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MESSIANIC
JEWISH
RABBINICAL
COUNCIL

Standards of Observance





Standards *of* Observance

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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.

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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 study and deliberation over the course of those five years. 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.

We recognize that the Messianic Jewish movement consists mainly of people unaccustomed to or uncomfortable with traditional Jewish religious life, and those we are seeking to reach for Yeshua generally have a similar background. In large part this results from the high rate of secularization and assimilation among twenty-first century Jews. However, this profile also fits our calling as a movement for Yeshua within the Jewish world. Just as he came to seek and save the lost, and devoted his energy especially to reaching the disenfranchised among the Jewish people, so our mission is directed primarily to Jews who have little knowledge of or attachment to traditional Jewish practice.

In light of this reality, the MJRC decided that it should not formulate standards

of observance that aim to be a new and definitive interpretation of the Torah's contemporary requirements. Of course, Messianic Jewish Rabbis are sometimes compelled to offer creative rulings adapted to the new circumstances of the Messianic age inaugurated by Yeshua's death and resurrection. Nevertheless, the MJRC found that in most cases it was reasonable to presume the basic teaching of the halakhic tradition, especially as understood by contemporary authorities who appreciate the dynamic nature of that tradition and the need for its wise development in a rapidly changing world.

Our aim instead was to articulate realistic and practical standards and guidelines for Messianic Jewish observance that point us and our communities toward the way of covenant faithfulness. We want to set out on a journey with Yeshua that will lead us all, in diverse ways, to a richer and fuller life as Jews obedient to the Torah through Messiah Yeshua, and obedient to Yeshua through the Torah.

The Document

This document employs two terms that require special explanation. The first term is *basic practice*. This refers to standards of observance that members of the MJRC are themselves committed to follow in their own lives. They will also seek to order communal events of their congregations in accordance with these standards, and will employ them in instructing those preparing for conversion. While members of the MJRC commend these standards of basic practice to all members of their congregations, they will not be imposed as requirements for congregational membership.

The second term is *expanded practice*. This refers to a more demanding level of observance, beyond basic practice, that includes a fuller expression of traditional forms of Jewish life. An expanded practice is one that is explicitly commended by the MJRC, but is not required of its Rabbis or those converted under their auspices. The practices so listed do not exhaust the range of worthy expressions of Torah observance that a Messianic Jew might adopt, but provide concrete examples of the shape such observance could take.

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 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.

The Document
continued

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

1.1 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” (JUDGES 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 (JUDGES 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 forbears. 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 HALAKHAH:
OUR APPROACH**

In Jewish tradition as a whole, Scripture is of paramount importance and authority in the development of Halakhah (the concrete application of Jewish law to daily life). In principle, issues become *halakhic* because they are connected to some area of life in which Scripture reveals certain authoritative norms. In addressing those issues, Scripture is not the only resource consulted. However, it is always the source of greatest sanctity. Thus, when Rabbinic literature distinguishes between laws that are *d’oraita* (ordained by Scripture) and those that are *d’rabbanan* (established by Rabbinic authority), precedence is always given to those that are *d’oraita*.

Within Tanakh, Jewish tradition has always regarded the Torah (the Pentateuch) as possessing unique authority in the development of Halakhah. While the Prophets and the Writings amplify and clarify the intent of the Torah, the Torah is always foundational in matters of Halakhah.

In addition to Tanakh, we as Messianic Jews have another authoritative source for the making of halakhic decisions: the Apostolic Writings. Yeshua himself did not act primarily as a *Posek* (Jewish legal authority) issuing halakhic rulings, but rather as a prophetic teacher who illumined the purpose of the Torah and the inner orientation we should have in fulfilling it. Nevertheless, his teaching about the Torah has a direct bearing on how we address particular halakhic questions. As followers of Messiah Yeshua, we look to him as the greatest Rabbi of all, and his example and his instruction are definitive for us in matters of Halakhah as in every other sphere.

In addition, the Book of Acts and the Apostolic Letters provide crucial halakhic guidance for us in our lives as Messianic Jews. They are especially important in showing us how the early Jewish believers in Yeshua combined a concern for Israel’s distinctive calling according to the Torah with a 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.

Just as teaching associated directly with the person of Moses is foundational in relation to other material in Tanakh, so teaching associated directly with the person

1.1 Halakhah:
Our Approach
continued

of Yeshua is foundational in relation to other material in the Apostolic Writings. This 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 a *Shali'ach* (Apostle).

As Messianic Jews we affirm the special precedence given to Scriptural law in Rabbinic Halakhah. However, we also affirm the Scriptural character of the Apostolic Writings. While the Torah is foundational in relation to the teaching of Yeshua and the *Shelichim* (Apostles), the writings that record that teaching (the New Covenant Scripture) are also inspired, and they offer us an entirely reliable guide to the meaning and intent of the Mosaic Torah.

In principle, Scripture always has highest authority in the halakhic process. However, in practice other sources play as significant or a more significant role. 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. In order to add concrete substance to halakhic decision making, we must have recourse to the way the mitzvot have been understood and observed by Jews throughout history and in the present.

The Torah is Hashem's gift to Israel. While it includes teaching of universal significance and application, and has special bearing on the life of those Gentiles joined to Israel through Messiah, its primary purpose as a halakhic document is to shape the corporate way of life of the people of Israel. Rabbinic tradition holds that Hashem has given substantial authority over the practical outworking of the Torah in Israel's corporate life to the people and its 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 those days rested in the hands of the people of Israel and its leaders.

This principle finds support in Yeshua's teaching in Matthew 23:3 which urges obedience to the decisions of the Pharisaic Torah-teachers. This verse echoes Deuteronomy 17:10, the key text in Rabbinic tradition undergirding the authority of Israel's sages. Thus, while we may critique traditional rulings, and argue for alternative positions, we should be reluctant to depart from halakhic rulings accepted by Jews throughout the centuries and held today by most of the branches of Judaism and most committed Jews. At the same time, Yeshua did found a new sub-community of Jews (the ekklesia of the Circumcision) whose life is marked by an anticipatory experience of the powers of *Olam Haba* (the world to come), and who are to have a special relationship with a body of Gentile worshipers of the God of Israel (the ekklesia of the Uncircumcision). As such, he imparted to this sub-community and its leaders halakhic decision making authority for its common life (Matthew 18:18). Thus, when the Apostolic Writings and the Good News warrant it, we may need to strike out in new directions.

As followers of a Messiah 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 be toward inclusion of those Jews who have been alienated from their own heritage. Eager to heal the wounds of Israel, we also seek

**1.1 Halakhah:
Our Approach**
continued

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.

Therefore, like Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist branches of Judaism, we recognize that the new circumstances of the modern world require adaptation in traditional practices. Our halakhic decision making will require thoughtful reflection on these new circumstances, and the changes they may require. In this process, we should pay special attention to the halakhic analysis and rulings of these branches of Judaism, and learn from them.

Responsible engagement in the halakhic process places enormous demands on Jewish leaders. We will need to devote ourselves to serious study, prayer, discussion, and corporate decision-making. 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 booth of David within the people of Israel.

**1.2 THE MESSIANIC
JEWISH RABBI:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY**

1.2.1 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 UMJC's Teudat Semikha (Ordination Certificate):

This know in all of Israel that so-and-so was appointed to the role of rabbi and teacher by the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, by virtue of finishing a course of study in Scripture, learning the mitzvot, and studying the traditions of Israel in our yeshiva under the authority of the council of supervising rabbis. The recipient of this certificate obligates himself to carrying out the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He, and is found to be on the path of acquiring knowledge and studying the pleasant ways of the Almighty and Mashiach Yeshua.

From the date written above the recipient of this certificate may function in the role of rabbi and teacher among our people Israel. May the Holy One, blessed be He, enlighten our eyes and attach our hearts to his Torah.

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

**1.2 The Messianic
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be a Jew is an assertion that the MJRC stands in the historic understanding of the rabbinate in the wider Jewish community.

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 halachic discourse. As custodians “of Israel’s revelation and holy tradition,” it is incumbent upon all Messianic

1.2 The Messianic Jewish Rabbi: Decisions & Commentary
continued

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 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.

1.2.2 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 of 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

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for the spiritual care and leadership of the community (Hebrews 13:17). While the 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 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.



Issues of Status

2.1 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:
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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.



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 suffers. 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.

3.0 KASHRUT: DECISIONS & COMMENTARY

3.1 Fundamental Requirements.

3.1.1 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.

**3.0 Kashrut:
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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.

3.1.2 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.

3.2 Gelatin, Cheese, Wine.

3.2.1 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.)

3.2.2 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.

3.3 Shechitah and Removal of Blood.

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

**3.0 Kashrut:
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continued

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.*

3.3.2 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)

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

**3.0 Kashrut:
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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.

3.4 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

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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.

3.5 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).

3.6 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 Halacha and Home Ritual for Conservative Jews [2004], 12-13).

Community Practices

4.1 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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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 3.1.2). 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 3.2.1 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)*

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.

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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 ones occupation.

One ceases from his or her profession, trade, or daily occupation on Shabbat, except in the following occupations: health care workers and care-givers, 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” (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 3.7.4 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 crock-pot). 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 two days 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 Issac 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 Shabbat:
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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.

4.1.12.2 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

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Introduction
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this calendar is what stitches us together as a family, enabling this scattered and trans-generational family to rejoice together, to weep together, and to steep in fragrant memory.

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.

4.2 HOLIDAYS:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY

4.2.1 Moedim.

4.2.1.1 According to the explicit teaching of the Torah, we should avoid *m'lechet avodah* (servile work) on the *mo'edim* (Leviticus 23:7, 21, 35-36). 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 *mo'edim*.

What are the mo'edim? They 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.

Rabbinic tradition understood this permission to include all actions that would be involved in normal food preparation, such as transferring a flame for cooking, and carrying objects from one domain to another. According to b. Betzah 12a, the houses of Shammai and Hillel disagreed over whether this permission meant that such activities (e.g., transferring a flame and carrying objects from one domain to another) were allowed in general on holidays, or only when food is actually being prepared. The House of Hillel took the more lenient view, and their position prevailed.

It should be noted that the Shabbat prohibition of buying and selling also applies to holidays.

4.2.1.2 The last (seventh) day of Pesach and Shemini Atzeret are full *mo'edim*.

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.

4.2.1.3 In accordance with the traditional practice of Diaspora Jews, we honor the

**4.2 Holidays:
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continued

additional day added to Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, and Sukkot as *mo'edim*. At the same time, since the establishment of these days is *d'rabbanan* (Rabbinic Law) rather than *d'oraita* (Biblical Law), and since Reform Jews and some Conservative Jews no longer observe them as *mo'edim*, we will place less emphasis on their observance than on those days that are *mo'edim d'oraita*.

The day added to Sukkot after Shemini Atzeret is called Simchat Torah. It celebrates the end of one year's cycle of Torah readings, and the beginning of the next year's cycle. In the land of Israel Simchat Torah and Shemini Atzeret are observed on the same day, and are in fact one holiday.

We can honor holidays, even if we are not fully observing them. For example, we 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).

4.2.1.4 While we acknowledge that refraining from work on the *mo'edim* is obligatory *d'oraita*, we also acknowledge that many among us – as in the wider Jewish community – will be unable to observe them all in this way. Therefore, we will not include refraining from *melechet avodah* on the *mo'edim* as a basic practice (with the exception of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, where avoidance of work is a basic practice).

*This should not be construed as halakhic “permission” to profane these holidays. The Torah and Jewish tradition require the observance of the *mo'edim*, and we cannot rescind this requirement. Nevertheless, it must be recalled that we are a community in the process of returning to the Torah; our definition of “basic practice” should not function as a communal goal but instead as a starting point for continued growth.*

4.2.1.5 In order to foster as much observance of these mitzvot as possible and to avoid an “all or nothing” mentality, we should observe the following prioritization in descending order among the other *mo'edim*: (1) The first day of Pesach; (2) The first day of Sukkot; (3) The first day of Shavuot; (4) Shemini Atzeret; (5) The seventh day of Pesach; (6) the Second day of Rosh Hashanah (7) The added days for the diaspora, in descending order of priority: Simchat Torah, the Eighth day of Pesach, the Second day of Shavuot.

From a strictly halakhic point of view, the only important distinction here is between the days required by the Written Torah (the first five above) and those decreed by the Sages (number six). Thus, the first day of Sukkot is not “more obligatory” than Shemini Atzeret. Still, the religious sensibility of the Jewish people has assigned priority to certain mitzvot, as seen, for example, by differentiated levels of observance of the various holidays among Jews who seek to live a Jewish life but are not committed to the complete framework of traditional Halakhah. While such religious sensibility does not reveal differentiated levels of objective obligation, it does suggest the order in which those who are returning to the Torah should structure their return.

4.2.1.6 We commend the avoidance of all activities that would detract from the peacefulness, rest, and sanctity of the *mo'edim*.

4.2.1.7 We commend attendance at communal worship services on the *mo'edim*, but if such attendance is not possible one should use the standard holiday Amidah

4.2 Holidays:
Decisions &
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continued

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 the *mo'edim*.

4.2.2 Yom Kippur.

4.2.2.1 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).

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

4.2.2.3 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).

4.2.3 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).

4.2.4 Sukkot.

4.2.4.1 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

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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).

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

4.2.4.3 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).

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.

4.2.5 Pesach.

4.2.5.1 From 10 a.m. on the day of the first Seder (the 14th of Nissan) till the end of Passover eight days later no leaven shall be eaten.

According to the traditional rabbinic interpretation, the Written Torah forbids eating leaven from noon on the day the Passover 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 Passover 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.

4.2.5.2 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.

Of course, the exception here is matzah – which consists of unleavened bread made from any of these five types of grain.

4.2.5.3 In addition to the above and in accordance with the Ashkenazic tradition (the lineage of most American Jews), we should also avoid eating the following foods on Pesach (called *kitniyot*): rice, millet, corn, legumes (e.g., beans, peas, lentils), sesame and sunflower seeds. According to traditional authorities, these are forbidden because they can easily be confused with the five grains listed above. Since string beans are classified as a vegetable and cannot be confused with grains, they may be eaten on Pesach.

The avoidance of *kitniyot* on Pesach would not be a practice for Messianic Jews living in a Sephardic Jewish environment. Sephardic Jewish families living in an Ashkenazic environment may follow the Sephardic *minhag* (custom) in their own homes, but they should respect the *minhag* of the wider community when participating in community events or when inviting those from the community into their homes.

Rabbinic tradition stresses the importance of conforming to local Jewish custom, even when it differs from one's own normal practice. "Rabbi Tanhum bar Hanilai said: One should never break away from local custom. For Moses ascended on High and ate no bread [like the Angels, who do not eat], whereas the Ministering Angels descended below [Genesis 18] and ate bread" (b. Bava Metzia 86b).

In accordance with the determinations of many traditional authorities, the use of peanuts and peanut oil are permissible, as are the use of legumes in a form other than their natural state, for example corn syrup, corn oil, and soy oil.

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

4.2.5.5 While we commend the traditional approach to kashering dishes and silverware or having separate dishes and silverware for Pesach, we do not consider this to be a basic practice.

4.2.5.6 Just prior to 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 one dollar. After Pesach, the money is exchanged for the *chametz*. For the purpose of our basic practice, one may also keep the *chametz* in one's own home, but separated from the foods eaten for Passover (e.g., in the basement, a closet, or garage).

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.

The Torah forbids not only the consumption of chametz on Pesach, but also its possession (Exodus 12:19). The complexity of the modern commercial food industry makes it extremely difficult to comply with the latter prohibition in a literal manner. The custom of isolating and selling chametz expresses our intention of treating it as though it were no longer present and no longer ours.

4.2.5.7 We commend the tradition of *b'dikat chametz* – the search for leaven. After sundown on the night before Pesach, all the lights of the home are turned

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off, a candle is lit, a berachah recited (*al b'ur 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 when the appropriate berachah is recited and the crumbs are burned. The power of the symbolic removal of *chametz* in such a deliberate and dramatic fashion is especially meaningful for families with small children.

4.2.5.8 The chances of accidentally eating food mixed with *chametz* is great when eating in restaurants. Therefore, during the week of Pesach one should avoid eating in restaurants, unless one is merely purchasing a beverage.

4.2.5.9 In accordance with traditional Ashkenazic practice, we should not serve or eat lamb at a Seder. As stated above, non-Ashkenazic families living in an Ashkenazic environment may follow the non-Ashkenazic minhag in their own home, but they should respect the *minhag* of the wider community when participating in community events or when inviting those from the community into their home.

4.2.6 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 commence the 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.

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 Qumarn 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.

4.2.7 Minor Fasts and Festivals.

4.2.7.1 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.

**4.2 Holidays:
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4.2.7.2 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.)

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

4.2.7.4 Yom HaShoah and Yom HaAtzma'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 yahrzeit 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.

**4.3 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.

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

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continued

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 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.

**4.3 PRAYER:
DECISIONS &
COMMENTARY**

4.3.1.1 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. 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 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.

4.3.1.2 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.

4.3.1.3 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 Shachrit and Minchah Amidah).

4.3.1.4 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 Shachrit 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).

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).

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

4.3.2 Shabbat Prayer.

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

4.3.3 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.

4.3.4 Berachot.

4.3.4.1 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 (Shachrit, 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-tzivanu...). 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).

4.3.4.2 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.

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).

4.3.4.3 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.

4.3.5 Practices Connected to the Shema.

4.3.5.1 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

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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.

4.3.5.2 Our basic practice includes wearing a tallit during one’s daily Shachrit 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.

4.3.5.3 Our basic practice includes laying tefillin at least once per week during one’s daily Shachrit 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 “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.

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

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

4.3.6.2 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

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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.



Lifecycle

5.1 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.

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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

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(Leviticus 18:19; 20:18). It also determines that a menstruant is to be considered 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.

