

Gateways Into Jewish Living:

Guiding the Conservative/Masorti Rabbi in Supporting Families with Non-Jewish Loved Ones

Table of Contents

1. Introduction by Coeditors Rabbis Pamela Barmash and Emily Barton.....	2
2. The Rabbinical Assembly Standards of Religious Practice.....	5
3. A Summary of Rabbi Daniel Nevins and Rabbi Katja Vehlow, “Halakhic Guidance for Jews of Blended Religious Backgrounds”.....	5
4. Offering Congratulations or Honoring a Couple Where One Partner Is Not Jewish on the Event of Their Marriage and Other Life Cycle Events by Rabbi Avram Reisner.....	6
5. Families Where One Partner Is Not Jewish and the Bimah by Rabbis Miriam Spitzer and Emily Barton.....	8
6. A H an ukkat Habayit (Dedication of the Jewish Home) Ceremony for Couples Consisting of a Jewish Partner and a Non-Jewish Partner Who Have Decided to Build an Exclusively Jewish Home and Family Together by Rabbi Emily Barton.....	14
7. May a Non-Jew Serve as a Sandek or Kvatter at a Brit Milah/Kodesh or Brit Habat? by Rabbi Amy Levin.....	19
8. Does a Child Born to a Jewish Mother and Non-Jewish Father Require Pidyon Haben? by Rabbi David Fine.....	21
9. Benefiting from a Relationship with a Non-Jew for Halakhic Purposes or in order to Fulfill a Mitzvah by Rabbi David Fine.....	23
10. Jews, Non-Jews, and Death Rituals by Rabbis Miriam Spitzer and Emily Barton.....	26
11. May an Intermarried Jew Be Hired by a Conservative Institution? by Rabbi Joshua Heller..	31
12. Synagogue Membership from the Editors.....	36
13. Conclusion.....	37

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. Individual rabbis, however, are authorized to interpret and apply halakhah for their communities.

1. *Introduction by Coeditors Rabbis Pamela Barmash and Emily Barton*

The Conservative/Masorti movement and the Rabbinical Assembly seek to nurture communities of people who passionately identify with our mission of observing mitzvot, studying Torah, and seeking God. Today the definition of community within our movement has been broadened more than any other time in history. Our synagogues and communities embrace LGBT Jews and their families; Jews of Color; couples and families in which one partner is not Jewish; and many other groups and individuals who, even in recent decades, may not have felt like there was a home for them in mainstream Conservative/Masorti Judaism, or indeed, in any part of Judaism. It is an exciting time to be a Conservative/Masorti Jew!

The last time the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) addressed in a sustained way issues raised by intermarried couples and families, that is, couples in which one partner is not Jewish and families with non-Jewish loved ones, was in the 1980's and early 1990's. Since then, the CJLS approved two teshuvot on the issue of non-Jews opening the ark but did not address these issues in a broad way. The overall halakhic approach in that era of the 1980s and early 1990s was to express disapproval of partnerships in which one partner was not Jewish.¹ Today, however, our goals are very different, even though our Standard of Religious Practice is not changing. We are more likely today to seek alternate ways to creatively and pastorally welcome a couple where one partner isn't Jewish but who are interested in living an exclusively Jewish life or supporting an exclusively Jewish family life.² Our objectives in extending a welcome are designed to increase the likelihood that the couple will continue to engage meaningfully in Jewish practice at home and in community, and, if having children, raise their children as Jews. Additionally, we increasingly see non-Jewish members of Jewish families

¹ It is to be noted that not all of the teshuvot of the 1980's and early 1990's were grounded in the "disapproval" framework — see Rabbi Harry Sky, "[The Mitzvah of Keruv](#)". Other than Rabbi Sky's teshuvah, these teshuvot do not reflect the practice and conceptual approach of many Conservative/Masorti colleagues and institutions today.

² It may be that a non-Jewish parent who has agreed to and supports a Jewish family and raises Jewish children may not wish to renounce their own religion because of their own faith, or because of considerations of their own upbringing or of *kibbud av va'em* (honoring one's parents). Whatever the reason, their assent to raise a Jewish family should suffice to pastorally welcome the family.

Judaism teaches us to honor all people, given that all are equally created in the divine image. Jews who are married and/or related to non-Jews by birth or marriage are expected to treat all with respect. Some such non-Jewish relatives, while not interested in conversion to Judaism, nevertheless have committed themselves to supporting Judaism as the exclusive religious faith and practice of the household. In this they are partners in Jewish education and their role is greatly appreciated. Other non-Jewish relatives practice different faith traditions. They are to be respected for their commitments and are likewise expected to respect the exclusively Jewish faith and practice of their Jewish relatives. Jews who are invited to attend the religious ceremonies of their non-Jewish relatives should show them respect but should not play an active role in such rituals. (Special appreciation to Rabbi Daniel Nevins for this paragraph.)

as allies of the Jewish community whose lives are potentially enriched by their connection with Judaism. In some cases they choose to convert to Judaism at a later date after being married to a Jewish partner. Even when this is unlikely, however, being welcoming and hospitable is an important Jewish value. We also seek to avoid what might be a consequence of being unwelcoming: the Jewish extended family members of Jews who are partnered with non-Jews may feel alienated from the Jewish community.

We should see each encounter with intermarried couples as an opportunity to guide them to actualize a Jewish present and future, inspired and shaped by Jewish traditions. Many couples are already participating meaningfully in Jewish life, and intermarried families are raising Jewish children. The percentage of intermarried couples and families varies from community to community. However, they are a significant percentage of our greater Jewish community so that we need to be mindful about how we treat and honor these partnerships. We must recognize that often the couple or family just wishes to be a part of the Jewish community just like every other Jewish family, not as a “separate yet equal” constituency within our Jewish organizations and synagogues. We must see our role as both pastoral and educational. We must create gateways so that everyone can find a place where they can learn and find joy and inspiration in our traditions within the boundaries of halakhic standards and principles.

As rabbis, we enjoy the privilege of being invited into people’s lives, and we want to assure them that we care about them. As people figure out their own identities and relationships, it is our role to help them integrate Jewish tradition in the conversation. As couples turn towards each other and seek to integrate Judaism in their lives, it is for us to help them chart a course for what role it will play in their lives. It is for us to help them bring Jewish tradition and Torah into the conversation.

Our lives include many liminal and transitional moments which can be sanctified and beautified by the traditions developed by the Jewish people over the course of centuries and millennia. Much of Conservative/Masorti Judaism’s institutional focus has been on the circumstances under which rabbis can officiate at a wedding. Our Standard of Religious Practice on officiation is not changing. However, while a wedding is a moment of great significance, there are also many other important life cycle moments that rabbis can offer as times for Jewish celebration. These include celebrations of personal and family accomplishments, such as setting up a residence, births and birthdays, starting and continuing Jewish education, and professional and vocational attainments. We must also consider observance of everyday mitzvot, such as Shabbat (for example, whether a person may benefit from a non-Jewish partner or parent’s *melakhah* on Shabbat, work that Jews are not permitted to do on Shabbat or on a holiday but that non-Jews can do) or Passover (for example, whether one may sell *ḥametz*, unleavened food that is forbidden to Jews on Passover, to a non-Jewish partner or parent) as well as synagogue life in general. As keepers and teachers of *halakhah*, we are entrusted with fostering communities of

belonging and care, inspired by and anchored in the mitzvot, stories, and traditions that continue to shape Jewish life and identity today.

The rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud lived through the destruction of the Temple and had to re-create Judaism anew because they had no other choice. Our situation at the beginning of the 21st century may not be as dire, but it is as urgent. When faced with such challenging times, our predecessors found creative and often beautiful solutions to embody the Torah as they understood it. The members of the CJLS and our rabbinic colleagues are now following in their footsteps, using the wisdom we have inherited to both uphold and transform those values and halakhic principles that are central to our rabbinates.³

A number of the she'eilot (questions) we address in this teshuvah have already been answered in practical terms by rabbis in our communities, and we present teshuvot and tools that incorporate current practice and offer insights that help our colleagues and communities better serve our diverse community members. Many of these practices are already in place and vary from region to region since Conservative/Masorti communities are all over the world. Conservative/Masorti communities serve Jews around the world, in Israel and other Asian countries, North and South America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. While the halakhic principles expressed and applied in this paper are universal, sociological realities and expectations vary significantly among these incredibly diverse communities. Some sections of this teshuvah offer solutions that speak most directly to circumstances and realities in North America. Within the bounds of the Standards of Religious Practice, local rabbis must interpret this teshuvah and its conclusions in light of the circumstances in their local community.⁴ We provide models refined through experience.⁵

A note about voting: sections 4-12 were voted upon individually because they contain a new *pesak* (ruling), and the voting records will appear at the beginning of each section. Sections 1 and 13 are introduction and conclusion without a *pesak*. Section 2 contains the

³ Following the creation and report of the 2017 RA Blue Ribbon Commission, the rabbis of the Rabbinical Assembly wanted to move forward with creating clearer norms as they relate to intermarried couples and families. As a result of this, the RA 3.0 Strategic Planning team formed a sub-committee, the Standards Working Group (SWG), to evaluate our Standards of Religious Practice as outlined in the Rabbinical Assembly's Code of Conduct. As a result of meeting with hundreds of colleagues and hearing their experiences first-hand regarding intermarried couples and families, the SWG created a series of questions that they suggested the CJLS address. In turn, the CJLS established a special temporary subcommittee on intermarriage issues. The end product is this omnibus teshuvah in which several rabbis have contributed innovative and thoughtful ways to be welcoming to intermarried couples and families. We hope that the reader finds this to be a helpful and suitable document for our times.

⁴ Special appreciation to Rabbi Joshua Heller for his contribution to this paragraph.

⁵ The editors of this omnibus teshuvah would like to thank our principal respondents, Rabbis Jaymee Alpert and Robert Scheinberg, for their thoughtful suggestions, as well as the rest of the CJLS, who helped tremendously in moving this important work forward.

Standards of Religious Practice of the Rabbinical Assembly, already approved by the CJLS, and section 3 presents the *pesakim* of a teshuvah also already approved by the CJLS.

2. The Rabbinical Assembly Standards of Religious Practice

(These Standards are part of the Rabbinical Assembly Code of Conduct.)

Jewish Status and Conversion

Clergy of the Conservative/Masorti Movement may grant formal Jewish status only to a person who is either born to a Jewish woman or converted with *tevilah* and (if male) *brit milah* as approved by a *beit din*. Any member of the RA shall continue to possess the right to petition the CJLS for an opinion on any case of extraordinary circumstances.

Wedding Officiation and Get/Divorce Decree

Clergy of the Conservative/Masorti Movement may officiate in any aspect of any manner of wedding ceremony for a person previously married to a Jew only if the previous marriage was dissolved by the death of the spouse or by a divorce in both civil law and Jewish law—the latter by a *get*, by another form of dissolution approved by the CJLS, or by the action of the Joint Beit Din.

Wedding Officiation

Clergy of the Conservative/Masorti Movement may officiate at weddings only if both parties are Jewish. Officiation means signing documents or verbal participation of any kind. Attendance as a guest at a wedding where only one party is Jewish is not included in this Standard of Religious Practice.

3. A Summary of Rabbi Daniel Nevins and Rabbi Katja Vehlow, “Halakhic Guidance for Jews of Blended Religious Backgrounds”⁶

1. Traditional criteria for establishing Jewish status—maternal birth or conversion with *brit milah* and *tevilah* before a *beit din*—remain normative for purposes of ritual, marriage, and the transmission of Jewish status.

2. People of hybrid religious background who wish to establish halakhic Jewish status should be greeted with respect and kindness and should be educated about the pathways to conversion or affirmation of their Jewish identification.

⁶ This [summary](#) was written by the authors of the teshuvah.

3. People who have been raised to identify exclusively as Jewish—for example, by virtue of patrilineal descent or adoption—but who do not meet the traditional halakhic criteria to establish Jewish status, and who decline to participate in rituals of affirmation with a *beit din* should nevertheless be treated with respect and included as members of the extended Jewish family. If they decide to pursue halakhic recognition in order to participate fully in traditional Jewish ritual and family life, their process of affirming Jewish identity through *milah* and *tevilah* should be expedited by the *beit din*.⁷
4. People who intend to continue to practice one or more religions in addition to Judaism should be treated as guests, but not granted ritual roles such as counting in *minyan*, leading worship, or being called to the Torah, until they commit to exclusively Jewish belief and practice, and if appropriate, complete a process of affirmation or conversion with a rabbinic *beit din*.
5. People who have been raised in or practiced religions other than Judaism, but who were born to a Jewish mother, and who wish to adopt an exclusive Jewish identity should immerse in the *mikveh* as a demonstration of return (*teshuvah*). A *beit din* is not required for this immersion.
6. People who were either born Jewish or converted to Judaism with a *beit din*, and subsequently practice one or more other religions remain technically Jewish. However, if they choose to return to exclusive Jewish identity and practice, and to participate in Jewish ritual life, they should immerse in a *mikveh* as an indication of their return (*teshuvah*). A *beit din* is not required for this immersion.⁸
7. As for people who already identify as Jews and possess formal halakhic Jewish status, whether by birth or by conversion, they have an important role in greeting spiritual seekers and offering them support and guidance.

4. Offering Congratulations or Honoring a Couple Where One Partner Is Not Jewish on the Event of Their Marriage and Other Life Cycle Events by Rabbi Avram Reisner

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 21-0-2. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Avram Israel Reisner, Karen Reiss Medwed, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel, Raysh Weiss. Voting Against: None. Abstaining: Rabbis Daniel S. Nevins and Marcelo Polakoff.

⁷ A convert may take a name other than “ben/bat Avraham avinu veSarah imenu”. See Rabbi Barry Leff, “[Name of Convert](#).”

⁸ A clarification by Rabbi Daniel Nevins, June 11, 2026, not originally included in the Nevins-Vehlow teshuvah.

In the past, the Jewish community has treated those individuals who entered intermarriages as sinners, to be rebuked and shunned. In that light, in 1989, the CJLS decided that it was unacceptable for a congregation to offer congratulations upon an intermarriage to those intermarrying or to their family, or to the Jewish parent or grandparent for the birth to an intermarried couple of a child who was not Jewish at birth (that is, one whose mother was not Jewish), or to accept a donation marking such a moment.⁹ We no longer consider that an acceptable strategy.

The Jewish community had faced an analogous situation before. Intermarrying members wished to convert their spouses. In the face of traditionalists who cited the halakhic stricture that one should not accept one who wishes to convert in order to marry (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Issurei Bi'ah* 13.14; *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 268.12), several rabbis, recognizing that that stricture was only advisory and that such conversions were considered valid after the fact,¹⁰ argued that other factors should take precedence -- in particular, establishing a Jewish household and raising Jewish children.¹¹

We are heirs of that understanding. We seek to encourage and accept with open arms couples that wish to create a Jewish household and to raise their children within the Jewish community. These families should be seen as Jewish families, fully integrated into the life of the synagogue. There is no room for harboring ill-feelings toward those individuals who have intermarried if they wish to create a Jewish household. Nonetheless, proper conversion to Judaism remains the standard with regard to allowing individuals to participate fully in the religious rituals of the Jewish community.

Thus in the particular matter of issuing congregational and communal congratulations, we should consider that our congratulation upon intermarriage is to the Jewish family that is being created, a recognition of their joy, be it congratulations to the parents of the intermarrying couple or the couple themselves, and upon the birth of a child, to the parents or grandparents. Similarly, accepting donations in recognition of family events and their recognition is not only in order, it is welcome.

⁹ Rabbi Jerome Epstein, "[Congratulations to Mixed Marriage Families](#)". Rabbi Epstein did permit congratulations upon the birth of a child, non-Jewish at birth, whose parents had committed to an imminent conversion.

¹⁰ See Tur 268 that dispenses with the advice against such conversions and only offers confirmation of their validity.

¹¹ See Tzvi Zohar and Avraham Sagi, *Giyyur veZehut Yehudit*, ch. 3, in particular section B2. Cited there, Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman, *Melammed Leho'il*, 2.83: "It is appropriate that the beit din should transgress a minor prohibition and accept the convert."

Pesak Din:

1. Our communities should offer congratulations upon a marriage to those intermarrying or to their family, or to the Jewish parent or grandparent for the birth to an intermarried couple of a child. We may accept a donation marking such a moment.
2. We continue to advocate for the conversion of individuals to Judaism.

5. Families Where One Partner Is Not Jewish and the Bimah by Rabbis Miriam Spitzer and Emily Barton

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 18-3-2. Voting in favor: Rabbis Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Daniel S. Nevins, Matthew S. Nover, Marcelo Polakoff, Avram Israel Reisner, Karen Reiss Medwed, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel. Voting against: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Joel Pitkowsky, Rachel Safman. Abstaining: Rabbis Micah Peltz and Raysh Weiss.

May a non-Jew accompany a Jew up for an aliyah?

1. *May the non-Jewish parent of a b*mitzvah come up with their spouse for an aliyah?*¹²
2. *May a Jew and a non-Jewish partner have a “joint aliyah,” and may they have a joint mi shebeirakh? If so, what might the ceremony look like?*
3. *May the non-Jewish partner be called up by an English name?*

Coming up to the Torah for an *aliyah* is a vivid demonstration of Jewish peoplehood, Jewish adulthood, and the covenant between the Jewish people and God. We see this in the language of the *aliyah* blessings: “Blessed are You . . . who has chosen us from among all the nations and given us the Torah.” These words are intended to give voice to the Jewish people's shared covenant, history, and sense of peoplehood, and therefore are not naturally applicable to those outside the Jewish community.¹³ The Jewish people over the centuries and millennia have embraced our status as part of a covenant between the Jewish people and God expressed in Torah and mitzvot, and we celebrate our status and uniqueness as a people in many ways, including in our public davening (public liturgical services and communal Torah reading). When we come up to the Torah, we “kiss” the Torah by putting the *tzitzit* of our *tallit* to the Torah and then to our

¹² Though the term b*mitzvah may be startling, even uncomfortable, to some of our readers, it is seen to be a much more affirming term for people preparing for and having this life-cycle event who may be in the LGBTQ+ community and/or identify as gender non-binary. Thus, the authors of this section have chosen to use this term over bar/bat mitzvah or benei mitzvah. However, each author of a section of this omnibus teshuvah may choose which term works for them.

¹³ See Rabbi David Booth, “[Non-Jews Opening the Ark](#),” p. 7.

lips, symbolically giving our consent to its mandate and showing our love for the Torah. As such, it is clear that a person who is not Jewish may not come up to the Torah for an *aliyah* on their own.

The question then is: may a non-Jew accompany a Jew up to the Torah and stand beside him/her/them as the Jew(s) recites the *aliyah* blessings?

Non-Jews on the Bimah?

There are many congregations in the Conservative/Masorti movement, even today, that prohibit non-Jews from ascending to the *bimah*. Some of these congregations may be under the mistaken impression that the presence of non-Jews, even if accompanied by a Jew, might somehow decrease the sanctity of the *bimah*, but there are no authoritative Jewish sources that suggest such a thing. There is also no valid halakhic worry that a non-Jew (or anyone else) will somehow render the Torah impure by standing near it or by touching it. That is simply not the case. A Torah scroll (or any holy object) does not become defiled or ritually impure under any circumstances.¹⁴ Furthermore, even though Rambam and others write that it is permissible for a non-Jew to touch or hold a Torah without making it ritually impure, today no one, Jewish or non-Jewish, may touch a Torah scroll directly (i.e. with their bare hands), other than when

¹⁴ Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 22a.

אין דברי תורה מקבלין טומאה

Words of Torah do not become ritually impure.

Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 22a

כל הטמאים אפילו נדות מתרים לאחזו בס"ת ולקרות בו והוא שלא יהיו ידיהם מטונפות או מלכלכות

All those who are ritually impure, even menstruating women, are permitted to hold a Sefer Torah and to read from it, as long as their hands are not dirty

Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 282:9

כל הטמאים אפילו נדות מותרים לאחזו בס"ת ולקרות בו והוא שלא יהיו ידיהם מטונפות או מלוכלכות

All who are impure, even a menstruating woman, are permitted to hold a Torah scroll and to read from it, provided that their hands are not dirty or soiled.

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Tefillin, Mezuzah and the Torah Scroll 10:8

כל הטמאין ואפילו נדות ואפילו כותי מתיר לאחזו ספר תורה ולקרות בו. שאין דברי תורה מקבלין טמאה. והוא שלא יהיו ידיהם מטונפות או מלכלכות בטיט אלא ירחצו ידיהם ואחר כך יגעו בו

Those who are ritually impure, even menstruating women, **even non-Jews**, are permitted to hold a Sefer Torah and to read from it, for the words of Torah do not contract ritual impurity. This applies as long as their hands are not dirty, and if they are, they should wash them and then handle the Torah.

writing or repairing the scroll.¹⁵ It is for this reason that Torah readers use a *yad* or *etzba*, a ritual pointer, to assist in reading from the Torah.

In this context, we might ask if non-Jews may open the ark. In 2013, Rabbi David Booth wrote a teshuvah allowing non-Jews to open the ark.¹⁶ A later teshuvah, written by Rabbis Joshua Heller and Amy Levin in 2016, concludes that “it is not accepted practice for non-Jews to be offered the honor פְּתִיחַת אֲרוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ/ ceremonially opening the Holy Ark during services.”¹⁷

Mar'it Ayin: Appearances

Jewish law sometimes forbids the permitted on the grounds that *it looks like* something that is prohibited. This is called *mar'it ayin*, the principle of appearances. Some congregations will continue to determine that the easiest way to avoid the appearance of a non-Jew having an *aliyah* would be to not permit non-Jews to accompany their partner to the Torah for an *aliyah*. For those congregations who wish to acknowledge the support of the non-Jewish parent in raising a Jewish family by having the non-Jewish parent on the *bimah* for the b*mitzvah blessing, there are many ways to ensure that it does not appear that a non-Jew is having an *aliyah* to the Torah and we are confident that individual congregations will develop choreography that will ensure that it does not appear that a non-Jewish person is having an *aliyah*, even as the parent is included in the b*mitzvah ceremony.

Although we have permitted the non-Jewish parent to be present on the *bimah* in some way, it is ultimately up to the clergy and lay leaders to decide which approach works best for their *kehillah* (synagogue community), school, or organization.

For the Hebrew part of the *aliyah*, the Jewish parent's Hebrew name is the name called out by the *gabbai*, but the English version of the invitation to the *bimah* may include both parents' names in English, again making clear that only the Jewish parent is being called to the Torah.

The congregation may permit, in the case where a parental speech is given to the child, to have both parents ascend to the *bimah* to give their respective speeches after the Torah is put away or when it is the custom in the congregation for this to happen.

¹⁵ Even though a Torah scroll cannot become ritually impure under any circumstances, there are Jewish sources that suggest that non-Jews may be the source of impurity, some of them written in the Middle Ages and some written even today. The Conservative/Masorti movement utterly rejects all such ideas.

See Rabbi Reuven Hammer, “[The Status of Non-Jews in Jewish Law and Lore Today](#)”.

¹⁶ Rabbi David Booth, “[Non-Jews Opening the Ark](#)”.

¹⁷ Rabbis Joshua Heller and Amy Levin, “[The Dissonance of a Non-Jew Opening the Aron Kodesh/the Holy Ark](#)”.

Blessing a Couple in which One Partner Is not Jewish when They Intend to Live in and Create an Exclusively Jewish Home

It is very common for Jewish communities to celebrate and bless newly married couples. In Ashkenazi communities, this ceremony, termed an *aufruf*, usually takes place the Shabbat before the wedding. In Sephardic communities, the blessing typically takes place the Shabbat after the wedding. In all cases, the ceremony is aspirational. We pray that this new couple will establish a *בֵּית נְאֻמָּן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל*, a Jewish household, and we pledge as a community to help them do so. We have the same hopes and aspirations for an intermarried couple when they intend to create an exclusively Jewish home.

The CJLS offers a *mi shebeirakh* that may be recited in a communal setting, which can be found in the addendum to this section, for a couple that has affirmed their intention to conduct their household as exclusively Jewish.¹⁸ We recommend that the *aliyah* with the *mi shebeirakh* for the intermarried couple be done after the wedding day, although some rabbis may prefer to recite the *mi shebeirakh* before the wedding day. This *mi shebeirakh* cannot be recited on the wedding day. Without sanctifying the intermarriage, a *mi shebeirakh* before the wedding day or after the wedding day can be affirming to all who are involved.

Pesak Din:

1. Non-Jews may not have an *aliyah* to the Torah.
2. Non-Jews may accompany their partner on the bimah in such a way that it does not appear that they are having an *aliyah* but does respect their effort in supporting Jewish family life.
3. Non-Jewish parents may and should be mentioned in the English b*mitzvah blessing.
4. A rabbi may offer an intermarrying couple who intend to live an exclusively Jewish life (and if having children, raise Jewish children) a *mi shebeirakh* on the occasion of an *aliyah* enjoyed by the Jewish partner accompanied by the non-Jewish partner after the wedding day or before the wedding day but not on the wedding day.

Addendum: *The rabbi may offer a variation on the aufruf mi shebeirakh on the occasion of the couple's recent wedding. Here, the CJLS offers one such example.*¹⁹

¹⁸ It may be that the non-Jewish parent is fully committed to raising Jewish children but is unwilling to convert and/or continues to practice his or her faith.

¹⁹ The editors have great gratitude for Rabbi Robert Scheinberg, who has offered both the Hebrew and English text for this *mi shebeirakh*. This is based on a prayer for an *aufruf* compiled by Kehillat B'nai Jeshurun and edited by Rabbi Jan Uhrbach (and further edited for this teshuvah). The following is an adaptation of the texts of the *mi shebeirakh* for a marrying couple found in Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat and Festivals, p. 443.

***Mi Shebeirakh* for a couple with one Jewish and one non-Jewish partner** (by Rabbi Robert Scheinberg, May 2026 / Sivan 5786)

Some communities may prefer to recite this prayer in English only (in either of the two versions found below). Others may choose to recite it in Hebrew but to use the non-Jewish partner's first and last name, rather than to use a patronymic (and matronymic) form of the non-Jewish partner's name.²⁰

The Hebrew form of this prayer affirms and celebrates the couple's partnership while also avoiding some of the Hebrew terms that either have a technical meaning from the perspective of Jewish law or have been conventionally reserved for Jewish marriage in the more traditional sense.

May the one who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bless the couple, _____ and _____	מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרֶךְ אֶת הַזּוּג _____ וְ_____
<i>soon to be married:</i> who soon will enter into a covenant as loving partners. <i>recently married:</i> who have entered into a covenant as loving partners.	<i>soon to be married:</i> אֲשֶׁר יִתְחַתְּנוּ בְּקֶרֶב <i>:recently married</i> אֲשֶׁר הִתְחַתְּנוּ
May it be Your will that they establish a faithful home, a sanctuary of love and friendship, lit with holiness and the traditions of the Jewish people.	יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ שְׂיָקִימוּ בֵּית נְאֻמָּן, מְשֻׁכָּן אַהֲבָה וְאַחֻוּהָ, מוֹאָר בְּקִנְיָנָה וּבְמִסְכָּרַת עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל.

²⁰ Note that throughout the Hebrew Bible, the patronymic form of names is used for Jews and non-Jews alike. See, for example, the names in Genesis 36.

May their love grow, as You plant within them a listening heart and a tongue that speaks the truth quietly and kindly.	חַיֵּךְ נָא אֶהְבֶּתֶם אֶהְבֶּתֶן וְטַע בָּהֶם בָּהֶן לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ וְלִשׁוֹן מְבַטֵּאת אֱמֶת בְּנֵעִם וּבְחֵן.
Be with them in difficult times, and give them the courage always and in whatever circumstance to face each other and the courage to face the world, that it may reflect the kingdom of heaven.	יְהִי עִמָּם עִמָּן בְּעֵתִים הַקָּשׁוֹת, וְתֵן בָּהֶם בָּהֶן אֱמִץ לִפְנֵי לְוִילַת בְּכָל־עֵת וּזְמָן, וְאֱמִץ לִפְנֵי אֵל הָעוֹלָם לְתַקְנֹו בְּמַלְכוּת שְׁדֵי.
Sovereign of peace, bless them with an abundance of love that continues to flower through the years—long years, filled with health and goodness. So may it be Your will, and let us say: Amen.	אֲדוֹן הַשְּׁלוֹם, בָּרַכְם בָּרַכְן בְּשֹׁפַע אֶהְבָּה שְׂתַצְמַח וְתִפְרַח לְאָרֶץ יָמִים בְּרִיאִים וְטוֹבִים. וְכֵן יְהִי רְצוֹן, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן

Alternate English version:

O God, source of love, we invoke Your blessings of life, health, and love upon the couple, _____ and _____ as they stand together in celebration of their marriage.

May they live together in harmony and faith, blessed with an ever greater capacity to love and be loved, to share in the celebration of life, and with courage and integrity to face the inevitable difficult moments of life.

May their sensitivities to one another ever increase in their search for each other's true selves.

May they learn to understand one another's silence, tears, and laughter.

May soul encounter soul.

May they be blessed and supported in their creation of a Jewish home filled with holiness and guided by the light of Torah, and may they be granted the means with which to do their part in the work of *tikkun olam*.

May they, together with their loved ones, help in the continuous creation of Your world, so that all people everywhere may live in peace and justice.

And let us say: Amen.

6. A *Ḥanukkat Habayit* (Dedication of the Jewish Home) Ceremony for Couples Consisting of a Jewish Partner and a Non-Jewish Partner Who Have Decided to Build an Exclusively Jewish Home and Family Together by Rabbi Emily Barton²¹

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 14-5-4. Voting in favor: Rabbis Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, David J. Fine, Amy Levin, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Marcelo Polakoff, Karen Reiss Medwed, Robert Scheinberg, Stewart Vogel. Voting against: Rabbis Daniel S. Nevins, Joel Pitkowsky, Avram Israel Reisner, Rachel Safman, Raysh Weiss. Abstaining: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Aviva Fellman, Joshua Heller, Miriam T. Spitzer.

May the ḥanukkat habayit ceremony that already exists in our tradition be used by couples of a Jewish partner and a non-Jewish partner who have decided to build an exclusively Jewish home and family together (and for families who are maintaining an exclusively Jewish home and raising Jewish children)?

A Jewish home needs to have a *mezuzah* on its doors, and affixing the *mezuzah* is an occasion that can be used to involve the rabbi with a new couple, a couple newly moved to the community, or a couple of any age, Jewish or intermarried, who have moved to a new home, as well as for families. A rabbi could simply join the couple/family in affixing the *mezuzah* with the appropriate *berakhah*, or the *berakhah* could be incorporated into a more encompassing ceremony.

There are no halakhic impediments for using a *ḥanukkat habayit ceremony* for intermarried couples/families who have decided to build an exclusively Jewish home, and by formulating a ritual for such a couple/family, we hope that this will offer a meaningful ritual for intermarried couples who have decided to build an exclusively Jewish home and family together.

By slightly reformulating the existing ceremony for affixing a *mezuzah*, the rabbi and the community welcome the intermarried couple/family and support them in bringing more Judaism into their homes and more fully into their lives. Even more importantly, the ceremony affirms any couple's or family's commitment to Jewish practice and home life. The way we reformulate it may, however, create some potential challenges as we seek to live in the space between our tradition and *keruv*.

*Who is eligible for such a *simḥah* (joyous ceremony upon fulfilling a mitzvah)?*

This ceremony is designed as a welcoming ceremony for an intermarried couple who has made the commitment to build an exclusively Jewish home in which the children will be raised

²¹ This ceremony is based on Rabbi David Lerner's [extensive work](#) on the subject, for which the author is very grateful.

solely as Jews (for example, if the mother is not Jewish, those children would undergo a halakhic affirmation of their Jewish status). Although one might argue that no preconditions should be set, without this commitment the ceremony rings hollow.

This ceremony can also be for a Jewish or intermarried couple/family moving into a new home at any point and can be repeated as often as a couple/family needs to put up a *mezuzah* in their new home, or when partners are moving in together for the first time.

Expectations

There should be a clear expectation that non-Jewish symbols and observances would not be a part of the couple's home (e.g., no Christmas tree). In addition, there should be a requirement of meeting regularly with the rabbi for a learning program of three to six months for the rabbi and the couple to get to know each other before the ceremony, form a connection between the couple and the rabbi, and talk about the Jewish home the couple is building and the values that should animate it. Without these prior discussions, both partners might agree to something they did not really understand. How, for example, can they decide to raise exclusively Jewish children if they, particularly the non-Jewish partner, do not know what that entails? These sessions also allow them to plan the ceremony that affirms what they have learned and the commitment they are making.

The couple should meet with a local RA rabbi who could conduct the *hanukkat habayit* ceremony where the couple lives, even if the initial connection is made through the parents' rabbi, who lives elsewhere. This has the benefit of forming a personal link with a local spiritual leader. The setting for this ceremony should preferably be a large room in the couple's home near a doorway with a small table to hold the items in the ceremony.

A Ritual for *Hanukkat Habayit*

Family and friends should be invited to the couple's home. Once all the participants and guests are assembled, the rabbi leads "Hinei Ma Tov" to set a welcoming mood and shares words of welcome, introducing the ceremony and discussing the importance of a relationship and marriage grounded in Jewish values and rituals), including building a Jewish home and raising a Jewish family (if the couple plans on having children):

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדֹד הַנָּה מְה־טוֹב וּמִה־נָּעִים שְׁבֵת אֲחִים גַּם־יָחַד

Hineh mah tov umah na'im shevet aḥim gam yaḥad.

How good and how pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity. [Psalm 133:1]

The couple shares an English prayer that they can recite together:

Eternal One, our God, Source of all creation, we pray that the ability to love and understand be re-created for us every day. May You endow us with the strength to be ever sensitive to each other and may the blessing of companionship rest upon us always.²²

The rabbi takes a cup of kosher wine and explains the significance of the following blessings:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא פרי הגפן.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creating the fruit of the vine.

שמן תשמח רעים האהובים. כשמתה יצירה בגן עדן מקדם. ברוך אתה יי הטוב והמטיב.

Grant perfect joy to these loving companions, as You did for Your first human beings in the Garden of Eden. Praised are You, Adonai, who is good and does good.

The couple then drinks from the cup.

The parents of the couple or close friends of the couple may recite:

- a. We praise You, Adonai, for guiding our children to a loving partner as You guided us to each other. It is our fervent prayer that our children's wedded life will always be delightful and joyful. We celebrate the happiness of this couple, our children. May their love, like Your love, endure forever.
- b. When you speak with your beloved, may you always know the joy of companionship. When you touch your beloved, may you remain ever open to happiness. When you disagree, as couples sometimes do, may you always think of compromise. When you see each other, may your eyes be filled with wonder at the miracle of your love. Throughout your lives, may the vigor and sweetness of your love continue to startle you, so that you will always know God's blessings in your home and in your hearts.
- c. May the Source of Great Joy bless those who have entered here in great joy. We ask for Your guidance, Source of all Blessing. We know that unless You, Adonai, build the home, those who build it work in vain. Teach our children to nurture the promise of this moment, so that all who know them will call them truly blessed.²³

²² See *Moreh Derekh*, Volume 1, page C-41, second paragraph

²³ See *Moreh Derekh*, Volume 1, C-59.

The rabbi addresses the couple by speaking about the significance of the mezuzah. The rabbi may continue with one of the following:

1. May you live to see your world fulfilled.

May your destiny be for worlds still to come.

May you trust in generations past and yet to be.

May your heart be filled with intuition, your words with insight.

May songs of praise ever be on your tongue,

And your vision on a straight path before you.

May your eyes shine with the light of holy words,

And your face reflect the glory of heaven.

[inspired by Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 17a]

2. From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. And when two souls, destined to be together, find each other, the streams of light flow together and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being.

[Ba'al Shem Tov]

3. Eternal God who blesses us, we are made in Your image. We live in Your world to work and create, to love and be loved, to rejoice and be fulfilled and to share ourselves with those we love. Grant that this couple who love each other find the full measure of joy and satisfaction in Your world. Bless them, Eternal One, that they may be a blessing to all they meet on life's way. _____ and _____, in these among all things may you be blessed:

In loving each other;

In appreciating how you are alike;

In treasuring how you are different;

In sharing your lives together;

In peace and serenity in your home;

(In the blessing of raising children
of your own;)

In the fulfillment of living and growing and achieving together;

In the warmth and companionship of family and friends;

And in realizing your fondest hopes.²⁴

[*The rabbi continues:*]

יְבָרֶכְךָ י-הוה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ. יְאֹר י-הוה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַחֲנֶנֶךָ. יֵשׂא י-הוה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֶּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

May Adonai bless you and protect you.

May Adonai show you favor and be gracious to you.

May Adonai show you kindness and grant you peace.

[Numbers 6:24–26]

If appropriate, the rabbi may relate the Priestly Blessing to building a Jewish home, and to mitzvot like lighting Shabbat and holiday candles and raising Jewish children where this berakhah is recited every Friday night.

The rabbi addresses the couple, speaking personally about them, their learning together and what each brings to the other and to the new Jewish home they are creating. It would be helpful to speak about the power and significance of the mezuzah as well.

Finally, the couple and the rabbi move to the front door (or another appropriate doorway) to affix the mezuzah – the Jewish partner recites the following blessing in Hebrew:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי א-להינו מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ לְקַבֵּוֹעַ מְזוּזָה.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu likbo'a mezuzah.

The Jewish partner then recites the translation in English, perhaps joined by the non-Jewish partner as the rabbi deems appropriate, followed by the actual affixing of the mezuzah:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with God's commandments and commanded us to affix a *mezuzah*."

The guests join in with "Siman tov umazel tov." If there is a meal, the festivities conclude with birkat hamazon (grace after meals), perhaps with a special haraḥaman invocation for the couple and their new home.

Following Up

The rabbi may continue to speak with the couple in the following months to guide them in their Jewish growth and continue to welcome them into the community (when appropriate). If the couple moves, the rabbi should contact a colleague in their new community who will continue to help them along the road to raising a Jewish family if they are blessed with children. This will also help colleagues ensure the children born to non-Jewish mothers are brought to the

²⁴ See *Moreh Derekh*, Volume 1, C-61.

mikveh and that *brit milah leshem gerut* (ritual circumcision for the sake of conversion) for their infant sons is properly done and witnessed, thus avoiding the need for *hatafat dam brit* (drawing blood from the site of circumcision) at a later age that would otherwise be necessary.

A year's free membership to a local Conservative/Masorti synagogue or *minyan* would be a wonderful housewarming gift for these families. May this *hanukkat habayit* ritual sow the seeds for a fuller integration of the family into the Jewish community and for building a stronger foundation for a Jewish home.

Pesak Din:

A *hanukkat habayit* ceremony may be a way to welcome couples in which one partner is not Jewish who have decided to build an exclusively Jewish home and family together. This ceremony can also be used for any couple/family wishing to affix a *mezuzah* in their new home as part of a special occasion.

7. May a Non-Jew Serve as a Sandek or Kvatter at a Brit Milah/Kodesh or Brit Habat? by Rabbi Amy Levin

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 20-1-2. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Daniel S. Nevins, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Marcelo Polakoff, Avram Israel Reisner, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel. Voting against: Rabbi Karen Reiss Medwed. Abstaining: Rabbis Aviva Fellman and Raysh Weiss.

May a non-Jew serve as a sandak (one who holds the baby during the Brit Milah/Kodesh) or a kvatter (who brings the baby into the ceremony) at a brit milah/kodesh or brit habat? Recite an English reading at a brit milah, bar/bat mitzvah or other life cycle event?

Although the act of holding a newborn at the halakhically required circumcision, **ברית מילה** (*brit milah/brit kodesh*), performed on the eighth day of the child's life may seem to be a passive role and therefore not bound by any halakhic restrictions, for centuries the role of the *sandak* has been raised up as an essential and halakhically significant role.

The standing of the one who fulfills this role is spelled out in the *Shulhan Arukh*:

נוהגין לעשות כסא לאליהו שנקרא מלאך הברית וכשמניחו יאמר בפיו שהוא כסא אליהו: הנה ונוהגין להידר אחר מצנה זו להיות סנדק לתפס התינוק למוהל (הנהגות מימוני פקק ג' דמילה) ויפה כח הסנדק מכה המוהל להקדימו לקריאת התורה דכל סנדק הוי כמקטיר קטרת. [שולחן ערוך, יורה דעה רס"ה, י"א]

It is customary to set up a chair for Elijah, who is called the "messenger of the covenant." When placing it, one should say aloud that it is Elijah's chair.

*Rema*²⁵: It is also customary to honor this mitzvah by being the *sandak* (the one who holds the baby during the circumcision ceremony) for the *mohel* (the one who performs the circumcision). The power of the *sandak* is considered greater than that of the *mohel*, entitling him to be called up first to the Torah reading, for every *sandak* is likened to one who offers incense [on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem]. [*Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 265:11]

Elsewhere, the *sandak*, along with the father of the child and the *mohel* [the one who performs the circumcision], are together referred to as “the masters of the covenant” [*ba'alei habrit* / בעלי הברית]. The special status of all three are enshrined in the same codex. In a discussion of appropriate practices on the 9th of Av [the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem] which involves a number of practices meant to express mourning and a sense of loss [fasting, wearing simple clothing of darker hues, for example] we read:

בַּעַל בְּרִית לֹבֵשׁ בְּגָדִים אֲחֵרִים אֶךְ לֹא לְבָנִים מִמֶּשׁ: הֵגֵה וְאָבִי הַבֵּן וְהַמֹּהֵל וְהַסַּנְדָּק כָּלֶם נִקְרָאִים
בַּעֲלֵי בְרִית וּמִתְרִים לְלִבָּשׁ בְּגָדֵי שַׁבָּת לְאַחֵר שֶׁגִּמְרוּ הַקִּיּוֹנוֹת וּבְאֵין לְמוֹל הַתִּינוּק אֲבָל לֹא יִלְבָּשׁוּ
לְבָנִים:

The *ba'al habrit* (master of the covenant) dresses in other clothes, but not white ones. *Rema*: and the father of the child and the circumciser and the *sandak* are all called *ba'alei habrit* and it is permitted for them to dress in Shabbat clothes after they have completed the *kinnot* [liturgical passages of mourning for the fallen Temple]. And they come to circumcise the child, but they should not dress in white.

[*Shulḥan Arukh, Orah Ḥayyim* 559:8].

Thus, although the context may be abstruse, these definitive texts do ascribe a unique halakhic status to the one who serves as *sandak*. In accordance with this standard reflected in authoritative halakhic texts, we maintain that the role of *sandak* be reserved for a person who is halakhically Jewish.

In any life cycle celebration to be conducted within halakhic guardrails, there is always an appropriate way to involve and honor others who are loved and respected family and friends. Indeed, their presence offers an opportunity to add meaning and connections that might otherwise be marginalized. In any life cycle moment, though the *sandak* must be halakhically Jewish, non-Jewish family members and friends may be invited to read an English reading as

²⁵ The name “Rema” refers to Rabbi Moshe Isserles [Poland, 1530 - 1572] who added his gloss adding Ashkenazic practice to the *Shulḥan Arukh* text written in the land of Israel by Rabbi Yosef Karo [1488 - 1575], which documented Sephardic practice at the time.

part of the ceremony itself [whether it be *brit milah* / *brit kodesh* / *simhat bat* / *brit habat*]. Such a reading could be a biblical text like a psalm, a piece of relevant poetry or even a blessing written by the person being invited to participate.²⁶ Those who are supportive of the child's Jewish identity may also be among the *kvatter* or *kvatterin*, the chain of people who carry the child from his mother's arms to the lap of the *sandak*.

Pesak Din:

1. The role of *sandak* is reserved for a person who is halakhically Jewish.
2. Family members and friends (Jewish and non-Jewish) may be invited to read an English reading as part of the ceremony itself (to be chosen or approved by the family's rabbi or the mohel). Those who are supportive of the child's Jewish identity, including those friends and family members who are not Jewish, may also be among the *kvatter* or *kvatterin*, the chain of people who carry the child from his mother's arms to the lap of the *sandak*.

8. Does a Child Born to a Jewish Mother and Non-Jewish Father Require Pidyon Haben? by Rabbi David Fine

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 23-0-0. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Daniel S. Nevins, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Marcelo Polakoff, Avram Israel Reisner, Karen Reiss Medwed, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel, Raysh Weiss. Voting against: None. Abstaining: None.

Yes, unless the mother is a *leviyah* (daughter of a *levi*) or the *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first born) is not applicable for some other reason, such as in the case of a C-section. This is a matter of codified law. The Shulḥan Arukh describes the child liable to *pidyon* as בכור לאמו הישראלית, the first born (if male) of a Jewish woman.²⁷ There are a number of exceptions to the *pidyon haben*, such as a child born by C-section.²⁸ Another exception is if the father is a *kohen* or

²⁶ See also Rabbi Jerome Epstein, "[Participation of Non-Jewish Parents or Grandparents in Home Religious Ceremonies](#)". See also Rabbi Kassel Abelson, "[The Non-Jewish Spouse and Children of a Mixed Marriage in the Synagogue](#)".

²⁷ Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 305:1.

²⁸ See Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 305:24, and Rabbi Howard Handler, "[Pidyon Haben and Caesarean Sections](#)". Another exception to *pidyon haben* is when the mother had a previous miscarriage or an aborted fetus beyond forty days of pregnancy.

levi. If the mother is a *kohenet*, however, the release from *pidyon* applies only if the father is Jewish. On this point the Shulḥan Arukh reads:

כהנים ולוים פטורים מפדיון הבן ואפ"י כהנת ולויה נשואה לישראל אין הבן חייב בפדיון שאין הדבר תלוי באב אלא באם שנאמר פטר רחם בישראל ואם נתעברה מעובד כוכבים בן הלוייה פטור מפדיון ובן הכהנת חייב בפדיון שהרי נתחללה אמו מן הכהונה בבעילת העובד כוכבים

Kohanim and *levi'im* are exempt from *pidyon haben* and even when a *kohenet* or *leviyah* married to a *yisrael* the son is not liable for *pidyon haben* because the matter does not depend on the father but on the mother, as it says, “the first issue of the womb among the Israelites (Numbers 3:12). And if the woman became pregnant from a non-Jew, the son of a *leviyah* is exempt from *pidyon haben* but the son of a *kohenet* is liable for *pidyon haben* because his mother disqualified herself from the priesthood through having relations with a non-Jew.²⁹

Besides the general rule that the law “does not depend on the father but on the mother,” this paragraph of the Shulḥan Arukh states explicitly that the child of a *leviyah* is exempt because his mother is a *levi*, but the child of a *kohenet* and a non-Jew is liable because the *kohenet* loses her priesthood status by having forbidden relations, a consequence reserved for *kohanim* and *kohanot*, not *levi'im* and *leviyot*. For our purposes here, the fact that the Shulḥan Arukh focuses on this specific question of whether the child of a *kohenet* or a *leviyah* with a non-Jew is liable for *pidyon haben* (yes for the offspring of the *kohenet*, no for the offspring of the *leviyah*), makes it obvious that the child of a *yisraelit* and a non-Jewish man would be liable for *pidyon haben* as well (like the child of the *kohenet* and a non-Jew). Although the obligation to redeem the first born falls upon the father, the mother may redeem the child especially in the case when the father is not Jewish.³⁰

Pesak Din:

A child born to a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father requires *pidyon haben*, unless the mother is a *leviyah* (a woman of Levite status). There are several other exceptions to the *pidyon haben*, such as a child born by C-section. In any case, when doing *pidyon haben* for a child born to a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father, the traditional ceremony may be used and the Jewish parent would take the role traditionally given to the father.

²⁹ Shulḥan Arukkh, Yoreh De'ah 305:18. The Shulḥan Arukh's usage of “*kohenet*” and “*leviyah*” rather than “bat kohen” or “bat levi” should not be surprising. See Rabbi David J. Fine, “[Kohenet Kirvi: Call a Bat Kohen a Kohenet.](#)”

³⁰ See also by Rabbi Jerome Epstein, “[Participation of Non-Jewish Parents or Grandparents in Home Religious Ceremonies](#)”.

9. Benefiting from a Relationship with a Non-Jew for Halakhic Purposes or in order to Fulfill a Mitzvah by Rabbi David Fine

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 22-0-1. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Daniel S. Nevins, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Avram Israel Reisner, Karen Reiss Medwed, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel, Raysh Weiss. Voting against: None. Abstaining: Rabbi Marcelo Polakoff.

a. May a person sell their ḥametz (leavened products forbidden on Passover) to their non-Jewish partner? What is involved in the non-Jewish partner's ownership of hametz?

No. *Ḥametz* on Pesah is one of the principal prohibitions where *hana'ah*, the prohibition of benefit, applies.³¹ While one may in general sell one's *ḥametz* to any non-Jew, the situation is more complicated when one shares an economic relationship with a non-Jew. The Shulḥan Arukh devotes an entire *siman* to the question of a Jew who has a partnership (*shutafut*) with a non-Jew, because the Jew can receive no benefit from *ḥametz* on Passover. On the question of a Jew who receives money from a non-Jew for use of a shared oven, the Shulḥan Arukh stipulates:

ישראל שהיה לו תנור ואפו בו עכו"ם חמץ בפסח אפי' מעות אסור לקבל בשכרו דהוה ליה משתכר
באיסורי הנאה ואם קבל כבר המעות מותר ליהנות מהם

A Jew who has an oven and a non-Jew baked *ḥametz* in it on Passover, even accepting money for the usage is prohibited as the Jew would be earning from a prohibited benefit. However, if the Jew already received the money it is permitted to benefit from it.³²

It would be better, the Shulḥan Arukh rules, if the Jew receives no benefit from the non-Jew. But if the non-Jew should remit benefit (in this case, rent) for the shared oven, the Jew is permitted *bedi'eved* (after the fact) to take the money. The lines of benefit are not always black-and-white, but the impulse of the law is to err on the side of caution. While technically the non-Jewish partner would have purchased the *ḥametz*, a shared domicile in a romantic partnership usually implies shared usage (i.e. "benefit") of each other's foodstuffs, regardless of whether the two partners keep separate or joint finances. There is a presumption of shared finances in a marriage, and the CJLS, in 2017, unanimously approved a responsum by Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner that argued that the *halakhah* recognizes the joint ownership of marital property that is common in

³¹ Mishnah Pesahim 2:1 and Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 23a. On *hana'ah* in general, see *Talmudic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, pp. 92-97, s.v. איסורי הנאה.

³² Shulḥan Arukh, Orah Ḥayyim 450:4.

most jurisdictions today.³³ While Rabbi Reisner discussed several mitzvot where joint ownership raises questions (such as the requirement to own one's own *lulav* for Sukkot), in discussing the requirement to remove (or sell) the *ḥametz* of joint marital property, he wrote that in an intermarriage “husband and wife are joint owners of their property and the non-Jewish partner may not serve as the non-Jew to whom the Jewish partner’s *ḥametz* is sold.”

Indeed, if we are concerned that the non-Jewish spouse may eat of the old *ḥametz* or may use jointly owned resources to purchase and eat *ḥametz* during Passover, we should be no less concerned that the less observant Jewish spouse may do so as well. The ideal situation from a halakhic perspective would be if both spouses observe Passover on the same level. However, recognizing that marriages are partnerships between two different people, we cannot assume that there will always be agreement on matters of Jewish observance all the time. In such circumstances, the more observant spouse should understand that since she (or he or they) sold the *ḥametz* then that sale covers not only the entirety of the sale when there is agreement to sell the jointly held property, but also at least that individual’s share of the joint property. It matters not whether the share is an even 50 percent or as yet undetermined, as often the division of comingled marital property is only determined by a court adjudicating the divorce. The force of Rabbi Reisner’s 2017 teshuvah is that the *halakhah* accepts the concept of jointly held comingled property as a function of *dina demalkhuta dina*, that “the law of the land is the law” especially in matters of property (*dinei mamannot*). This same approach for the couple of different levels of observance would also apply to the intermarried couple. Ideally, all of the *ḥametz* in the household, whether owned separately or jointly, should be sold to an independent non-Jewish buyer, removing any suggestion of rights of the Jewish partner toward the *ḥametz*. When the Jewish partner does so representing the non-Jewish partner as well, all the better. When there cannot be an assumption of representation--because the non-Jewish partner wants to continue to eat the *ḥametz*, or to purchase *ḥametz* for the home, or even outside of the home but with marital funds--then the assumption is that Jewish partner’s sale of the *ḥametz* constitutes the Jewish partner’s sale of his or her or their portion of the *ḥametz* of the joint property, while any *ḥametz* that remains that the non-Jewish (or non-observant) partner will eat, benefit from, or purchase during Passover is all excluded from the Jewish partner’s portion of the joint property.

b. What kind of melakhah can a non-Jewish partner of a Jew do on Shabbat?

The non-Jewish partner may perform any kind of *melakhah* (a labor prohibited on Shabbat) and the Jewish partner may benefit from that as long as the Jewish partner does not request any *melakhah* of the non-Jewish partner. Unlike *ḥametz* on Passover, there is no prohibition of benefit (*issur hana’ah*) from the labor performed by a non-Jew on Shabbat. The only concern with labor performed by a non-Jew for a Jew on Shabbat is that the Jew cannot direct the non-Jew to perform the Shabbat violation, because of the principle of responsibility of

³³ Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner, “[Joint Ownership](#)”.

agency, that if one directs an agent (be it to deliver a get, or , in this case, perform a prohibited Sabbath labor) the agent become an extension of one's self, *שְׁלוּחַו שְׁל אָדָם כְּמוֹתוֹ*.³⁴ The benefit from labors performed by a non-Jew on Shabbat has a long history in the *halakhah*,³⁵ and there is nothing in the context of a Jew and non-Jewish partner living together that would change any of the parameters of the existing laws.

c. May a Jewish child benefit from a non-Jewish parent's labor on Shabbat—in what cases is this permissible and not permissible?

From a technical halakhic perspective, yes, in all circumstances and without exception. Even if the child asks something directly of the non-Jewish parent on Shabbat, there is no violation as long as the child is under the age of majority. There is no concern of responsibility of agency (*שְׁלוּחַו שְׁל אָדָם כְּמוֹתוֹ*) because a minor cannot legally appoint an agent.

And yet, it is advisable for the Jewish and non-Jewish parents to set parameters about what the non-Jewish parent can do and not do for the Jewish child from a pedagogic concern about the best way to educate the child about Shabbat and to create a home where Shabbat is honored and kept holy.

Pesak Din:

1. A person may not sell their *ḥametz* to their non-Jewish partner.
2. All of the *ḥametz* in the household, whether technically owned by the Jewish or the non-Jewish partner, should be sold to an independent non-Jewish buyer, removing any suggestion of rights of the Jewish partner toward the *ḥametz*.
3. If the non-Jewish partner intends to enjoy *ḥametz* over Passover, then the Jewish partner's sale of *ḥametz* is assumed to apply to the Jewish partner's share in the jointly held *ḥametz*.
4. The non-Jewish partner of a Jew may do any kind of *melakhah* on behalf of their partner as long as the Jewish partner did not directly request it on Shabbat.
5. Technically, a Jewish child may benefit from a non-Jewish parent's labor on Shabbat, in all circumstances and without exception. Even if the child asks something directly of the non-Jewish parent on Shabbat, there is no violation as long as the child is under the age of majority. And yet, the Jewish and non-Jewish partners should set parameters around the observance of Shabbat in the home so that the child may learn and experience the holiness of Shabbat.

³⁴ Mishnah Berakhot 5:5.

³⁵ See, for example, Jacob Katz, *The Shabbos Goy: A Study in Halakhic Flexibility* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

10. Jews, Non-Jews, and Death Rituals by Rabbis Miriam Spitzer and Emily Barton

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 23-0-0. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Daniel S. Nevins, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Marcelo Polakoff, Avram Israel Reisner, Karen Reiss Medwed, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel, Raysh Weiss. Voting against: None. Abstaining: None.

When we talk about welcoming the families in which one partner is not Jewish into our congregations, the conversations often focus on how to include non-Jewish family members in synagogue ritual and joyous milestone events. We must not forget that being part of the Jewish community includes times of grief as well: our Jewish members seek guidance in mourning for non-Jewish relatives, and non-Jewish family members may seek support from the Jewish community when they mourn for their Jewish family and when they mourn for their non-Jewish family.

In this section of the omnibus teshuvah, we plan to address several issues: 1) how a rabbi may conduct a funeral for non-Jews who are related to a Jewish person; 2) how a Jewish person may mourn a non-Jewish family member; 3) how a non-Jew may mourn a Jewish family member; and 4) how our communities may extend comfort to a non-Jew who participates in our communities who has suffered the loss of a non-Jewish loved one. We recognize the sensitivity of this topic, and we hope to offer some guidance as to how to best support all people in the Jewish community during those difficult times.

1. *May Jewish cemeteries have delineated areas for the burial of Jews alongside non-Jewish spouses and children?*
2. *May a rabbi conduct a funeral for non-Jews?*

The CJLS has been grappling with these and related issues for decades. In 1982, two teshuvot ruled that non-Jewish spouses may not be buried in Jewish cemeteries,³⁶ while two other teshuvot ruled that non-Jewish family members may be buried in Jewish cemeteries.³⁷ In 1991,

³⁶ “It should be made clear to the couple that membership in the synagogue of the Jewish spouse does not entitle the non-Jewish spouse to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.” Rabbi Kassel Abelson, “[The Non-Jewish Spouse and Children of a Mixed Marriage in the Synagogue](#).”

“Permission for the non-Jewish spouse to be buried in a Jewish cemetery should not be granted.” Rabbis Joel Roth and Daniel Gordis, “[Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families](#)”.

³⁷ “The Kol Bo Al Avelut is not as strict about the burial of the spouses of Jews as are Rabbis Roth and Gordis.” Rabbi Seymour Siegel, “[Comments on "Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families"](#).” “If non-Jewish spouses of Jews continue to associate with us and raise their children to be Jews, then when their days on earth end, we should permit their interment in our burial grounds.” Rabbi Harry Sky, “[The Mitzvah of Keruv](#).”

Rabbi Ben Zion Bergman concluded that it is permitted for a Jew to be buried in a Jewish section of a non-Jewish cemetery.³⁸ In 1994, Rabbi Myron Geller permitted the burial of the body parts of Jews and non-Jews together after a catastrophe.³⁹ Clearly our precedents are very mixed.

In 2010, Rabbis Kassel Abelson and Loel Weiss wrote a teshuvah that endorsed the creation of “mixed burial” sections of cemeteries and permitted rabbis to officiate at the funerals of non-Jewish spouses and children.⁴⁰

a. We must be sensitive to the commitments that were made with those who have already been buried under the assumption that only Jews would be buried with them. Hence we recommend the creation of “mixed burial” sections in Jewish cemeteries, where non-Jewish spouses and children may be buried alongside Jews.⁴¹ The mixed section should be separated from the rest of the cemetery by a path, a road or a sidewalk of four amot (1.9 to 2.3 meters wide).

b. Following the Tur, the Beit Yosef, the Baḥ and the Arukh Hashulḥan, it is permitted for rabbis to attend and officiate at the funerals of non-Jewish spouses and children.

c. The funeral ceremony should be conducted by Jewish clergy and not contain any non-Jewish ritual. The ceremony may include Psalm 23, a eulogy, and other appropriately worded prayers as determined by the local rabbi. If there are surviving Jewish family members, they may recite *kaddish*. The tombstone should not have non-Jewish religious symbols engraved on it.

The Abelson-Weiss teshuvah pointed out that relations between Jewish and non-Jews are different now than they been in the past:

In the United States there is an unprecedented respect for Jews and Judaism. On a day to day basis, Jews and non-Jews, work together and socialize together. This has led to the second change: a significant increase in marriage between Jews and non-Jews.

Studies have recently appeared that indicate that the Jewish community can encourage intermarried families to choose Judaism for themselves and their children. In addition, every rabbi has members who are married to non-Jews [and every rabbi] knows non-Jews who have a strong connection to the Jewish community while deciding for

³⁸ Rabbi Ben Zion Bergman, “[A Matter of Grave Concern: A Question of Mixed Burial](#)”.

³⁹ Rabbi Myron S. Geller, “[Peaceful Paths](#)”.

⁴⁰ Rabbis Kassel Abelson and Loel M. Weiss, “[Burial of a Non-Jewish Spouse and Children](#),” 10.

⁴¹ However, it is not permissible for a priest or other Christian clergy to officiate at the burial of a Christian in the intermarried section of a synagogue cemetery (Correspondence of the Chair, 061501). See also Rabbis Abelson and Weiss, “[Burial of a Non-Jewish Spouse and Children](#)”.

various reasons not to formally affiliate with Judaism through conversion. These non-Jews are a part of our communities.⁴²

By this reasoning, the teshuvah allows a rabbi to officiate at the funeral of the non-Jewish relative of a member of their community, with the following guidelines:

Non-Jewish spouses or children of Jews who were involved in a religion other than Judaism should be honored with a funeral according to the customs and rituals of that religion, and the funeral should be conducted by clergy from that religious tradition. Non-Jewish spouses or children who were unaffiliated with another religion may have a funeral conducted by a rabbi.⁴³ A rabbi who chooses to officiate at a funeral for a non-Jewish community/family member may decide whether psalms and elements of Jewish funeral liturgy are appropriate for such a funeral, keeping in mind the wishes of the deceased. If there is a *minyan* because Jewish friends and family members are in attendance at the funeral, *kaddish* may be recited. Non-Jewish religious symbols must not be engraved upon the memorial monument.

3. *May a Jewish Person Sit Shivah and Recite Kaddish When the Deceased Is Not Jewish?*

In 1998, the CJLS approved a teshuvah by Rabbi Joel Rembaum requiring converts to Judaism to follow standard Jewish bereavement practices when mourning the death of non-Jewish parents and close relatives.⁴⁴ While the 1998 teshuvah is specifically about converts and not Jews married to non-Jews or Jews who have non-Jewish children, it is relevant in that it establishes the rule that Jews *are actually required* to mourn for their close non-Jewish relatives, that is, those that they would have to mourn if the relative were Jewish – parent, spouse, sibling, child. This principle extends to the community as a whole – we have an obligation to provide *shivah minyanim* for our Jewish bereaved, regardless of whether the deceased for whom they mourn was or was not Jewish. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon us to make that clear to our congregants that they can expect to be called for a *kaddish minyan* when the deceased, Jewish or not, is a family member of one of our congregants, Jewish or not.

We have a longstanding position that a Jew, whether by birth or conversion, should mourn for their non-Jewish parents, siblings, spouse, children, in the same Jewish ways that they should mourn for their Jewish parents, siblings, spouse, and children, including *keri'ah* (tearing

⁴² Note that while we prohibit non-Jewish religious ritual in the funeral and non-Jewish religious symbols on the tombstones, we allow rituals brought by members of the military, fraternal organizations, clubs, and the like, as long as they are not explicitly part of a religion other than Judaism.

⁴³ This is especially relevant for those who took an active role in the Jewish community during their lifetime and/or encouraged and sustained their Jewish children's religious education, or if the deceased is the non-Jewish child of a Jew who participated in Jewish religious education and abstained from non-Jewish religious education,

⁴⁴ Rabbi Joel Rembaum, "[Converts Mourning the Death of Close Relatives](#)".

the garment/ribbon,) shiva, mourner's kaddish and yahrzeit.⁴⁵ Jewish bereavement rituals are designed for the spiritual and psychological needs of the mourners (unlike Jewish burial rituals which focus on the deceased.⁴⁶) We wish to stress that, in general, a Jew who is mourning for a non-Jewish parent, spouse, sibling or child has the same spiritual and psychological needs as they would have were they mourning a Jewish parent, spouse, sibling or child.⁴⁷ We do not wish to treat a convert or anyone else mourning a non-Jew as in any way “less than” those who mourn Jews.

We further stress that it is the responsibility of the community to provide for the needs of the mourner. We have an obligation to provide *shivah minyanim* for our Jewish bereaved, regardless of whether the deceased for whom they mourn was or was not Jewish.

We acknowledge, however, that a Jew who is mourning for a non-Jewish parent, spouse, sibling or child may not have the same life-experience as they would were they mourning a Jewish parent, spouse, sibling or child. A Jew, whether by birth or conversion, should, in general, mourn for their non-Jewish close relatives in the same Jewish ways that they should mourn for their Jewish parents, siblings, spouse, and children. There may be cases, however, where this is not appropriate. The societal needs of a Jew who is mourning a non-Jew may be different. There may be, for example, other non-Jewish relatives who also have needs and/or other family considerations. The mourner's ability to mourn Jewishly may also be complicated by considerations of what the non-Jewish deceased wanted or believed. In this context we affirm the principle of *kevod hamet* (honoring the deceased) as paramount, and understand that the mourner knows what is appropriate for the loss of a loved one and how to respect the wishes of the deceased. In such cases appropriate adjustments of practice may be made.

4. *When Requested, May a Rabbi and/or Jewish Community Comfort the Non-Jewish Bereaved?*

Sometimes it is the Jewish partner who is mourning the death of their non-Jewish family members, and sometimes it is the non-Jewish spouse who is mourning the death of close

⁴⁵Ibid. While Rabbi Rembaum is speaking about converts and not Jews married to non-Jews or Jews who have non-Jewish children, it is nonetheless relevant in that it establishes the rule that Jews are actually required to mourn for their close non-Jewish relatives.

⁴⁶ Our tradition offers different reasons for the recitation of mourners' *kaddish*. Some Jews believe that the recitation of *kaddish* serves to elevate the soul of the deceased loved one to the heavenly realms. Others maintain that the recitation of *kaddish* is for the mourner, not for the deceased. If *kaddish* is for the mourner and not the deceased, the needs of the mourner do not change just because the deceased is not Jewish. Furthermore, even some of those who hold that *kaddish* is for elevating the soul of the deceased also maintain that *kaddish* can elevate the soul of a non-Jewish loved one as well. See for example, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, *Yehaveh Da'at*, 6.60.

⁴⁷Every situation is different, of course, and the parental relationship is complicated, which is probably why mourning a parent extends a whole year, rather than the month that is given for other relationships. It is beyond the scope of this paper to rule on when a parent's behavior results in forfeiting that parental relationship and the obligations incumbent upon their adult children. The CJLS will take this up elsewhere.

relatives who are Jewish. The non-Jewish spouse might also be mourning the death of their close relatives who are not Jewish. How is the Jewish community to provide comfort to the non-Jews among us?

The Shulḥan Arukh Yoreh De'ah 367:1 reads:

קוברים מתי עכו"ם ומנחמים אבליהם מפני דרכי שלום

We are to bury the dead of non-Jews and comfort their mourners, because of the ways of peace.

Similarly, Yoreh De'ah 151:12 states:

מותר לפרנס ענייהם ולבקר חוליהם ולקבור מתייהם ולהספידן ולנחם אבליהם משום דרכי שלום

It is permitted to support [non-Jews who are] poor and to visit their sick and to bury their dead, eulogize them, and to comfort their mourners, because of the ways of peace.

It is clear from these sources that the mitzvah of *niḥum avelim*, comforting mourners, includes comforting non-Jews who are in mourning. It behooves us as a Jewish community to find meaningful ways to provide consolation for all mourners, whether they be Jewish or non-Jewish, and whether they are mourning for Jews or non-Jews.

Judaism is in many aspects a community religion: the most important parts of public prayer require the presence of ten Jewish adults, including the mourner. It should be stated, however, that even though the community should seek to comfort even the non-Jewish mourner, the community is not required to provide *shivah minyanim* for a non-Jewish mourner since the non-Jewish mourner is not obligated to mourn using Jewish rituals. A rabbi may guide community members in appropriate ways to comfort the non-Jewish mourner. Many of the psalms and readings in our siddurim designed for use at *shivah* may be useful in this endeavor.

Pesak Din:

1. Rabbis are permitted to conduct the funerals of non-Jewish community or family members but the funeral may not contain any non-Jewish religious elements.⁴⁸
2. Non-Jewish spouses or children of Jews who were involved in a religion other than Judaism should be honored with a funeral according to the customs and rituals of that religion, and the funeral should be conducted by clergy from that religious tradition. Non-Jewish clergy may not officiate at or perform other rituals for the deceased in a Jewish cemetery, including the mixed-burial section.
3. Non-Jewish spouses or children who were unaffiliated with another religion may have a funeral conducted by a rabbi, especially if as a parent they took an active role in the Jewish community during their lifetime and/or encouraged and sustained their Jewish

⁴⁸ There are many reasons a rabbi might officiate at or participate in a funeral of a non-Jew. We leave it up to the discretion of each rabbi.

children's religious education, or if the deceased is the non-Jewish child of a Jew who participated in Jewish religious education and abstained from non-Jewish religious education. A rabbi who chooses to officiate at a funeral for a non-Jewish community/family member may decide whether psalms and elements of Jewish funeral liturgy are appropriate for such a funeral, keeping in mind the wishes of the deceased.

4. If there is a *minyan* because Jewish friends and family members are in attendance at the funeral, *kaddish* may be recited.
5. Non-Jewish religious symbols cannot be engraved upon the memorial monument.
6. Jews should mourn, sit *shivah*, and say *kaddish* for their non-Jewish relatives just as they would for their Jewish relatives. In cases of extenuating circumstances, the mourner may make appropriate adjustments of practice.
7. Non-Jews who are part of our communities may be comforted by their Jewish community, and a rabbi may include Jewish ritual as appropriate. However, since non-Jewish mourners are not obligated or expected to sit *shivah*, the community is not required to provide *shivah minyanim*.

11. May an Intermarried Jew Be Hired by a Conservative Institution? By Rabbi Joshua Heller

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 21-0-2. Voting in favor: Rabbis Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Amy Levin, Daniel S. Nevins, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Marcelo Polakoff, Avram Israel Reisner, Karen Reiss Medwed, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel, Raysh Weiss. Voting against: None. Abstaining: Rabbis Aaron Alexander and Suzanne Brody.

In 1997, Rabbi Jerome E Epstein wrote a teshuvah approved by the CJLS with the conclusion that “*Congregations and Solomon Schechter Day Schools may not engage or employ any individual who is intermarried for a position in which he/she may serve as a Jewish role model. This specifically includes, but is not limited to, rabbis, cantors, educators, teachers of all age groups and subjects, youth workers and executive directors.*”⁴⁹

This position requires a re-examination. We would suggest that this prohibition should still be applied to those who are considered *klei kodesh* כלי קודש (a category that we take to be roughly synonymous with clergy), but not to others who might be employed by a congregation or day school. Rabbi Epstein is correct in asserting that staff (and lay leaders) of Jewish institutions are held up as role models. However, it is worth noting that there are degrees to which this is the

⁴⁹ Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, “[Issues Regarding Employment of an Intermarried Jew by a Synagogue.](#)”

case. While full observance is the ideal for every Jew, we understand that this is aspirational, and practical expectations may vary based on the nature of the role. The expectations for these roles may gain further complexity in contexts where staff are shared across institutions of different denominations, or institutions have multiple denominational affiliations.

Rabbi Epstein cites the concept of an אדם חשוב, an “important person,” found in many places in Talmudic literature. For example Rav Ami calls two colleagues to task for drinking water boiled by a non-Jewish person,⁵⁰ even though this would generally be permitted. This is also applied in areas of business and judicial ethics⁵¹--because they are great sages, they are held to a higher standard. If, as role models, these sages are required to abstain from an activity that is frowned upon for “regular” Jews, but ultimately permitted, how much more so must they distance themselves from any activity which is actually a violation of Jewish law!

In that vein our expectations for clergy must remain in place, at the strictest level. From a practical perspective, Jews who associate with the Conservative movement, even if they may not be scrupulous in their own observance, do see observance as an ideal. This is particularly true in their expectations of rabbis. They expect their rabbis to serve as role models in terms of key areas including, but not limited to, Shabbat, *kashrut*, regular prayer, and interpersonal relationships, as well as personal ethics. In addition, the home of the rabbi is often seen as an extension of the community. In some communities, a congregational rabbi may live in a “parsonage”- a home owned by the congregation. Other clergy may own their own home but still declare it to have that status. As a result, there is an expectation that the nature of the familial relationships that take place in that home is due a level of scrutiny beyond that of other employees of the community.⁵²

Furthermore, from a narrow technical perspective, rabbis in our movement are expected to serve as individual legal decisors, as members of a *beit din* and עדי קיום - witnesses who do not merely testify to a truth, but actually serve to certify it. From this standpoint, one who consistently violates certain categories of commandments was traditionally regarded as ineligible to serve as a witness,⁵³ and being in a relationship with someone who is not Jewish falls into

⁵⁰ In Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 51a it is Rav Nahman, and Moed Katan 12b it is Rav Yehudah Nesi’a, and it is worth noting that this prohibition was enacted to discourage intermarriage!

⁵¹ Cf. Babylonian Talmud Ketubbot 86a and Bava Metzi’a 73a.

⁵² It is fair to note that there are negative dynamics and excesses that can sometimes arise from this sense of “vicarious” observance or scrutiny, but that does not diminish the truth, and the value, of the general expectation.

⁵³ Shulḥan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat 34:2.

that one of those categories.⁵⁴ The requirements to serve as a judge and decisor are even more stringent than those to serve as a witness.⁵⁵

Similar reasoning applies to ordained cantors, who have a high level of training and are also called upon to serve roles similar to those of a rabbi- to officiate at life cycle events, serve as educators at the highest level, make decisions in matters of ritual, and even serve as part of a standing Beit Din.

Some congregations may hire an individual with lesser qualifications to lead services or assist with synagogue music (sometimes referred to as “Cantorial Soloists”). Similarly, some congregations retain a “ritual director” who is responsible for helping lead and organize shabbat and weekday services. To the extent that such individuals function as clergy, by making decisions of Jewish law, providing pastoral care, officiating at life cycle events or serving on a beit din, the same criteria would apply.

Therefore, a community that holds to Conservative/Masorti standards should not engage in a clergy role any rabbi or cantor who is married to (or otherwise engaged in a romantic relationship) with a non-Jewish person. This ruling also has implications for those who might be applying for admission to one of our rabbinical or cantorial schools or membership in the Rabbinical Assembly. We acknowledge the challenges faced by clergy in the field in finding appropriate romantic partners, especially in smaller communities. However the Standard of Religious Practice that prohibits participation at an intermarriage as clergy should reasonably be assumed to apply to participating as one of the partners as well.

One might also consider this reasoning with reference to someone serving a formal role as a *mohel/mohelet* in a community. There are conflicting views in the tradition as to whether a *bris* performed by a Jew who is non-observant is kosher after the fact.⁵⁶ To the extent that someone is certified as a *mohel/et* and performs circumcision on a regular basis, that person is considered a *kli kodesh* and may be required to make halachic decisions or serve as a witness with regard to issues of personal status. As such, they would ideally meet general standards of observance, like Shabbat and *kashrut* as well as those related to marriage. In practice, a community may be limited in its choice of *mohalim* and may have to prioritize criteria other than personal observance.

⁵⁴ Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat 16:1.

⁵⁵ While we will accept an imperfectly observant Jew as a witness on a ketubah or for some other purpose on an incidental basis, there is clearly a difference between this and having someone serve as judge or regular functionary in this role.

⁵⁶ Rema on Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 264:1 declares that a *mohel* who totally rejects the entire Torah, or the mitzvah of *brit milah*, is ineligible, implying that circumcisions performed by others are valid. Some later sages expand the prohibition to those who do not observe Shabbat.

On the other hand, intermarriage is certainly not a disqualification for some of the roles that Rabbi Epstein includes in his *pesak*. In the Talmud, the concept that Rabbi Epstein cites, of “*adam hashuv*,” was only used to apply to sages, members of the rabbinic community. Rabbi Epstein seeks to extend that category to many additional communal figures. Is that extension justified? What expectations do we have of other employees of synagogues, schools and other institutions?

At one extreme there are roles that need not have any ritual or religious responsibility. In fact, they might appropriately be filled by someone who is not Jewish at all. This is very often true for general studies teachers in a Jewish day school or preschool environment. There are also some Conservative/Masorti synagogues who employ non-Jewish executive directors, and they may be admitted to NAASE, the North American Association of Synagogue Executives. While it would be expected that these staff would be respectful of the Jewish values and observances in their work context, and may be expected to be role models in their adherence to Jewish ethical values, there is obviously no expectation that they be personally observant. If a role can be filled by one who is not Jewish, then a person who is married to a non-Jew should be able to fill such a role as well!

There remains a middle ground: of roles which have varying degrees of religious or ritual responsibility, but are not necessarily filled by clergy. Particular attention might be paid to roles where reliability in matters of ritual is essential to the role- *mashgi'im* who supervise the kosher status of a kitchen, “guides” at a mikvah. More generally this category would include administrators or Judaica educators in a day school, supplementary school or early childhood setting, directors of membership or engagement, youth advisors, paid Torah readers, or B’nai Mitzvah tutors.

Rabbi Epstein's *pesak* made a clear statement about these roles, and this statement must be reconsidered. Should a community overlook a particular gap in observance to trust an individual in other aspects of communal life? Our tradition does have a significant thread of understanding that a person can be respected and relied upon in some aspects of their observance even if they are lacking in another. For example Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 119:7:

מי שהוא מפורסם בא' מעבירות שבתורה חוץ מעבודת כוכבים וחלול שבת בפרהסיא או שאינו מאמין בדברי רבותינו ז"ל נאמן בשאר איסורי' ובשל אחרים נאמן אפילו על אותו דבר לומר מותר הוא

A person who is publicly known to have transgressed one of the prohibitions mentioned in the Torah provided that the transgression is not idol worship, open desecration of the Sabbath, or denial of rabbinic authority, is trusted with regard to other prohibitions, and if it affects others, he is believed even with regard to that particular commandment.

Rabbi Epstein elevated intermarriage to a level beyond that of any other aspect of observance, including Shabbat, kashrut, prayer, and personal ethics. While we uphold the traditional restriction on intermarriage, we understand that many communities are more open to compartmentalizing the different aspects of a person's identity and observance. In many

non-clergy communal roles, the family life of the employee may not be visible or relevant to the community that they serve. In fact, to the contrary, in some communities, a Jewish person who is married to a non-Jewish person and is engaged actively in Jewish life to the point of making that their profession may serve as a role model for other individuals in similar life circumstances..

As a result, in roles that truly have religious significance, but are not at the level of clergy, it falls to the rabbi and the community to consider the whole person, and the local realities and expectations. The ideal candidate for roles of this nature are individuals who have all of the requisite talents and can serve as strong role models in every aspect of their observance. However, in many communities the scope of qualified individuals is more limited, and people of varying degrees of observance will have significant roles to play. Therefore, when filling a role with some religious significance that is not clerical in nature, a community must take into account whether a candidate will serve as a strong role model, but in doing so should consider the entirety of the candidate's qualifications and commitment, of which their observance of any one commandment is only one factor.

Pesak Din:

A Conservative community must not engage someone who is intermarried for any role that might be considered *klei kodesh*, clergy. For roles where a non-Jewish candidate might also be considered, there is no reason to reject a candidate who is married to a non-Jew. For roles with religious or communal significance, a candidate must be considered for the totality of their skills and Jewish commitment, of which their choice of life partner may be one factor among many.

12. Synagogue Membership from the Editors

Approved on June 25, 2026, by a vote of 17-3-3. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David J. Fine, Joshua Heller, Matthew S. Nover, Joel Pitkowsky, Avram Israel Reisner, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Stewart Vogel. Voting against: Rabbis Amy Levin, Micah Peltz, Karen Reiss Medwed. Abstaining: Rabbis Daniel S. Nevins, Marcelo Polakoff, Raysh Weiss.

Between 1964 and 1984, several teshuvot were written about the family where one partner is not Jewish and synagogue honors and leadership, whether on the bimah or the synagogue board. Many of these were restrictive stances, reflecting the Conservative

movement's position at a particular moment in time.⁵⁷ However, there are more permissive stances, with regard to both membership and leadership roles, which we feel are more appropriate to the current moment, because the same arguments used above regarding professionals would apply here as well. While there is a general expectation that lay leaders in our communities will be respectful of Jewish values and observance, no one aspect of observance should be a barrier preventing a Jewish person from offering time and talent to the community. Similarly, there are appropriate roles for supportive non-Jews to play in communal life and leadership.

In 2017, USCJ changed its congregational standards to enable individual affiliated communities to make their own decisions about membership and leadership roles for non-Jews in their communities:

USCJ does not mandate who can be a synagogue member nor what rights and privileges members may have in terms of voluntary service, ritual, or life cycle participation. Rather, we support every congregation in developing its own criteria based on what is best for their community. For some communities, this criteria includes who may stand on the bimah, interpreting Jewish identity, and whether to include the word “interfaith” in outward facing communications. We do, however, encourage affiliated congregations to celebrate communal diversity by engaging all those who seek connection with authentic and dynamic Judaism.⁵⁸

This major change in USCJ policy and guidance, with endorsement of the CJLS, may be helpful for synagogues that wish to take another look at their current by-laws as they relate to the family where one partner is not Jewish. There are many options to choose from when thinking about changing synagogue membership laws to intentionally welcome intermarried families. Those who are interested in this topic should avail themselves of the resource in the footnote below.

Pesak Din:

Using USCJ policy as a guide, each Conservative/Masorti rabbi and

⁵⁷ Regarding honors and leadership positions for an intermarried Jew in a Conservative synagogue please see the teshuvot by 1) Rabbi Max Routtenberg, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1964, pp. 244-248; 2) Rabbi Joel Roth, “[Synagogue Honors for the Intermarried Jew](#),” ; 3) Rabbis Joel Roth and Daniel Gordis, [Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families](#). Regarding membership of the non-Jewish partner, the opinions of the CJLS in the past had been overwhelmingly negative: 1) Rabbi Max Routtenberg, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1964, pp. 244-248; 2) Rabbi Wilfred Shuchat, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1964, pp. 249 -254); 3) Rabbis Joel Roth and Daniel Gordis, “[Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families](#)”; 4) Rabbi Harry Sky, “[The Mitzvah of Keruv](#)”; 5) Rabbi Seymour Siegel, “[Comments on Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families](#)”.

⁵⁸ For more information please see the USCJ publication, “[Membership in USCJ-Affiliated Congregations](#)”.

synagogue/community, even outside of the USCJ in other parts of the world, should develop criteria for synagogue membership that suits their own community, understanding that some of these criteria may be based on a synagogue/community's comfort level and recognizing that different synagogues in a particular community, let alone in differing communities may have different expectations and goals.

13. Conclusion

The role of Conservative/Masorti clergy on the wedding day remains limited, but that specific day is only one small aspect of the establishment and growth of a family. We have many opportunities, and indeed obligations, to provide spiritual support and encouragement both to Jews and to the non-Jews whom they have chosen as life partners. This paper is an important step in mapping out the ways that we can do so which are true to our commitments both to tradition and to respecting the dignity of each individual we encounter.

Rabbis, communities, and the institutions of our movement will continue to express their creativity and ask thoughtful questions in exploring the most authentic Conservative/Masorti ways to engage with intermarried families in every aspect of communal life, with best practices varying from community to community. The CJLS will continue to respond thoughtfully to new questions as they arise and provide halakhic frameworks that rabbis and communities can use to embrace each family that seeks inspiration from us.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Thank you to Rabbi Joshua Heller for these brief and thoughtful words of conclusion.