

Synagogue Honors for the Intermarried Jew: Holding Office and *Aliyyot*

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This paper was adopted as a Minority Opinion on December 12, 1984 by a vote of 5 in favor and 7 opposed. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Isidoro Aizenberg, Ben Zion Bergman, David M. Feldman, Joel Roth and Israel N. Silverman. Members voting in opposition: Rabbis Elliot N. Dorff, Morris Feldman, David H. Lincoln, Judah Nadich, Mayer E. Rabinowitz, Henry A. Sosland and Gordon Tucker.

Note: A Dissenting Opinion signed by eight members of the Committee follows this paper.

SHE'ELAH

Should members of our congregations who are intermarried be given honors within the framework of congregational life? Specifically:

- (1) Should they be permitted to hold synagogue offices?
- (2) Should they be given *aliyyot*?

TESHUVAH

In January 1963 the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards discussed and voted upon two papers dealing with the status of the Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple. The papers, by Rabbis Max Routtenberg and Wilfred Shuchat, are published in the *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly 1964*.¹ Of the two respondents, Rabbi Routtenberg was more lenient, for he does not forbid membership in the synagogue itself to the Jewish spouse. Rabbi Shuchat favored denying membership to the Jewish spouse who applied for membership, and requiring forfeiture of membership by a Jew who intermarries while a member. The only circumstances in which Rabbi Routtenberg required forfeiture of membership on the part of the Jewish spouse were refusal to give the

children a Jewish education and refusal to have the children converted to Judaism. The position of Rabbi Routtenberg was adopted as the Majority Opinion of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

While the authors disagreed on specifics, they agreed that the goal was to take a firm stand against intermarriage and to so indicate by refusing to offer an imprimatur of legitimacy to the marriage in any way. The paragraph of Rabbi Routtenberg's paper directly applicable to the question now before us reads: "The intermarried Jew, while admitted to membership in the congregation, shall not be entitled to hold any office or to serve as chairman of any committee, nor shall he be singled out for any special honors."² In a paper which I submitted to the Law Committee in 1982 on the subject of the mitzvah of *keruv* (which appears elsewhere in this volume), I urged that we reaffirm Rabbi Routtenberg's position, adding only that intermarried Jews

...are more than passive members of a halakhically improper marriage -- they made an active decision to enter into that relationship, a relationship which we consider of paramount danger to the Jewish community. That they should understand the fact that their marriage must affect their status in the Jewish community is not unfair or unethical, it is obligatory and desirable.

It seems to me that the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards should reaffirm the position of Rabbi Routtenberg. Indeed, the very fact that many offer as evidence that we should now become more lenient seems to me to indicate the polar opposite. The increase in intermarriage is a fact that cannot be denied. But new facts need not indicate a need to accommodate them. Indeed, if accommodation to them serves to undermine our strongly held commitments, it is contraindicated. Absolute opposition to intermarriage is one of our most strongly held commitments, and we should stand by that commitment with all vigor. Every leniency that we adopt regarding intermarriages weakens the ability of our constituency to appreciate the strength of our feelings. Allowing an intermarried Jew to hold office in the synagogue must be understood to imply that his/her illegal and unacceptable marriage is irrelevant to us. And that, in turn, suffuses it with an aura of legitimacy that is counter-productive to the greater needs of the Jewish community. How hollow our sermons, classes and lectures against intermarriage must sound when we allow the leadership of our synagogues to be entrusted to those whose very marriages are anathema to us. When Rav returned to Babylonia from Israel, he took steps against undesirable *facts* that he found there. Standing firm is no less acceptable or desirable as an option than accommodating. At the very least, the Majority Opinion of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards since 1963 should

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be reaffirmed.

It is my assumption that by using the phrase, "singled out for any special honors," Rabbi Routtenberg was referring to such items as making an intermarried Jew honoree at a dinner or representative of the synagogue in a communal organization, and not referring to the question of granting him/her an *aliyyah*.

I know of no source that explicitly forbids granting an *aliyyah* to an intermarried Jew. *Orah Hayyim* 128:40, however, does seem to imply it. That passage forbids granting an *aliyyah* to a *kohen* married to a divorcee, even though all agree that in such a union *kiddushin tofesin*. It is not improbable to suppose that the silence of the sources stems from the fact that so honoring an individual who was virtually ostracized from the community was unthinkable.

I would urge that the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards adopt the position that *aliyyot* for an intermarried Jew be disallowed in almost all cases. Honoring one whose marriage threatens our community implies that the marriage is not really a threat. That is an implication we cannot afford to foster. I would make an exception only for an *aliyyah* in commemoration of a *yahrzeit*, because in that case the general perception is that the *aliyyah* is given in honor of the deceased. That perception is sufficiently widespread to obviate any fear that granting the *aliyyah* implies approval of the intermarriage.

NOTES

1. Max J. Routtenberg, "The Jew Who Has Intermarried"; and Wilfred Shuchat, "The Intermarried Jew and Synagogue Membership," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly XXVIII* (1964): 247-254.
2. Routtenberg, *ibid.*, p. 248.

