RABBI BROWN’S EXPLORATION OF THE QUESTION AS TO WHETHER ~~RABBIS~~ HE SHOULD OFFICIATE AT INTERFAITH WEDDING CEREMONIES: SELECTED REFERENCES FROM TODAY’S PRESENTATION

Session 1: Can/Should Jewish Law Change Over Time?, 1/6/13

Session 2: Interfaith Marriage in Jewish History, 2/10/13

**Session 3: The Role of Non-Jews In Jewish Ritual**

* *Rabbis Talk About Intermarriage* by Gary Tobin and Katherine Simon (1999)
* You shall not intermarry with them; do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the Eternal One’s anger will flare against you, promptly wiping you out.” **Deuteronomy 7:3-4**
* She [the Israelites] lusted for concubinage with them, whose sexual members were like those of asses and whose organs were like those of stallions. **Ezekiel 23:20**
* The All Merciful One made his [a gentile’s] seed ownerless. **Babylonian Talmud, Yebamot 98a**
* We have thus found that kiddushin with her [a non-Jew] is not recognized. **Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 68b**
* Reform Judaism and the Central Conference of American Rabbis has opposed mixed marriages. We recognize the problem as significant in every period of Jewish history. It has become more severe in 20th-century America, and, therefore we have made provisions for families of mixed marriages and their children. They are welcome in our congregations, and we continue to urge them to convert to Judaism. **CCAR Responsum: “Reform Judaism and Mixed Marriage” (1980),** <http://bit.ly/13i1kPd>
* A vineyard with a fence is better than one without. **Avot d’Rabbi Natan (ver II) 1, 2a as quoted in *Boundaries and Opportunities* (JRF) p. 27**
* **Selected Policy Recommendations of the CCAR Responsum on “Gentile Participation in Synagogue Ritual” (1994 - viewable at** [**http://bit.ly/11d3sVy**](http://bit.ly/11d3sVy)**) and the JRF Task Force on “The Role of Non-Jews in Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Congregations” as published in *Boundaries and Opportuniti*es(1998)**
  + A non-Jew should not count in a minyan;
  + A non-Jew can and should participate in a worship service by offering appropriate readings, but never be the service leader
  + *Aliyot,* and the lifting and dressing of the Torah should be reserved for Jews
  + Blessings containing the words *asher kidshanu bemitzvotav* (who has made us holy through Your commandments) should be reserved for Jews
* […] A non-Jew should not be called to the Torah for an *aliyah.* The reading of the Torah requires the presence of a community, because it is one of the central acts by which the community affirms its reason for existence, i.e., the covenant whose words are contained within the scroll. To be called to the Torah is to take one's position in the chain of privilege and responsibility by which the Jewish community has perpetuated itself. A non-Jew, no matter how supportive, does not share that privilege or that responsibility as long as s/he remains formally outside the Jewish community. **The CCAR Responsum on “Gentile Participation in Synagogue Ritual” (1994 - viewable at** [**http://bit.ly/11d3sVy**](http://bit.ly/11d3sVy)**)**
* I would urge that the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards adopt the position that aliyyot for an intermarried Jew be disallowed in almost all cases. Honoring one whose marriage threatens our community implies that the marriage is not really a threat. That is an implication we cannot afford to foster. I would make an exception only for an aliyyah in commemoration of a yahrzeit, because in that case the general perception is that the aliyyah is given in honor of the deceased. That perception is sufficiently widespread to obviate any fear that granting the aliyyah implies approval of the intermarriage. **From the CJLS Minority Opinion** **“Synagogue Honors for the Intermarried Jew: Holding Office and *Aliyyot*” by Rabbi Joel Roth (1984) at** [**http://bit.ly/ZZ2jiW**](http://bit.ly/ZZ2jiW)
* [Every human being has] irreducible worth and dignity, because every human was fashioned in the image of God. **Rabbi Harold Kushner on Genesis 1:27, *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (2001), p. 10**
* **Selected Rabbinic Texts Which Affirm the Full Humanity of the One Who Is Not Jewish, As Cited by Rabbi Eugene Mihaly on pp. 62-63 of *Teshuvot* (*Responsa) on Jewish Marriage: with special reference to “Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage”* (1985)**
  + “He who sees the wise of the nations recites the blessing, “Blessed be He who gave of his wisdom to all creatures.” **Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 58a**
  + “…There are righteous among the gentiles who have a share in the world to come**.” Tosephta Sanhedrin 13:2**
  + “A gentile who studies Torah is like the high priest.” **Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 59a**
  + “When R. Simeon b. Gamliel saw an exceptionally beautiful gentile woman, he exclaimed, “How great are your works, O Lord, in whose wisdom have you made them all.” **Babylonian Talmud, Makkot 20a**
  + “I call heaven and earth to witness, whether a person is a gentile or Jew, man or woman, male or female slave, the holy spirit rests upon him in accordance with the deeds that he performs.” **Seder Eliahu Rabbah**

* Those (non-Jews) who live under a religious discipline and worship God in whatever manner, even though their faith is distant from ours, they are not included in the[se] rabbinic ordinances (against gentiles) but they are, regarding many manners, like full Jews, without any distinction. **Rabbi Menachem Meiri (13th century Spain)**
* If wine is brought after the food and there is but that one cup, the School of Shammai say: The Benediction is said over the wine and then over the food. And the School of Hillel say: The Benediction is said over the food and then over the wine. They may answer ‘Amen’ after an Israelite who says a Benediction, but not after a Samaritan until they have heard the whole Benediction. **Mishnah, Brachot 8:8**
* **Selected Passages from Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg’s *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity* (2004)**
  + The covenant of demand (for higher standards of behavior from Jews) had been morally passed through the fires of the Holocaust – and had been found wanting. In a world where evil forces had access to extraordinary power while God did not intervene to guarantee the safety of the covenantal people, in such a world, any absolute insistence that the people Israel live by a higher standard – or else – was inherently abusive. Such a demand was illegitimate, and therefore null and void…**Pages 27-28**
  + Partnership, however, involves going one step further [than pluralism]. Each partner affirms that its truth/faith/system alone cannot fulfill God’s dreams. The world needs the contribution that the other religion can make for the sake of achieving wholeness and perfection for all. A partner affirms (today, I would say: celebrates) that God assigns different roles and different contributions to different groups. **Page 43**
  + The members of the other faiths could be recognized as Abraham’s beloved children, but only when they purged themselves of hatred of Jews and of supersessionist claims. **Page 40**
  + In effect, I am proposing that Christians are “honorary” members of the House of Israel, spiritual descendants of Abraham and Sarah. […] The articulation of this relationship is an attempt to capture the special connection to the mission of Israel and the intention to join the people Israel, which Christians express by dint of being Christian. **Page 96**
* **Two Projects That Rabbi Steven Greenberg Contributed to That Rabbi Brown Highly Recommends:**
  + *Trembling Before G-d* (documentary film, 2001)
  + *Wrestling With God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (book, 2004)

[Texts continue on the next page.]

* [In our day,] the traditional Jewish community forces the non-Jewish spouse [in an interfaith relationship] to consider an all or nothing bargain -- either full-fledged Jewish identity by conversion, or rejection.   An alternative approach that would emphasize the positive value of Jewish culture and tradition, and the joys of living in a Jewish home without insisting upon conversion has, until now, not been imaginable.  What if we were to create such an approach that would in effect look upon non-Jewish spouses as potential *gerei toshav*?   Rabbis would then be able to offer to non-Jews wishing to marry a Jewish spouse the opportunity to become not converts, but committed fans of the Jewish people.” […] “The marriage of a Jew and a *ger toshav* would not be legitimate under existing *halachic* frameworks.  However, my own work in finding solutions to gay and lesbian marriage has shed light on this issue for me.    In thinking about non-normative marriage partners, I have decided that *kiddushin*, the traditional ritual for the Jewish wedding, simply doesn’t apply to gay couples.   What does make sense for such couples is a religiously meaningful commitment ceremony.  In this case as well, the traditional ritual would not well serve a mixed couple.   New rituals for such marriages, rituals that partake of Jewish resources and speak honestly about what is actually happening, are needed.  Exactly what such marriages could mean for the Jewish community, how they ought to be formally enjoined, or how they should be terminated when they end are all questions that call for the exercise of cultural creativity.  **Rabbi Steven Greenberg, “Between Intermarriage and Conversion: Finding a Middle Way” (2001), available at** [**http://www.clal.org/ss43.html**](http://www.clal.org/ss43.html)
* Can we live together? […] Can we overcome long histories of estrangement and bitterness? […] Can we find, in the human other, a trace of the Divine Other? Can we recognize God’s image in one who is not in my image? There are times when God meets us in the face of a stranger. […] Can I, a Jew, hear the echoes of God’s voice in that of a Hindu or Sikh or Christian or Muslim? What then becomes of my faith, which until then had encompassed the world and must now make space for another faith, another way of interpreting the world? **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (2003)**