

K'rov Yisrael and Ohev Yisrael Membership

An Initiative for the Coming Year

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This is a new year on the Jewish calendar, and there are some new things happening in the Messianic Jewish world that I want to make you aware of. One of these is that our *shaliach* network, Tikkun International, has published what it terms a “New Covenant *halachic* statement” titled “The Status of Gentiles in Messianic Judaism.” Copies of it are available in the office. I want you to know that I am asking the elders to adopt Tikkun’s statement for Ohev because it closely represents my view that there is a need to officially” recognize Gentiles who are “called by God to have a unique and permanent joining to the Messianic and wider Jewish communities without having to “convert to Judaism.” After much deliberation, Tikkun settled on the term *K'rov Yisrael* (plural: *K'rovei Yisrael*) to describe those specially called Gentiles; the term that literally means “those who are closely related to Israel like family. Let me be clear that the statement and its contents are not binding on any congregation and, so far, Ohev’s elders have not ruled on it one way or the other. Still, I want to share it with you at this time so that you can know what the elders are deliberating about, and so that you can be in a position to pray for the elders and to give them your input.

The part of Tikkun’s statement that I want to discuss with you today reads this way:

“Tikkun’s “Committee on New Covenant Halacha” believes there is a consensus understanding on some issues, and we are therefore recommending the following to Tikkun congregations as a path for Gentiles who desire, and are called, to be fully joined to the Jewish community and to Messianic Judaism as a lifetime commitment.”

“1. Gentiles who are “born again” in Yeshua are grafted into the olive tree (Romans 11), and are equal citizens in both the Body of Believers and in the “commonwealth of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12) which includes all Jews, and all believers in Yeshua. This “commonwealth” denotes the larger circle of those who are joined to Israel and the Jewish people from all nations through their faith in the Messiah Yeshua.”

Permit me to read Romans 11:17-25, and then Ephesians 2:11-19:

Romans 11:17-25: *“And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how*

much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

Ephesians 2:11-19: *“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- that at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ...”*

These Scriptures are not speaking of Gentiles with a special calling, but of all Gentile believers in Messiah. The Scriptures teach that, regardless of which church or congregation a Gentile believer affiliates with, he or she also comes into a covenant relationship with Israel – in fact into citizenship in the “Commonwealth of Israel” – by virtue of his or her faith in the Jewish Messiah and, according to 1 Peter 2:9-10, acquires a priesthood in Yeshua:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

So all Gentile believers are special to God, but those of us who have been in Messianic Judaism for awhile sense that some Gentiles are specially called, and this is addressed in the second item of Tikkun’s statement:

“2. Some Gentile citizens of the commonwealth of Israel may be called by God to have a unique and permanent joining to the Messianic Jewish community and the wider Jewish world – to live among Jews and Messianic Jews where possible, to maintain a *Torah-observant* New Covenant lifestyle, to marry Messianic Jews or Gentiles similarly called, to raise their children in Messianic Jewish life, and to participate in Messianic Jewish responsibilities. We are designating Gentiles who are so called and live out this calling, to be known as *k’rovei Yisrael* – those who are closely related to Israel. The singular is *k’rov Yisrael*, and we use this term instead of “proselyte,” “convert,” or other such terms so as to avoid misunderstanding.”

For completeness, I’ll read item 3 to you, but I will not focus on that today:

“3. *K’rovei Yisrael* Messianic Gentiles who wish to formalize their *k’rov* identity and commitment to the Jewish people and to Messianic Judaism may do so by engaging in a public ceremony that includes declaration or oath, and *tevilah* (ritual washing).”

I don’t want to focus on the option of a public ceremony because that is not what makes a *K’rov Yisrael* any more than a *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony makes a *Bar Mitzvah*. A person either is or is not a *K’rov Yisrael* with or without a ceremony. The thing to focus on is that the newly coined term recognizes, for the first time officially, that certain Gentiles have a lifelong calling – not only to worship and serve in a Messianic Jewish congregation – not only to keep the Sabbaths of the Lord – not only to minister to the Jewish people and support Israel – but to actually move in and become a permanent life-long part of the Jewish community while retaining their status as non-Jews. This represents where the majority of Ohev Gentiles already are, so it is only the official recognition of it that is new. For some of you though, considering yourselves to be part of the greater Jewish community may be a new thought, and it may take time for you to get used to the notion. I will speak more about that in the future.

Now to preempt fears that some among us may have that this is an attempt at Gentile exclusion, let me point out that it is the opposite. It is recognition of those Gentiles who are specially called, by giving them a name other than “Messianic Gentile,” a term which refers to all Gentiles who attend a Messianic Jewish congregation. Not every Gentile who attends a Messianic Jewish congregation would say that he or she has a *K’rov* calling, and that is fine and expected. There are many other valid reasons to choose a Messianic Jewish congregation as one’s place of worship, a common one being to learn about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith in a way that most churches do not teach. If you are at Ohev for such a reason, that is very good, and you are most welcome. As a matter of fact, even if you don’t have a *K’rov Yisrael* calling, you no doubt have some other calling that is just as important in God’s Kingdom, and you may need to be at a congregation like Ohev in order to fulfill it. Also, even if this new recognition is adopted at Ohev, it will not affect the reality of anyone’s identity, because the Gentiles among us are (or are not) *K’roei Yisrael* already, and at Ohev, people are accepted for who they are – all equal in value before the Lord.

What this new concept may affect, however, is becoming an Ohev member if you are not already a member, because I am proposing that the elders tighten up Ohev’s membership requirements so that Jewish and *K’rov Yisrael* believers can become Full Members, and all others who are here for good reasons can become Associate Members. I don’t mean that the applicant has to be ceremonially *K’rov Yisrael*; I mean that he or she should admit to the *K’rov Yisrael* calling, have lived out the calling for some time, and be judged to have the calling by the elders. I think it is conceptually wrong and, if not wrong at least unwise, to offer full membership in a Messianic Jewish congregation to non-Jews who are not specially called by God to the Jewish community, are not living a culturally and religiously Messianic Jewish life, and are not prepared to throw in their lot with the Jewish people as a permanent lifelong commitment. Currently, according to Ohev’s constitution, the elders have no say at all over who can become a member. In fact, the way it is now, the moment a person signs a membership application certifying agreement with Ohev’s constitution, the applicant becomes a provisional member, and can retain that status forever by never attending or completing a membership class. I believe this is wrong and it ought to be changed for new applicants, but it will not affect those of us who are already Ohev

members. Under my proposal to the elders, we will all be “grandfathered” into Full Membership.

There are other changes to membership that I am proposing. The one I have already addressed is to eliminate “provisional membership,” institute two new categories – Full and Associate Membership, and use the *K’rov Yisrael* principle as the criteria for offering Full Membership to Gentiles. Another change I am proposing is to require that applicants for membership, in addition to attending the membership classes, participate fully in at least one annual cycle of Feasts and Holy Days before being received in any class of membership. I would waive this for transferees from other Messianic Jewish congregations, but it is important to assure that prospective members know and understand the lifestyle of Messianic Judaism (at least Ohev’s lifestyle), and what Jewish congregational life is like. I would engage the elders and *shamashim* to meet with, and get to know prospective members over the year in order to help them integrate into the life of Ohev and, after the year is up, to give input to the elders who will formally meet with the applicants and make a determination of whether or not to receive them into membership. I would give the elders considerable latitude in making the decision, including assessing the applicants’ spiritual and family lives, and their experiences at Ohev over the past year.

I believe that upgrading Ohev’s criteria for membership by emphasizing spiritual life and Jewish calling among both its Jews and its Gentile members will have a very positive effect on the congregation’s Jewish life and Holy Spirit power because the Full Members – the Jews and the *K’rovei Yisrael* who will be entrusted to influence its growth and direction will have solidly embraced the congregation’s Jewish identity, mission, and spirituality.

Again, I want to emphasize that what you just have heard me say is my proposal to the elders, who would like your input and prayers to help them in making their decision.