

May the Reception Following an Inter-marriage be Held in a Conservative Synagogue?

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This paper was adopted as a unanimous opinion on January 14, 1987, by a vote of twelve to zero. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Isidoro Aizenberg, Ben Zion Bergman, Elliot N. Dorff, Richard L. Eisenberg, David M. Feldman, Howard Handler, David H. Lincoln, Lionel E. Moses, Mayer E. Rabinowitz, Joel Roth, Morris M. Shapiro and Henry A. Sosland.

An addendum prepared by Rabbi Lionel E. Moses was adopted by a unanimous vote of fourteen to zero on March 11, 1987. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Ben Zion Bergman, Elliot N. Dorff, Amy Eilberg, Richard L. Eisenberg, Arnold M. Goodman, Howard Handler, David H. Lincoln, Lionel E. Moses, Judah Nadich, Mayer E. Rabinowitz, Joel Roth, Seymour J. Rosenbloom, Morris M. Shapiro and Henry A. Sosland.

שאלה

May a reception or a wedding party for a marriage that has taken place in a Reform congregation between one of its members who is not of the Jewish faith by the Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly and a member of a Conservative congregation, be held in the Conservative congregation?

תשובה

It could be argued that, in spite of the fact that it is a Standard of Rabbinic Practice to prohibit the presence of any member of the Rabbinical Assembly at a mixed marriage, as long as such a ceremony takes place elsewhere, the reception could be held at the Conservative synagogue. Some might even argue that holding such a reception would

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

encourage observance of *kashrut*. Others might suggest that renting out a space for a synagogue reception is purely a business consideration.

Nevertheless, a dichotomy should not be made between the ceremony and the reception in honor of the marriage, whether immediately following or a later date. Such a reception is, therefore, forbidden in a Conservative synagogue.

Moreover, a reception following such a marriage or in honor of such a marriage cannot be allowed in a Conservative synagogue because of the misunderstanding that it would generate. Many wedding announcements in newspapers do not state who performs the ceremony and where the ceremony is held, but only where the *reception* takes place. On seeing such an announcement, people might assume that the “wedding” took place in the Conservative synagogue, and that the ceremony itself was therefore within the guidelines of halakhah. Furthermore, Conservative congregants themselves might assume that because the reception for such a marriage can be held in the Conservative synagogue, even the ceremony itself would be permitted there.

In this case, a kosher reception will tend to mask the non-kosher ceremony and lead to genuine misunderstanding. Therefore, it is by no means a purely business decision to be made by the caterer.

A further consideration about having the reception after a wedding at the synagogue is that many congregations require recitation of *birkat hamazon* along with the *sheva berakhot* at the conclusion of the reception. If the wedding is a mixed marriage, then the wedding party clearly cannot be called a *seudat mitzvah*, and the *sheva berakhot* cannot be said. Even if a particular congregation does not require recitation of *birkat hamazon*, the question of whether or not to hold such a wedding reception at a Conservative congregation is certainly far more than a purely business decision.

CONCLUSION

We must be guided by the general rule that if the marriage ceremony itself is not according to halakhah, the reception may not be held at a Conservative congregation.

ADDENDUM

Acting in consonance with its understanding of the Standard of Rabbinic Practice regarding the Determination of Jewish Identity, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards considers that no dichotomy should be made between the ceremony of any rite of passage and a

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reception held in its honor. We consider the receptions held in honor of rites of passage to be *seudot mitzvah*. Therefore, when the ceremonies connected with these rites of passage are performed in direct violation of our Standard of Rabbinic Practice, we contend that such receptions may not be held in Conservative synagogues.