

JANUARY 2022

MESSIANIC
JEWISH
RABBINICAL
COUNCIL

Standards of Observance





Standards *of* Observance

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Standards *of* Observance

The MJRC

The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) was formally established in May 2006. It consists of a group of ordained Messianic Jewish Rabbis and associated leaders who share a common vision for Messianic Jewish practice rooted in Torah, instructed by Tradition, and faithful to Messiah Yeshua in the twenty-first century.

The MJRC had its beginnings five years earlier. At that time a set of Messianic Jewish leaders from New England invited some of their colleagues from outside the region to join them in working on a common set of halakhic standards for themselves and their congregations.

Standards of Observance

While other areas of Messianic Jewish life are of profound importance, such as worship, ethics, education, and social concern, we believed that halakhic standards had received far less attention than their place in Messianic Jewish life warranted. We saw the need for such standards in our own lives, and as Rabbis also received numerous requests from others for halakhic guidance – guidance which up to this point we had been able to provide only in an improvised, ad hoc, and provisional manner.

The standards of observance contained in the present document are the fruit of our continued study and deliberation. They embody in practical form the core beliefs and values that are at the heart of the MJRC.

We, the members of the MJRC, have committed ourselves to implement these standards in our own lives, and to teach and promote them in the congregations we lead. We also commend these standards for the consideration of the entire Messianic Jewish movement, and hope that others outside our immediate sphere will benefit from the work we have done.

The Document

This document includes two types of material. The main body of the document, in sans serif font, consists of decisions approved by the full Council. Each of these decisions derives from hours (and sometimes days) of Council deliberation. Together they constitute the Standards of Observance, referred to in the document's title.

The document also contains reflective introductions and explanatory commentaries on the Standards, printed in a *serif font*. Prepared under the auspices of the MJRC Faith and Halakhic Standards Committee, the commentaries aim to explain the meaning of the Standards, the reasoning behind them, and their importance for

The Document
continued

our lives. While the commentaries are endorsed by the MJRC, they do not possess the same level of authority for the MJRC as the Standards themselves.

Like most Messianic Jews, we acknowledge the Torah as the constitution governing all Jewish life and seek to obey it in accordance with the teaching, example, and redemptive work of Yeshua the Messiah while also drawing upon Jewish tradition, especially those practices and concepts that have won near-universal acceptance by devout Jews through the centuries. This commitment to the Torah has motivated us to seek a common approach to its practical observance.

We rejoice in the opportunity to work together as Messianic Jewish leaders who desire to discover together what obedience to the Torah means for our daily lives. Like others in our movement, we are only beginning the journey. But we are determined to walk together, and to grow steadily in knowledge and observance of the Torah, and in faithfulness to our Righteous Messiah.



Halakhah and Messianic Judaism

1.0 HALAKHAH: INTRODUCTION

Who needs Halakhah?

ACTUALLY, WE ALL DO, FOR VARIOUS reasons. The most obvious is that it was the people of Israel collectively, rather than individuals as individuals, who were called into covenant with God, to honor God by living according to the Torah. This collective call meant that all Israel was responsible for the covenant fidelity of its individual members. A breach by anyone put the entire people in covenant jeopardy – the status of having broken the covenant – which triggers dire consequences.

The clearest illustration of this principle is found in JOSHUA 7, when Joshua and the people of Israel are unexpectedly repelled in their attempt to capture the city of Ai. Hashem had forbidden the people to take any spoils from the city, and the chapter opens by attributing their corporate defeat to an act of individual disobedience: “But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things; for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel” (JOSHUA 7:1). Notice how the sin of one man, Achan, is portrayed as the entire people having broken faith with God – entering into covenant jeopardy. This is why, once Achan is singled out, the entire people must participate in the enforcement of the judicial decree against him (JOSHUA 7:25). Just as the people as a whole were required to obey, so it is the people as a whole who must deal with the consequences of disobedience.

Halakhah is our understanding of what we are holding ourselves and each other responsible to do in honoring God through Torah obedience. We simply cannot hold

each other responsible without such a standard. So it is that we in our congregations need halakhic guidelines to function as *kehillot kodesh* – holy communities.

Secondly, we all need Halakhah because it provides wonderful freedom. We all remember what it was like when we were kids and we said to our mothers, “Ma, I don’t know what to do. I’m bored.” Halakhah gives us guidance as to what to do in every area of life. This comes as a special gift when we keenly want to know “What does it mean for me to glorify God in this situation?” In fact, this is arguably the key question in Jewish spiritual life. Halakhah builds upon the distilled wisdom of countless generations of our people who took seriously their obligations to God and Torah. Halakhah helps us to identify the shape of obedience, so that we might retrace with the stylus of our own lives patterns of holiness worn deep by generations of our forbearers. And when we do so as our gift of love to Hashem, it brings joy, not only to us, but also to Him.

Finally, we all need Halakhah because it not only binds us to a standard of holiness but also looses us from needless guilt and worry. A case in point: David was offended by something Isaac said. Isaac went and apologized to David, but David was not able to forgive – he was too hurt by the offense. Isaac felt terrible about what he had done, and so he returned to David, and apologized a second time. Again, David responded coldly. Now Isaac was desperate. What could he do? He decided to go to David a third time – with the same result.

Isaac then spoke of his dilemma to a friend knowledgeable in Halakhah. His friend

Halakhah Introduction
continued

told him: “Don’t apologize again. Based on Joseph’s experience with his brothers, Halakhah sets the limit of three times in asking someone to forgive an offense – lest one forever be in thrall to a bitter person unable or unwilling to forgive.” Great wisdom! And more than that, great freedom. By telling us not only what to do, but also by setting limits on what one must do, Halakhah has the power to set us free.

When Isaac heeded the voice of his friend and the wisdom of Halakhah, and stopped apologizing, he was free from David’s inability

to forgive and his own self-recrimination. They were both able to get on with their lives – and they are still friends today!

When we interpret and apply Halakhah with wisdom and love, it brings freedom rather than bondage. When we treat Halakhah as an extension of God’s Law, a guideline for communal obedience and relationship, we experience the character it shares with Torah, “the perfect Law that gives liberty” (JAMES 1:25).

Enjoy!

**1.1 THE HALAKHIC
AUTHORITY
OF THE MJRC**

1.1.1 Halakhah and Halakhic Authority

Halakhah refers to the authoritative application of the rules of the Torah in the form of concrete decisions in response to the circumstances of daily life – all in the context of the covenant life of the people of Israel. Because every age, location, culture, and socio-political circumstance is unique, new questions inevitably arise which lead to fresh developments in Halakhah. Thus, while rooted in a stable ground of well-defined and universally recognized laws, Halakhah remains dynamic, a living and growing organism rather than a static and inflexible legal code.

Halakhic authority consists in the communally acknowledged competence to interpret, develop, and apply the rules of the Torah for a particular situation and social group.

1.1.2 Halakhic Authority, the Jewish People, and Rabbinic Tradition

The Torah calls for the establishment of a central court possessing the authority to deal with complex judicial cases where the application of the law is unclear and where the final ruling will presumably constitute a significant legal precedent (Deuteronomy 17:8–13). Later Jewish interpreters understood this text as authorizing not only the communal judicial process but also the expansion, explanation, and application of Jewish law in non-judicial contexts (b. Shabbat 23a). These interpreters likewise claimed that the Sages of the rabbinic tradition constituted the legitimate successors to the central court of Deuteronomy 17.

Matthew 23:2–3 alludes to an interpretation of Deuteronomy 17 resembling that which appears in the rabbinic literature of a later era, and affirms that the “Scribes (i.e., Torah Teachers) and Pharisees” are in some sense the proper heirs of Moses. While the book of Matthew as a whole – and Matthew 23 in particular – levels fierce criticism at the conduct of many of these “Scribes and Pharisees,” its terminology and halakhic orientation have much in common with what we know of the early rabbinic movement. It is likely that the book’s author knew segments of the early rabbinic movement, embraced and promoted many of their core tenets and halakhic perspectives, yet found some of their primary leaders lacking in character, spiritual discernment, and good judgment – as reflected especially

**1.1 The Halakhic
Authority
of the MJRC**
continued

in their response to Yeshua and their treatment of his disciples. In light of the high tensions of the period, the transmission of this qualified endorsement of the “Scribes and Pharisees” in Matthew 23:2–3 – with its allusion to Deuteronomy 17 – is remarkable.

While halakhic authority is vested in particular leaders and groups of leaders, it is fundamentally bestowed by Hashem on the people as a whole (Deuteronomy 16:18; 17:14–15; Esther 9:23, 26–28) – “catholic (i.e., universal) Israel,” as it was called by Solomon Schechter. Though the worldwide community of “catholic Israel” has always been diverse in thought and custom, its wisdom concerning covenantally faithful Jewish life becomes manifest in the general consensus of those Jews who acknowledge Hashem as Israel’s sovereign and affirm the Tanakh as the sacred written medium of divine revelation. Over many centuries this worldwide community has placed its seal upon the rabbinic tradition as the central vehicle by which the Torah – and its halakhic expression for the life of the Jewish people – has been authoritatively transmitted from generation to generation. The MJRC believes that this communal determination faithfully represents the divine purpose for the Jewish people, a purpose which we see as already implicit in Yeshua’s recognition of proto-rabbinic Pharisaic authority in Matthew 23.

**1.1.3 Halakhic Authority, the Bilateral *Ekklesia*, and the Wounded
Two-Fold Tradition**

Though the Sages of the rabbinic tradition are legitimate bearers of halakhic authority, they are not the only leaders with such competence. As the embodiment of heavenly Wisdom and the living Torah, Yeshua himself is the ultimate earthly source of halakhic authority. While he acknowledged the authority of some leaders in the wider Jewish community, he also formed his own messianic sub-community and bestowed upon its designated leaders – the Apostles – the authority to bind and loose (Matthew 16:16–19; 18:18). In doing so, Yeshua was authorizing the Apostles to regulate the life of the messianic community according to their Master’s interpretation of the Torah and according to the guidance of his Spirit who writes the Torah on the hearts of his disciples (Matthew 28:18–20; John 14:26; Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 3:2–3). Following their Master, the Apostles respected the authority of the wider Jewish community and its leaders for the governance of public Jewish life (Acts 23:4–5) but also asserted their freedom to diverge from its rulings when they were clearly incompatible with the commandments of the risen Messiah (Acts 4:18–20; 5:27–32).

The halakhic authority given to the Apostles by Yeshua had a bilateral character, in conformity to the bilateral character of the *ekklesia* in which it was exercised. (The *ekklesia* of Yeshua is inherently bilateral in that it is constituted by two distinct yet united corporate spheres – one which is primarily made up of Jews and the other which is primarily made up of Gentiles.) The halakhah appropriate to the Jewish *ekklesia* differed from the halakhah appropriate to the multinational *ekklesia* (Acts 15:19–21; Acts 21:17–26; 1 Corinthians 7:17–19), and it appears as though each of the Apostles had a mandate to function primarily in one or the other sphere (Galatians 2:7–10).

**1.1 The Halakhic
Authority
of the MJRC**
continued

The tragic disappearance of the Jewish *ekklesia* and its halakhic tradition disrupted the transmission of this bilateral halakhic tradition. In losing its Jewish center and its bilateral context, the entire community of Yeshua's followers suffered a grave wound which disfigured its understanding and application of the Torah. Nevertheless, in its many diverse historical expressions and traditions the multinational *ekklesia* retained its commission from the Messiah to shape a covenantally faithful way of life. Along with this commission came a type of "halakhic" authority (for a community of non-Jews attached to Israel) and the presence of the Spirit; the risen Yeshua continues to speak and act in its midst.

The disappearance of a messianic *ekklesia* within the Jewish people also damaged the halakhic and prophetic capacity of "catholic Israel" – which remains incomplete without the presence of Jewish disciples of Yeshua at its very heart, and without a living connection to the multinational *ekklesia* which has been joined by the Messiah to Israel as its extension among the Gentiles. Nevertheless, in their many diverse historical expressions and traditions, the Jewish people and their recognized leaders have retained their legitimate halakhic authority, and God continues to operate among them and through them in order to shape their life in accordance with the Torah.

1.1.4 Halakhic Authority and the Modern Messianic Jewish Movement

As participants in a movement larger than itself, the MJRC affirms its conviction that Messianic Judaism emerged in the 20th century as a work of Hashem with the twin aims of restoring a Yeshua-following community within the wider Jewish world and a Torah-observant Jewish community within a renewed bilateral *ekklesia*. While claiming to be the resurrected form of a lost community of the past, the Messianic Jewish movement also undeniably lacks direct historical continuity with its ancient prototype.

Messianic Jews see themselves as participating in a movement of spiritual renewal bringing healing to the wounded and divided people of God. We are not ourselves the goal but are servants of a greater purpose for the two communities to which we are bound in diverse ways. As the Pietist movement of the 17th and 18th centuries breathed life into the Christian world, and as the Hasidic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries opened new doors for the revitalization of the Jewish people, so we believe that the Messianic Jewish movement is called to become a gift to the entire two-fold people of God.

As such, the authority of the Messianic Jewish movement is prophetic rather than institutional. In keeping with the historical pattern of all such renewal movements, its legitimacy is not something that can be determined unequivocally in the present. The prophetic claim of the Messianic Jewish movement now remains a disputed proposition which can only be definitively confirmed or disconfirmed by its future fruit and by the eventual recognition or non-recognition it receives from the wider communities in which it claims a prophetic role.

1.1.5 Halakhic Authority and the MJRC

Within the context of the Messianic Jewish movement and its prophetic role, the MJRC sees itself as called to serve a particular halakhic function. The MJRC does

**1.1 The Halakhic
Authority
of the MJRC**
continued

not view itself as the only halakhic authority in the Messianic Jewish movement, nor does it claim to be the movement's highest halakhic authority. It does, however, believe that it has halakhic authority for its own immediate sphere and for those beyond that sphere who look to it for guidance. The MJRC believes that its role is to be a pioneer in the development of a halakhic way of life among Messianic Jews, and thereby to stimulate serious halakhic thinking and practice within the movement as a whole. It holds this conviction for the following reasons:

- a. The MJRC was founded by Rabbis ordained within the first congregational association in the Messianic Jewish movement (The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations or UMJC), an organization distinguished within the wider movement for its appreciation of the Jewish and Christian traditions in all their richness and diversity, and for its support of theological education;
- b. The MJRC is characterized by a commitment to active participation in the community and tradition of the Jewish people, and to respectful and teachable partnership with the community and tradition of the multinational *ekklesia*;
- c. The MJRC includes some of the finest scholars in the Messianic Jewish movement and rabbis who are capable of interacting knowledgeably with classic Jewish texts and halakhic tradition;
- d. The MJRC tests all of its decisions through a process of practical and pastoral application in the congregations in which its member rabbis live and serve;
- e. The MJRC is the only leadership body in the Messianic Jewish movement that has engaged in the halakhic process over an extended period of time, laboring together since the beginning of this century to develop corporate standards of Torah observance, in faithfulness to the biblical text and with sensitivity to the Spirit of Yeshua.

As is the case for the authority of our movement as a whole, the legitimacy of our claims cannot be determined unequivocally in the present but awaits a divine judgment to be rendered in the course of future events. If our claims are justified over time, then we are an integral part of a process in which the bilateral halakhic authority of the apostolic tradition is being restored, the bilateral *ekklesia* is being healed, and a corporate Torah-faithful witness to Yeshua is restored to the Jewish people.

**1.2 THE HALAKHIC
APPROACH OF
THE MJRC**

In this section, we will discuss the function of Scripture, tradition, and new circumstances in the halakhic process.

1.2.1 Scripture and the Halakhic Process

Our approach to halakhic decision-making is based on a recognition of the paramount importance and authority of Scripture (i.e., the Tanakh and the Apostolic Writings) in the development of Halakhah.

In accord with Jewish tradition as a whole, we recognize the unique place of the Tanakh in matters of Halakhah. Within the Tanakh, the Torah (the Pentateuch) articulates the mitzvot and is therefore always foundational in the development

**1.2 The Halakhic
Approach
of the MJRC**
continued

of Halakhah. In principle, issues become halakhic because they are connected to some area of life in which the Torah reveals these authoritative norms. The Prophets and the Writings amplify and clarify the intent of Torah.

As Messianic Jews, we affirm the special precedence given to scriptural law in traditional Halakhah, while likewise affirming the scriptural character of the Apostolic Writings (i.e., the New Testament) and the unique ways in which they contribute to halakhic development. These writings convey to us the teachings of Yeshua and the Apostles and serve as an entirely reliable guide to the intent of the Mosaic Torah.

Just as teaching associated directly with the person of Moses is foundational in relation to other material in the Tanakh, so teaching associated directly with the person of Yeshua is foundational in relation to other material in the Apostolic Writings. This principle is evident in the way Paul contrasts halakhic instruction deriving from the teaching of Yeshua with his own rulings on related matters (1 Corinthians 7:10, 12, 25), without detracting from the authority he possessed as an Apostle.

In the Gospels, Yeshua acted as Israel's pre-eminent prophetic teacher who illumined the purpose of the Torah and the inner orientation we should have in fulfilling it. We consider his teaching and example as definitive in matters of Halakhah as in every other sphere and therefore his teaching has a direct bearing on how we interpret the Torah as a whole and on how we address particular halakhic questions. At the same time, we recognize that most of his teaching was only indirectly halakhic in character, and that care must be exercised in interpretation so that prophetic hyperbole not be read as binding legislation (e.g., Matthew 5:29–30).

The Book of Acts and the Apostolic Letters provide crucial halakhic guidance for us in our lives as Messianic Jews. They are particularly important in showing us how the early Jewish disciples of Yeshua combined a concern for Israel's distinctive calling according to the Torah with recognition of the new relationship with God and Israel available to Gentiles in the Messiah. They also provide guidelines relevant to other areas of Messianic Jewish Halakhah, including (but not restricted to) areas such as distinctive Messianic rites, household relationships, and dealing with secular authorities.

1.2.2 Jewish Tradition and the Halakhic Process

In addressing matters of Halakhah, Scripture always has the highest halakhic authority and sanctity. Thus, when traditional Judaism distinguishes between laws that are *d'oraita* (i.e., ordained by the Tanakh) and those that are *d'rabbanan* (i.e., established by rabbinic authority), precedence is always given to those that are *d'oraita*.

Nevertheless, in the real-life unfolding of the halakhic process other sources often play a more visible role than Scripture in the formation of halakhic principles and the detailing of halakhic norms. While all Halakhah is rooted in Scripture, the text usually provides limited information on how the mitzvot are to be lived out and how they are to be adapted to new circumstances. Over the centuries, our rabbis deliberated and developed other sources for the halakhic process, central among

**1.2 The Halakhic
Approach
of the MJRC**
continued

them are the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds, with the latter having special relevance for mitzvot observed by Jews living in the Land of Israel. In order to add concrete structure and substance to our present halakhic decision-making, our first consideration is the way the mitzvot have been elaborated in these sources and understood and observed by Jews throughout history and in the present.

Jewish tradition holds that Hashem has given substantial authority over the practical outworking of the Torah in Israel's corporate life to the people and their recognized leaders. This principle is symbolized most powerfully by the ancient role of the rabbinic court in announcing the New Moon and in intercalating the calendar. The pattern of holy days was established in the Torah, but the determination of precisely when those days were to be observed rested in the hands of the people of Israel and its leaders in the Land of Israel (b. Rosh Hashanah 25a-25b) who relayed this determination to the Jewish people everywhere (Sefer Hamitzvot 153). As noted above, this principle finds support in Yeshua's teaching in Matthew 23:3, which urges obedience to the decisions of the "Scribes (Torah Teachers) and Pharisees," echoing Deuteronomy 17:10 and resembling later rabbinic use of the same text. As disciples of Yeshua, we are reluctant to depart from those halakhic practices that have been formulated by the Sages, accepted as normative by Jews throughout the centuries, and acknowledged by most branches of Judaism. On this basis, we do not need to justify adherence to such practices.

It is sufficient to show that they are widely accepted and observed traditions. To depart from such traditions, on the other hand, we must be able to provide some reason – theological, exegetical, or practical. The weight required for these reasons will vary for each halakhic tradition according to its centrality in the framework of Jewish life and the consensus it enjoys among committed Jews.

Nevertheless, if the teaching and example of Messiah Yeshua and the Apostolic Writings warrant a departure from certain traditional rulings, we are responsible to strike out in new directions. One of the most significant of these new directions follows from the teaching and example of Messiah Yeshua, whose mission took him more to the sick than to the healthy, and who, while welcoming the righteous and the pious, eagerly pursued the *am ha'aretz* (those less scrupulous in their observance). We recognize that our halakhic orientation must take into account those Jews who have been alienated from their own heritage. Eager to heal the wounds of Israel, we also seek to lead those of ambiguous Jewish status back to the way of their ancestors. While we are committed to not diluting the demands of the Torah, we want to bring many near to Torah who are now far from it. When we depart from certain traditional rulings, we do not depart from tradition itself but seek its repair.

We recognize that the new circumstances of our times require adaptation in traditional practices. The various branches of contemporary Judaism take this into account in their corporate responsa, with varying degrees of willingness to depart from traditional norms. Our halakhic decision-making too requires thoughtful reflection on these new circumstances, and the changes they may require. In this process, we review the halakhic analyses and rulings of all branches of Judaism to learn how they have responded and are responding to many of the same challenges we face. The halakhic way of life commended by the MJRC should

**1.2 The Halakhic
Approach
of the MJRC**
continued

not be viewed as an endorsement of any one of these branches as either the functional starting point or goal of Messianic Jewish life. We do, however, seek to honor those practices which have withstood the test of time.

1.2.3 Christian Tradition and the Halakhic Process

As noted above, the halakhic authority given to the Apostles by Yeshua had a bilateral character corresponding to the bilateral character of the *ekklesia* of Jews and Gentiles in which it was exercised. The disruption in the transmission of this bilateral tradition caused by the tragic disappearance of the Jewish *ekklesia* disfigured the understanding of the Torah passed on within the *ekklesia* of the nations, but it did not nullify the *ekklesia*'s enduring apostolic authority in its own proper sphere. This means that in certain matters we must learn not only from Jewish tradition but also from ecclesial tradition.

We have already stated our acceptance of the Apostolic Writings as Scripture, and the central role those writings play in our interpretation of the Torah. In doing so, we are recognizing as authoritative a collection of books which, while composed mainly or exclusively by Jews, has been canonized, preserved, and transmitted to us by Christian tradition. We are grateful to the *ekklesia* of the nations for this treasure which it has cherished and kept, and which now enriches us.

However, the disappearance of the Jewish *ekklesia* and the growth of anti-Jewish sentiment and belief in the historical church undermined the authority of ecclesial teachers in their halakhic interpretation of the Apostolic Writings as applied to the distinctive features of Jewish life. Nevertheless, some elements of the halakhic approach of Yeshua and the Apostles (e.g., the centrality of the two love commandments) were equally applicable to both wings of the bilateral *ekklesia*, and in its treatment of such matters ecclesial tradition retains much wisdom which can benefit Jews as well as Gentiles. Similarly, some elements of the non-halakhic teaching of Yeshua and the Apostles (e.g., concerning the deity of Yeshua) were equally applicable to both wings of the bilateral *ekklesia*, and in its treatment of such matters ecclesial tradition is again worthy of our study and discerning reception.

The Apostolic Writings also command certain practices (e.g., *Tevilat Mashiach* and *Zichron Mashiach*) without providing concrete detail on how they are to be observed. Just as the practices given through Moses cannot be adequately lived-out apart from the living tradition of those Jews who have sought to do so from generation to generation, so the practices ordained by Yeshua cannot be adequately lived-out apart from the living tradition of those disciples of Yeshua who have sought to do so from generation to generation. As disciples of Yeshua, our manner of living out the commandments given through Moses will sometimes diverge from that of other Jews, but serious engagement with and learning from Jewish tradition is essential to the formation of that manner of life. Similarly, as Torah-observant Jews our manner of living out the commandments of Yeshua will sometimes diverge from that of gentile disciples of Yeshua, even though the commandments themselves are shared in common. Nevertheless, serious engagement with and learning from Christian tradition is essential to the formation of our practice of those commandments.

1.2 The Halakhic Approach of the MJRC
continued

1.2.4 Our Challenging Task

We cannot know how the bilateral *ekklesia* would have developed had its Jewish corporate expression survived and thrived. Similarly, we cannot know how Jewish tradition would have developed had the Jewish disciples of Yeshua been accepted and respected by our entire people at an early stage of the development of Halakhah. We do not strive to articulate or re-create what might have been. However, we cannot avoid engaging in the task of shaping today's Messianic Jewish practice from the textual sources and other resources available to us today. This task places enormous demands on Messianic Jewish leaders, requiring of us a serious devotion to study, prayer, discussion, and corporate decision-making in a spirit of humility and charity. At the same time, we believe that the resurrected Messiah dwells among us and within us, and we rely upon his ongoing guidance as we seek to carry on his work of raising up the fallen tent of David within the people of Israel (Acts 15:14–18; Amos 9:11–12).

1.3 THE MESSIANIC JEWISH RABBI: DECISIONS & COMMENTARY

1.3.1 A Messianic Jewish Rabbi is a Jewish follower of Yeshua qualified by a supervised course of study, authorized by his or her ordaining authority, and empowered by the Spirit through the rite of ordination to expound and apply Torah as fulfilled in and mediated through the person, teaching, and work of Yeshua. As a custodian of Israel's revelation and holy tradition, including the Apostolic Writings, and as a disciple of Mashiach Yeshua Rabbenu, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi teaches Israel the ways of God and models this tradition for the members of the Messianic Jewish community in a manner imbued with the Spirit of God.

This definition of the nature of a Messianic Jewish Rabbi builds upon an understanding of the essence of what has been and continues to be common to all rabbis throughout every generation. A rabbi is defined first and foremost by his or her relationship to our sacred tradition and our community. In this role, a rabbi serves as a teacher and symbolic exemplar of Torah for the community, principally in matters of religious practice and instruction. This historical understanding of the nature of a rabbi is reflected in the text of the MJRC's Teudat Semikha (Ordination Certificate):

This document certifies that (insert full English name) has completed a course of study in the Tanakh and its interpretation, the Apostolic Writings, and the writings of the sages of the Jewish people and demonstrated exemplary character, spirituality, and fidelity to the commandments of Torah in order to become a spiritual leader and be known as a Rabbi and Teacher in Israel.

May ADONAI be with him/her and prosper him/her through the Holy Spirit in his work to elevate the Torah and reverence of God. May he merit to magnify and exalt the practice of Torah as it is fulfilled and mediated in the person, the teaching, and the service of the Messiah, Yeshua, to influence all streams of our people and to draw them near to Yeshua our Messiah. Amen.

According to this definition, five things qualify an individual to serve as a Messianic Jewish Rabbi. First, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi must be Jewish in accordance with the standards of Jewish status affirmed by the MJRC. Stating explicitly that a Rabbi must be a Jew is an assertion that the MJRC stands in the historic understanding of the Rabbinate in the wider Jewish community.

1.3 The Messianic Jewish Rabbi: Decisions & Commentary
continued

Second, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi must be a follower of Yeshua who exhibits commitment to Yeshua in both word and deed. Commitment to Yeshua is what distinguishes the Messianic Jewish Rabbinate. Messianic Jewish Rabbis should exemplify the life, message, and teachings of Yeshua as they seek to teach “Israel the ways of God and model this tradition for the members of the Messianic Jewish community.”

Third, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi must be qualified by a supervised course of study. Attainment of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinate cannot be acquired through self-study. Anyone aspiring to rabbinic ordination must study Scripture, learn halakhah and the traditions of Israel, and be strengthened in devotion to Yeshua the Messiah through a course of training under the supervision of one or more Messianic Jewish Rabbis (1 Peter 5:5). Such a course of study is essential for the personal and spiritual formation of the candidate and for the development of Messianic Jewish Rabbis who display integrity of thought and action (kol talmid chacham she'ein tocho kevaro einno talmid chacham “Any talmid chacham whose character does not correspond to their exterior is not a talmid chacham”; b. Yoma 72b; cf. Matthew 15:11). This understanding of rabbinic education is modeled on the practice of Messiah Yeshua and his disciples and is also evinced in classical rabbinic education (e.g., Matthew 4:18–25; b. Berachot 27a).

Fourth, ordination to the Messianic Jewish Rabbinate can only be authorized through the agency of an ordaining authority, which is normally affiliated with the educational institution overseeing the candidate's preparation for the rabbinate. This understanding of the role of the ordaining authority in ordaining a Messianic Jewish Rabbi is adopted from traditional Jewish practice and is consonant with historic Christian practice.

Fifth, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi must be empowered by the Spirit through the rite of ordination. The Spirit plays a central role in ordaining people to particular vocations (e.g., Numbers 27:18; Deuteronomy 34:9; 2 Kings 2:14–15; Acts 6:5–6, 13:2–3; 1 Timothy 4:14). Throughout the Scriptures, the giving of the Spirit is conjoined with the laying-on of hands by those in authority.

According to this definition, four functions are the essential responsibilities of all Messianic Jewish Rabbis. First, Messianic Jewish Rabbis “expound and apply Torah as fulfilled in and mediated through the person, teaching, and work of Yeshua.” The statement understands Torah in the broadest sense. At its core, the Torah entails the Scriptures revealed to Israel and canonized in the Tanakh and Apostolic Writings. The Messianic Jewish Rabbi expounds and applies this Torah in light of the tradition, including the historical enrichment of the biblical heritage within the life of the community. For a Messianic Jewish Rabbi, his or her relationship to our sacred tradition and our community is approached through the person, work, and teaching of Yeshua our Rabbi and is informed by the teaching of the historic and universal Body of Messiah.

Second, Messianic Jewish Rabbis are custodians “of Israel's revelation and holy tradition.” They stand at the nexus between the continuous tradition of the past and the communities of the present. They are the link mediating the heritage of the past to living communities today. For the Messianic Jewish Rabbinate, the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible and the Apostolic Writings constitute God's special revelation to Israel. Israel's holy tradition consists of the historic tradition of rabbinic interpretation and halakhic discourse. As custodians “of Israel's revelation and holy tradition,” it is incumbent upon all Messianic Jewish Rabbis to attain Hebrew literacy, i.e., the ability to read and teach our texts, including the Siddur, with comprehension. Attainment of competence in

1.3 The Messianic Jewish Rabbi: Decisions & Commentary
continued

Modern Hebrew is also commended as it exhibits the concern of Messianic Jewish Rabbis for the State of Israel and the ability of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinate to interact with this significant center of Jewish life. Basic competence in Aramaic and Greek is also commended.

Third, central to the vocation of Messianic Jewish Rabbis is the role of teaching “Israel the ways of God.” Their vocation is not merely exercised within the Messianic Jewish community but also extends to all Israel. Messianic Jewish Rabbis should call all Jewish people to deeper faithfulness to their covenantal responsibilities as Jews through the mitzvot and to clear and ongoing commitment to Messiah Yeshua. Messianic Jewish Rabbis should not regard the calling of teaching Israel the ways of God lightly. Assisting all Jews in life-cycle rituals or in the performance of any mitzvah is an opportunity to help another Jew fulfill his covenantal responsibilities and thus live in greater accordance with God’s ways. In doing so, Messianic Jewish Rabbis model and teach Messiah’s mandate to call all Jewish people back to greater covenantal faithfulness (Matthew 15:24).

Fourth, Messianic Jewish Rabbis are called to serve for the Messianic Jewish community as exemplars of the tradition they have received. The Tanakh, the Apostolic Writings, and rabbinic literature are filled with examples of people learning the ways of God not only through verbal teaching but also through their actions. Messianic Jewish Rabbis should be attentive to the fact that their modeling of the tradition cannot be undertaken apart from the work of God’s Spirit (Numbers 27:18; Deuteronomy 34:9; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 2:11–12). They should seek to model “this tradition for the members of the Messianic Jewish community in a manner imbued with the Spirit of God.”

It is important to note that this definition is not meant to define how a Messianic Jewish Rabbi should spend the majority of his or her time, nor suggest that the essential and universal rabbinical role defined here captures the most important functions that every rabbi must fulfill. In fact, many, if not most, of our rabbis will continue to focus the majority of their time and energy in their roles as spiritual leaders for our congregations, administering our communal organizations, serving as chaplains, teaching in our educational institutions or serving bi-vocationally.

1.3.2 In the context of congregational life, the senior rabbi appointed by that community serves among them as their Mara d’Atra, i.e., mentor, guide, and authority in matters of religious practice and teaching, encouraging growth and unity that express the life of the Spirit of God.

The MJRC affirms the wisdom of traditional Jewish practice of deferring to the senior rabbi appointed by that community to serve as their “mentor, guide and authority in matters of religious practice and teaching.” This role, known in Aramaic as Mara d’Atra (literally “Master of the Place”) is based on tannaitic precedent (m. Avot 1:6; b. Chulin 116a) and is affirmed by the later Amoraim and Geonim (e.g., b. Shabbat 19b, 46a; b. Eruvin 94a). The importance of the Mara d’Atra in local synagogue life continues to be affirmed in the Conservative or Masorti and Orthodox communities.

The Mara d’Atra is appointed to serve his or her community and provide for them in all areas of life. The Mara d’Atra should encourage personal and spiritual growth among the members of the community, guiding them to deeper fidelity to the Torah and Messiah Yeshua. This point is particularly important given that the Mara d’Atra is responsible for the spiritual care and leadership of the community (Hebrews 13:17). While the

1.3 The Messianic Jewish Rabbi: Decisions & Commentary
continued

responsibility and authority of the Mara d'Atra are great in a local synagogue, he or she is not immune from criticism if his or her decisions are made in error or in opposition to explicit biblical commands (see the comments of Rabbi Menachem Meiri and Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli, i.e., the Ritva, to b. Eruvin 94a).

The appointment of a Mara d'Atra is important for each local community in that it establishes clearly from whom members of that community should seek definitive guidance in matters of religious practice and teaching. In communities of which several ordained rabbis are members or appointed to serve in rabbinical roles in the community, the adoption of the tradition of the Mara d'Atra clarifies lines of authority among them and for the community.

1.3.3 In concert with the example of Messiah Yeshua and the teaching of scripture concerning the leadership roles of men and women, we affirm the ordination of women as Messianic Jewish Rabbis.

In issuing this standard, the MJRC welcomes women to use their God-given spiritual gifts in our community as leaders, rabbis, and teachers.

Scripture contains a number of examples of women who hold significant roles in leading and shaping the life of the people of Israel and the early community of Yeshua's followers – Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Esther, Junia (Romans 16:7), and Phoebe (Romans 16:1) to name a few. Scripture often describes these women as having significant positions of leadership within the community: judges, prophets, deacons, apostles, etc. We regard these women leaders in the Tanach and Apostolic Writings as models rather than as exceptional cases reflecting communal disorder or the lack of men of sufficient caliber to serve as leaders in the community.

In the case of Deborah, the book of Judges describes her as both prophet and judge, roles which Jewish tradition understands as central to the position of rabbi (Judges 4:4). Traditional interpretation of Deborah's work as judge views her as a paradigm of the role a woman can have in Jewish religious life (see the Tosafot in b. Gittin 88b; b. Baba Kamma 15a; b. Nida 50a; cf. Sefer haChinuch 158). According to these opinions, a wise woman (Ishah Hachamah) can teach and instruct, and a community may accept such a woman as its spiritual and halakhic guide, which are central communal roles of a rabbi.

*In addition to the cases where women are explicitly named, scripture may testify to women serving in leadership roles where groups of leaders are mentioned, and scripture does not specify that the group only consists of men. In both ancient Greek and Hebrew, mixed groups of men and women are described with nouns, pronouns, and verbal suffixes that are marked as masculine (e.g., *benei Yisrael* = "children of Israel," not "sons of Israel"). Given Paul's reference to specific women serving as apostles and deacons (e.g., Romans 16:1, 7), it may well be the case that when Paul speaks of broad categories of assembly leadership in other letters written by him that those lists include both men and women (1 Corinthians 12:28; Philippians 1:1; Ephesians 2:20; 4:11).*

*Additionally, Messiah Yeshua himself elevated the status of women in a highly patriarchal Greco-Roman culture. For example, he transgressed social boundaries by talking with the Samaritan woman at the well about theology, worship, infidelity, and eternal life (John 4). He also welcomed women into his circle of students and friends. These women were the last at the cross (Mark 15:40–47). They were the first at his tomb and first to bear witness to his resurrection, the very substance of the *besorah**

1.3 The Messianic Jewish Rabbi: Decisions & Commentary
continued

(e.g., Matthew 28:8–10). Messiah Yeshua's first disciples continued this tradition of transgressing the dominant cultural norms of their day by elevating the status of women in their communities. Paul also makes no distinction between spiritual gifts given to men and women (1 Corinthians 12:1–31). In fact, the outpouring of the Spirit recorded in Acts 2:17–18 (quoting Joel 2:28–32) includes both men and women exercising spiritual gifts (in particular, prophecy) in partnership and equality in God's kingdom.

We recognize that there are passages in the letters of Paul that historically have been interpreted to restrict women's participation in teaching and communal leadership in settings involving men (1 Corinthians 14:26–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15). The broader trajectory of Scripture regarding women, the examples from the Pauline epistles of women functioning in leadership roles (including teaching) noted earlier, and Paul's own teaching on the equality of spiritual gifts complicate such a reading. In the case of 1 Corinthians 14:34, we understand the specific injunction to be made to women who are in the position of learners not teachers and concerns their talking (*lalein*) disruptively while someone else is instructing the congregation. In the case of 1 Timothy 2:12, there is good support for understanding the restriction as being against women who domineer or usurp (*authetein*) proper authority (see Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 291–444). In this regard, the restriction is not against women exercising authority or teaching *per se* but in exercising authority in such a way as to usurp appropriately ordained or designated authority.

We make this decision to affirm the ordination of women because of the teaching of Scripture and tradition regarding this matter. Nevertheless, it is important to note that we are not alone in our affirmation of the ordination of women. There is in fact a great transition in the wider Jewish world to welcoming women to serve the community as rabbis (as well as women being ordained as ministers and serving in pastoral roles in a number of Protestant denominations). There are rare cases of women serving in rabbinical roles before the 20th century. For instance, in the 17th century Asenath Barzani served as a rabbi among the Kurds. In the 19th century, Hannah Rachel Verbermacher was a female Hasidic rebbe in Ludmir. The first formally ordained woman was Regina Jonas in Germany in 1935. In America, major streams of liberal Judaism have followed suit: Reform (1972), Reconstructionist (1974), Renewal (1981), Conservative (1985), and Humanist (1999). In general, the various streams of Orthodoxy have not embraced women's ordination. Some leading figures and institutions in Modern Orthodoxy such as Rabbi Avi Weiss in America and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem have founded rabbinical training programs in recent years that either include women or are specifically geared towards women. Rabba Sara Hurwitz was ordained by Rabbi Weiss in 2010. Some leading Orthodox rabbinical figures have issued *teshuvot* in support of women's ordination including Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, Rabbi Dr. Daniel Sperber, and Rabbi Joshua Maroof.

Consonant with the standards of the MJRC, we affirm that all Messianic Jewish Rabbis, male or female, should view the observance of the mitzvot as central to their rabbinical vocation. Women who are studying for the rabbinate or ordained as Messianic Jewish Rabbis should voluntarily take upon themselves the obligation to observe time-bound mitzvot from which they have traditionally been exempted (e.g., *Shema* and *Tefillin*; *m. Kiddushin* 1:7; *m. Berachot* 3:3; see Section 4.3.6.2 “Men, Women, and Basic Practices Related to Prayer” of the MJRC Standards).

Issues of Status

2.0 JEWISH STATUS: *CC* INTRODUCTION

Who is Jewish?

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ENTIRE OF ITSELF. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” (John Donne). The same could be said of our movement – we are not an island, entitled to do exactly as we please without reference to others. We are interconnected, not only with each other in our congregations and in our movement, but also with our people Israel, with Yeshua-believers from all nations, with all humankind, past, present, and future. Therefore, what we do must be done with due respect for all concerned.

Because Jews are a shrinking minority, the issue of who claims Jewish identity and on what basis is an especially heated one. Although being Jewish in 21st century America exacts little or no social cost, this is a recent phenomenon. All of us who are Jews have parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents who endured persecutions, deprivations, and devastations simply because they were Jews. And since we are connected not only to our immediate families, but also to the Jewish people throughout time, when we claim Jewish identity, we are laying hold of something precious and costly to a people who have suffered millennia for the privilege of calling themselves Jews.

The Jewish people exists today, and will exist forever, because God has promised that it will do so, and because God is faithful to His promise. At the same time, the primary causality of God is normally active in the world through intermediate causes. In this case one of the means God has used to preserve Israel has been Israel’s concern for a national consensus on who is and is not a Jew. As a divine instrument employed for a holy end, this concern – and the discussion and decisions it has produced –

should be treated with honor and respect.

Therefore, whenever we in the Messianic Jewish movement lay claim to Jewish identity, or whenever we attribute that identity to one of our number, we must take pains to do so in a manner that respects the norms of the wider Jewish world.

In a movement like ours, with many Gentiles who value Jewish life, it would be easy to succumb to the temptation to assign Jewish identity to whoever wanted to lay claim to it. We must not do so. People do not become Jews on their own terms, nor on the basis of their avowed spiritual testimonies. Jewish identity is a communal reality that can only be granted by appropriate community representatives, not something one grabs for oneself from the table of available options or establishes independently through private revelation.

This must not and does not mean that Gentiles are to be denied status in our movement, or that such persons should regard themselves, or be regarded by others, as second-class citizens, God forbid. Nevertheless, of those who are born Gentile only those who have gone through a responsible halakhic conversion are entitled to claim the name “Jew.” Some, who have Jewish ancestors three or four generations past, should more properly identify themselves as persons of Jewish background.

For those of us who are Jews, or converts through a credible communal process, the definition provided in our standards is one the Jewish world can appreciate as being respectful of the wider community at whose table we are now claiming our place.

**2.1 JEWISH STATUS:
DECISION &
COMMENTARY**

2.1.1 Following the consensus of Jewish tradition, we recognize as a Jew anyone who is born of a Jewish mother or who is a convert to Judaism.

We also recognize as a Jew anyone who is born of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother if that person has undertaken public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people.

In 1947 the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) of the Reform movement affirmed in principle the traditional understanding that children born of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother required conversion to be considered Jews. However, they also ruled that the conversion need not be a formal event involving mikveh and beit din: “With regard to infants, the declaration of the parents to raise them as Jews shall be deemed sufficient for conversion.” In practice, therefore, the children were accepted as Jews if the parents raised them as Jews, though the language of “conversion” was retained as a link to the traditional understanding. This link enabled them to present their approach as application of the Jewish consensus in new circumstances rather than as a radical innovation.

In 1968 the Reconstructionist movement adopted the same practice as Reform but eliminated any reference to the child’s “conversion”: “the Reconstructionist Movement and its affiliated institutions will consider these children Jews if the parents have committed themselves to rear their children as Jews, by providing circumcision for boys, Jewish education for boys and girls, and if the children fulfill the requirements of bar and bat mitzvah or confirmation.” This decision of the Reconstructionists did not elevate patrilineal descent to the same level as matrilineal descent as the basis for determining Jewish status, since the conditional quality of the child’s Jewish status only applied to those born of non-Jewish mothers, whereas the children of Jewish mothers and non-Jewish fathers were accepted as Jews without condition.

In 1983 the Reform movement abandoned its attempt to present its approach as a mere application of a historical Jewish consensus. Not only did it drop the language of “conversion” in reference to the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, it took the momentous step of placing matrilineal and patrilineal descent on the same level. The same conditional quality of Jewish status would now apply to the children of Jewish mothers and non-Jewish fathers: “This leads us to the conclusion that the same requirements must be applied to establish the status of a child of a mixed marriage, regardless of whether the mother or the father is Jewish.”

Like the Reconstructionist and Reform movements, we in the MJRC accept patrilineal descent as sufficient for Jewish status if it is accompanied by appropriate actions. According to the Reconstructionists, those actions include the following: “if the parents have committed themselves to rear their children as Jews, by providing circumcision for boys, Jewish education for boys and girls, and if the children fulfill the requirements of bar and bat mitzvah or confirmation.” The Reform movement speaks in general of “appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people,” and then provides specific examples of what it has in mind: “mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the covenant [i.e., circumcision], acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, bar/bat mitzvah, and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation).” Thus, patrilineal descent is not sufficient in itself to establish Jewish status. Such descent must be accompanied by public and formal acts of commitment to the Jewish faith and the Jewish people if it is to confer

**2.1 Jewish Status:
Decision &
Commentary**

continued

upon a person the privileges and obligations inherent in being a Jew.

The Reform ruling also addresses another case that is especially relevant in our circumstances, namely, the situation where an adult born of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother reclaims his or her Jewish inheritance: “For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.”

Nevertheless, we in the MJRC are not entirely in accord with the Reform movement’s approach to Jewish status. In contrast to the Reform movement, we in the MJRC do not treat patrilineal and matrilineal descent in an equivalent manner. This would lead to a narrowing of the traditional reckoning of Jewish status rather than its broadening. One could conceive of cases where Orthodox and Conservative authorities would accept someone’s Jewish status whereas Reform authorities would deny it. As Messianic Jews, we should never find ourselves in a situation where we deny Jewish status to those accepted as Jews by most in the wider Jewish community.

The Reform decision also departs dramatically from the historical Jewish consensus regarding the sufficiency of matrilineal descent for determining Jewish status. In this matter we see no good reason for such a radical departure.

**2.2 KOHEN AND
LEVI: DECISION &
COMMENTARY**

2.2.1 Following the consensus of Jewish tradition, we recognize as a Kohen (Priest) a man who is born to a father who is a Kohen and a mother who is herself born to a Jewish mother. Similarly, we recognize as a Levi (Levite) a man who is born of a father who is a Levi and a mother who either is herself born to a Jewish mother or is a convert to Judaism.

The Torah very clearly defines priestly status based on patrilineal descent from Aaron, who was himself a descendent of Levi (e.g., Exodus 4:4; 28:1). Similarly, the tribe of Levi holds a special status within the Jewish people and has a special responsibility for the care of the Tabernacle and later the Temple and its accoutrements (Numbers 3:12; 1:50). According to Jewish tradition the status of an individual as a Levi is determined by their birth to a father who is himself a Levi and a mother who is born to Jewish parents or who is a convert to Judaism. Concern for the identification of proper priestly lineage continues to be an issue outside of the Torah in later biblical materials (see Nehemiah 7:63–65) as well as in the Mishnah and later halakhic literature (e.g., m. Ketubot 2:7–8; Tur even ha-ezer 6:3; Isurei Biah 19:17).

The Apostolic Writings also reflect a concern for a person’s status as a Kohen, a Levi, or a general member of the Jewish people (Yisra’el). Paul describes himself as a member of the tribe of Benjamin by birth (Philippians 3:5). At the beginning of Luke, John the Immerser’s father, Zechariah, is described as a priest belonging to the priestly order (mishmerah) of Abijah. His wife, Elizabeth, is similarly described as the daughter of a priest, a bat Kohen (Luke 1:5). In doing so, Luke designates the herald of Yeshua as himself a priest. The writer of Hebrews also describes Yeshua as a Kohen, albeit of a different order than the Aaronic priesthood (see Hebrews 5:1–10).

Kohanim are consecrated for priestly service in the Tabernacle and later the Temple according to the Torah (e.g., Exodus 29:1). The Torah itself reflects a strong concern for maintaining the sanctity of the Kehuna (priesthood) and hence enumerates a number of restrictive commands to ensure the ritual purity of Kohanim (e.g., Leviticus 21;

**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 2.2).

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 halakhic 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 halakhic 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 HEBREW NAMES:
INTRODUCTION**

The Jewish community has used patronymics and matronymics, such as Moshe ben (son of) Amram and Yocheved, or Miriam bat (daughter of) Amram and Yocheved since biblical times as genealogical identifiers and not surnames. The people of Israel are still identified as B'nei Israel, even though our ancestor Ya'akov (Israel) lived thousands of years ago. Though today surnames are

the norm in the vernacular, the Jewish community still uses patronymics and matronymics in Hebrew names for ketubbot (wedding certificates), *gittin* (divorce certificate), *aliyot* (being called to the Torah) and *El Malei Rachamim* (the memorial prayer recited for the deceased). In essence, a Jewish name is a key element of Jewish identity.

**2.4 Hebrew Names:
Decisions &
Commentary**

2.4.1 Jews by Birth.

2.4.1.1 In accordance with standard Jewish practice, children born to two Jewish parents will take the patronymic and matronymic of their Jewish father and mother in the form (child's given Hebrew name) ben/bat patronymic (father's name) and matronymic (mother's name).

2.4.1.2 In cases where one parent is Jewish and the other a Christian, the child born into the union is given the matronymic or patronymic of the Jewish parent and may be given the Christian parent's name in the vernacular as the patronymic or matronymic with the words "hanotzri/t" added after the name (e.g., Yoel

**2.4 Hebrew Names:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

ben Avigayil v'David Williams Hanotzri or Yoel ben Christina Williams Hanotzrit v'David). This option expresses the fact that Christians have been incorporated into the people of God, while still acknowledging the Jew-gentile distinction.

2.4.1.3 In cases where one parent is Jewish and the other is neither Jewish nor Christian, the child born into the union takes the matronymic or the patronymic of the Jewish parent and may also take Avraham Avinu or matronymic Sarah Imeinu as the corresponding patronymic or matronymic.

2.4.2 Jews by Conversion

2.4.2.1 In accordance with the long-standing *minhag* and normative practice of *Klal Israel*, a person converting to Judaism through the MJRC should take the patronymic and matronymic of Avraham [Avinu] v'Sarah [Imeinu] *in their* Hebrew name, e.g., *ploni* (the convert's chosen Hebrew name) *ben/bat Avraham Avinu v'Sarah Imeinu*, or *ben/bat Avraham v'Sarah*. This name is to be used for *ketubbot* (marriage certificates), *gittin* (divorce certificates), *aliyot* (being called to the Torah) and *El Malei Rachamim* (a memorial prayer for the deceased).

For over 900 years the custom in Israel, which has been endorsed by many halakhic authorities, has been to ascribe a Jewish convert's lineage to Avraham Avinu v'Sarah Imeinu or simply Avraham v'Sarah. Just as a newborn Jewish child is given a Hebrew name according to the formula "his/her name in Israel will be ploni ben/bat patronymic [name of the Jewish father] v' matronymic [name of Jewish mother,]" indicating the child's identity in Israel, a convert, who is considered as one born anew into the covenant and Jewish people—past, present and future—receives a Hebrew name according to the same pattern with Avraham and Sarah as the patronymic and matronymic. Taking the names of our ancestors Avraham and Sarah is one of the greatest compliments that can be given to a convert to Judaism. It is a badge of honor that identifies a convert as part of the Jewish family where both born Jews and Jews by conversion enjoy equal status before Hashem and the Jewish people. Though the practice of naming converts after Avraham and Sarah is minhag (a tradition) and not a halakhic ruling, it is a well-established, codified, and normative practice in Klal Israel. As such it should not be considered a senseless, redundant, or banned tradition (minhag shtut). Instead, it should be considered one that we are reluctant to change.

There are many reasons for naming a convert after Avraham Avinu and Sara Imeinu. For one, the story of the Jewish people begins when Hashem calls Avraham, and Sarah with him, to leave behind their old identity and embark on a journey toward a new identity based on a covenantal relationship with Hashem. A convert's journey replicates that of Avraham and Sarah in that they take on a new identity based on a covenantal relationship with Hashem. Furthermore, Avraham is considered the first convert to Judaism (b. Chagiga 3a, b. Kiddushin 71b) and the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5), which Judaism understands to include all those from the nations who convert to Judaism. Sarah bore the chosen son (Yitzhak) through whom the covenant continued, becoming the mother of Israel (Isaiah 51:1–2). Throughout rabbinic literature and Jewish tradition, Avraham and Sarah are referred to as Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu.

One concern about converts taking the patronymic and matronymic Avraham and Sarah is the possibility of exposing them to shame and disrespect by the constant

**2.4 Hebrew Names
Decision &
Commentary
continued**

reminder that they are converts. The patronymic and matronymic Avraham [Avinu] v'Sarah [Imeinu] were never intended to disrespect or verbally abuse a convert. Based on the prohibition in the Torah against oppressing the ger (Leviticus 19:13), Jewish tradition forbids such disrespect or shame of a convert (b. Bava Metzi`a 58b-59a; Yad, Mekhirah 14:12-13; Shulchan Arukh Choshen Mishpat 228:1-4). A convert is not to be verbally abused (ona'at devarim), shamed (halbanat panim) or disgraced. The adoption of the patronymic and matronymic Avraham and Sarah are intended to remind a convert of their courageous and dedicated commitment to become a Jew and of their identity in the Jewish people.

Promoting a system in which converts may choose a different patronymic or matronymic could be misunderstood as implying that their past is something of which to be ashamed and which should be covered up. This is not something the MJRC wants to believe, say or affirm. Thus, the MJRC follows the normative tradition of Klal Israel in the use of patronymic and matronymic, Avraham and Sarah, for converts.

We also strongly advocate that Messianic Jewish communities uphold our tradition's position on ona'at devarim (verbal abuse), halbanat panim (shame), and kevod habriyot (honoring one another) for the sake of the converts in their midst.

2.4.2.2 Minor children who are converted along with their parents or who are adopted into a Jewish family and are undergoing conversion may use the patronymic and matronymic of their Jewish parents and are not limited to using Avraham [Avinu] and Sarah [Imeinu].

**2.5 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 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

**2.5 Jews, Gentiles,
& Messianic Jewish
Congregations**
continued

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.

**2.6 JEWS, GENTILES,
& MESSIANIC JEWISH
CONGREGATIONS:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY**

2.6.1 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.

2.6.2 Rites of Passage.

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

- 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)

**2.6 Congregations:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

- 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)

2.6.3 Ritual Privileges.

2.6.3.1 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.

2.6.3.2 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 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.

Kashrut

3.0 KASHRUT: INTRODUCTION

Why keep kosher?

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT GIVEN TO humankind was about food: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’” (GENESIS 2:16-17). Why this commandment? Why not the command to till the earth and subdue it? Why not some other command? Why is this one the very first, and therefore most prominent?

Perhaps the reason is that there is nothing more personal, nothing which we are so inclined to think of as nobody’s business but our own, as the question of what we choose to put in our mouths. Which of us has not grown irritated with someone who says to us, “Do you think you should eat that?” We feel intruded upon. And for many of us, even when the doctor tries to regulate our diet, we feel invaded, diminished, demoralized.

So, the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a relationship test in the Garden. Would Adam and Chava respect God’s right to regulate their lives, even to the point of restricting their diet? They failed the test – and most of us Jews do as well, three times a day, every day. Kashrut is not primarily about food – it is all about relationship. Every time a religious Jew eats a kosher meal, she is reminded that

she is a Jew, and that God is really God. And when we fail to eat like Jews, we weaken our awareness that we are part of a holy people, and that the God who established a covenant with us has rights over our lives.

Keeping kosher is also about honoring the very nature of being Jews, “a people that dwells apart, that shall not be numbered with the nations.” Every time Jews eat kosher, they remind themselves, their children, and all around them that they are Jews. By eating kosher we are meant not only to stand apart from the other nations, but to stand together with each other – eating kosher is a means of group identity and cohesion. And wherever that practice is abandoned, group identity and cohesion suffer. But something far more crucial is compromised as well – the honor of God. Maybe we should paraphrase Ahad Ha’am here: “It was not the Jews who kept kosher, it was kashrut that kept the Jews.”

When we eat the way Jews eat, we honor God – we tell God, ourselves, and all who observe us, that Hashem is our God and we are Hashem’s people. And isn’t that a good thing? Again, it’s all about relationship. It’s easy to say that we love God. But Yeshua reminds us that words are not enough – they never are. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (JOHN 14:15). And that applies also, even first, to food.

3.1 KASHRUT: DECISIONS & COMMENTARY

3.1.1 Fundamental Requirements.

3.1.1.1 All pork products, shellfish, and food containing their elements (e.g., lard) are to be avoided.

All fruits, grains and vegetables are kosher. Fish with fins and scales are also kosher.

These basic laws of kashrut are first enjoined in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

**3.1 Kashrut:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

However, the distinction between animals that are tahor (ritually pure) and those that are not tahor is already found in the story of Noah (Genesis 7:2). While Noah and his family are permitted to eat all animals (Genesis 9:3), only those that are tahor may be offered as sacrifices (Genesis 8:20). As a priestly people set apart for Hashem from all the nations of the world, Israel is summoned to limit the animals it consumes so that its table may be analogous to the temple altar.

While many have argued that these dietary laws have hygienic value, the Torah itself provides a different rationale: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44; see Deuteronomy 14:2).

Peter’s vision in Acts 10 suggests that the nations of the world are now being called to share in Israel’s holiness, without losing their character as nations distinct from Israel. Therefore, they may now become holy, like Israel, without adopting Israel’s dietary regimen. However, Acts 10 does not imply that Israel may fulfill its own particular priestly calling apart from that regimen.

3.1.1.2 Following Conservative Halakhah, we consider swordfish and sturgeon acceptable as part of our basic practice. Meats (except from the hind quarters) from cattle, lamb, goat, or deer, and from most common fowl (e.g., chicken, turkey, goose, duck) may all be eaten.

The traditional dispute over swordfish and sturgeon concerns the status of their scales. According to Ramban, the Torah refers only to scales that can be detached from the skin of the fish. The scales of the swordfish and sturgeon can be removed from the skin, but only with difficulty. Thus, Orthodox authorities generally regard these fish as non-kosher, whereas the Conservative movement has ruled them kosher.

This dispute also affects the kashrut of caviar, which is derived from sturgeon.

On the prohibition of meat from the hind quarters of permitted four-legged animals, see decision 3.3.3.

3.1.2 Gelatin, Cheese, Wine.

3.1.2.1 For our basic practice we will adopt the standards of the Conservative Movement that treat all gelatin and cheese as acceptable.

“Some substances that originate in animal sources undergo such complete change as a result of chemical treatment that they can no longer be regarded as ‘meat’ products. This is the case with both gelatin and rennet, which Conservative authorities have ruled are kosher.” (S. Dresner, Keeping Kosher [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2000], 63.)

3.1.2.2 All wines or other alcoholic beverages are acceptable. In the case of Jewish ceremonies only kosher wine or grape juice should be used.

“When wine is used for the fulfillment of a mitzvah, such as circumcision, weddings, kiddush, and havdalah, it is proper to use wine that is certified kosher” (Dresner, 64). The fact that the wine was produced by Jews and the production process supervised by Jewish religious authorities adds to the sacred character of the occasion.

3.1.3 Shechitah and Removal of Blood.

3.1.3.1 The most basic Biblical dietary law, addressed not only to Israel but also

**3.1 Kashrut:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

to the nations of the world in Noah, involves avoiding the eating of blood (foods that are cooked in or with blood). Concern to guard this core dietary law led to the institution of *shechitah* – the Jewish ritual slaughter of animals (which removes the vast majority of the blood) – and the special preparation of meat (which removes the remainder). Therefore, ideally it is recommended that only meat slaughtered and packaged under reliable kosher supervision be purchased.

The prohibition of ingesting blood, enjoined on all humanity in Genesis 9:4 and confirmed in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25, is given when human beings are first permitted to eat meat (Genesis 9:3). Permission to eat meat is a concession to the violence that precipitated the flood (Genesis 6:11, 13). The prohibition of eating blood, the one universal dietary restriction, immediately precedes the prohibition of murder (Genesis 9:5-6) – the shedding of human blood. Thus, this universal dietary law expresses the biblical value of reverence for life.

It is striking that all carnivorous animals are ritually impure, according to Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. The nations of the world are forbidden to eat the blood of animals, but Israel must go a step further – it must avoid even the meat of animals that consume the blood of other animals. In this way the value of reverence for life is doubly reinforced.

Because it is not specifically a Jewish prohibition but a universal one, the commandment not to eat blood (along with many other universal commandments) is not what we are calling here a “basic practice.” It is assumed that all Yeshua-believers should desire to keep this commandment and thus, within reasonable limits, will avoid consuming blood.

The prohibition against eating blood is elucidated in Ezekiel 33:25, where the prophet speaks these words of condemnation on behalf of Hashem: “You eat with the blood” (which probably means, “You eat meat with the blood in it”). Thus, Jews must purge meat of blood to the extent that this can be reasonably accomplished. This is done through kosher slaughter and additional measures.

*While shechitah refers specifically to the kosher slaughtering of an animal, in the above decision the term is used more broadly to cover both the kosher slaughtering (done by a shochet) and the processing and preparation of the meat (done by a butcher). The latter is technically called *porging* and involves (1) removal of residual blood remaining after shechitah; (2) removal of fats prohibited by the Torah (Leviticus 3:17); and (3) removal of the sciatic nerve, as required by Genesis 32:33 (see below). Given the evident basis of these practices in the Written Torah, the institution of shechitah should be honored among us as Messianic Jews, and if at all feasible we should seek to purchase meat slaughtered and packaged under reliable kosher supervision.*

3.1.3.2 Most meat labeled kosher has been salted to remove the blood. One should investigate to see if this is the case with kosher meat one has purchased. If it is not the case, one should remove the blood oneself through salting or broiling.

For a detailed description of the process of salting and boiling, see Klein, 350-57.

Liver requires broiling because of the preponderance of blood in it.

“Because it contains an excessive amount of blood, liver can be koshered only by broiling, and should not be soaked. Even if liver is to be cooked in some other way, it must first be broiled.” (Dresner, 62)

3.1.3.3 While the purchase of meat slaughtered and butchered under reliable kosher supervision is highly recommended, given the difficulty in many places of

**3.1 Kashrut:
Decisions &
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continued

obtaining kosher meat our basic practice will not involve eating only such meat. It will involve urging that we avoid meat from the hind quarters of permitted four-legged animals (a practice rooted in Jacob's injury in Genesis 32).

Cuts that are acceptable according to our basic practice include Chuck, Rib and Ribeye, Shank and Brisket, Skirt and Flank. Also permitted are London Broil (when from the shoulder), and Cubed Steak and Ground Beef (when they do not contain elements from the hindquarters).

Cuts that are to be avoided include Top Loin (Strip or Shell) Steak, T-Bone, Porterhouse, Tenderloin, Sirloin, Tri-Tip, and Round. (London Broil from the Bottom or Top Rounds are likewise to be avoided.)

The angel who wrestled with Jacob “wrenched Jacob’s hip at its socket” (Genesis 32:26). The Torah tells us that this event is remembered by Jacob’s descendants through a dietary restriction: “That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob’s hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle” (Genesis 32:33). This dietary restriction remains a Jewish practice, and involves the removal of the sciatic nerve by a kosher butcher (m. Chullin 7:1-6). Since this procedure is very difficult even for a trained kosher butcher, it is customary in the diaspora to set aside the hindquarters and sell them to non-Jews.

If it is not feasible to obtain kosher meat or practice vegetarianism, and if we purchase meat of permitted animals from another source, our basic practice – in accordance with Genesis 32:33 – entails avoiding meat from the hindquarters.

3.1.4 Separating Meat and Dairy.

Our basic practice involves avoiding the consumption of meat products (including fowl) and obvious dairy products (or foods containing obvious dairy products) together in a given meal. Meat may be eaten after eating obvious dairy foods without any time interval, though they should not be present together at the same table. After eating a meat meal, the minimum time interval before eating obvious dairy products should be one hour.

By “obvious dairy products,” we mean milk and milk products such as cheese, butter, yogurt, and ice cream. Some products normally considered “nondairy” (some nondairy creamers, margarine, dessert toppings) actually contain dairy derivatives, and so are technically not pareve (containing neither dairy nor meat). Such products are not included in “obvious dairy products.”

The separation of meat and dairy products is associated with the Torah’s prohibition of eating a kid cooked in its mother’s milk (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). The Mishnah states: “No flesh may be cooked with milk save the flesh of fish and locusts; and it is forbidden to serve it up together with cheese upon the table excepting the flesh of fish and locusts” (m. Chullin 8:1). While such separation is not obviously implicit in the biblical text, it should be respected as an ancient fence around the biblical prohibition that is firmly grounded in Jewish tradition and practice. (The sages themselves viewed this as a ruling of the Written Torah.)

The separation of meat and dairy products is also rich in symbolic significance. As noted above (5.3.1), permission to eat meat is a concession to the violence that precipitated the flood. In the creation narrative human beings are assigned an exclusively vegetarian

**3.1 Kashrut:
Decisions &
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continued

diet (Genesis 1:29). While the laws of kashrut do not impose a return to that pristine regimen, their fundamental concern is the limitation of meat consumption. Only certain animals may be eaten, and even they must be slaughtered and prepared in a certain fashion (or they are also excluded). Now we add a further restriction – that even properly slaughtered and prepared meat cannot be consumed with dairy products. This final limitation points us back to the original reason for restricting the consumption of meat: reverence for life. As dairy products symbolize the nurturing of new life, it is fitting that they not be mixed with foods which require the taking of life.

The inclusion of fowl in this prohibition is a further rabbinic fence, and is acknowledged as such by the sages (b. Chullin 113a). It was reasonable to group fowl together with beef, lamb, etc., and to distinguish both from fish, as the first two groups are both subject to the laws of shechitah, while fish are not. The inclusion of fowl in the separation of meat and dairy is as established in Jewish tradition as the separation itself, and as such deserves our respect. It also contributes to the primary symbolic significance of the custom, and of the dietary laws as a whole – reverence for life.

No particular time limit between eating meat and dairy products is specified in the Talmud. Therefore, a variety of customs developed in Jewish communities around the world. In some places the minimum interval was as long as six hours; in other places it was as short as one hour. In keeping with our principle of establishing a basic practice that is as accessible as possible, we have adopted the most lenient custom as our basic practice.

3.1.5 Eating in Restaurants.

When eating out, the above standards may be relaxed, but one should continue to avoid all meat (and meat-products) from non-kosher animals (e.g., pig, shellfish). Beyond this basic practice, we commend the eating of non-meat meals when eating in non-kosher facilities.

The practice commended here (but not included as basic practice) is taught within the Conservative movement: “If it is necessary to dine in non-kosher facilities, meat and dishes containing meat may not be eaten. Some sanction only the eating of cold foods, such as salads, if the food contains no forbidden ingredients. Others approve eating permitted fish and other foods, even if cooked” (Dresner, 64).

3.1.6 Medications and Nutritional Supplements.

In keeping with the views of many halakhic authorities, as our basic practice there are no restrictions on medicines and nutritional supplements derived from non-kosher animals when consumed in pill/capsule or elixir form.

“Beyond the question of medical need, the question is whether we are eating food: swallowing without chewing may not be considered eating, and a foul-tasting substance may not be considered food... Pills that are swallowed whole rather than chewed need not be kosher (since they are not being eaten in the usual way), but pills that are chewed should be kosher. Liquids with a very unpleasant taste need not be kosher, but pleasant tasting liquids should be kosher” (Yehuda Wiesen, Guide to Practical Halakha and Home Ritual for Conservative Jews [2004], 12-13).

Community Practices

4.0 SHABBAT: INTRODUCTION

Why keep Shabbat?

SHABBAT IS FOR JEWS A CONSTANT reminder that we are the people whom the Creator of heaven and earth redeemed from slavery in Egypt. If we cannot make room for Shabbat in our busy schedules, we prove that the fact of our slavery has not changed, only its location.

Ahad Ha'am reminds us: "It was not the Jews that kept the Sabbath, it was the Sabbath that kept the Jews." It was keeping Shabbat that helped us hold fast to Jewish life and identity amidst the threatening political and cultural cross-currents of two millennia in exile. And as we raise our children in a world friendlier to Jews but no less threatening to Jewish life, keeping Shabbat becomes even more critical. Without Shabbat, our children may not forget that they are Jews, but are sure to forget the meaning of being a Jew.

In *Growing Up Religious*, Robert Wuthnow explores how spiritual identity is preserved and passed on from generation to generation. Speaking of religious practices such as keeping Shabbat he says, "the pursuit of any particular practice (such as Shabbat keeping) is accomplished only at the sacrifice of other possible activities. Growing up religious was a memorable part of people's childhood because it included...discrete, separable activities that took time away from other interests, but they were also embedded in social relationships. People did them with their mothers and fathers, their grandparents, their siblings, and their friends and fellow congregants... But spirituality also came to be understood as a way

of life, and it did so because people grew up living it. The parents, teachers, and clergy who understood this best were the ones who created an environment in which spirituality was fully and deeply embedded. They honored the spirituality of chicken dinners, of gefilte fish, of family Bibles [and of Shabbat tables, candles, meals, and the protected differentness of the day]" (xxxv-xxxvii).

The Torah reminds us that we are to be "a people that dwells apart, that shall not be numbered with the nations" (NUMBERS 23:9). Keeping Shabbat is indispensable if that Jewish distinctness and collective identity is to become real, something one can see, hear, taste, and remember as lived experience. While the rest of the world treats Saturday as a day off, a day to shop, or even a day to catch up on work, Jews are to treat Saturday as the holiest of days when we are privileged to host the Holy One at our table and sing his praises in our gathered families. It is a day where all our creativity is devoted to Sabbath joys, and to receiving and celebrating the life we did not make but have been given by the Holy One. Perhaps you will ask, "What good will keeping Shabbat do for me?" That is, of course, the wrong question. The question is, "What will not keeping Shabbat do to you?" Thousands of years of Jewish history supply the answer: "Nothing good."

Come, keep – and be kept by – the holy Shabbat.

4.1.1 Starting/Ending Time.

4.1.1.1 Shabbat begins and ends according to the times determined and accepted by the wider Orthodox and Conservative Jewish world. This means that we are accepting the Rabbinic fence around the law, with an earlier time for starting and a later time for ending.

According to the Jewish reckoning of time, days begin at night. But when does “night” begin? Jewish tradition recognizes a transitional period between “day” and “night” that is technically neither day nor night. This is the period that commences with the setting of the sun and concludes with the appearance of the stars (when the evening sky is clear). In Hebrew this period is called beyn hashmashot – the time “between the suns.”

Though the status of this transitional part of the day is inherently ambiguous, for halakhic purposes it needs to be regarded as either part of the day that preceded or the night that follows (e.g., the yahrzeit of someone who dies during this period of the day needs to be determined). In setting the beginning and ending times of the Sabbath, Jewish law has traditionally followed a sound halakhic principle: when there is doubt concerning the application of a law that has biblical authority (that is d’oraita), we should follow the stricter of two possible interpretations. In the case of the Sabbath, this means that we should reckon the time “between the suns” as part of the Sabbath both on Friday and on Saturday. Thus, Shabbat begins with the setting of the sun on Friday and ends with the appearance of the stars on Saturday.

Rabbinic tradition provided further protection against violation of Shabbat by adding roughly twenty minutes to the day at the beginning and the end. This addition also derives from a talmudic principle that we should “add from the profane to the holy” (b. Rosh Hashanah 8b-9a), and so fulfills a positive as well as a negative (protective) purpose. Thus, the times listed in Jewish calendars for the beginning of Shabbat are slightly earlier than sunset, and the times listed for the ending of Shabbat are slightly later than nightfall.

4.1.1.2 In keeping with common observance, Shabbat can be extended, but not diminished (we can light candles before Shabbat actually begins during the summer).

4.1.1.3 One should prepare for Shabbat in order to make it special. Food, clothing, and table setting should be special (not just different but at a higher level than usual) and prepared for in advance

“You should rejoice in the coming of Shabbat. Imagine how you would put the house in order in honor of the arrival of a dear and distinguished person, all the more so [should you exert yourself] in honor of the Sabbath Queen” (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 72:7).

The Sages interpreted Isaiah 58:13, “You shall honor it [Shabbat],” as meaning that one should wear finer clothing on Shabbat than on weekdays (b. Shabbat 113a).

4.1.2 Candle Lighting.

4.1.2.1 If it is not possible to light candles before Shabbat begins, traditional Halakhah would strictly prohibit lighting the candles at a later time. We respect this traditional halakhic decision, and the honor it shows to the objective temporal boundaries of Shabbat built into the natural order. At the same time, given the symbolic importance Shabbat candle lighting has assumed in modern Jewish family

**4.1 Shabbat:
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continued

life, our own basic practice will not prohibit lighting Shabbat candles after Shabbat begins by transferring a fire from a candle lit before the beginning of Shabbat. In this case the original candle should not be extinguished on Shabbat, nor should the mitzvah berachah be recited.

The custom of lighting Shabbat candles, in order to honor Shabbat and to define the beginning of the holy day within the home, is not a biblical commandment, but is presumed by rabbinic authorities in the Mishnah (m. Shabbat 2:1-7). It is a mitzvah that has been embraced enthusiastically by the Jewish people as a whole, and – like a mezuzah on one’s doorpost – it expresses a family’s fundamental commitment to Judaism.

The beginning and ending of Shabbat have both objective and subjective dimensions. The objective dimension results from the earth’s turning on its axis as it orbits the sun. The subjective dimension involves the deliberate acknowledgement of the day’s temporal boundaries by the Jewish people. The importance of the subjective dimension is shown by the fact that one can light candles earlier than the stipulated time, and from that point on one must treat the day as holy. The interdependence of these two dimensions is seen from the traditional principle stated above: Shabbat can be extended, but not diminished (decision 4.1.1.2). We can take from the profane and add to the holy, but we should not take from the holy and add to the profane.

Traditional Halakhah prohibits both kindling and transferring a flame on Shabbat. Nevertheless, the two actions are distinguished, as is evident in halakhic rulings concerning the holidays. On a holiday one may transfer but not kindle a flame (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 98:1, 31). This suggests that the prohibition of transferring a flame may be an extended stringency protecting the special sanctity of Shabbat. At the very least, one may assume that transferring a flame on Shabbat is a less serious violation than kindling a flame.

Decision 4.1.2.1 neither encourages nor sanctions transferring a flame on Shabbat. It merely states that observance of the traditional prohibition is not required as part of our basic practice.

On the prohibition of kindling a flame on Shabbat, see decision 4.1.6.

4.1.2.2 Between Pesach and Sukkot, it is permissible to light Shabbat candles as much as three hours in advance of the beginning of Shabbat.

4.1.2.3 The berachah recited at the lighting of the candles will be the traditional mitzvah berachah. If one wants to use an additional Messianic berachah, one may do so. Normally at least two candles are lit. It is customary for the woman of the household to officiate, lighting the candles and then reciting the blessing while covering her face with her hands. She then removes her hands and looks at the candles. *If there are no women in the household, or no women are available at the appropriate time to perform the mitzvah, a man may and should light the candles.*

This practice derives from the combination of two important rules:

(1) A blessing associated with a mitzvah should be said before doing the mitzvah, in order to demonstrate that one is consciously acting in obedience to a divine commandment;
(2) A fire may not be kindled after Shabbat begins. Since the recitation of the blessing signifies the beginning of Shabbat, the candles could not be lit after the blessing – but the blessing should come first! To show respect for both rules, one covers one’s face while reciting the blessing – as if the candles were not yet lit. (See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 75:4)

**4.1 Shabbat:
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Commentary**
continued

Normally the candles are lit in the room where Shabbat dinner will be served and kiddush recited, in order to indicate that the candles were lit in honor of Shabbat (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 75:8).

4.1.3 Participation in Shabbat Services.

One should participate in a weekly Friday night or Saturday service.

Shabbat is a sign of God's eternal covenant with the people of Israel (Exodus 31:12, 16-17). As such, it is important that Jews gather before God as a community on this day, to honor the covenant and the One who gave it.

Jews throughout the centuries have recognized the special importance of gathering on Shabbat for prayer and study. It is noteworthy that one of the earliest Jewish documents attesting this practice is the New Testament (Luke 4:15-16, 31-33; Acts 13:13-15; 15:21).

4.1.4 Kiddush, Havdalah, and the Meals of Shabbat.

4.1.4.1 Friday night meal: The basic practice includes reciting *kiddush*, *hamotzi* (over bread), and an abbreviated *birkat hamzon* (all prayers to be said in Hebrew).

We commend as expanded practice ritual handwashing (*netilat yadaim*) with its traditional *berachah*, use of two loaves of bread, salting the bread, recitation of *ayshet hayil*, blessing of the children, singing of *zemirot* (special Sabbath songs), full *birkat hamazon*, and discussion of Torah (*divrey Torah*).

4.1.4.2 Saturday noon meal: The basic practice includes reciting *kiddush*, *hamotzi* (if bread is eaten), and an abbreviated *birkat hamazon*.

Kiddush at the noon meal is recited over any beverage except water. If the beverage is not wine, then *shehakol* is substituted for *borey peri hagafen*.

We commend as expanded practice ritual handwashing (*netilat yadaim*), singing of *zemirot*, discussion of Torah (*divrey Torah*), and the full *birkat hamazon*..

4.1.4.3 Saturday evening meal: The basic practice includes *hamotzi* and an abbreviated *birkat hamazon*.

We commend as expanded practice the singing of *zemirot* and the full *birkat hamazon*.

4.1.4.4 The traditional *havdalah* service should be recited after Shabbat ends.

The Talmud sees the recitation of kiddush (literally, "sanctification") over wine at the beginning of Shabbat as a fulfillment of Exodus 20:8 – "Remember the Sabbath day, to sanctify it" (b. Pesachim 106a). Maimonides applies the verse also to havdalah (Mishneh Torah, Shabbat 29:1). Friday evening kiddush and Saturday evening havdalah serve both as ceremonial declarations (corporate and verbal acts of "remembrance") of the holiness of the day, and as lines of demarcation, subjectively distinguishing the sacred from the secular.

Wine symbolizes and conveys the joy of the Sabbath day. In Judaism, holiness and joy are indissolubly united.

On hamotzi and birkat hamazon, see decisions 4.1.4.2 and 4.1.4.3.

**4.1 Shabbat:
Decisions &
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continued

According to rabbinic tradition, the ritual washing of hands should precede all meals at which bread is eaten. This custom derives from the Torah's ritual for priests before offering sacrifice or performing service within the tabernacle/temple (Exodus 30:17-21). By extending this practice to all meals outside the temple, Jewish tradition implies that the role of every Jew is priestly, and the table of every Jew is a sacred altar. If this is true for all meals, how much more so for the meal that inaugurates Shabbat!

*The Besorot (Gospels) record a dispute between Yeshua and Pharisaic teachers concerning the practice of hand washing before meals (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23). The dispute had less to do with hand washing itself, and more with the primacy of biblical law over Pharisaic oral tradition, the primacy of basic moral imperatives (such as honoring parents) over ritual minutiae, and the nature of true defilement and purification. It is also important to recognize that ritual hand washing in the first century was a distinctive Pharisaic custom, and not a generally accepted Jewish norm, as it later became. Since Yeshua showed consistent respect for Jewish norms, we cannot assume that he would treat ritual hand washing today as he did in his original disputes with the Pharisees. For more on this topic, see Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).*

4.1.5 Practicing one's occupation.

One ceases from his or her profession, trade, or daily occupation on Shabbat, except in the following occupations: health care workers and caregivers, police, military, emergency personnel, and synagogue personnel who are involved in the synagogue activities of the day.

Accommodations may be made on a case-by-case basis by a bet din handling a conversion.

"If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth." (Isaiah 58:13-14a)

Isaac Klein points out the halakhic implications of this text from Isaiah: "The obvious intent of this passage is that one should not pursue his chosen profession, trade, or daily occupation on the Sabbath; the merchant should not go to his store, the manufacturer to his plant, the laborer to his shop, or the professional to his office" A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice, 80-81.

All traditional Jewish authorities recognize exceptions to this rule, and to all Shabbat restrictions, in matters pertaining to the saving or preserving of life (b. Yoma 85a, b. Shabbat 132a). Yeshua highlights this principle, and even appears to extend it beyond matters of life and death to include basic acts of kindness to those in genuine need (Mark 3:1-5). Similarly, the Torah commands priests to perform tasks in the temple on Shabbat that are prohibited to others engaged in secular pursuits (Matthew 12:5). Accordingly, a rabbi serving a congregation on Shabbat is fulfilling a mitzvah rather than performing forbidden work.

4.1.6 Kindling Fire.

According to our basic practice, one should not kindle a flame on Shabbat. Halakhic authorities disagree about whether the use of electrical devices and the combustion involved in starting and running an automobile violate this commandment of the Torah. Our basic practice will follow the more lenient interpretation.

“You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day” (Exodus 35:3).

The kindling of fire, which involves creating a flame, transforming the nature of the material consumed by the flame, and giving off light and heat, serves as a paradigmatic illustration of the sort of creative activity prohibited on Shabbat. It also recalls God’s first act of creation in Genesis 1 – the formation of light.

While all Orthodox halakhic authorities prohibit the use of electricity on Shabbat, some see this restriction as a rabbinic extension of the biblical commandment rather than a prohibition carrying the full weight of the Written Torah (see Donin, To Be A Jew, 92).

In a groundbreaking responsum issued and adopted in 1950, the Conservative movement accepted the view that the prohibition of electricity on Shabbat carried rabbinic and not Scriptural authority. As such, it was to be respected, but it could also be modified in light of other important considerations.

On an even more controversial point, the same responsum ruled that combustion for energy (such as that which occurs in an automobile) does not constitute the type of “kindling” prohibited on Shabbat.

4.1.7 Buying and Selling.

4.1.7.1 One should normally neither buy nor sell on Shabbat. This includes both the buying and selling of goods for profit and the buying and selling of goods that are not for profit (such as religious articles). Thus, we will not sell items (such as books or CD’s) in our synagogues on Shabbat.

4.1.7.2 “Buying and selling” here also includes payment for food or entertainment. Therefore, dining out or other recreational activity that involves spending money is inappropriate on Shabbat.

4.1.7.3 Credit card purchases are buying.

4.1.7.4 Offerings and tzedakah on Shabbat do not constitute buying and selling.

The prohibition of practicing one’s occupation on Shabbat implies that Jews should not sell merchandise on Shabbat. While this is not explicitly stated in the Torah, it is presumed as early as the prophet Amos, who indicates that even the wicked refrain from selling wheat on Shabbat (Amos 8:4-5). Nehemiah makes clear that the purchasing of goods on Shabbat likewise profanes the holy day (Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-18).

Rabbinic tradition extended this prohibition of buying and selling by forbidding any contact with money on Shabbat. This helpful custom reinforced the basic prohibition and fostered an experience of the holiness of the day. Strict adherence to this halakhic extension would, of course, rule out the giving of offerings and tzedakah on Shabbat. While acknowledging the value of the traditional practice, the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council takes no official position on the appropriateness of giving offerings and tzedakah on Shabbat. Decision 4.1.7.4 does, however, make clear that such giving does not violate the Torah’s basic prohibition of buying and selling on Shabbat.

4.1.8 Traveling.

In general, traveling on Shabbat conflicts with the spirit of the day. Nevertheless, limited travel may be appropriate to uphold certain values that are themselves associated with Shabbat. Thus, our basic practice does not prohibit travel on Shabbat to attend services at the synagogue, to visit the sick, and to sustain contact with the synagogue community and with one's family, though such travel should not occupy a substantial portion of the day. Normally one should avoid traveling on Shabbat for other purposes.

"Each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29).

A strict reading of this text could lead to the view that one should not leave one's house on Shabbat. However, the Talmud interprets the passage as meaning only that one should not travel far from one's residence on Shabbat (b. Eruvin 51a).

Rabbinic tradition established clear limits to such travel: within a city one could go any distance, whereas beyond city limits one could go two thousand cubits (about three quarters of a mile). Knowledge of and respect for such limits is seen in the Book of Acts, which refers to the distance between the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem as "a Sabbath day's journey" (Acts 1:12).

Rabbinic tradition likewise prohibited riding a horse or a wagon on Shabbat. The authorities understood this to be a rabbinic rather than a Scriptural rule, ordained because such forms of travel may lead indirectly to the violation of Shabbat.

Traditional rabbinic concerns still apply today. While these concerns may not lead us to avoid all travel on Shabbat, they should cause us to limit our travel to a minimum.

4.1.9 Food Preparation.

On Shabbat we do not manipulate and alter the world but receive and enjoy it. Cooking alters the composition of food. Therefore, all food for Shabbat should be cooked in advance, or the cooking should be initiated in advance (as in a crockpot). However, food may be reheated.

The traditional prohibition of cooking on Shabbat is implicit in the story of the manna (Exodus 16). The people gather a two-day supply of manna each Friday, and prepare their Shabbat meals before the holy day begins: "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning'" (Exodus 16:23). The baking and boiling must be completed while Shabbat is still "tomorrow."

4.1.10 Writing and Drawing.

Due to the demands of modern life, the traditional prohibition on writing and drawing places an excessive burden upon the Messianic Jewish community in our contemporary situation. Therefore, our basic practice will not include prohibitions of the sort of writing and drawing that enhances the community's ability to experience Shabbat and that does not violate the spirit of Shabbat. At the same time, we appreciate the reasons for these prohibitions and recognize their great value, and therefore commend them as part of our expanded practice.

As should be clear by the last sentence, this decision neither encourages nor sanctions writing or drawing on Shabbat. It merely states that observance of the traditional prohibition is not required as part of our basic practice.

4.1.11 Laborious Activity.

Laborious activity such as moving heavy appliances or heavy furniture is not appropriate on Shabbat.

Speaking in the name of God, the prophet Jeremiah sees the “bearing of a burden” as incompatible with the holiness of Shabbat: “Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors” (Jeremiah 17:21-22).

While this text appears to us to focus on the carrying of any heavy load on Shabbat, rabbinic tradition understood it differently. It is there interpreted as applying to the carrying of any object, regardless of its size or weight, but only when that object is moved from one domain to another. According to the Mishnah (Shabbat 7:2), the thirty-ninth major category of work prohibited on Shabbat is “removing an object from one domain to another.” As with the other basic categories of work, this prohibition is traditionally viewed as Scriptural rather than rabbinic in nature.

Traditional Halakhah also prohibited the carrying of heavy objects within a domain, but this was seen as a rabbinic rather than Scriptural limitation, imposed to preserve the spirit of Shabbat.

In our view, the authoritative sources of the two commandments (not carrying from one domain to another, not bearing a heavy burden) should be reversed. We understand the prohibition of bearing a heavy burden as Scriptural, and the prohibition of carrying any object from one domain to another as rabbinic. We respect the rabbinic limitation and commend it as an expanded practice, but we have not included it as part of our basic practice.

4.1.12 The Spirit of Shabbat.

On Shabbat one should avoid as much as possible activities that, while not strictly work, are not in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat. This principle is called *shevut*.

To keep the spirit of Shabbat, it is important that the people one is with are not violating the spirit of Shabbat. Therefore, it is best to avoid Shabbat activities that involve the general public.

In determining which social amusements are fitting to Shabbat and which unfitting, one may be guided by the words of Morris Joseph (*Judaism as Creed and Life*, New York: Bloch, 1920), quoted by Isaac Klein (pages 89-90): “The Sabbath is a sacred day and there are certain kinds of enjoyment which by their very nature are out of harmony with its inherent holiness. Participation in them on the Sabbath is like a sudden intrusion of a shrill street organ on a beautiful melody sung by a lovely voice. It is difficult, almost impossible, to lay down a definite rule on this point, to say ‘This sort of amusement is allowable, that sort improper, on the Sabbath.’ The matter must be left to the individual conscience, to each person’s sense of what is seemly.”

4.1.12.1 Due to the socially fragmenting effect of television on families, normally it is best to avoid television on Shabbat. In particular, we consider the watching of commercial television to be inappropriate on Shabbat.

**4.1 Shabbat:
Decisions &
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continue

4.1.12.2 It is best to leave mail unopened till Shabbat is over.

4.1.12.3 It is best to not compose, send, retrieve, or read e-mail on Shabbat.

4.1.12.4 Use of the telephone should be minimized. One should especially avoid usage which intrudes upon the spirit of Shabbat.

4.1.12.5 Cell phones, beepers, and electronic messaging devices should be turned off on Shabbat, and not be used except for emergencies.

Isaac Klein provides a clear and concise statement of the meaning of shevut: “The term shevut (resting) covers a whole area of activities which are not strictly work but are to be avoided because they are not in the Spirit of the Sabbath, or because doing them may lead to acts that constitute a major desecration of the Sabbath” (84). This is a crucial concept for making Shabbat a transforming experience rather than a mere compliance with a set of arbitrary external restrictions.

It is possible to avoid all forms of work, yet never enter into the spirit of Shabbat. To partake of that spirit, one must combine the joyful experience of the day’s holiness with the avoidance of all activities that detract from that holiness.

In addition to television, we must be careful in our use of computers and recorded video. It is possible to employ these media in a way that preserves the spirit of Shabbat. However, they also have great potential for undermining that spirit, especially when members of the family retreat to their own monitors and their own private worlds, or when the contents viewed involve intense sensory stimulation, or are violent or immodest.

Abraham Joshua Heschel described Shabbat as “a palace in time which we build. It is made of soul, of joy and reticence” (Heschel, The Sabbath, 15). While Shabbat exists whether we observe it or not, our experience of the day depends on how we build that palace in our lives. The habit of avoiding distracting activities and thoughts while actively participating in Shabbat-related activities has the cumulative effect of creating an atmosphere entirely different from the other six days of the week, a time without struggle or worry.

**4.2 HOLIDAYS:
INTRODUCTION**

**Why Celebrate the
Jewish Holidays?**

JUST ABOUT EVERYONE HAS A CALENDAR in their kitchen, and there is probably not a kitchen calendar anywhere without hand-drawn circles and scribbled notes. What are these notes and circles? They are the appointments and commitments that make each family unique – the dental appointments, soccer games, music lessons, birthdays, celebrations, vacations, graduations, and anniversaries that distinguish one family from another. No other calendar out of all the millions of kitchen calendars scattered throughout America is a duplicate of any other. The appointments, commitments, celebrations,

and observances on each particular calendar constitute the stitching that makes each family unique and binds it together as one.

What is true for every family in America is true as well for the family of Israel scattered around the globe and sown across time and eternity. The holidays of Israel are our unique calendar, circled and scribbled, stained with cholent, wine, charoset, birthday cake, and sometimes blood. But this calendar is what stitches us together as a family, enabling this scattered and transgenerational family to rejoice together, to weep together, and to steep in fragrant memory.

**4.2 Holidays:
Introduction**
continued

And just as it is erosive to family ties to forget birthdays and anniversaries, so Jewish identity erodes and our ties with each other unravel when we fail to honor our common calendar. While neglecting these holy days, both the happy ones and the sad, will not annul our family status, can there be any

doubt that such neglect weakens family ties? Because it is important for us to be family to each other, all the holidays are important – the big ones and the small ones. They are no burden – they are the stitching that binds us to each other, and by which we honor the One who is the Father of us all.

**4.3 HOLIDAYS:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY**

4.3.1 Chaggim.

4.3.1.1 According to the explicit teaching of the Torah, we should avoid *melechet avodah* (servile work) on the *chaggim*: The first and seventh days of Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first day of Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. According to Jewish tradition, this includes all Sabbath restrictions on work with the exception of the transferring of flame, the preparation and cooking of food, and the carrying of objects, all of which may be done on *chaggim*.

In the Torah, the chaggim are referred to as mo'adim? Mo'adim are the "fixed" or "appointed" times listed and described in Leviticus 23. In that chapter they are also called "holy assemblies" (mikra'ey kodesh), occasions set apart for Israel to gather and worship the Holy One. Leviticus 23 lists the following holidays as mo'edim: Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret.

According to Ramban, melechet avodah (servile work) refers to work that is a burden, such as ordinary labor in factory and field. Exodus 12:16 describes the work that is permitted on Pesach: "only what every person is to eat (okhel nefesh), that alone may be prepared for you." Based on this verse, the Mishnah states: "The difference between a holiday (yom tov) and Shabbat is only the food (okhel nefesh)" (m. Megillah 1:5). The preparation of food is forbidden on Shabbat but permitted on holidays.

The last (seventh) day of Pesach and Shemini Atzeret are chaggim with the attendant work restrictions. The Torah is unambiguous on this point: the final day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:8) and the eighth day after the beginning of Sukkot (Leviticus 23:36, 39) are full holidays. This needs to be stressed because so few Jews today outside the Orthodox world observe these holidays.

4.3.1.2 The intermediate days (*Chol haMo'ed*) of Pesach and Sukkot are considered part of the festivals and the practices associated with each of them are observed throughout their duration. Normal work, however, is permitted during this period though it is commendable to refrain from any unnecessary labor.

Though the Torah only explicitly prohibits work on the first days of Pesach and Sukkot and the seventh day of Pesach (Leviticus 23:7,8, 35), it does not prohibit work on the remaining days of these festivals. It is our judgment that the prohibition of work on Chol haMo'ed is d'rabbanan (following here the judgment of Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Shevitat Yom Tov, 7:1 and Tur, Orach Chayyim, 530). Given this judgment and in accordance with the general principles of Jewish law (kol sefeka d'rabbanan l'kula,

**4.3 Holidays:
Decisions &
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continued

“a matter of doubt which arises concerning an issue that is d’rabbanan is resolved in leniency”; b. Betza 3b), we adopt a leniency regarding the prohibition of work on Chol haMo’ed. However, we commend that people refrain from regular work and employment during this period to focus their attention on the observance of the holiday and spending time with their families and communities.

4.3.1.3 We recognize that in the traditional practice of Diaspora Jews, additional days are added to Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret and are observed in the same manner as the first days of these *chaggim* (as well as the seventh day in the case of Pesach). Since establishment of these days is *d’rabbanan* and since Reform Jews and some Conservative Jews no longer observe them as *chaggim*, we regard their observance as a venerable, but non-binding *minhag*. In those localities where the wider Jewish community observes these days, one may honor them in keeping with the local *minhag*. Priority, however, should be placed on observance of those days that are *mo’adim d’oraita*.

One can honor holidays, even if one is not fully observing them. For example, one could decide to practice our occupation on such a day, and yet still avoid public acts that treat the day as secular or normal (e.g., mowing the lawn, painting the house, going to the movies).

4.3.1.4 We commend the avoidance of all activities that would detract from the peacefulness, rest, and sanctity of the *chaggim*.

4.2.1.5 We commend attendance at communal worship services on the *chaggim*, but if such attendance is not possible one should use the standard holiday Amidah in one’s daily prayer. It is appropriate to make special preparations for holiday meals, since such preparations add to the distinctiveness, sanctity, and communal aspect of *chaggim*.

4.3.2 Yom Kippur.

4.3.2.1 On Yom Kippur one should fast completely (no food or drink) beginning before sundown and ending after nightfall the following day. This applies to all of bar/bat mitzvah age and over. Those who have special health needs should eat and drink according to those needs.

The Torah commands the practice of “self-affliction” (inuy nefesh) on Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Numbers 29:7). Other biblical texts demonstrate that this phrase implies fasting (Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 58:3), along with other expressions of self-denial. In the Acts of the Apostles, the day is referred to simply as “the fast” (Acts 27:9). According to the Mishnah (m. Yoma 8:1), and the consensus of Jewish tradition, the fast required on Yom Kippur involves abstention from both food and drink.

Children nine years old or younger should not fast on Yom Kippur. Children more than nine years old should learn to fast, adding hours each year as they grow older.

“Children need not be made to fast on Yom Kippur, but they should train them the year before or two years before, in order that they become accustomed to the observance of commandments” (m. Yoma 8:4). The Shulchan Aruch recommends that the training begin at age nine (133:19).

4.3.2.2 On Yom Kippur one should not bathe for pleasure, but washing the hands and face for hygienic purposes is not inappropriate.

4.3.2.3 On Yom Kippur one should not engage in sexual relations.

The Mishnah defines the “self-affliction” required on Yom Kippur as involving abstention from washing (for pleasure), sexual intercourse, and the wearing of leather sandals, in addition to a total fast (m. Yoma 8:1).

4.3.3 Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah one should hear the sounding of the shofar.

The Torah (Numbers 29:1) calls the first day of the seventh month (reckoned according to the festal calendar, in which Nissan is the first month) a “day when the horn is sounded” (yom teruah). It also states (Leviticus 23: 24) that the day is “commemorated with loud blasts” (zichron teruah). According to the Mishnah, this implies that a Jew is obligated to hear the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah (m. Rosh Hashanah 3:7).

4.3.4 Sukkot.

4.3.4.1 As weather permits during Sukkot, one should eat as many of one’s meals as possible in a sukkah (whether a congregational sukkah, a friend’s sukkah, or one’s own). We would also commend the expanded practice of sleeping in the sukkah.

“The Sukkah is a temporary structure... erected in the open air, under the sky, not in a room or under a tree. It consists of four walls and removable covering... Theoretically two complete walls and part of a third wall satisfy the minimum requirements for a Sukkah, but it is customary to have four walls, and these should be strong enough to withstand the impact of ordinary winds... The covering, called sekhakh, must be of material that grows from the soil, has been detached from the ground, and cannot be defiled... The sekhakh should be loose enough so that one can see the sky, yet thick enough so that the shadow it casts on the ground exceeds the light thrown by the sun.” (Klein, 162-63)

“You shall live in booths (sukkot) seven days; all citizens of Israel shall live in booths” (Leviticus 23:42). The Mishnah teaches that this means making the sukkah one’s primary home and one’s house a secondary home during the seven days of the holiday (m. Sukkah 2:9). However, the Mishnah also teaches that one should move from the sukkah to the house when harsh weather intervenes. The Shulchan Aruch expands on this concession: “If staying in the sukkah causes you discomfort, that is if you are troubled by the cold weather or the wind, or by a bad odor or similar annoyances, you are exempt from the mitzvah of sukkah on all nights other than the first night, and on all the days of Sukkot” (135:17).

4.3.4.2 As an expanded practice, we commend building one’s own sukkah for the celebration of Sukkot.

4.3.4.3 One should wave the lulav and etrog at least once during the holiday in accordance with traditional practice. The traditional mitzvah berachah should be recited before waving. While it is acceptable to wave a lulav/etrog that belongs to the congregation or to a fellow congregant, it is preferable to purchase one’s own.

“On the first day [of Sukkot] you shall take the product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days” (Leviticus 23:40). According to the Talmud, the “product of hadar trees” is the citron (etrog), and the “leafy tree” is the myrtle (b. Sukkah 35a, 32b).

**4.3 Holidays:
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The lulav consists of palm, myrtle, and willow branches placed together. To fulfill the mitzvah of waving the lulav, the etrog is placed in the left hand, the lulav in the right hand, and they are held together so that they touch one another. When reciting the mitzvah blessing, the tip of the etrog points downward and the stem upward. When waving, the tip of the etrog points upward and the stem downward. The lulav and etrog are waved first toward the east, then toward the south, then west, north, up, and down.

4.3.5 Pesach.

4.3.5.1 From 10 a.m. on the day of the first Seder (the 14th of Nissan) till the end of Pesach, no chametz (translated “leaven”) shall be eaten.

According to the traditional rabbinic interpretation, the Written Torah forbids eating leaven from “noon” (in halakhic terms, the half-way point between sunrise and sunset) on the day the Pesach lamb was sacrificed (m. Pesachim 1:4). This time was set by calculating the earliest hour when the afternoon sacrifices (which on this day included the Pesach lambs) would begin in the Temple (m. Pesachim 5:1). The Sages then added an additional two-hour buffer as a fence around the Torah.

Pesach ends after either seven or eight days depending on one’s minhag regarding the additional day of Yom Tov practiced among segments of the Jewish world (See section 4.3.1.3.).

4.3.5.2 Leaven (called chametz) refers specifically to five kinds of grain which rise when put in contact with water. These are wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats. During Pesach we do not eat these, nor do we eat foods containing any of them.

During Pesach we do not eat these, nor do we eat foods containing any of them. Of course, the exception here is matzah – which consists of unleavened bread made from any of these five types of grain.

4.3.5.3 Ashkenazic normative practice has historically included the minhag to avoid a halakhic category of foods referred to as kitniyot: beans, buckwheat, caraway, cardamom, corn, edamame, fennel seeds, fenugreek, flaxseeds/linseed, hemp seeds, lentils, millet, peas, poppy seeds, rapeseed, rice, sesame seeds, soybeans, sunflower seeds, teff. The MJRC does not regard this minhag to be an authoritative norm for contemporary practice, but as a custom whose observance is a matter of communal and individual discretion.

According to traditional Ashkenazic authorities, these are forbidden because they can easily be confused with the five grains listed above.

In recent years the normativity of this minhag has waned among Ashkenazic Jews, most strongly articulated in the 2015 Rabbinical assembly CJLP responsum, which overturns the ban on kitniyot. That said, ancestral custom holds significant importance for many Jews, and large portions of Torah-observant Ashkenazic Jewry continue to refrain from the eating of kitniyot.

Therefore, while the MJRC does not uphold the ban on kitniyot for Ashkenazic Jews, the MJRC encourages individual Jews to make decision for their sederim, homes and meals throughout Pesach that keep in mind the customs of the people with whom they will be eating and providing transparency about one’s own practice.

Furthermore, the fact that certain processed kitniyot products include elements of actual

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continued

chametz will require individuals to check these products carefully lest they unwittingly eat chametz on Pesach. For example, one's local rice products may not have "kosher for Passover" labeling.

The MJRC also encourages communities to work to ensure there are non-kitniyot options at communal meals during Pesach (communal sederim, Shabbat Chol haMo'ed Pesach, etc.) for people who may maintain the minhag concerning the abstention from kitniyot.

4.3.5.4 Foods that have a "Kosher for Passover" *hekhsher* (symbol indicating official kosher certification) are guaranteed to contain no *chametz*. During the eight days of Pesach shoppers should look for the distinctive markings on food packages.

4.3.5.5 During the week of Pesach one should not eat in restaurants that are not kosher for Pesach, unless one is only purchasing a beverage that does not contain any *chametz* in it.

The chances of accidentally eating food with chametz is great when eating in restaurants, therefore this should be avoided.

4.3.5.6 Prior to the beginning of Pesach, a family may sell all their *chametz* to a non-Jewish friend or neighbor. All the *chametz* is gathered, taken out of the house for the duration of Pesach and sold for an agreed upon amount of money (usually one dollar). After Pesach, the money is exchanged for the *chametz*. One may also keep the *chametz* in one's own home, but separated from the foods eaten for Pesach (e.g., in the basement or a closet) provided one does not make use of these areas during Pesach.

The Torah prohibits not only the consumption of chametz on Pesach, but also its possession (Exodus 12:19). The sale of chametz is a mechanism to concretize this without having to dispose of food wastefully.

In some synagogues the procedure of selling chametz is entrusted to the rabbi who is granted "power of attorney" to establish the terms of the sale. Individuals in the synagogue may sign a registry indicating their agreement to have their rabbi fulfill this responsibility on their behalf. In this case the sold chametz is kept in one's home in a separate place.

4.3.5.7 During Pesach, one should not use the dishware, cookware, and utensils one uses regularly during the year until those items have been fully cleaned such that they contain no *chametz*. Items which cannot have *chametz* fully removed (e.g., wooden vessels and other utensils with gaps inaccessible to cleaning) should be replaced with alternative items that are used for Pesach only.

One of the great gifts God gave in the various mitzvot of Pesach is the command to concretize our commitment to the covenant in the earthly details of our lives. Few things overturn the sense of normalcy and constancy more than a complete overhaul of the kitchen. Pesach is a commemoration of the seminal transition for the people of Israel. We participate in this transition through a series of annual practices that are meant to stir us into a posture of openness to newness, redemption, and Divine service. Accordingly, no holiday expects as much of the Jewish home as Pesach.

As mentioned in the commentary to decision 4.2.5.6, it is not only eating but also the presence of chametz which is prohibited in the Torah (see Exodus 12:19). Accordingly, one area of special attention is the setting where our food is stored and prepared. The

**4.3 Holidays:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

traditional practice of many observant Jews is to kasher all vessels that can be kashered (not all materials are “kasherable”) in preparation for Pesach such that they are returned to a neutral halakhic status. The core issue at stake for Pesach is the removal of all recognizable chametz. Contemporary cleaning materials can generally remove all food particles. That said there are items whose structural design or material composition makes them susceptible to retaining pieces of recognizable chametz. Accordingly, the MJRC recommends that only these items be set aside for Pesach, while other utensils/dishes/cookware be simply thoroughly cleaned.

There may be those for whom the standard of traditional kashering for Pesach is more congruent with their practice more broadly and may also enable them to share with their families and community. For people in those situations the MJRC does continue to validate the legitimacy of the kashering model as a hiddur mitzvah (beautification of the commandment) and a way to ensure cohesion within communities and relationships.

Our core position reflects our concern to appropriately balance the following values: fidelity to the core d’oraita mitzvot of Pesach concerning removal of chametz, recognition of the wisdom of mitzvot d’rabbanan in providing the way to observe the mitzvot, and responsiveness to the realities of contemporary life. Rather than reflecting a concern for supporting doing the bare minimum for the d’oraita mitzvah, we hope this standard of practice will enhance the accessibility of Pesach preparation to those for whom it may have been made distant.

4.3.5.8 The prohibition to not own chametz includes its existence in the spaces one owns. Therefore, homes and vehicles are to be thoroughly cleaned prior to the beginning of Pesach.

We recommend starting this process no later than Rosh Chodesh Nissan. It can be helpful to begin with cleaning rooms/areas where it is easy to avoid bringing in food, and to avoid bringing food into those areas once one has thoroughly cleaned them.

4.3.5.9 On the 13th of Nissan any remaining chametz is to be identified, and before 10:00 am on the 14th of Nisan this chametz is to be destroyed. One may do this earlier if one is traveling. We commend the tradition of b’dikat chametz — the search for leaven as the way to enact this process. Once the chametz is removed, one recites the appropriate mitzvah berachah to declare any missed chametz as ownerless.

After sundown on the night before the Pesach Seder (or the evening before one travels, if one is travelling for Pesach), all lights of the home are turned off, a candle is lit, a berachah recited (al biur chametz) and the search for a few intentionally scattered crumbs of bread is begun. After these are scooped up, they are set-aside until morning, and burned. The power of the symbolic removal of chametz in such a deliberate and dramatic fashion is especially meaningful.

4.3.6 Counting the Omer

The counting of the omer is to be done in accordance with the existing Halakhah, commencing on the second day of Pesach and culminating at Shavuot fifty days following. Though various schools of thought existed during the Second Temple period concerning which day to comment counting, the existing Halakhah has prevailed for the past two millennia, and any change would be an unnecessary adaptation resulting in an odd variance from the greater Jewish community.

**4.3 Holidays:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

The practice of counting the omer derives from Leviticus 23:15: “And from the day on which you bring the sheaf (omer) of elevation offering—the day after the Sabbath—you shall count seven weeks.” The Sages understood the command “you shall count” as requiring a formal, liturgical act in which the days between Pesach and Shavuot would each receive a numerical designation. Following the interpretation adopted by the Pharisees during the Second Temple Period (and supported by the Septuagint, Philo and Josephus), rabbinic tradition understood “the Sabbath” of Leviticus 23:15 to be the first day of Pesach. Thus, the counting of the omer would commence on the second day of Pesach. Apparently, the Sadducees and the Qumran community interpreted the word as referring to a Saturday—either the Saturday after Pesach began, or the one after the seven-day Pesach holiday ended. According to their reckoning, the practice of counting the omer would always begin on a Sunday.

4.3.7 Minor Fasts and Festivals.

4.3.7.1 The Ninth of Av. Our basic practice includes fasting on the Ninth of Av.

Zechariah 8:19 refers to four fasts, all associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The most important of these occurs on the Ninth of Av. According to the Mishnah (m. Taanit 4:6), both the first and the second Temples were destroyed on this day. Many other historical calamities (such as the expulsion from Spain) have befallen the Jewish people on the Ninth of Av. Consequently, after Yom Kippur this day has been the most solemn fast in the Jewish calendar. While work is not prohibited (a common characteristic of all the minor fasts and festivals), one avoids all eating and drinking from sunset to sunset, as on Yom Kippur.

4.3.7.2 Chanukah. Our basic practice includes lighting menorah candles on Chanukah, accompanied by the traditional berachot. (As with Shabbat candles, a Messianic berachah may be added.)

4.3.7.3 Purim. Our basic practice includes hearing the Megillah (the Book of Esther) read on Purim.

4.3.7.4 Yom HaShoah and Yom HaAztma’ut. Our basic practice involves commemorating these days by gathering (if possible) with others from our congregation or with the wider Jewish community. As an expanded practice we commend lighting a yearzeit candle on Yom HaShoah.

These holidays commemorate the two monumental events of twentieth century Jewish history: the holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. These events, both of profound spiritual significance, have left an indelible mark on the consciousness of the Jewish people. It is appropriate that we gather with other Jews on these occasions to demonstrate our solidarity with our people, expressing together our grief and our joy.

**4.4 PRAYER:
INTRODUCTION**

**Why pray in the
traditional Jewish
manner?**

DAVVENING IS PRAYING TRADITIONAL Jewish liturgy in a traditional manner, hopefully with other Jews. Why might this be something we should do?

First, we need to davven because it puts us in “a different space.” When we davven, we reconnect with our identity as members of a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It

is not enough to remember that this is true: in davvening—in the postures it requires, the prescribed “script” that guides our words, the “processing of the psyche” that ensues—we viscerally, experientially, and spiritually reconnect with our true identity so that we have a greater likelihood of acting out of that awareness throughout the day.

4.4 Prayer:
Introduction
continued

Second, we need to davven out of obedience to Hashem's call upon Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation: to not davven, to not bring God this sacrifice of prayer and praise is to be derelict in our duty as members of that people who responded at Sinai, "na'aseh v'nishma" – we will do and we will hear (understand).

Third, we need to davven because otherwise we are left to our own devices in seeking to express and nurture our spirituality. Davvening keeps our prayers from becoming narcissistic, subjective, or a neglected discipline. In davvening we submit to the wisdom of our people through thousands of years. We inherit and benefit from their trial and error. In submitting to the discipline of davvening, we say yes to our identity as Jews, yes to our priestly role in the world, yes to our God, and yes to our identity as members of Klal Yisrael. We come into the world of Jewish prayer together as participants, learners, and co-bearers of the priestly burdens, privileges, and responsibilities of the people of Israel.

Fourth, we need to davven because the depth and diversity of the liturgy speaks to us in different ways each time we do it. Although the liturgy remains the same, the experience is always different. And perhaps this is because each day we are different. Were it not for the liturgy, we would lack any prayer measuring stick by which to take notice of how we are different today from yesterday, and, to a degree, different from all of our yesterdays – and also how we, like the liturgy, remain the same through all our changes.

Fifth, we need to davven because the discipline shapes our theology and spirituality as Messianic Jews. And if we don't submit to this discipline, then other internal and external factors will end up shaping our theology and spirituality, generally in a manner dissonant with our Jewish identity. To paraphrase Bob Dylan, "You gotta be shaped by somebody; it might be the Jewish tradition, and it might be another tradition, but you gotta be shaped by somebody."

Sixth, we need to davven because of the regularity it calls us to. Even if we never davven three times a day – to pray Shacharit daily, or even just Monday, Thursday, and Shabbat, is a call we need to heed. Such davvening is a context in which we can manifest faithfulness to the promises we make to others ("I'll pray for you"). It also constitutes a regular appointment with God at which time progress is made on important matters, often in a manner structured around our inherited prayer agenda, the Amidah.

Seventh, we need to davven in order to heed the eternal call, "Seek my face." This regular appointment is like a regular audience with the King, and we will often find ourselves smiling as we go into it, because we will learn that as we davven, we sense the King's presence. It is not as if we generate that Presence out of our own subjectivity, but rather we find God there, almost as if God waits to meet us in the traditional practice.

Eighth, we need to davven because we need the companionship of the tradition. There is a holy specialness, a different texture and awareness that davvening brings, a sense of being part of a global trans-generational community. This is a necessary and life-giving alternative to the isolation of modern hyper-individualistic spiritualities. In praying within the tradition we are never socially alone, even if we are not meeting with other Jews at that time. But of course, we experience this companionship in a deeper manner when we pray with a *minyan* (a quorum of ten Jews).

Ninth, we need to davven because there we meet and join with our Messiah in his priestly service for Israel, the nations, and the cosmos. As High Priest he offers to Hashem the sacrifice of himself, but also the sacrifice of his praise, thanks, and petition for the sake of Israel and the world. This is what Hebrews is speaking of when it borrows the language of Tanach and puts these words on the lips of Messiah: "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and

4.4 Prayer:
Introduction
continued

sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you” (HEBREWS 2:12). He is in the midst of the congregation of his people praising his Father. When we davven, we are joining our prayers to those of Yeshua, our Great High Priest. We come to Hashem in him, with him and through him. As he is, so we are: as he does, so we do – in him, through him, for the honor, glory, and progress of the purposes of Hashem.

Yeshua is engaged in loving agony for the culmination of Hashem’s saving purpose for the world. In Scripture, God, Messiah, the Holy Spirit, and God’s faithful people are all described as being engaged in longing and struggle toward the consummation of all things. In COLOSSIANS 1:24, the Apostle Paul says, “in my flesh I am making up what is lacking in Messiah’s afflictions for the sake of His Body.” The point is that just as Messiah participates in Hashem’s struggle and agony for *tikkun olam*, the full redemption

and repair of the world, so Paul participates in these struggles, and so should we.

Tenth, we need to davven because our role is indispensable to the purposes of God. In the Tanach, all sacrifices were to be seasoned with salt. Yeshua told his talmidim, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot” (MATTHEW 5:13). We are the salt on the sacrifices of the prayers of Israel – that is part of our function in the world. The only question is, will we play our part?

Of course, there is a learning curve in davvening. But all of us share this in common – we can only begin from where we are. The important thing is to be on the right road, for no matter how far we are along the road, the most important thing is that we meet each other, our tradition, and our God who awaits us there.

4.5 PRAYER:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY

4.5.1 Shema, Amidah and Alenu

4.5.1.1 Our basic practice should include praying the Shema, the Amidah and the Alenu prayer each morning. Prayer may be recited in the person’s native language or Hebrew, whichever allows the individual to more actively engage in the prayer more actively. We would however commend Hebrew as the preferred language of prayer.

The Shema consists of three paragraphs from the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41). According to the Mishnah (m. Tamid 4:3; 5:1), these three paragraphs (plus the Decalogue) were recited daily by the priests who officiated in the temple. After the destruction of the temple, rabbinic tradition saw this recitation (minus the Decalogue) as incumbent upon all adult free Jewish males (m. Berachot 3:3). Since Deuteronomy 6:7 and 11:19 command that we recite these words “when you lie down and when you rise up,” it was determined that the three paragraphs of the Shema should be recited each morning and evening.

While the sages viewed the daily recitation of the Shema as ordained by the Written Torah, they recognized that the Eighteen (Shemoneh Esreh) Blessings of the weekday Amidah derived from the post-biblical period. Maimonides teaches that the commandment to pray daily is biblical, but the precise wording and timing of the Amidah (which fulfills that commandment) was determined by later tradition (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 1:1-3).

Just as the recitation of the Shema can be traced back to temple practice, so the Amidah appears to have its origins in the prayers offered by the people while the priests fulfilled their sacrificial duties. Such prayers were offered by the crowds gathered in the temple

**4.5 Prayer:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

courts (Luke 1:10). When Peter and John go up to the Temple at the time of the afternoon sacrifice (Acts 3:1), the author of Acts even speaks of it as “the hour of prayer” (rather than “the hour of sacrifice”). Apparently the devout would pray at this hour, even if they could not be in Jerusalem (Acts 10:1-3, 30). Thus, the Talmudic traditions that link the Amidah to the daily sacrifices appear to have some merit (see b. Berachot 26b). This link would also explain the term “Amidah,” which means “standing”: this was the posture of the priests as they offered sacrifice, and it is also the posture of those who recite the Amidah, even today, at the times of the daily sacrifices.

While the Alenu derives from a much later period than the Shema and the Amidah, it has been held in great esteem among all observant Jews for centuries and has become the customary way of ending every statutory service.

When we pray the Shema, Amidah, and Alenu daily, we are plunging into the heart and soul of the traditional Jewish encounter with God and are also fulfilling Israel’s corporate obligation to come before God as a priestly people.

4.5.1.2 Recognizing the difficulties in doing so, our basic practice does not involve praying the Minchah service.

The Minchah service, prayed in the mid-afternoon, consists primarily of the daily Amidah. As its name suggests (minchah means “gift” or “grain offering”), this service has its roots in the prayer accompanying the afternoon sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 3:1, 10:1-3, 30). While not included in our basic practice, it is a venerable tradition to be honored and commended.

4.5.1.3 In lieu of a Ma’ariv service, our basic practice for evening prayer involves a bedtime Shema. As an expanded practice, we commend the recitation of the three paragraphs of the Shema, its accompanying blessings, and the Ma’ariv Amidah.

The statutory core of the standard Ma’ariv service is the Shema. The sages of the Mishnah disagreed about whether the Amidah was also a necessary part of this service (b. Berachot 27b). They decided to include the Amidah, but in recognition of its ambiguous status they ruled that it should not be repeated publicly by the Reader (unlike the Shacharit and Minchah Amidah).

4.5.1.4 The Shema section should consist at minimum of the Shema and the V’ahavta. But we also commend as expanded practice the recitation of all three paragraphs of the Shema (including V’haya im-shmo’a and Va-yomer), along with the blessings before and after the Shacharit and Ma’ariv Shema.

“In the morning one recites two blessings before it [the Shema] and one after it. And in the evening, two before it and two after it” (m. Berachot 1:4). While the themes of these blessings were already determined by the time of the Mishnah, the precise wording varied from location to location.

Reuven Hammer explains the function of these blessings: “First we need to know why there are blessings surrounding the Shema at all. Why not simply recite the passages from the Torah? Surely they are the main concern. Rabbinic Judaism, however, prescribed that blessings be recited before and after the ritual recitation of any biblical passage... Thus the blessing immediately prior to the Shema and the blessing immediately following it really serve first to introduce it as a biblical reading and then to affirm the truth of what has been read” (Entering Jewish Prayer, 135).

**4.5 Prayer:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

The first blessing before both the morning and evening Shema acknowledges God as the creator of all, with attention given especially to light and darkness (as appropriate to the time of day). Since the blessing after the Shema focuses on God as redeemer, Hammer notes the theological significance of the three basic blessings surrounding the Shema: “Thus the theme of creation is joined to the Shema, so that the three themes basic to Jewish belief are explicitly discussed: creation, revelation, and redemption” (137).

4.5.1.5 The Amidah referred to above is the entire weekday Amidah.

4.5.2 Shabbat Prayer.

On Shabbat our basic practice is the same as our daily basic practice with the substitution of the Shabbat Amidah.

4.5.3 Holiday Prayer.

On holidays our basic practice is the same as our daily basic practice with the substitutions and additions appropriate for the particular holiday.

4.5.4 Berachot.

4.5.4.1 Our basic practice is to recite the relevant blessing upon the performance of those mitzvot which are themselves part of our basic practice, when acknowledging God’s provision of food, and the Shehecheyanu when appropriate.

The formula of blessing (Baruch Atah...) is the basic unit of Jewish worship. As seen above, it is integral to all of the statutory services (Shacharit, Minchah, Ma’ariv). It also provides the framework by which Jews have traditionally sanctified the events of daily life. The standard berachot can enable us as Messianic Jews to fulfill Paul’s charge: “everything you do or say, do in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks through him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17).

Before fulfilling a ritual mitzvah, one recites the blessing associated with that mitzvah (...asher kid’shanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivenu...). In this way we acknowledge that the mitzvah is God’s gracious gift to us, and also demonstrate that we are consciously and deliberately acting in obedience to a divine command.

The Shehecheyanu blessing is mentioned in the Mishnah (m. Berachot 9:3). There we are told that it is recited when one builds a new house or buys new things. These examples are evidently meant to illustrate rather than exhaust its use. Its significance in Jewish life is noted by Reuven Hammer: “The blessing that for many elicits the most profound emotional reaction is the Shehecheyanu. Recited at every holiday, at every special new occasion, this blessing is attached to the experience of life itself. To be able to say, ‘Who has kept us in life, sustained us, and allowed us to reach this moment,’ means having survived to reach yet another season, another milestone. We bless God, whose sustaining force keeps us alive” (263-64).

4.5.4.2 Our basic practice for acknowledging God’s provision of food consists of prayer before meals. The general blessing before meals is Shehakol niyeh bid’varo. At meals where bread is consumed, one instead recites Hamotzi as a general blessing for all food eaten. If one is primarily eating fruit, one recites P’ri Haetz; if vegetables, P’ri Ha’adamah, and if pastry, Miney Mezonot.

**4.5 Prayer:
Decisions &
Commentary**
continued

The basic rules governing blessings before eating are found in m. Berachot 6. The Talmud sets these blessings within a broader context: “It is forbidden to a person to enjoy anything of this world without a blessing” (b. Berachot 35a).

4.5.4.3 As an expanded practice, we also commend prayer after meals, consisting of at least the first blessing of Birkat Hamazon (Hazan et Hakol).

The sages saw the recitation of the Grace after Meals (Birkat Hamazon) as a biblical commandment ordained in Deuteronomy 8:10: “When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.” The recitation of blessings before eating was a secondary derivation from this primary commandment: “If one says a blessing when one is full, how much more should one do so when one is hungry?” (b. Berachot 35a). Nevertheless, among Jews today blessings before eating are common practice, whereas blessings after eating are exceptional. Our basic practice thus follows common custom rather than strict halakhic priority. Hopefully, over time Birkat Hamazon will also become a normal part of our life.

4.5.5 Practices Connected to the Shema.

4.5.5.1 Our basic practice involves affixing a kosher mezuzah to the doorpost of the main entryway to one’s home, according to traditional practice.

The mezuzah contains the two first paragraphs of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21). Both of these paragraphs include the commandment to “inscribe them [these words] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” The affixing of a mezuzah thus fulfills this Torah commandment in a literal way, just as the recitation of the evening and morning Shema (“when you lie down and when you get up”) fulfills literally another part of the same text.

In the Mishnah the mezuzah is associated with the Shema, tefillin, the Amidah, and Birkat Hamazon (m. Berachot 3:3). They are all statutory verbal expressions of Israel’s faithful devotion to Hashem.

4.5.5.2 Our basic practice includes wearing a tallit during one’s daily Shacharit prayer.

The third paragraph of the Shema (Numbers 15:37-41) states: “Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes (tzitzit) on the corners of their garments throughout the ages... look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them.” In ancient times it was customary to wear four-cornered garments in daily life, and Israel is here commanded to attach tzitzit to such garments as a symbol of the mitzvot. Once people no longer wore such garments, it became common to wear a special four-cornered shawl with tzitzit when praying the morning service. In this way the tzitzit are worn, handled, and looked upon daily, and – like the mezuzah and tefillin – represent symbolically the divine Words that govern Jewish life and give it meaning, direction, and purpose.

4.5.5.3 Our basic practice includes laying tefillin at least once per week during one’s daily Shacharit prayer. As an expanded practice, we commend laying tefillin daily (with the exception of Shabbat and holidays).

Tefillin are two black leather boxes, each containing four passages of the Torah: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 (the first two paragraphs of the Shema, also found in the mezuzah), and Exodus 13:1-10 and 11-16. Each of these passages speaks of having

**4.5 Prayer:
Decisions &
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continued

“a sign on your hand and a symbol/reminder on your forehead.” Jewish tradition sees this as a reference to the tefillin, which are bound on the arm and the forehead.

Tefillin are closely linked to the recitation of the Shema. Ideally, according to the sages, one should wear tefillin while reciting the morning Shema (b. Berachot 14b). In reciting the words of the Shema and in literally wearing the words on our body, we take upon ourselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven (we accept God’s sovereignty in our lives).

“R. Yohanan also said: If one desires to accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven in the most complete manner, [upon waking in the morning] one should consult nature [relieve oneself] and wash one’s hands and put on tefillin and recite the Shema and say the tefillah [the Amidah]: this is the complete acknowledgment of the kingdom of heaven.” (b. Berachot 14b-15a).

Tefillin, like the tzitzit, are only worn by Jews, as they express our commitment to God’s covenant with Israel as embodied in the mitzvot. Tefillin are not worn on Shabbat or holidays, as these are also spoken of as “signs,” and would thus make the tefillin redundant.

4.5.6 Men, Women, and Basic Practices Related to Prayer.

4.5.6.1 Our basic practices in the area of prayer apply both to men and women.

4.5.6.2 In keeping with this, it would make sense to likewise see basic practices associated with prayer, such as the donning of tallit and tefillin, as applicable to both Jewish men and women. However, like many other contemporary Jewish movements, we recognize that certain traditional sensibilities lead many Jewish women to be reluctant to adopt these practices. Therefore, at this point we will not establish these as basic practices for women but will acknowledge the right of women to wear tallit and/or tefillin, if they choose to do so. Those who decide to wear tallit and/or tefillin should thereafter treat these practices as fulfilling an obligation and should recite the appropriate mitzvah berachah.

The Talmud exempts women from performing time-bound mitzvot: “every positive commandment whose observance is time dependent – men are obligated and women are exempt; but when a mitzvah is not time-dependent, men and women are equally obligated” (m. Kiddushin 1:7). Thus, women have been exempt from reciting the Shema and donning tefillin (time-bound mitzvot) but obligated to pray the Amidah and Birkat Hamazon (m. Berachot 3:3).

At the same time, nowhere in the Talmud are women forbidden to perform mitzvot from which they are exempt, including the wearing of tallit and tefillin. A tradition is reported that “Michal the daughter of King Saul used to wear tefillin, and the sages did not protest” (b. Eruvin 96a). Maimonides and Rashi rule that women are permitted to perform mitzvot from which they are exempt, but should not recite the mitzvah blessing, since “who has commanded us” does not apply to them. Other sages even permitted the recitation of the mitzvah blessing.

The obvious reason for the exemption from time-bound mitzvot is a woman’s need for flexibility in order to fulfill her traditional duties, especially those related to the care and rearing of children. In a society with large families, lower life-expectancy (and thus fewer non-childrearing years for women), and strictly demarcated gender roles, this exemption makes sense. In the developed world of the twenty-first century, the exemption is anachronistic (except, perhaps, in ultra-orthodox enclaves). Thus, rather than sitting in judgment on the tradition, we are concluding that the reasons for the traditional rulings no longer apply.

**4.6 TEVILAT
MASHIACH:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY**

4.6.1 Tevilat Mashiach is a mitzvah, a commandment of the Messiah. It is not a rite reserved for the most dedicated followers of Yeshua or a mark of special piety. Rather it is a basic practice that marks faithful reception of the good news and entry into the community of the disciples of Yeshua.

Tevilat Mashiach poses unique challenges for Jewish disciples of Yeshua. In Jewish historical memory the rite is associated with coerced betrayal of the people of Israel and of its divinely-bestowed covenant. This abuse of the rite by those who were entrusted with its administration constituted a radical perversion and reversal of its true meaning, such that Jews in these circumstances who refused to receive it and suffered the consequences walked the path of the very Messiah whom they were ostensibly rejecting. Ironically, these Jews were able to live out the truth of Tevilat Mashiach by refusing to receive its perverted expression. Consequently, Tevilat Mashiach calls to mind a tragic and traumatic chapter in the history of Jewish dealings with the Church.

Despite past Christian abuse of this rite and past Jewish suffering as a result of this abuse, we cannot deny that Tevilat Mashiach is a commandment given by the Messiah. Moreover, it is not a minor or “light” commandment whose evasion might be easily justified due to tragic historical circumstances. Instead, it is a weighty mitzvah that embodies in concrete ritual form the Messiah’s call to discipleship and the disciple’s willing response in trusting faithfulness. Thus, the mitzvah of Tevilat Mashiach tests the readiness of Jewish disciples of Yeshua to follow their Messiah wherever he leads.

4.6.2 To be eligible for Tevilat Mashiach, one should have received basic instruction in the message of the good news and its implications for Jewish life and in the meaning and significance of Tevilah and should have expressed in words and deeds a commitment to Yeshua and his mitzvot and to the responsibilities of membership in the community of Yeshua’s disciples.

What does Tevilat Mashiach signify (i.e., of what realities is it a sign)? To answer this question, we must take seriously the primary meaning of the phrase “Tevilat Mashiach”: it refers first and foremost to the immersion that Yeshua himself received at the hands of Yochanan. When disciples of Yeshua receive Tevilat Mashiach, they are joining Yeshua in his own tevilah. From this fact, we may identify five interconnected realities which the mitzvah of Tevilat Mashiach signifies.

- (1) *Union with the Messiah: Yeshua’s tevilah points forward to his death and resurrection and interprets the meaning of those events. He bears the sin of Israel, suffers the judgment Israel deserves, and rises as the pledge and mediator of Israel’s future redemption. Thus, a disciple’s immersion signifies identification and union with the Messiah in his suffering, death, and resurrection (Romans 6:4).*
- (2) *Forgiveness of Sins: The tevilah which Yochanan administered was one of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). Yeshua needed no forgiveness, but nevertheless submitted to Yochanan’s tevilah in solidarity with the people to whom he belonged and of which he was the head. As a result of his death and resurrection, Israel receives the first-fruits of the forgiveness of sins that accompanies the renewal of the covenant (Jeremiah 31:34). A disciple’s immersion signifies reception of this forgiveness and the foretaste of participation in the renewed covenant.*
- (3) *Immersion in the Spirit: Yochanan promised that the one whose coming he prepared would immerse not only in water but also in Spirit (Matthew 3:11). This*

4.6 Tevilat Mashiach:
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promise points to the Messiah as the one who would fulfill the restoration of Israel announced by Ezekiel (36:22-28). Ezekiel proclaims that the Spirit will be given to renew the hearts of the people of Israel and to enable them to obey the mitzvot. When Yeshua arises from the water, the Spirit descends on him (Matthew 3:16) to demonstrate that he is the one who lives with this renewed heart and who is thus qualified to immerse others in the Spirit. A disciple's immersion in the water of Tevilat Mashiach signifies reception of the Spirit through union with Yeshua, and thus also the foretaste of participation in Israel's renewed obedience and restoration.

- (4) *Membership in the community of the Messiah: All who received Yochanan's tevilah were linked together as a fellowship of those who were humbly awaiting Israel's renewal and restoration (Matthew 21:31-32). Yeshua's immersion brought him into fellowship with them, and even more brought them into fellowship with their Messiah. A disciple's immersion signifies participation in the community of the Messiah, a community which even now experiences a foretaste of Israel's—and the world's—redemption.*
- (5) *Taking upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven: All four of the above interconnected realities consist of divine actions. This accords with what is stated below (4.4.5): "Tevilat Mashiach is primarily the action of God through Yeshua by the Spirit." At the same time, however, Tevilat Mashiach "is also a mitzvah that calls for a human response of obedience." This obedient response is not merely a pre-condition for the fulfillment of the mitzvah but is in fact a crucial element in what Tevilat Mashiach itself signifies. Yeshua expressed his commitment to the will of his Father by submitting to the tevilah of Yochanan. In following after him by submitting to Tevilat Mashiach, a disciple expresses commitment to the Messiah and to the reign of Hashem in his or her daily life.*

All five of these realities signified by Tevilat Mashiach entail the foretaste of participation in Israel's renewed covenant. Thus, Tevilat Mashiach summons us as Jews to live lives of radical covenant fidelity, following our Messiah in his love for Israel, Torah, and the Holy Blessed One.

4.6.3 Ideally, Tevilat Mashiach should be administered in a body of water that meets the traditional requirements for a *mikveh*. However, if such a body of water is not available, Tevilat Mashiach may be administered in any body of water that is large enough to permit full body immersion.

4.6.4 As a rite signifying reception into the community of the disciples of Yeshua, Tevilat Mashiach should be administered in the presence of ten or more people who have themselves already received Messianic Tevilah. In exceptional circumstances this requirement may be waived, but in such cases there should be at least three witnesses (including the officiant).

4.6.5 While Tevilat Mashiach is primarily the action of God through Yeshua by the Spirit, it is also a mitzvah that calls for a human response of obedience, both from the one officiating at the immersion – as representing the community of disciples who originally received the commandment (Matthew 28:19-20) – and from the one being immersed. Its character as a mitzvah should be expressed through recitation of the mitzvah berachah ('al tevilat HaMashiach) by the officiant and by the response of "Amen" from the one being immersed.

4.6 Tevilat Mashiach:
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continued

Like all mitzvot, Tevilat Mashiach actualizes what it signifies. This is especially clear on the level of human response. Judaism has always integrated internal disposition and external deed in its mode of responding to divine revelation. Thus, we are called to love Hashem and the words of Hashem, but we are also called to express this love in ritual form by reciting the Shema and laying Tefillin. In the same way our internal disposition of love for Yeshua takes concrete ritual form in Tevilat Mashiach. As in the recitation of the Shema and the laying of Tefillin, disciples of Yeshua take upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven by receiving Tevilat Mashiach. The rite actualizes the human response which it signifies.

What is true on the level of human response is also true on the level of divine action. In rabbinic thought this is evident when considering issues of status. A convert to Judaism must fulfill a set of prescribed rites and be acknowledged by a duly constituted Bet Din in order to become a Jew. When the process is complete, it is believed that Hashem recognizes the person as a full member of the covenant. A new status is established before Heaven, which implies a change in the person's earthly reality. A proper internal disposition in the convert is required for this change to occur, but such a disposition is insufficient apart from the external rites.

Similarly, in order to be married people must fulfill a set of external conditions. Once they have completed the communally sanctioned process, their marriage is acknowledged by Hashem. Their relationship has a new status before Heaven, which implies a change in their earthly reality. Again, proper internal disposition towards one another is required, but it is insufficient apart from the external process.

Tevilat Mashiach is a mitzvah that relates to our status as disciples of Yeshua and members of his messianic fellowship. Like traditional Jewish rituals that establish a new status, it is a once-for-all event (unlike the recitation of the Shema or the laying of Tefillin). Also like such rituals, it actualizes what it signifies not only on the level of human response but also on the level of divine action. In Tevilat Mashiach Yeshua commits himself to the one being immersed, so that the person is established in the status of one united to Yeshua, forgiven, immersed in the Spirit, and joined to the community of the Messiah. The new status before Heaven entails a transformation in the person's earthly reality.

To say that a mitzvah dealing with status "actualizes what it signifies" does not mean that it does so apart from its setting within a broader context of internal dispositions and external practices. For example, a conversion or a marriage can be annulled if it becomes evident that the intent of an individual involved was incompatible with the action undertaken. Moreover, even a conversion or a marriage which is validly performed may fail to realize its purpose of creating a transformed earthly reality. In the same way, the rite of Tevilat Mashiach depends for its validity on the adequate intention of the one undergoing it and depends for its transformative power on other factors in the communal preparation, post-immersion pastoral care, and continued faithful response of that person.

To say that a mitzvah dealing with status "actualizes what it signifies" also does not exclude the possibility that the reality signified by the mitzvah might in certain circumstances be established apart from that particular mitzvah. Thus, as ecclesial tradition has consistently acknowledged, union with Yeshua, forgiveness of sins, immersion in the Spirit, and membership in the community of the Messiah are in certain circumstances bestowed on those who have never undergone the rite of Tevilat

4.6 Tevilat Mashiach:
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Mashiach. While the risen Messiah has committed himself to act in response to the fulfillment of his mitzvah by his community, he remains free to act by the Spirit as he sees fit. He has established a normative pattern for his followers which should be received by them in loving obedience, but that pattern restricts neither his freedom nor his power.

For this reason, we do not question the work of God in individuals who have met the qualifications articulated in 4.6.2 but who have not yet undergone a valid Tevilat Mashiach. Nevertheless, we would aim to instruct such people concerning the importance and significance of Tevilat Mashiach and encourage them to obey the mitzvah.

4.6.6 After the recitation of the mitzvah berachah and its response, the officiant will recite in Hebrew and/or in the vernacular the words, “I now immerse you [one may include here the person’s Hebrew name] in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Hineni ani matbil otcha/otach [Hebrew name] beshem HaAv uvshem HaBen uvshem Ruach Hakodesh).

הַנְּנִי אֲנִי מְטַבֵּיל אֶתְךָ [אֶתְךָ], _____,
בְּשֵׁם הָאָב וּבְשֵׁם הַבֶּן וּבְשֵׁם רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ.

An alternate formula, especially appropriate if the officiant is not in the water, would be: “[Name of the person to be immersed] is immersed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” While we consider the triadic formula of Matthew 28:19 (or its triadic equivalent) to be normative, we will accept as valid *bedi’avad* (in retrospect) all baptisms administered in the name of Yeshua (i.e., without a triadic formula) if they were administered in an ecclesial context which affirmed the triadic divine differentiation of Matthew 28:19.

“Is it not they [i.e., the rich] who blaspheme the honorable name which was invoked over you?” (James 2:7). Many scholars see this text as a reference to Tevilat Mashiach. In this rite the “honorable name” is called over the one being immersed, to set the person apart for the one to whom the name belonged. (It is the invocation of the divine Name over Israel which consecrates Israel to Hashem – see Deuteronomy 28:10; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 14:9)

The name that is invoked (literally, “called”) could be “Yeshua,” but it is more likely a reference to the divine Name (the Tetragrammaton), which God has bestowed on Yeshua (Philippians 2:9) and which now belongs to them both. According to Matthew 28:19, the new disciple is immersed into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This name could be “Father, Son, and Spirit,” but – once again – it is more likely the Tetragrammaton which is now shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, for Jewish disciples of Yeshua Tevilat Mashiach entails a renewed consecration to Hashem in acknowledgement of the fact that the risen Yeshua now shares in the divine Name, as does the Spirit who unites us to Yeshua.

According to the book of Revelation, the disciples of Yeshua are “sealed” (7:2, 9:4) by receiving a mark on their forehead, which elsewhere in the book is identified with “his [the Lamb’s] Name and his Father’s Name” (14:1; see 3:12; 22:4). Many scholars believe the seal here is the mark of Tevilat Mashiach, in which rite the divine Name – which belongs to both the Father and the Son – is invoked over the one who is immersed.

Another text from the Apostolic Writings which may have the same meaning is Ephesians 5:26, which refers to Tevilat Mashiach as the “washing of water with the word [rema].”

**4.6 Tevilat Mashiach:
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What is the “word” that is involved in Tevilah? A second century text offers a likely interpretation: “Hear, then, why the tower has been built upon the water: because your life was saved and shall be saved through water, and the tower has been founded by the utterance [rema] of the almighty and glorious Name and is maintained by the unseen power of the Master” (Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.3.5). The “word” invoked in Tevilat Mashiach, according to Hermas, is the divine Name.

For other texts from the first two centuries of the Yeshua-community which confirm this interpretation, see Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 8.6.4; 9.16; Odes of Solomon 42:11, 15, 19-20; Justin Martyr, First Apology 61.

It is thus evident that the words spoken by the officiant as the new disciple is immersed are of tremendous importance. As the Kohanim “placed the Name” of God upon Israel in the sanctuary (Numbers 6:27) by the recitation of the Birkat Kohanim (Numbers 6:24-26), so the officiant invokes the divine Name upon the new disciple of Yeshua, in recognition of the fact that Yeshua now shares in that Name, and that he consecrates us by the power of the Name through his Spirit. Thus, the invocation of the Name brings those immersed under Yeshua’s authority and marks them as those who belong to him.

Matthew 28:19 indicates that the formula pronounced by the officiant at Tevilat Mashiach should involve an explicit triadic invocation of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and this practice became normative among the early followers of Yeshua and remained so until the modern era. In the Book of Acts, however, the rite is said to be “in the name of Yeshua the Messiah” (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or “in the name of the Lord Yeshua” (Acts 8:16; 19:5). Traditionally, these references in Acts have been considered as descriptive shorthand for the full Matthean formula. However, in the modern era certain groups have seen the texts in Acts as modeling the proper formula to be recited by the officiant. Some of these groups have been motivated by anti-trinitarian convictions, but others have affirmed the triadic differentiation of God and have interpreted the language of their formula in light of Matthew 28:19.

In deference to the consensus of ecclesial tradition up to the modern era, we accept the Matthean formula (or a triadic equivalent) as specifying the proper words to be recited by the officiant in the rite of Tevilat Mashiach. Nevertheless, we also recognize that the texts in the Book of Acts could reasonably be interpreted as providing an alternate formula. This is why we will accept as valid bedi’avad (in retrospect) baptisms administered in the name of Yeshua (i.e., without a triadic formula), but only if they were administered in an ecclesial context which affirmed the triadic differentiation of Matthew 28:19.

**4.7 ZICHRON
MASHIACH:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY**

4.7 Zichron Mashiach: Decisions & Commentary

4.7.1 Zichron Mashiach is a mitzvah, a commandment of the Messiah. It is not an optional act of piety but a fundamental expression of God’s covenant with Israel renewed by the self-offering of Yeshua.

4.7.2 While Zichron Mashiach was instituted in the context of Pesach, there is no evidence that its practice was ever restricted to that season. It appears that the earliest followers of Yeshua observed it weekly. For practical reasons it is difficult for most Messianic congregations to observe Zichron Mashiach with such frequency. Nevertheless, we should aim to observe it at least monthly.

4.7 Zichron Mashiach:
**Decisions &
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continued

4.7.3 Zichron Mashiach may be observed in the context of a communal meal. In such a context the bread will be distributed at the beginning of the meal, and the fruit of the vine at the end of the meal. The mitzvah berachah (lizkor et Meshicho) will be recited before partaking of the bread, and an adapted Messianic version of Ya'aleh ve Yavo will be inserted in the third blessing of the grace after meals before the distribution of the fruit of the vine.

4.7.4. Zichron Mashiach may also be observed outside the context of a communal meal. In such cases an adapted version of the Mussaf Amidah will be recited, with the Messianic Ya'aleh ve Yavo inserted in the fourth blessing. The mitzvah berachah (lizkor et Meshicho) will be recited before receiving the bread and fruit of the vine.

4.7.5 Whether celebrated in the context of a communal meal or outside that context, Zichron Mashiach will also include a recitation of the narrative in which Yeshua instituted the rite, including his words of institution. The narrative of institution will be taken from 1 Corinthians 11:24–26, Matthew 26:26–29, or Luke 22:19–20, or consist of a composite of these texts.

4.7.6 Either unleavened or leavened bread may be used in the rite, though unleavened bread is preferred as recalling the original context of Pesach and as binding the rite to a distinctively Jewish type of food (though Challah could also accomplish this end).

4.7.7 As in Kiddush generally, either wine or grape juice may be employed in the rite, though wine is preferred. To express the sanctity of the event, only kosher wine or grape juice should be used.

4.7.8 In fulfilling the role of representing Yeshua, the bread and the fruit of the vine employed in the rite should be treated with special respect. Just as Jewish tradition ordains that books containing the divine Name be treated with special care, and not be disposed of in a profane manner, so these elements – which in the context of this rite represent for us the divine Name incarnate – should be treated with special care, and remaining portions should be consumed rather than discarded.

4.7.9 Zichron Mashiach expresses, confirms, and deepens the unity of the twofold body of Messiah. Therefore, while our own celebrations of this rite shall be conducted in a way that expresses its inherently Jewish character, we should look for opportunities to welcome Christian friends to share the meal with us. As appropriate situations arise, we should also respond favorably to invitations to share with our Christian friends in their own ecclesial celebrations of this rite.

Lifecycle

5.0 FAMILY PURITY: INTRODUCTION

Why are there boundaries for sexuality?

IF THERE IS ANYTHING MORE PERSONAL than kashrut, this has to be it: sexuality. And as with kashrut, so here, part of the core of the issue is one of relational boundaries: are we going to accord God the right to “intrude” into our sex lives? To the extent that we consider God’s prescriptions on this matter intrusive, we demonstrate our failure to understand that sex is God’s gift to us, not our own creation, that we are God’s servants in every area of life, and that God therefore has every right to make the rules.

This doesn’t go down well in our generation. Not only is our culture oversexed and overstimulated, we have converted the entire domain of sexuality to a matter of individual rights and preferences. Once the issues are thus described, any input from God can only be viewed as “another opinion.” But this will not do.

Two errors must be avoided in seeking to honor God in matters of *niddah*. First, the “impurity” (*tumah*) that attaches to a menstruant woman, or to a man who has ejaculated for that matter, has nothing to do with “dirtiness.” In the days of our ancestors, this impurity indicated that such a person was temporarily separated from normal access to the Tabernacle or Temple. This is generally interpreted to mean that when a woman menstruates or a man ejaculates, we draw near to the mystery of the creation of life itself – and

this is so special, that such an encounter immediately puts the persons involved into a temporary special category. They are set aside, not as discarded or rejected, but in respect for the holy otherness of what has just occurred.

Niddah is all about respect for sexuality, for procreation, for the mystery of life and our privilege to have such an intimate connection to its creation.

The second error is to view *niddah* as a form of deprivation. In reality, it is a matter of protection. The constraints of *niddah* protect the sanctity of sexual relations, elevating our awareness that sex is a gift to be enjoyed, and never taken for granted.

Sexuality is so powerful that it can easily control a person, and all of us know people whose sex drives drive them. This should not be. Sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed, full of developing delights, not something that controls and drives us, depriving us of freedom. When sexuality is fully expressed within its rightful boundaries, marital joy remains conscious, full, and unsullied.

God’s word about sex therefore is a familiar one: Enjoy! But the only way this can happen is to respect the limits God has set, ever mindful that sexual union is a gift, not a personal right. *Niddah* is a gift from God, given that we might enjoy marital sex, mindful that it too is a gift from God.

5.1 FAMILY PURITY: DECISION & COMMENTARY

According to our basic practice, all sexual relations should be avoided for a full seven days from the onset of the woman’s monthly menstrual period, or until the menstrual period has ended, whichever is longer.

The Torah explicitly forbids all sexual relations during a woman’s menstrual period (Leviticus 18:19; 20:18). It also determines that a menstruant is to be considered

5.1 Family Purity:
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continued

ritually impure (and thus sexually inactive) for seven days from the onset of menstruation (Leviticus 15:19). Thus, our basic practice adheres to the straightforward meaning (peshat) of the biblical text.

After dealing with the normal menstrual period (Leviticus 15:19-24), the Torah proceeds to discuss the woman with an extended abnormal discharge (Leviticus 15:25-30). In such cases, the purification process requires seven days from the time the discharge ends (Leviticus 15:28). Jewish tradition combined this latter ruling with the previous unit concerning menstruation and determined that a normal menstruant must wait seven full days after the cessation of her period (or after five days from the onset of menstruation, if her period lasted less than five days), and then immerse herself in a mikveh. She may then resume having sexual relations with her husband.

We view this traditional practice as a commendable fence around the Torah, to be treated with respect. Nevertheless, our basic practice is limited to the requirements contained in the peshat of the biblical law.



The MJRC Vision of Messianic Judaism

The primary purpose of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) is to articulate and promote a cohesive vision for Messianic Judaism rooted in Torah, responsive to Tradition, and faithful to Messiah Yeshua. Such a vision must (1) state how the MJRC sees the relationship between the Messianic Jewish movement and the Jewish people as a whole, the historical churches, and the Jews within those churches. It must also (2) define the Messianic Jewish relationship to the traditions transmitted and embodied by the Jewish people and the Christian church. Finally, a cohesive vision for Messianic Judaism must (3) include reflection on the potential eschatological significance of this movement. The following is an attempt to accomplish these three tasks by painting a portrait of Messianic Judaism not as it is, but as we work, pray, and long for it to be.

1. The Two-Fold Yeshua Community

As the resurrected Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth came to fulfill God's purpose for Israel, a purpose which included the redemption of the nations and the entire cosmos. Yeshua and his apostles established a community within Israel which confirmed God's eternal covenant with Israel while extending Israel's reach beyond its own social borders.

The community established by Yeshua has an essential two-fold constitution: it is composed of Jews and gentiles. In order for the two-fold character of the Yeshua community to be adequately expressed and preserved, it is necessary to foster distinct but united Jewish and gentile communal environments (though Jews will sometimes live in the gentile environments, and gentiles will sometimes live in the Jewish ones). Although the nature of this two-fold community is articulated in the Apostolic Writings, it cannot be understood apart from God's relationship with Israel which is articulated in the Tanakh and which endures perpetually. For this reason, the Jewish Yeshua-community is called to live as an integral part of the Jewish people, mediating Yeshua's holiness to the rest of Israel (Rom 11:16), while the gentile Yeshua-community is called to serve as a messianic extension of Israel among the nations of the world. As such, the Jewish Yeshua-community has a vocation of being a principal source of unity and reconciliation in the differentiated people of God.

Historically this two-fold constitution binding the gentile Yeshua-community to the people of Israel through the Jewish Yeshua-community was compromised with the disappearance of the Jewish Yeshua-community. The Jewish people and the gentile Yeshua-community (i.e., the historical Christian church) share responsibility for this loss, each in its own way. The people of Israel eventually denied the legitimacy of the messianic remnant and at times even vigorously suppressed it. In this way

Israel undermined the visible mediation of Yeshua's sanctifying presence in its midst. Likewise, the historical Christian church denied the legitimacy of its Jewish communal partner and the enduring covenantal identity of Israel as a whole. Moreover, the Christian church far exceeded the people of Israel in suppressing Jewish expressions of Yeshua-faith, at times even resorting to violence. In this way, the Christian church undermined the visible mediation of Israel's presence in the body of the Messiah. In undermining the Jewish Yeshua-community, the Christian church also undermined its own source of differentiated and reconciled unity, which is rooted in the life of the covenant people of Israel. It thereby opened itself up to opposing extremes of centralized clerical domination, on the one hand, and schismatic fragmentation, on the other.

Pressed on both sides, the Jewish Yeshua-community faded into the mists of a distant past. Yeshua continued to dwell in the midst of Israel, but now his sanctifying presence was hidden and diluted. Similarly, Israel continued to dwell in the midst of the Christian church through the church's union with Yeshua, but the covenantal power of Israel's life with God was hidden and diluted.

The MJRC believes that the God of Israel, who raised Yeshua from the dead, has begun the work of resurrecting the Jewish Yeshua-community. The MJRC sees the awakening of Jewish identity among Jewish disciples of Yeshua—manifested most visibly in the Messianic Jewish movement—as the first-fruits of that resurrection. The Messianic Jewish movement is not the full expression of that resurrection, but it points forward to that future reality. The MJRC employs the term “Messianic Jew” to refer to Jewish members of that movement, and the term “Messianic Judaism” to refer to their corporate way of life.

At present only a minority of Jewish disciples of Yeshua participate in the Messianic Jewish community. The majority are members of Christian churches, and their faith is shaped by the theological, liturgical, and devotional traditions of those churches. Some continue to identify as Jews and seek ways to express that reality. If properly related to Messianic Jews and to the wider Jewish world, followers of Yeshua in the church who are awakening to their Jewish identity could become a sign and instrument of the Christian church's enduring connection to the Jewish people. Strictly speaking, the MJRC sees these Jewish disciples of Yeshua as practicing Jewish Christianity rather than Messianic Judaism, for their communities are not Jewish, and the pattern of life of their communities is largely unaffected by the ongoing tradition of the Jewish people. In their service to the gentile Yeshua-community, Jews in that community order their life in relation to the life of their gentile brothers and sisters, for whose benefit the community has been established. Though such Jews have a different orientation to Jewish communal life than Jews in the Jewish Yeshua-community, the MJRC affirms them as fellow Jews in the Messiah. At the same time, the MJRC views the participation of Jews in the Christian church as an exception to the normal vocation of Jewish disciples of Yeshua, which lies within the Jewish Yeshua community.

At present the majority of participants in the Messianic Jewish community are gentiles. While such gentile members are not Messianic Jews, they have a share in Messianic Judaism insofar as they participate in and serve the Messianic Jewish community. Without their dedicated and often sacrificial support Messianic

Judaism would not have come to birth or have grown to its present level of maturity. If properly related to the Christian tradition, affirming its gifts even as they heed a call to a Jewish rather than a Christian communal life, these gentile members can serve as a continual reminder of the Messianic Jewish debt to the Christian church. The MJRC appreciates their ongoing contribution. Nevertheless, the role of gentiles in the Messianic Jewish community should be ordered in relation to that of their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters, just as the role of Jewish Christians in the church is ordered in relation to that of their gentile brothers and sisters. Gentile members of the Messianic Jewish community are called to serve and advance God's purposes for the Jewish members, who are central to that community. Moreover, the participation of gentile members of the Messianic Jewish community is an exception to the normal vocation of gentile Christians, which lies within the gentile Yeshua-community. In the future the MJRC hopes to see a Messianic Jewish community in which a majority of its members are Jewish.

2. Torah, Besorah, and the Two-Fold Tradition

The MJRC envisions Messianic Judaism as the corporate way of life practiced by Jews within the Jewish corporate expression of the two-fold Yeshua-community. The MJRC believes that this way of life must be rooted in the Torah, guided by Jewish tradition, and oriented to the welfare of the Jewish people. When this is the case, the Jewish expression within the two-fold Yeshua-community remains vitally connected with the ongoing life of the Jewish people. But the Messianic Jewish way of life is also to be animated by and centered upon the teaching, example, and redemptive self-offering of Messiah Yeshua, who is present among his disciples through the gift of his Spirit. Consequently, such a Messianic Judaism represents in visible form the hidden presence of the resurrected Messiah in the midst of the Jewish people, and it mediates corporately the resurrected visible presence of Israel in the midst of the two-fold Yeshua community.

The Messianic Jewish understanding of the Torah focuses upon God's eternally-faithful love expressed in Israel's election (Deuteronomy 7:6-7) and in the mission of the Messiah who gave his life for Israel and the nations (John 3:16). That love is now embodied within the Yeshua community through the presence of the Spirit (Romans 5:5), empowering its Jewish members to fulfill the Torah by rooting observance of all the mitzvot in Yeshua's own perfect fulfillment of the two great commandments of love of God and love of neighbor (Mark 12:28-34).

As those whose way of life visibly represents and mediates the sanctifying presence of the Messiah in the midst of the Jewish people, Messianic Jews have the vocation to live as part of that people and as descendants, heirs, transmitters, and practitioners of its interpretive tradition. Messianic Jews have received the Torah—and Tanakh as a whole—through generations of Jews who have gone before them, and their engagement with Tanakh is always also an engagement with those Jews.

Messianic Jews likewise represent and mediate the presence of Israel to the multinational extension of the covenant people established by the risen Messiah. As partners with the historical Christian church, Messianic Jews are beneficiaries of fundamental elements of its interpretive tradition. They have received the Besorah

which tells of the crucified and risen Messiah, fully divine and fully human—and the Apostolic Writings as a whole—through generations of Christians who have gone before them, and their engagement with this message and these texts is always also an engagement with those Christians.

Messianic Jewish fulfillment of the Torah—through Yeshua, in the Spirit, and centered on the two great mitzvot—takes concrete form in the practices of study (Torah), prayer (Avodah), and deeds of loving-kindness (gemilut chasadim). As envisioned by the MJRC, Messianic Jewish study focuses especially on Tanakh, the Apostolic Writings, and the classic texts of the rabbinic tradition. Messianic Jewish prayer is rooted in Jewish liturgical practice, mediated by the 4 heavenly priesthood of the risen Messiah, and empowered by the Spirit. Messianic Jewish deeds of loving-kindness actualize the conviction that all human beings are created in the divine image and that the Messiah himself is especially present among the hungry, the thirsty, and the stranger; moreover, they also take the form of addressing the underlying cultural, social, economic, and political realities which produce or exacerbate such conditions of deprivation.

As descendants, heirs, and continuators of the entire tradition of the Jewish people, we look for unifying commonalities among the diverse expressions of Jewish life through the ages, while respecting and learning from the distinctive contribution of each. As beneficiaries of fundamental elements of the tradition of the historical Christian church, we likewise look for unifying commonalities among the diverse expressions of ecclesial life through the ages, while respecting and learning from the distinctive contribution of each.

3. Messianic Judaism and the Age to Come

The awakening of Jewish identity among Jewish disciples of Yeshua occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the midst of fervent expectation of Yeshua's imminent return. While the MJRC is skeptical of efforts to chart the details of events that will occur at the final turning of the ages, it acknowledges that the Messianic Jewish movement is an eschatological sign. This sign challenges the entire people of God to attain the differentiated and reconciled unity befitting the consummation of history, and anticipates the return of the Messiah and the definitive establishment of his kingdom. Just as the return of Jews to the land of Israel over the past century signals a new phase in the eschatological frame of history, so the re-emergence of the Jewish Yeshua-community conveys the same message.

Messianic Judaism is not merely the restoration of an original biblical template for the people of God. The rebirth of the Jewish Yeshua-community is a new heavenly intervention in the world which intimates something of God's ultimate purpose for Israel and the nations. As participants in this movement—heirs of a tradition oriented to the messianic future and beneficiaries of a tradition in which that future has already been inaugurated—Messianic Jews are called to live their lives in this age with eyes focused on the age to come.

The MJRC understands Messianic Jewish study of Torah, observance of mitzvot (including the messianic mitzvot of Tevilat Mashiach and Zichron Mashiach), and practices of prayer and deeds of loving-kindness as anticipations of the messianic

age. The passionate desire for ultimate divine justice and peace expressed in the Prophets and Psalms has new meaning for Messianic Jews who taste now the powers of the age to come, and who humbly attempt to embody that eschatological vision in provisional form through practices of justice, peace, and healing in the present age.

The MJRC vision of Messianic Judaism is rooted in God's eternally-faithful love for Israel, the nations, and all creation in Yeshua. It is a love which perseveres and will not fail. The One who raised Yeshua from the dead and enthroned him at his right hand will send him once again to reign in Jerusalem. From there he will raise the dead, restore Israel, renew creation, and unify all things under the sovereignty of God. All who embrace the MJRC vision long for Yeshua's return⁵ and seek to advance it through lives lived in union with him in which the fragrance of the age to come ascends amidst a world still groaning in travail. Maran ata—Come Lord Yeshua!

Halakhic Principles

Halakha is necessary to apply a commitment to mitzvot in the nitty-gritty of everyday life. Even though the halakhic conversation is a legal discussion, the halakhic process is not necessarily linear or systematic. Halakha has a certain organic dimension which provides for its development over time. There are, however, principles which guide halakhic discourse and application. The following articulates halakhic terminology and discourse which shapes the MJRC's approach to establishing norms for emerging Messianic Judaism.

While not intending to reinvent halakha, or halakhic categories, the MJRC understands itself as having a responsibility to identify core principles of its halakhic process. As a body of leaders, it is important to be both internally and publicly transparent about the guiding principles and values which helped us come to the decisions we publish and commend.

Prioritizing Mitzvot from Different Sources

Mitzvot d'oraita (commandments derived from the written Torah), mitzvot mashiach (commandments derived from the Apostolic Writings that are not otherwise made explicit in the written Torah), and mitzvot d'rabbanan (commandments instituted by the Sages) are all foundational building blocks of MJRC halakhic decisions. In situations where conflicts may arise, both mitzvot d'oraita and mashiach carry greater weight than mitzvot d'rabbanan. That said, mitzvot d'rabbanan may still be regarded as normative halakha in MJRC decisions (partially because there is sometimes question as to whether or not a given mitzvah is d'oraita or d'rabbanan). This position is congruent with the halakhic approach of Jewish tradition, which itself sets standards to safeguard mitzvot d'oraita, even in moments of potential conflict with mitzvot d'rabbanan. This principle establishes a hierarchy to weigh priorities when conflicting values are present. It is not meant to undermine the importance of mitzvot d'rabbanan in establishing communal norms.

Acknowledging the Existence of "Weightier" and "Lighter" Mitzvot

The MJRC recognizes the importance of Yeshua's claim in Matthew 23:23 (see also Luke 11:42) regarding the halakhic categories of the weightier and lighter mitzvot. In this verse, doing "justice, mercy, and faithfulness" ("love of God" in Luke's account) are declared to be weightier than specifications of tithing. This principle does not deny the authority of "lighter" mitzvot as Yeshua also states that neither weighty nor light should be neglected. Nevertheless, this principle may lead to MJRC decisions deviating from elements of traditional halakha if implementing them would undermine justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Commitment to Using Halakhic Methods

The MJRC is committed to using traditional halakhic methods to articulate stringencies, leniencies, and exceptions as a matter of remaining faithful to halakhic discourse throughout the centuries. Accordingly, MJRC materials will include definitions and explanations of the technical halakhic terms and methods pertinent to each decision.

Appendix 2:
Halakhic Principles
continued

Adherence to Universally Accepted Takanot

The purpose of takanot is to ensure that the intention of the Torah is not undermined by continuing practices that, in contemporary circumstances, run counter to that intention. Takanot are decrees rooted in the rights of human leadership to exert authority in such circumstances. Certain takanot directly challenge the normativity of some biblical practices. Examples of this are the ban on polygamy and the ban on owning slaves (both of which are permitted, and even expected, in the written Torah). The MJRC accepts the authority of classical rabbinic takanot universally accepted by subsequent Jewish communities.

Responsibility to be Creative in the Development of Halakhic Standards

The MJRC sees itself as having the authority to develop new specifications of p'shat (literal meaning), gezeirot (fences), and takanot. This principle is not to be used lightly, often, or without reasonable evidence to suggest it is necessary to do so for the sake of preserving core values articulated in Scripture and Tradition. The purpose of this principle is to make it possible for the MJRC to be appropriately responsive to the social and historical context of its communities, promoting a halakhic way of life that invites us to deepen our growth in observance of mitzvot in contemporary life. If halakha is to be a genuinely guiding application of mitzvot in life it must be responsive to the realities of daily life itself.

Engaging with Contemporary Jewish Diversity

This principle reflects acknowledgement that all available halakhic sources are worth consideration in the halakhic process. The MJRC does not align itself with one approach of contemporary Judaism. It is therefore willing to engage with, and may endorse, decisions from many different contemporary halakhic bodies and/or poskim (e.g., Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbinical Council of America, Central Conference of American Rabbis, etc.). The MJRC's citation of a particular contemporary source in its explanation of a given decision is not demonstrative of acceptance of other halakhic positions presented by that particular source. The MJRC will also remain in respectful interaction with Messianic Jewish communal norms defined by other organizations/institutions, even if it at times they set a different standard.

Listening Ear to Christian Tradition

The MJRC will engage with the wisdom of the Christian Church in developing specifications, gezeirot (legal fences), and/or takanot (decrees rooted in communal authority) especially as they relate to mitzvot mashiach.

Drawing From Other Pertinent Sources of Knowledge

The MJRC will draw upon wisdom from other disciplines in developing its halakhic work (e.g. medicine, sociology, psychology, literary theory, etc.) when issues of halakhic application cross-over directly with elements for which these other disciplines have greater expertise. The MJRC also sees this principle as extending to the ways people know how to act in the world based on societal standards. While halakha invites us into unique ways of being in the world which reflect our covenantal relationship with God and Messiah, our commitments are not meant to cause us to opt out of a robust relationship with the wider world. It is important to be in dialogue with all forms of relevant knowledge to responsibly apply halakha in the contemporary world.

Appendix 2:
Halakhic Principles
continued

Value for Individual Pesak (Halakhic Decision-Making)

The complexity and variability of life situations mean that MJRC standards do not, and will not ever, provide all that is needed by our rabbis in rendering halakhic decisions. Therefore, MJRC halakhic standards are not the final word on any given issue. MJRC member rabbis are empowered to render halakhic decisions contrary to the written standards in particular moments (not as an ongoing alternative position) if they encounter presenting factors which contraindicate the application of halakha presented in the standards. Of course, any issue which has yet to be addressed in written MJRC standards can be decided by individual rabbis based on their own engagement with the halakhic factors at hand.

Glossary

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| <i>Al biur chametz</i> | The berachah recited before searching the home for chametz. |
| <i>Aleinu</i> | The prayer that marks the end of all three daily prayer services. |
| <i>Aliya (pl. aliyot)</i> | Calling of a Jewish member of the congregation to the bimah for a segment of the Torah reading. |
| <i>Am ha'aretz</i> | Lit., the people of the Land. In rabbinic literature it refers to Jewish people who are less scrupulous in their observance. |
| <i>Amidah</i> | HaTefillah (The prayer). Amidah is Aramaic for “standing,” called the “standing prayer.” It is the center of all three Jewish daily prayers. It is also called the Shemoneh Esrei, for the original 18 blessings in the prayer. |
| <i>Apostolic Writings</i> | Brit Chadasha, Newer Testament |
| <i>Avinu</i> | Lit., “Our father” |
| <i>Ayshet hayil</i> | “Woman of valor.” A poem from Proverbs 31:10–31 that is said each Shabbat in honor of the woman of the home. |
| <i>Bar mitzvah</i> | “Daughter of commandment.” A coming-of-age commemoration of a Jewish boy becoming 13 years old at which time he is obligated to perform the mitzvot. |
| <i>Basic practice</i> | Refers to standards of observance that members of the MJRC are themselves committed to follow in their own lives. |
| <i>B'rit milah</i> | Ritual circumcision of a boy on the 8th day – ritual acceptance of a son into the covenant |
| <i>Bat mitzvah</i> | “Daughter of commandment.” A coming-of-age commemoration of a Jewish girl becoming 12 years old at which time she is obligated to perform the mitzvot. |
| <i>Bedi'avad</i> | “In retrospect” |
| <i>Beit din</i> | Lit., “House of judgement.” A rabbinical court usually consisting of three Jews knowledgeable in Jewish law. |
| <i>Benei Yisrael</i> | “Children of Israel” |
| <i>Berachah</i> | “Blessing.” The manner in which we acknowledge and thank God for everything (cf. Prov. 3:8). |
| <i>Besorah; pl., besorot</i> | Good news, Gospel |
| <i>Beyn hashamashot</i> | The time “between the suns.” Begins with the setting of the sun and concludes with the appearance of the stars. |

Appendix 3: Glossary *continued*

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| <i>Birkat hamazon</i> | Blessing after meals |
| <i>Borey p'ri hagafen</i> | Lit., creator of the fruit of the vine.” Berachah said over wine or grape juice. |
| <i>Chag; pl., chaggim</i> | Jewish Holiday or Festival |
| <i>Chametz</i> | Lit., “leaven, something fermented.” Often translated “yeast.” Refers to foods forbidden for Jews to eat on Pesach. |
| <i>Chanukah</i> | Commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem during the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes. Also known as the “Festival of Lights.” |
| <i>Charoset</i> | One of the symbolic foods eaten at the Pesach seder. It is made from fruits, nuts and wine to resemble the mortar and brick made by Jews as slaves in Egypt. |
| <i>Chol haMoed</i> | “Regular days of the festival”. Specifically, Chol HaMoed refers to the intermediate days of Pesach and Sukkot. |
| <i>Cholent</i> | Yiddish. Refers to a traditional Jewish stew prepared on Friday and cooked overnight to be eaten on Shabbat. |
| <i>D'oraita</i> | Aramaic, “of the Torah.” Ordained by the Torah. |
| <i>D'rabbanan</i> | Aramaic, “of the rabbis.” Established by rabbinic authority.” |
| <i>Davven; davvening</i> | Yiddish, “to pray” |
| <i>Decalogue</i> | Latin from Gk., lit., “ten words/sayings.” The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20: 2–17) |
| <i>Diaspora</i> | Refers to Jews living outside of Israel or the land in which they live. |
| <i>Divrey Torah</i> | Discussion of Torah |
| <i>Ekklesia</i> | Assembly of Believers in Yeshua |
| <i>El Malei Rachamim</i> | Memorial prayer recited for the deceased, |
| <i>Etrog</i> | “Citron.” One of the four species required during Sukkot. |
| <i>Expanded practice</i> | refers to a more demanding level of observance, beyond basic practice, that includes a fuller expression of traditional forms of Jewish life. |
| <i>Get (pl. Gittin)</i> | Divorce |
| <i>Gezeirah; pl., gezeirot</i> | Preventative halakhic legislation; legal fences. |
| <i>Hagbah</i> | Lit., “lifting.” Refers to the lifting the Sefer Torah after it has been read. |
| <i>Halakhah</i> | The authoritative application of the rules of the Torah in the form of concrete decisions in response to the circumstances of daily life – all in the context of the covenant life of the people of Israel. |
| <i>Halbanat panim</i> | Lit., “whitening of the face.” Means shame or disgrace. |

Appendix 3: Glossary *continued*

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| Hamotzi | “who brings forth.” The name of the blessing spoken to God over bread: “... who brings forth bread from the earth.” |
| Hanotzri/t | “The Christian” |
| Havdalah | Lit., “Separation.” Refers to the ritual ceremony held at the close of Shabbat. |
| Hazan et hakol | Lit., “Nourishes all.” In Birkat HaMazon it means “providing food for all.” |
| Huppah | Canopy under which the bride and groom stand in a Jewish wedding. |
| Imeinu | “Our mother” |
| Inuy nefesh | Self-affliction commanded on Yom Kippur |
| Ishah hachamah | “A wise woman” |
| Kabbalat Torah | Confirmation |
| Kashrut | Lit., “fitness.” Dietary laws dealing with permitted and forbidden foods |
| Kehillot kodesh | Holy communities |
| Kehuna | Priesthood |
| Ketubah (pl., kettubot) | Marriage certificate |
| Kevod habriyot | The honoring of one another. |
| Kiddush | Lit., “sanctification.” Refers to a blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify Shabbat or Jewish holiday. |
| Kitniyot | Lit., “Legumes.” Refers to a larger group of foods that are traditionally prohibited for Ashkenazi Jews during Pesach, e.g., legumes, rice, grains, rice, corn and seeds. |
| Klal Israel | All of Israel. Parallel term to Am Israel. |
| Kohen (pl., kohanim) | A priest. A man who is born to a father who is a Kohen and a mother who is born to a Jewish mother. |
| Kol sefeka d’rabbanan l’kula | A matter of doubt which arises concerning an issue that is d’rabbanan is resolved in leniency. |
| Kosher | Lit., “fit or appropriate.” Any food permitted by Jewish dietary laws. |
| Levi (Levite) | A man who is born of a father who is a Levi and a mother who is either herself born to a Jewish mother or a convert to Judaism. |
| Lizkor et meshicho | A mitzvah berachah recited before eating bread in Zichron Mashiach. |
| Lulav | A closed palm frond. One of the four species bound together at Sukkot, which together are called “the lulav.” |
| Ma’ariv | The evening prayer service |

Appendix 3: Glossary *continued*

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| <i>Mara d'Atra</i> | Aramaic. Lit., “Master of the Place.” The Mara d’Atra serves her/her community as Mentor, guide, and authority in matters of religious practice and teaching, encouraging growth and unity that express the life of the Spirit of God. |
| <i>Matrilineal</i> | Kinship based on the mother’s lineage |
| <i>Matronymic</i> | A name derived from the name of the mother or matriarchal ancestor. |
| <i>Megillah</i> | Lit., “scroll.” The Megillah refers to the biblical Book of Esther read at Purim. |
| <i>Melechet avodah</i> | Servile work |
| <i>Mezuzah</i> | Lit., “Doorpost.” Refers to a piece of parchment (klaf) with Deut. 6:4–9 and Deut. 11:13–21 written on it that is encased in a decorative case and affixed to the doorposts of Jewish homes. |
| <i>Mikra’ey kodesh</i> | Holy assemblies |
| <i>Mikveh</i> | A Jewish ritual immersion |
| <i>Minchah</i> | The afternoon prayer service and the afternoon sacrifice in the Temple |
| <i>Miney mezonot</i> | Blessing over grains and grain products |
| <i>Minhag</i> | Tradition. |
| <i>Minhag shtut</i> | Redundant or banned tradition |
| <i>Minyan</i> | Quorum of ten Jews |
| <i>Mishmerah</i> | Priestly order in 2nd Temple Period |
| <i>Mishnah</i> | First and oldest major work of rabbinic literature |
| <i>Mitzvah (mitzvot)</i> | Lit., “commandment.” Applies to commandments, ordinances, laws and statutes in the Torah. |
| <i>Mitzvah berachah</i> | The berachah (blessing) before performing a mitzvah |
| <i>Mitzvot Mashiach</i> | Commandments derived from the Apostolic Writings that are not otherwise made explicit in the written Torah. |
| <i>Moed; pl., moadim</i> | Appointed time(s) |
| <i>Na’aseh v’nishma</i> | We will do and we will hear (understand). |
| <i>Netilat yadaim</i> | Ritual handwashing |
| <i>Niddah</i> | Lit., “One who is excluded.” Applies to a woman during menstruation. |
| <i>Okhel nefesh</i> | Lit., “Food for the soul.” Applies to food allowed on Yom Tov (cf. Exodus 12:16). |
| <i>Omer; Counting the Omer</i> | Sheaf; counting the 50 days (barley sheafs) from Pesach to Shavuot |

Appendix 3: Glossary *continued*

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| <i>Ona'at devarim</i> | Verbal abuse |
| <i>P'ri ha'adamah</i> | Lit., “Fruits of the ground” (including vegetables). The name of the blessing for food that the grows in the ground. |
| <i>P'ri haetz</i> | Lit., “Fruit of the tree.” The name of the blessing for food that grows on a tree. |
| <i>Pareve</i> | Yiddish. Lit., “neutral.” Food that is neither meat or milk. |
| <i>Patrilineal</i> | Kinship based on the father’s lineage. |
| <i>Patronymic</i> | Name derived from the name of the father or patrilineal ancestor. |
| <i>Pesach</i> | Festival of Passover, as well as the Passover lamb |
| <i>Pidyon haBen</i> | Lit., “Redemption of the son.” It is a Jewish ritual ceremony in which the first-born son is redeemed by giving silver coins to a kohen (Ex. 13:12–15). |
| <i>Ploni</i> | Hebrew expression indicating an anonymous person, similar to “John/Jane Doe” in English. |
| <i>Porging</i> | The processing and preparation of meat after shechitah. |
| <i>Posek; pl., poskim</i> | A rabbi or scholar who makes halachic decisions. |
| <i>P'sak; pl., p'sakim</i> | Halakhic ruling. |
| <i>P'shat</i> | Literal meaning |
| <i>Purim</i> | Persian. Lit., “Lots.” The holiday celebrates the saving of the Jews from massacre as recounted in the Book of Esther. |
| <i>Responsa</i> | Lat., lit., “answer.” In modern times a responsa describes decisions and rulings made by Jewish scholars on religious law. |
| <i>Rosh Chodesh</i> | Lit., “Head of the month.” Rosh Chodesh celebrates the arrival of the new moon on the Jewish Calendar. |
| <i>Rosh Hashanah</i> | Lit., “Head of the year.” The Jewish New Year (Yom Teruah, Leviticus 23:23–25). |
| <i>Seder; pl., sedarim</i> | Lit., “Order.” The traditional ceremonial Passover meal |
| <i>Sefer Torah</i> | Torah scroll |
| <i>Sekhakh</i> | Lit., “Covering.” The material used as the roof of a sukkah. |
| <i>Shabbat</i> | Sabbath, Saturday, 7th day of the week |
| <i>Shacharit</i> | The first of the daily prayers, said in the morning to coincide with the time of the morning burnt offering. |
| <i>Shaliach tzibur</i> | A person who leads a Jewish congregation in prayer and fulfills the obligation to pray on their behalf. |

Appendix 3: Glossary *continued*

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| Shavuot | Lit., “Weeks.” Feast of Weeks celebrated 50 days after Pesach at the end of the counting of the Omer. |
| Shechitah | Jewish ritual slaughter of animals |
| Shehakol | Blessing for all foods that do not grow from the ground or on a tree (e.g., meat, chicken, eggs, milk, fish). |
| Shehecheyanu | A blessing that celebrates special occasions, said when doing something for the first time or the first time that year. |
| Shema | “Hear of Israel...” (Deut. 6:4) followed by three Scripture passages Deut. 6:5–9, Deut. 11:13–21 and Num. 15:37–41. |
| Shemoneh Esreh | See Amidah. |
| Sheva Brachot | The seven blessings recited over the bride and groom in a Jewish wedding. |
| Simchat or bat brit | Public events initiating ritual acceptance of a daughter into the covenant |
| Sukkah | A temporary structure used during the 7 days of Sukkot |
| Sukkot | Feast of Tabernacles |
| Tahor | Ritually pure |
| Tallit | A Jewish prayer shawl with tzitzit on the four corners |
| Talmud(s) | The central text of Rabbinic Judaism that contains Mishnah and Gemara |
| Tamei | Ritually impure |
| Tefillin | A set of two black-leather boxes with Scripture verses written on parchment inside that are worn during morning prayer services. (Deut. 6:8) |
| Teshuvah (teshuvot) | Repentance |
| Tevilah | Immersion |
| Tevilat Mashiach | Lit., “Immersion of Messiah.” Refers to immersion into the Body of Messiah. |
| Tikkun olam | Lit., “Repairing the World.” Has become synonymous with repairing this earthy world through social actions and pursuit of justice. |
| Tumah | The state of ritual impurity |
| Tzedakah | Bible: “righteousness, justice.” In modernity it refers to righteous behavior through charity or philanthropy. |
| Tzitzit | Fringes on a four-cornered garment |
| V’ahavta | A continuation of the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:5–9. It is the first of three scripture passages in the Shema. |

Appendix 3: Glossary *continued*

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| <i>Ya'aleh ve Yavo</i> | “May [our remembrance] arise and come.” A special prayer inserted into the Amidah and Birkat HaMazon on Chaggim. |
| <i>Yahrzeit</i> | Yiddish, “Anniversary.” Anniversary of the death of a loved one where mourners remember and honor the life of the deceased. |
| <i>Yom HaAtzma'ut</i> | Israel's Independence day |
| <i>Yom HaShoah</i> | Israel's Holocaust remembrance day |
| <i>Yom Kippur</i> | Day of Atonement |
| <i>Zemirot</i> | Songs sung at the Shabbat table. |
| <i>Zichron Mashiach</i> | Lit., “Remembrance of Messiah.” Eucharist, Lord's supper |

