Dear Alice,

I'm upset because I am dating this Jewish guy who I love very much and who loves me. The problem is that in his parents’ eyes, I am not the "perfect" woman for him because I am not Jewish. I understand their concern that Judaism is passed through the mother, but I have made it known that I would be more than willing to convert. Yet I don't think that they are completely satisfied. They often ask my boyfriend how this and that Jewish woman is doing and it really upsets me. I've told my boyfriend this a number of times, but his way of dealing with it is to deny it and say that I am hallucinating.

I really don't know what to do. I don't want him to get upset or question his parents on account of me (because he really does have a great relationship with them), but I don't see how it can work out between us until this problem is resolved. Actually, I thought that everything was resolved until recently. I mean we are going to be graduating soon and would like to be engaged within the next three or four years, which I think is really beginning to frighten his parents. You see, I think that they were counting on our relationship ending as soon as we graduated, and now we're hoping to stay in the same city after college. I don't know what to do because we are both family oriented and this just isn't going to work out unless things get resolved. It would be a real shame too. It's upsetting me so much that I'm beginning to see my boyfriend in a different way.

?The shiksa

Answer

Dear The shiksa,

What a frustrating situation for you! While you are able to love your boyfriend regardless your differing religious backgrounds, his parents have not been able to accept you, creating a rift in your relationship. As you may suspect, resolving your feelings and what to do about your relationship will probably require a few (or many) conversations with your boyfriend, and maybe eventually his parents as well.

Try this for starters: begin a frank, non-defensive talk with your boyfriend about your thoughts and beliefs about religion, what it means to you now, and what it might mean in your future together. You could ask him questions too, like: Does he understand you are truly willing to convert? Would your possible conversion fit into his religious beliefs? Is the religion issue as important to him as it seems to be to his parents? Would he ever stay in a relationship or
make a serious commitment like marriage if he didn't have his parent's approval? Also be prepared to listen to his feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and expectations about his religion, and separate what each of you wants and believes as individuals and as a couple. Only then can you begin to discuss how his parents act toward you.

At some point you will need to decide what kind of support you need from your boyfriend, especially if his parents continue to bring up the fact that you aren't Jewish (yet). You may be looking for him to stand up to his parents, and he may or may not be willing or able to do that. Maybe religion is important to him, or maybe he is simply seeking his parent's approval. Either way, thinking about what you need from your boyfriend is as important as thinking about what he and his parents need from you.

If, and when, you get some clarity on the religion issue, and what it means to both of you, you can have a discussion about how you feel his parents treat you because you're not Jewish. Rabbis who assist in the conversion process have experience with these sorts of issues, and you'll be able to benefit from their wisdom and experience. If your relationship progresses to that stage, a Rabbi may also be able to help your boyfriend's parents understand your perspective and your predicament. You may also find it helpful to talk with a counselor, either on your own, or with your partner.

Keep in mind that your primary bond is with your boyfriend and not with his parents. Best of luck,

Alice!

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