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Rabbi Marc Angel is Founder and Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

How should we treat friends and family members who inter-marry?

Each situation is unique and needs to be evaluated separately. There isn't one correct or effective answer to this question.

Halakha distinguishes between a mumar le-tei'avon (who sins for personal pleasure) and a mumar le-hach'is (who sins defiantly). Often, Jews who intermarry are in the first category. They happened to meet a non-Jewish person, entered a friendly relationship, and fell in love. Such individuals may still maintain a strong Jewish identity and may want their children to be raised as Jews. In these cases, it often is best to maintain cordial relationships with the intermarried relative or friend in the hope that they will eventually come closer. Perhaps their non-Jewish spouse will convert.

When a Jewish woman intermarries, her children will be halakhically Jewish. We certainly would want the children to be raised as Jewishly as possible. Alienating their mother would be counter-productive.

In the case of a mumar le-hach'is, we would naturally feel less conciliatory. The person has willfully and spitefully chosen to break with the Jewish people. We would have strong feelings of betrayal. Yet, even in these cases, we need to consider the Jewishness of future children. Even if the mumar le-hach'is deeply disappoints us, we should think long and hard before cutting off all connections with him or her.

Intermarriage rates continue to rise, and the Orthodox community is not immune. The stigma that once attached to intermarriage has been diminishing even among many who identify as Orthodox Jews. Whether we like it or not, dealing

with intermarried relatives and friends is an ongoing challenge. The quality of hesed is an important asset.

Is it proper to casually sit on the floor (say, to play with one's children or at kumsitz) when it is not Tisha B'Av?

The real question is: why shouldn’t one sit on the floor to play with one’s children or at a kumsitz? The halakha has many prohibitions, but there’s no prohibition to sitting on the floor.

Why, then, are some people averse to sitting on the floor? The most obvious answer is that this is a practice associated with mourning. Some have an emotional/visceral discomfort with doing something that reflects mourning. Similarly, some disapprove of walking around the house in socks, since that also evokes the custom of not wearing leather shoes during Shiva or on Tisha B’Av.

If indeed someone has an aversion to sitting on the floor, that is a private decision. But for those who see this as a needless stringency, let them sit on the floor as they think best.

Is It Proper to Own a Gun?

The National Safety Council reported that in 2020 over 45,000 people died in the United States from gun wounds. While most entailed crimes of murder or suicide, over 500 people died through gun-related accidents. Having a gun in one’s house, unless carefully locked away, is an invitation to disaster.

If someone feels that owning a gun is vital to the safety of oneself and family, then one should train carefully on the use of the gun. One should be absolutely sure that the gun is kept locked and out of reach of others—including children—who could be tempted to use it unsafely.

Given the general rise in crime and the specific rise in anti-Jewish crime, it is (unfortunately) becoming more common to think about owning a gun as a means of self-defense. The problem is that owning a gun does not in itself provide safety. The criminals are more adept at gun use and are likely to act more quickly and

more violently if resisted by an amateur gun-holder.

While I think it is preferable for civilians not to own a gun, it is understandable why some feel the need for a gun in order to defend themselves, their families and businesses. If one is to own a gun, though, he/she must be thoroughly trained on its use. The gun must be stored in an absolutely safe manner so as to avoid accidental shootings.

Instead of giving one peace of mind, owning a gun might have the opposite effect of causing ongoing anxiety. The exception would be where a person feels so threatened that gun ownership becomes imperative. Each person must evaluate the risk/benefit ratio of gun ownership.