

APPENDIX 2

2.2 Kohen and Levi: Decision & Commentary continued

Numbers 18). This act of delineating the purity requirements of the Kohanim (and by extension the Levi'im) proceeds out of a desire to ensure the sanctity of the Temple and emphasizes its importance in the life and devotion of the Jewish people. As the Rambam notes, "In order to raise the estimation of the Temple, those who ministered therein received great honor; and the Priests and the Levites were therefore distinguished from the rest" (Moreh Nevuchim III.24). Yeshua and the early followers of Yeshua exhibited a similar concern for the sanctity of the Temple. Yeshua himself regularly went up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage for the festivals (e.g., John 10:22). After Yeshua's ascension, Kefa and John continued to go to the Temple to participate in prayers services held in conjunction with the sacrificial service (Acts 3:1). Paul exhibited a similar regard for the sanctity of the Temple and purified himself in order to enter the Temple and to participate in its sacrificial service (Acts 21:26).

The MJRC's concern for ensuring proper identification of who is and who is not a Kohen or a Levi proceeds out of a concern for fidelity to Scripture and the weight of Jewish tradition as well as for ensuring the sanctity of the Temple and its role in Jewish life. As such, we have adopted a stricter position regarding maternal status in determining who is a Kohen or Levi than we do in determining Jewish status (see 2.1).

Similarly, this definition does not reflect an egalitarian position regarding who is a Kohen or a Levi and recognizes only men as having the full and unambiguous status of a Kohen or a Levi. As such, the MJRC holds that the daughter of a Kohen (a bat Kohen) or a Levi (a bat Levi) does not confer the halachic status of a Kohen or a Levi to her children. In making this ruling, the MJRC does not address the question of what functions a female from a Kohen or Levi family could perform but only determines that she does not confer the halachic status of a Kohen or a Levi to her children. Whether a child is a Kohen or a Levi is a status only conferred by the child's father if he is a Kohen or a Levi himself.

2.3 JEWS, GENTILES, & MESSIANIC JEWISH CONGREGATIONS: INTRODUCTION

What is a Messianic Jewish Congregation?

THE MJRC UNDERSTANDS MESSIANIC Jewish congregations to be synagogues that honor Yeshua as Messiah and find in Him the embodiment and fullness of Judaism. They differ from Christian churches in that full membership is not based solely on a confession of faith (and its sacramental enactment in baptism) but also entails commitment to, identification with, and participation in the Jewish people and its distinctive way of life embodied in the Torah. The Messianic Jewish congregation thus sees itself as part of a wider Jewish community.

Because of its faith in Messiah Yeshua it is also joined to the Churches of the Nations -- or, rather, those Churches are joined to it, inasmuch as they are attached to the nation of Israel through union with Israel's Messiah. The relationship of love and cooperative action between the Messianic

Jewish community and the Christian Churches is the crucial sign that these Churches are now part of an expanded People of God and can look to Israel's history as in a sense their own. However, this sign only has validity insofar as the Messianic Jewish congregation is in fact participating in and expressing the life of the Jewish people as a whole.

This means that the Messianic *ekklesia* consists not only of individual Jews and Gentiles, but also of Jewish and Gentile social environments. For a social environment to be Jewish, it must operate according to patterns and principles that express the Jewish communal experience around the world and through the centuries. Among such patterns is a clear definition of those practices that express the distinctive character of Jewish identity, and which are only appropriately

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undertaken by those who are Jewish. For a social environment to be Jewish, it must also consist largely of Jewish members who bear responsibility for determining its distinctive communal character.

Given the pluralistic character of Western society; the level of assimilation of many contemporary Jews; the intimate bond that joins Messianic Jews with Gentile Christians; the appreciation many Christians have for Judaism; and the particular history of the Messianic Jewish movement, we recognize that Messianic Jewish congregations – especially in the Diaspora – will always involve the participation of non-Jews. Nevertheless, a clear distinction must exist within the Messianic Jewish community between Jews, who are themselves fully part of the Jewish people, and those who are not fully part of that people but participate actively in its life.

By establishing a responsible conversion process, the MJRC has demonstrated its belief that the Jew-Gentile boundary which runs through the midst of the Messianic Jewish congregation must be permeable rather than hermetically sealed. But the establishing of a conversion process likewise demonstrates the MJRC's conviction that the boundary exists. To be real, this boundary must find concrete expression in congregational life. However, it should not be so conspicuous that it undermines the love and mutual respect in the Spirit that should predominate in any community rooted in Messiah Yeshua.

The following decisions seek to uphold such a boundary while honoring both our history as a movement and the many Gentiles who dedicate their lives to promote our movement's success.

**Distinctive Jewish
Practices Within a
Messianic Jewish
Congregation**

THERE ARE MANY JEWISH PRACTICES which may suitably be adopted by non-Jews in a way that honors the Jewish people and tradition. Resting on the Seventh day and avoiding the consumption of pork products are illustrations of such practices. The MJRC does not believe that Gentiles are required to observe these practices, nor do we see Messianic Judaism as a movement charged with promoting such practices for Gentiles. Nevertheless, we also recognize that such customs are permissible, and – when undertaken with the right motives and reasons – may even be commendable.

In contrast, there are other Jewish practices

in which the Jewish identity of the one engaged in the practice is integral to the practice itself. There are two types of such distinctive Jewish practice that will be addressed here: (1) Fundamental rites of passage; and (2) Ritual privileges which identify the person participating in them as a member of the people of Israel and a recipient of the Torah.

We need to consider thoughtfully all of these various practices and rules, in order to fashion a communal set of standards that will enable our congregations to flourish as Jewish social environments dedicated to Messiah Yeshua.

**2.3 JEWS, GENTILES,
& MESSIANIC JEWISH
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2.3.1 It is our conviction that the direction of Messianic Jewish congregations should be the responsibility of Jews alone. Criteria for becoming a member or a leader in a Messianic Jewish congregation should take account of this conviction.

2.3.2 Rites of Passage.

Fundamental Jewish rites of passage are reserved for Jews. Such rites of passage include:

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- B'rit Milah on the eighth day (ritual circumcision), and Simchat Bat Brit, as public events initiating ritually the child into the covenant
- Pidyon HaBen (redemption of the first-born)
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah (we may have a parallel rite of passage for children of Gentile members; however, we will use another name to refer to it)
- Union of marriage solemnized through the traditional rites of Jewish marriage (e.g., Huppah, Ketubah, Sheva Berachot). These may be employed in the case of intermarriage, but not in the marriage of two Gentiles (we may have a parallel marriage rite for Gentile members that includes certain elements from the Jewish rite)

2.3.3 Ritual Privileges.

2.3.3.1 Privileges Associated with Full Membership in a Jewish Community.

Jewish ritual privileges associated with full membership in a Jewish community are limited to Jews. This includes wearing tallit or tefillin; being counted in a minyan; serving as Shaliach Tzibur; reciting a mitzvah berachah; or receiving a Torah aliyah.

However, Gentiles may participate in certain rituals: reciting a mitzvah berachah with the congregation or with Jewish members of their family, receiving a Torah aliyah when done jointly with a Jewish member of their family, and participating in the Torah service as described below. Gentiles may also read publicly from the Besorah and recite publicly English prayers that do not involve the mitzvah berachah and do not refer to the election of Israel or the gift of the Torah to Israel.

2.3.3.2 Torah Aliyot.

Messianic Jews should honor the traditional custom of reserving for Jews Torah aliyot that involve identifying oneself as a direct recipient of the Torah (such as reading from the Torah and reciting the berachah for the gift of the Torah). Nevertheless, it is essential that we also acknowledge that the redemptive work of Yeshua and the sanctifying power of the Spirit bring Christians into a wider orbit around the Torah even as they bring them into the expanded multinational commonwealth of Israel. This acknowledgement should be reflected in Messianic Jewish practice. As an appropriate expression of this reality, we affirm the right of Christians to honor the Sefer Torah by means of physical contact. At the same time, certain ritual roles occur in liturgical contexts that so express the Torah's intimate bond with the Jewish people that they should not normally be undertaken by Christians.

Non-Jews may kiss the Torah as it passes in procession, and they may dance with the Torah on Simchat Torah if the entire congregation is doing so. They may also carry the Torah in the Torah procession. Lifting the Torah (hagbah) and dressing the Torah (gelilah) should normally be restricted to Jews – not because contact is forbidden, but because of the role these ritual acts play within the wider framework of the liturgy.

According to Jewish custom, non-Jews are not permitted direct contact with a Sefer Torah, as an expression of the unique bond between Israel and the Torah. The Torah

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is Israel's Ketubah with Hashem, and only the people of Israel are responsible for the fulfillment of all its mitzvot. Thus, in traditional Jewish settings non-Jews may not lift the Torah, carry the Torah, or dance with the Torah.

