

A number of months ago, I had been asked to host a young man for Shabbos by a kiruv organization. During the Shabbos meal he expressed great interest in everything Jewish. When I asked him about his background, he mentioned that even though he had been raised as a non-Jew by his non-Jewish mother - but since his father was Jewish he knew he was Jewish. I was shocked by the revelation but said nothing to the young man. After Shabbos I asked the director of the program why he had sent me a non-Jew for Shabbos? He replied that he had received a halachic ruling from an American rav who allowed participation of a non-Jew – who viewed himself as Jewish. This was so even though the program had a mixture of boys and girls and there was a danger of intermarriage of the participants. I have since found out that this is not an isolated incident but in fact reflects the decision by certain individuals in kiruv to proselytize those who have a Jewish father. I mentioned this information to Rav Moshe Sternbuch. After gathering information from other sources, he wrote the following psak which he requested me to translate and disseminate. Daniel Eidensohn

HaRav Moshe Sternbuch shlita

Kiruv for someone with a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother

You ask what are the guidelines for kiruv programs - that encourage Jews to fully observe the Torah - which take place in religious schools or organized events. In particular should a person who is not halachically Jewish - because his mother is not Jewish but his father is - be encouraged or even allowed to participate? I have heard that there are rabbis who not only permit it but even encourage it, They assert that especially those people who already view themselves as Jewish – even though they are mistaken - should be encouraged to participate because they might eventually convert.

My view is that it is absolutely forbidden to try to proselytize a non-Jew even if he mistakenly views himself as Jewish. One obvious reason is that such an approach actually encourages intermarriage. If people with only a Jewish father are encouraged to participate in Jewish educational events it will convey the message that in some sense they are actually Jewish. That is because it is commonly accepted that only Jews are allowed to participate in these events. Thus this innovation crosses the red lines that have always been accepted by Torah true Jews. Typically the intermarried couple does not realize that they are constantly transgressing prohibitions which carry the punishment of kares [Rambam Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah 12:6]. But at least they need to be aware that intermarriage cuts them off completely from the Jewish people. If we allow and even encourage their non-Jewish offspring to participate in Jewish educational events, they will feel that they still have an intimate connection to the Jewish people – G-d forbid!

Another basis of concern is that I see this as a violation of following non-Jewish practices (chukas akum). These rabbis are showing mercy to the Jewish father by a de-facto acknowledgment of the non-Jewish concept of patrilineal descent. According to the unanimously held Torah view - any person with a non-Jewish mother is completely non-Jewish. Also the gratuitous granting of Jewish status and benefits to this non-Jewish child violates the Torah prohibition of Lo Techanem.

These rabbis also try to justify their innovation by claiming that it is a solution to the massive problem resulting from the intermarriage of Russian Jews. They assert that one should encourage the conversion of the child of a non-Jewish mother because the Russian Jews intermarried because of the unfortunate circumstances under the Communists. Therefore they are to be regarded as innocent children who grew up in captivity (tinok shenishba). They feel it is appropriate to show special mercy on these unfortunate people. I agree that they should be shown special sensitivity and leniencies. However this is only when they have at least distanced themselves from their intermarried parents or have already indicated an interest in genuine conversion. However if the parents insist on continuing their intermarriage, there is no halachic basis to be sorry for them. The child in that case is a non-Jew and will remain as such.

Concerning the specific case that you mentioned of a student whose father is Jewish but the mother is a non-Jew. One of the kiruv programs wants to include him – even though he still lives with his parents. You mentioned that a number of American rabbis have given halachic rulings that his participation in the program should be encouraged because he might convert. Do not associate yourself with their programs. You will receive much greater reward by disassociating from them than the possible benefit that might result.

I am being deliberately brief in my comments here - even though there is clearly much more to mention. That is because the plague of intermarriage has already spread here to the Holy Land – the palace of the King. The Holy One Blessed be He should help us and quickly bring into actuality our Redemption. Eliyahu should come and purify our camp so that we are fit to receive the countenance of our righteous Moshiach.