult children, was not interested at all in taking that path. He is a firm supporter of his wife's Jewish life and a frequent participant in her community, but he nonetheless felt no need to change his identity in order to bring his life together with hers, especially being in their late 40s and late 50s. He wasn't looking for God or religion. He just wanted to marry her and happily welcomed the Jewish traditions and community that came along with her. The case was made less complicated by the fact that there were no

more children coming, no conversations around how to raise and educate the kids would be necessary.

I could have simply refused the request as I had done so many times before, but given the realities of American Jewish life I had started to confront, it felt misguided to turn this couple away. I was their rabbi before they married and would continue to be their rabbi afterwards. Who was I supposed to be for the moment they came together? Was there no way for me to stand with them at their wedding, bless the love that brought them together, send the message that the Jewish community wants their continued presence and involvement, all while maintaining my integrity and that of Jewish tradition?

I believed there was, but that belief was hard won.

I knew I would not perform a Jewish wedding for them with the traditional rituals of a ketubah, the formula around the ring ceremony invoking the custom of Moses and Israel, and the seven wedding blessings. Those are historic and holy elements reserved for the wedding ceremony of two Jews. But surely there were words within the treasure of Jewish texts and poetry that could serve as sources of blessing and affirmation without compromising tradition! And indeed there are.

Moreover, I knew I would have to consult with my spiritual partners whose understanding and views I hold in the highest esteem, and whose respect means everything to me: mine and Andi's children.

Were I to marry this couple, I could not allow it to undermine the teaching we had been sharing with our children about the importance of them making their lives with another Jew who walked the same path as they, the importance of raising a Jewish family and fulfilling their privilege and responsibility to carrying Judaism forward.

We had numerous family summits on the issue. The kids were clear and consistent. It was my duty, they felt, to embrace this couple and keep them close to the Jewish community. They understood this not as a signal that what is expected of them has changed, but as a reality that I as a rabbi had to learn to address lest I, and we, become hopelessly irrelevant to the swelling ranks of intermarried Jews.

Every family, including our own, has been touched by this issue. To say no was simply to stick my head in the sand and miss a critical opportunity. Such was the counsel of our children.

Yes, I was worried that if I agreed it would somehow give permission to my kids, and also to yours, to take less seriously the priority of marrying someone Jewish, even though they assured me it wouldn't. But to be perfectly honest, well before this ever came up we'd had many heartfelt Shabbat table discussions in our home during which the kids wondered aloud what would happen if they fell in love with a non-Jew, revealing the anxiety of a generation of American Jewish youth with unprecedented freedom who also feel deep love for and loyalty to their Judaism. It could happen to them, they realize, no matter how many years of day school they have, no matter how traditional a home they come from. Every conversation followed the same pattern: we would reiterate the importance of marrying a Jew, whether born or converted – either is totally fine –but would conclude by reminding them that being our children, we will always stand with them and want above all for them to live authentically and at peace with themselves.

I can only hope that in the decision I made to marry this couple our children see my complex but firm commitment not only to the Jewish people, but to Jewish people, and be motivated to remain resolute in their own Jewish lives even as they understand that nothing and no one will ever come between us.

I knew as well that if I were to make the courageous move of marrying this couple and set aside millennia of precedent not to mention my own movement's standards because I believed I was standing by a Jew who was committed to her Judaism even though she fell in love with a non-Jew, then she was going to have to make a move that affirmed her ongoing dedication to Jewish life. And so, I asked her to step up her visibility within the community and take more responsibility to make clear her Jewish loyalties. And she did.

My next step was to resign from the Conservative movement. That was hard for me. I left my Orthodox home at the age of 20 to follow my calling to be a rabbi, and found spiritual and intellectual affinity with Conservative Judaism. As with all changes, there are gains and losses. It was difficult to leave the Jewish world I had known all my life in order to fulfill my own Jewish aspirations. That move altered many of my relationships with my extended family and friends, the effects of which I still negotiate today. To find myself yet again having to leave my spiritual home in order to be true to myself was painful. But knowing the movement's rules forbidding rabbis not only from officiating at intermarriages but also from even attending them, I had no choice but to withdraw my membership. When I submitted my resignation to my colleague Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive director of the Rabbinical Assembly, I explained honestly that my membership was limiting my ability to serve the demographic I was leading in the way I felt could most ensure their Jewish lives. She acknowledged that the reality of intermarriage is forcing everyone to reconsider their stances, but that the Conservative movement was not where I was, and we sadly agreed to part ways. I now exist as an independent rabbi, with no formal affiliation. I'm ok with that, although it does present some challenges when seeking to register with certain marriage bureaus and I did miss the annual pre-Rosh Hashanah conference call with the President of the United States that is made available to

rabbis within the major Jewish denominations. So it can get lonely sometimes. But, I'm not complaining.

The wedding took place last fall. I had the jitters that morning, never mind the bride and groom. Was I doing the right thing? Was I risking Jewish tradition or saving it? Would my wager that standing by Jews, even if it meant departing from religious precedent, would ultimately bring more honor to Judaism, eventually succeed? I didn't know. I still don't. But I know that I could not turn them away.

It was an intimate ceremony in a beautiful outdoor venue. We lit a candle. I shared a Jewish teaching about the gift and the responsibility of love. We signed the documents and said shehecheyanu. They are now happily married, members of a Jewish community, and living the lives they dreamed of living.

*I know that what I created with them was not Kiddushin—the particular form of consecration that should be reserved for the marriage of two Jews. But I understand that I am a rabbi, people know me to be a rabbi, and I officiated at the wedding, ergo, many may say, it was a Jewish wedding. While some may think I'm dabbling in semantics, the distinction between a Jewish wedding and what we did is clear, most importantly, to the people immediately involved. And that's what matters to me. They know that their choice was non-traditional, and that there are implications to accept. But they also know that their choice won't exclude them from the Jewish community, not from *their* Jewish community. Not from mine.*

I didn't rush out the next day and have a shingle made for my office door saying, "Yes, I do intermarriages". I decided that I would evaluate each request that came to me, and carefully consider the commitments of the couple before agreeing to marry them. I felt good about what I had done, even as the weight of it took time to dissipate.

A few months ago I received the next call that would keep me up for several nights. This time the couple was young, at the beginning of their adult lives and their dreams of having a family. The bride is Jewish, raised in a home with a deep cultural, connection to Judaism. . The groom is a British man who was raised Catholic but who today identifies, if at all, culturally, certainly not religiously. Knowing my family and me personally and assuming I would refuse to officiate, I was asked if I could at least “sprinkle some Judaism” on the ceremony that was to be conducted by an interfaith minister.

I agreed to explore this even more challenging scenario that would involve children to see if I could engage this couple and help them become a Jewish family. The bride takes great pride in her Jewish identity, acknowledges the seriousness of her decision to marry someone who isn't Jewish, made sure that he understood and supported her commitment to raise Jewish children and establish a Jewish home – which he does with profound respect. And while she demonstrates sensitivity to his background, she's able to assert her values and priorities within their loving relationship.

True to my ideals, in my first conversation with him I endeavored to get to know him and his connection to his Catholic roots, and to see if there was an opening to discuss the possibility of conversion. What I discovered was an exceptionally bright, open-minded and open-hearted man, keen to learn as much as he can about the traditions and practices of his soon-to-be wife, and about the Jewish home and family he has pledged to build with her. He had never thought about conversion, and assumed he wasn't a candidate because he hadn't embraced the Jewish God. I explained to him that the road to conversion takes many paths, not only the theological. People are moved to hang their hats with the Jews as much because of an appreciation for Jewish values, Jewish culture, Jewish history and destiny, as they are for Jewish

religious beliefs and expressions. Not to mention those who come aboard simply because their marriage depends on it. Moreover, I asked him to consider how fulfilling it might be to be a participant in his wife's and children's Jewish lives and not just an observer; to actually share a spiritual life, and not just watch.

He responded thoughtfully. While he wasn't ready to commit to a formal conversion process, he and his fiancé expressed a strong desire to begin a course of study with me that is to last well beyond their wedding day. She realizes that in order to make a Jewish home she will need to deepen her own Jewish knowledge, and he realizes that whether an official conversion comes about or not, he needs to be much better informed about the tradition in which he has promised to live his life.

Once again, I could easily have refused to officiate as I have done so many times before. And instead of me, an officiant would conduct a one-size-fits-all ceremony without any of these precious and particular Jewish sentiments. But I saw the opportunity to capture the positive Jewish energy of both the bride and the groom, to stay close to them through study sessions and the creation of a customized wedding ceremony that will acknowledge and celebrate both their roots without it pretending to be a Jewish wedding, and to help make of them an informed and committed Jewish family. A traditional Jewish wedding may yet come down the road should he convert one day. But formal conversion or not, is this not what we want and need for our communities: knowledgeable and devoted Jewish parents and families?

I decided not to just "sprinkle some Judaism" on their marriage ceremony, but to help them plant the seeds of learning, dedication and responsibility that, nourished with my presence and that of some Jewish spirit at their wedding, will hopefully yield fruit for us all in the years to come.

Some of you might be thinking that there's a safety-catch in this one: the bride is Jewish so the children will be also regardless of what I do or don't do. Technically that's true by many Jewish interpretations. But shouldn't we be concerned about more than creating Jewish bodies? We must work relentlessly, courageously, even sometimes assuming some risk, to create Jewish souls – people who will appreciate and devote themselves to living Jewish lives and sustaining Jewish communities.

A few years ago on Yom Kippur I shared with you a sort of precursor to this talk inspired by a teaching in an ancient rabbinic midrash about Moses smashing the tablets on his way down Mount Sinai. In the words of Avot D'Rabbi Natan:

...Moses took the tablets of the commandments and started descending the mountain, happy and excited. When he saw the offense the Israelites had committed in building the golden calf, he asked himself: how can I give them these tablets of the commandments? In doing so I would be obligating them to these laws and thus condemning them to death for it says 'You shall have no others gods before me.' (Ex. 20:3)

Moses started to turn back, but the Elders saw him and ran after him. Moses held on to one side of the tablets, they held on to the other, but Moses was stronger... He looked at the tablets and noticed that the writing had disappeared from them. 'How can I give the Israelites blank tablets?' he thought, and decided it would be better to break them instead, as it is said, 'And I took hold of the two tablets, and cast them out of my two hands, and broke them' (Deut 9:17) (Avot D'Rabbi Natan, Ch.2)

The Rabbis assert that God approved of Moses' breaking the tablets because the disappearance of the writing comes *after* Moses struggles with the Elders but immediately *before* he throws them down on the ground. To them, this is a sign that

after Moses himself took the first step of withdrawing the Torah from the Jews in order to save them from being culpable for building an idol, God agreed with his instinct and withdrew the laws from the tablets.

What Moses understood was that there could be no Torah without a community to follow its teachings, and if the community was not able or willing to receive it, better the Torah be withdrawn than have all its adherents destroyed. And God agreed.

The profound message is that there is no value in Torah for Torah's sake. The Torah's value derives from those who animate its teachings by living them. And according to our striking Midrash, when God acceded to Moses' impulse to withdraw the laws and smash the tablets, God embraced the idea of the primacy of the people, however imperfect we may be, over the supposedly perfect Torah.

I am not suggesting that intermarriage is our generation's golden calf. On the contrary, maybe our unwillingness to evolve Jewish rituals in pace with the changing Jewish world has become our idol, at great cost to the Jewish people. Seventy-two percent of the Jewish world that I lead is turning to their rabbis for direction. Even Moses would have found a way to say Hineni, Here I am.

Rabbi Gordon Tucker, my former dean and colleague, once listed all the skills a rabbi needs to have to be successful: a good speaker, an engaging teacher, a competent administrator, an empathic pastor, a tireless activist, a charming personality, a sense of humor, thick skin, and I'm sure you can add to the list. What almost always fails to appear on anyone's inventory is what he called our charge to be an "ish/isha ha-elohim" – literally, "a man or woman of God". I understand this to mean that I must be someone who can truly be present to another and help make manifest the singular, sacred, if messy, essence of life that transcends all particular religions and

identities and that unites and binds us all to one another and to the divine. Our Jewish path to that revelation is rich, beautiful, precious, and in dire need of reinforcement to ensure its continuity. But that continuity will come in many forms. Part of my role as a rabbi is to illuminate for people their path to ensuring Judaism's future. As the Lubavitcher Rebbe taught, the true teacher connects you with your God – and then gets out of the way.

A true teacher also knows when to show courage and take risks for others, and how to still distinguish their needs from those of the one they're helping.

One Yom Kippur morning, just over 200 years ago, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the first rebbe of the Lubavitch Hassidic dynasty, was leading services, wrapped in his tallit and immersed in the prayers, igniting the hearts of all in the sanctuary with each sacred word chanted and each passionate melody sung. Everyone was entranced as he led them deeper and deeper into the spirit of Yom Kippur.

And then suddenly he stopped. He cast off his tallit and walked out of the shul. Stupefied, the people followed him as he briskly crossed to the other side of the village, to a dark house on an outlying road from which the cries of a newborn baby could be heard. Reb Shneur Zalman entered the house, chopped some wood, lit a fire in the oven, boiled a soup, and fed and comforted the helpless mother and newborn lying in bed. When they were settled, he returned to the shul and to the ecstasy of his prayers.

Whenever the Lubavitcher Rebbe would tell this story, and did so often, he would make sure to point out the fact that Reb Schneur Zalman removed his tallit before going to help this mother and child. From this the Rebbe learned, and taught, that sometimes in order to help someone, you have to leave your own world in order to enter the place where that person lives.

On the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, Reb Schneur Zalman, the leader of his generation, abandoned shul, chopped wood, lit a fire and cooked – all clear violations of Yom Kippur. But he did so in order to show compassion to another human being. *He didn't eat, he didn't benefit from his labors, he knew his own priorities and commitments, and was able to suspend them to be present to another without violating his own integrity, returning to his practice when his task was complete.*

Yes, he was saving a life, for which we are permitted to violate any rule. In my own breaching of the boundaries, I may not be literally saving a life, but I believe in my heart and soul that the vitality and continuity of Jewish life, at least outside of the Orthodox community, is truly at stake.

And I recognize that while Reb Schneur Zalman suspended his Yom Kippur for this single episode, I am advocating for the establishment of a new norm: a new wedding ceremony for a Jew and a non-Jew at which a rabbi can be present to convey the desire that the couple remain connected and committed to the Jewish community, one that would welcome them lovingly and respectfully, even as it continued to promote the ideal of Jewish marriage.

Can it work? Is it a risk worth taking? Will couples be motivated to do their part for Judaism as I have pledged to do mine? The jury is out. I believe the wager is worth making. Think about it – as parents and grandparents. Do you want Jewish leaders to stand by your children and grandchildren some of whom will inevitably face these choices and help them find their home in the Jewish community, or should we close our doors and walk away?

On this sacred day of disclosure – between people and God and between one another -- I shared this with you because as I prepare to write and speak about it

more widely, I felt it only proper for you, my community, to hear it from me first, not read about it in the media.

I recognize that what I've shared may leave you with many questions and concerns. The majority of rabbis in the world have chosen not to perform intermarriages, though the numbers are growing as we wrestle with the costs of maintaining the traditional stand against doing so. Understand that I am motivated by a passionate commitment to inclusion, not exclusion, and am trying to stimulate discussion and model approaches that can, and I pray will, enfranchise those who risk becoming alienated while strengthening the Jewish people and maintaining the dignity and integrity of Jewish tradition.

All I ask is that if you struggle following this talk, come see me and give us a chance to discuss it together. Not only so that you can learn more from me, but so that I can learn more from you.

Throughout the entire day of Yom Kippur we plead before the holy One:

Pitchu lanu shaarei tezedek, navo vam nodeh yah. Delatecha dafaknu rachum vechanun. Na al teshiveynu reykam milfanecha.

Open for us the gates of righteousness. We will come in, and we will be grateful.

We've been knocking on your door, You who are compassionate and gracious.

Please don't turn us away empty-handed.

If God can welcome us home each and every year and accept the array of choices we've made in our lives, can we not do the same for one another?