

## The Status of "Messianic Jews"

YD 268:12.2012a

Rabbis Kassel Abelson and Reuven Hammer

*Approved by the CJLS on October 23, 2012 by a vote of twenty-one in favor. In favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Pamela Barmash, David Booth, Elliot Dorff, Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Susan Grossman, Reuven Hammer, David Hoffman, Joshua Heller, Jeremy Kalmanofsky, Adam Kligfeld, Jane Kanarek, Gail Labovitz, Amy Levin, Jonathan Lubliner, Daniel Nevins, Paul Plotkin, Avram Reisner, Elie Spitz, Loel Weiss and Steven Wernick.*

***Sheilah:* What is the halakhic status of Jews who become members of so-called 'Messianic Jewish' groups such as 'Jews for Jesus' that teach that Jesus was the Messiah? Are they still to be considered Jews? May they be members of a synagogue? May they receive an aliyah or other synagogue honors? May they receive a Jewish burial? Are their children/grandchildren Jewish? If they decide to abandon that belief and return to Judaism what must they do?**

***Discussion.*** The specific question of the status of 'Messianic Jews' was dealt with by the CJLS for the first time on Sept. 12, 1978. (See Appendix for the record of that meeting.) A discussion was held concerning whether or not to allow 'Jews for Jesus' to join synagogues or to send their children to Jewish schools. Although a variety of opinions was discussed, with special attention given to the dangers presented by such people and their methods of trying to influence others, the consensus of the committee was to issue a statement declaring that "Hebrew Christians are indeed Christians." Beyond that, no specific decisions were made. Subsequently other *teshuvot* have dealt with some of the issues raised here. This *teshuvah* is intended to serve as a more comprehensive guide to this entire issue.

## **Missionary Activities**

Throughout the centuries Jews were subject to intense missionary activity by the Catholic Church and various Protestant groups. Many Jews left Judaism and converted to Christianity, most forcibly but others voluntarily. Following the emancipation many in Europe and England converted either from conviction or convenience. In early twentieth century America attempts to convert Jews to Christianity were common, especially in centers of Jewish population such as New York's lower east side. These efforts were generally not successful. In the mid-twentieth century, Judaism's stature in America grew. It was commonly recognized as a religion equal to Catholicism and Protestantism. Many Protestant groups began to view Judaism more positively. Vatican II was crucial in the change of attitude toward the Jews. The Catholic Church recognized the right of Jews to practice Judaism. Catholic missionary activities ceased and Protestant Missionary activities to convert Jews to Christianity decreased somewhat, although many fundamentalist groups continue that effort vigorously until this day.

## **Messianic Jews**

In the 1970's, however, a new organization sponsored by Protestants came into existence under the rubric of 'Jews for Jesus.' Other groups, calling themselves 'Messianic Jews,' followed.

'Jews for Jesus,' the largest of these groups, is a conservative evangelical organization that focuses on the conversion of Jews to Christianity without using that term. Its members are encouraged to consider themselves to be Jews, 'completed Jews.' Some members are born Jews who at some point 'accepted Jesus as their Lord,' thereby, they believe, completing the process of being a Jew.. Others not originally Jewish call themselves Jews *because* they are

followers of Jesus. In some instances Christians have falsely converted to Judaism in order to become 'Messianic Jews.'

In essence 'Jews for Jesus,' is a sophisticated attempt at converting Jews to Christianity, a kind of wolf in sheep's clothing, since its selling point is that one does not have to stop being a Jew in order to accept basic Christian belief. Thus one may continue to call oneself a Jew and justify one's belief by saying that this is what Judaism has always taught. One continues to attend services on Saturday in a place called a synagogue, observes Jewish holidays in one form or another, circumcise males and listen to sermons from leaders who call themselves "rabbis." If there is no 'Jews for Jesus' synagogue where one lives, one can comfortably attend a regular synagogue and keep one's identity and beliefs to oneself or perhaps speak of them privately to Jews who may be ripe for them. Whereas historically Jews who converted to Christianity were usually interested in staying as far away from being identified with Judaism as possible, 'Messianic Jews' deliberately stress their Jewishness and even demand that they be recognized as Jews by the Jewish community and accorded all the rights that go with that.

This idea was originally promulgated by Martin Rosen in 1973. Rosen was born a Jew but converted to Christianity and became a Baptist minister. He led a mission to convert other Jews, but when he found that they were not responsive, he came up with the idea that the impediment to Jews accepting Jesus was their reluctance to give up their identity as Jews and become "Christians." Jews for Jesus was his new tactic for converting Jews and it has proven itself a successful if limited one. With a budget of \$24,000,000 a year, a staff of 150 in America, 9 branches have been established there as well as branches in many other countries,

including Israel where they have been established since the 1980's with headquarters in Tel Aviv and branches throughout the country. They have a sophisticated website, publications in English, Hebrew and other languages, street evangelists, festivals, outreach to Russians in Israel etc.

Although there are differences in approach among the various groups of 'Messianic Jews,' what they all have in common is their belief in the basic concepts of Christianity as presented in the Christian Bible and their attempt to remain Jews while believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Such a belief places them within the category of apostates, in this case Jews who have become Christians. This status also differentiates them from other Christians who were never Jews and do not claim to be so. Nothing that is said in this *teshuvah*, therefore, necessarily applies to Christians and Christianity in general, nor does it have any application to intermarried couples.

## **APOSTASY**

It has always been difficult in Judaism to define apostasy. There has never been an official formulation of Jewish beliefs and dogmas against which apostasy can be defined. In this *teshuvah* we define an apostate Jew as one who has taken the definitive step of professing and joining another religion.

It is even difficult to determine the correct Hebrew terminology for an apostate. The commonly used term is *meshumad*, but often that word is used to refer to a Jew who does not observe various mitzvot, rather than one who has converted to another religion. Another term is *mumar* and yet a third is *min*. *Mumar* comes from the verb *mor* meaning to change. *Meshumad* is

derived from *sh-m-d* meaning to destroy. S. Zeitlin demonstrates that "change" was the word used to describe one who converted from Judaism to paganism in early Greek language literature.<sup>1</sup> "A Jew who was forced to adopt another religion was called *meshumad*. If a Jew was willing to adopt another religion he was called *mumar*."<sup>2</sup> In post-tannaitic times *meshumad* – one worthy of destruction – came to be applied to both. Adolph Buchler states that prior to 135 C.E. *min* denoted Jewish heretics, although whether they were Gnostics or Christians cannot be determined. After that, the term referred to both Jewish and Gentiles with heretical views.<sup>3</sup>

Jacob Petuchowski,<sup>4</sup> however, shows that in the Talmud *mumar* is also used for one who is not an apostate but simply a Jew who violates commandments, "a bone fide Jew who has become alienated either from the totality of Jewish observance, or from one or more aspects thereof" (p.181). An apostate is known as either *min* or *apikoros* (p.189). Therefore rabbinic sources that use these terms must be interpreted with caution and may not always be referring to what we would call an apostate.<sup>5</sup> Since *meshumad* is the commonly used term, we shall adopt it here as the Hebrew term for an apostate.

---

<sup>1</sup> JQR 54:1 July 1963 pages 84-86. See iii Mac. 1:3, ii Mac. 6:24, Josephus Jewish War 7.3.3.(50) and Ant. 20.7.1. (139) where it indicates one who changed from paganism to Judaism as well.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p.86.

<sup>3</sup> The Minim of Sepphoris and Tiberias in the Second and Third Centuries, Studies In Jewish History Oxford University Press, London, 1956, p 245ff). See especially Hullin 13a and Gittin 45b and Sifre Numbers 16.

<sup>4</sup> The Mumar- A Study in Rabbinic Psychology, HUCA 30 1959 pages 179-190,

<sup>5</sup> To further complicate matters Aharon Lichtenstein ("Brother Daniel and the Jewish Fraternity", Judaism 12:3 Summer 1963 pages 260-280) writes that *mumar* appears only because of censorship while *meshumad* was the genuine term for an apostate. Only he, and not the *min* or *apikoros*, could be excluded from Judaism (notes 3 and 5). Lichtenstein believes such a one – born a Jew- remains a Jew and does not require conversion should he return (267), but "He remains a Jew without Jewishness" (267).

Today various religious groups within the Jewish community have differing beliefs and are frequently denounced by other groups as having violated basic Jewish dogmas. Although it may be difficult to define exactly what are the parameters of Jewish belief,<sup>6</sup> nonetheless it should be possible to recognize when a group has gone beyond the broad spectrum of acceptable Jewish beliefs to the extent of adopting the basic tenets of another faith. 'Messianic Jewish' sects, by their belief in Jesus as Messiah, as one of a trinity, as "the son of God," and as the one who leads to salvation, have crossed the red line and have become a Christian sect in everything but name. As such, members of any such group are apostates as surely as are Jews who have converted to Christianity or to any other religion but do not pretend that they are still Jews.

This definition does not apply to non-Jews who are born as Christians or have adopted that faith. Although, as will be noted below, in the early days of Christianity Judaism's attitude toward Christianity, which was then seen as a breakaway Jewish sect, was extremely negative and confrontational, today we consider Christians neither apostates nor pagans but members of a legitimate religion. This determination was made clear by the great scholar of Provence, the Meiri (Menahem ben Solomon, 1249-1316) who termed them "nations governed by religion."<sup>7</sup> In the words of Louis Jacobs, "To all intents and purposes Meiri has created a third category, unknown in the earlier sources, between Jews and pagans. For Meiri, Christians were certainly not Jews, but they were not pagans either."<sup>8</sup>We make a distinction between non-Jews who are

---

<sup>6</sup> See Solomon Schechter, "The Dogmas of Judaism" in Studies In Judaism, New York, 1958 and Louis Jacobs, We Have Reason To Believe, London, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Bet hBehirah to Bava Kamma 37b (ed K. Schesinger, Jer., 1973) p.122. See Alan Brill, "Judaism and Other Religions: Models of Understanding."

<sup>8</sup> Judaism and Theology, Louis Jacobs, London 2005, page 105. See also his note 11 on page 114 for further discussion and references.

Christians and born Jews who accept Christianity. Having left Judaism, they are Christians who are also apostate Jews. As such we cannot grant them the privileges of Jews but we can hope that they will return to Judaism and be ready to welcome them back. Unlike born Christians, a Jew who has converted to Judaism has demonstrated a negative attitude, not to say contempt, for Judaism. Judaism recognizes and honors Christians and Christianity and does not seek to convert Christians to Judaism. At the same time, it expects Christianity to respect Judaism and not to seek to convert Jews. Unfortunately Messianic sects do exactly that while contending that they do not.

### **Birkat HaMinim**

The question of the status of Jews who embraced Christianity was dealt with by the Rabbis in Yavneh, in the days of Rabban Gamliel II around 100 C.E. when they formulated the *Birkat HaMinim* paragraph of the daily *Amidah*.<sup>9</sup> Although the version of that prayer that is in use today in Ashkenazi rites makes no mention either of *minim* or of Christians, early versions of the prayer found in the Cairo *Genizah*, reflecting the ancient formulas of prayer in Eretz Yisrael, make explicit that it is directed specifically against early Jewish Christian sects among others. Note the extremely harsh language of the prayer:

“May the *Meshumadim* have no hope and may the kingdom of wickedness be speedily uprooted in our own time, and may the *Notzrim* (Christians) and the *Minim* perish immediately and be erased from the Book of Life.”

---

<sup>9</sup> Ashkenazi *Siddurim* refer to this blessing as *Birkat Malshinim*, the Blessing of the Slanderers. whereas Sefardi versions still refer to *minim*.

Gedaliah Alon points out that while there were differences in belief and practice among the many early Jewish Christian sects, some being less radical and closer to Judaism than others, it was difficult to distinguish among them and they were all lumped together in this prayer and “were to be regarded as apostates and could no longer be called Jews”<sup>10</sup>.

This blessing was intended to make certain that Jewish Christians – apostates - would be unable to worship together with normative Jews. Furthermore it represents the official attitude of second century Judaism which saw in the Jewish-Christians of that time a group that was to be read out of Judaism. They were to have no part in the redemption that the Amidah envisions.<sup>11</sup>

In this prayer, at least, the technical difference between *Minim* and *Meshumadim* does not seem to have relevance in the context of 'Messianic Jews.' May it not be said that the current situation of 'Messianic Jews' resembles closely the ancient situation of Jewish-Christians who were considered similar to *minim*, in which case 'Messianic Jews' are to be considered Christians and not Jews as far as their religious beliefs are concerned? At the same time it must be emphasized that we today in no way apply the words of that prayer calling for *Minim* to perish to either members of other faiths or Jewish apostates. On the contrary, our desire is for apostates to return to the Jewish fold.

---

<sup>10</sup> Alon, Gedaliah, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age*, Jerusalem, 1980 Magnes Press P.290.

<sup>11</sup> See Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer*, New York, 1994, pp 178-179.

## Responsibilities but not Rights

The early Sages recognized that Jews who had accepted Jesus as a Messiah and the son of God posed a threat to the continued existence of the Jewish people and to Judaism as a distinct religion. Hence they no longer considered them to be Jews, but apostates who were members of a different religion. At the same time it must be pointed out that there is ambivalence in halakhic literature on the question of whether or not these apostates have completely lost their Jewish identity. As Theodore Friedman wrote, "Few areas in the Halakhah are more charged with ambiguity and inconsistency than the Halakhic status of an apostate Jew. According to the standard codes, in matters of marriage, divorce and *halizah*, Jewish apostates are considered Jews and their action in these matters is valid."<sup>12</sup> This ruling was based on an interpretation of the passage in the Talmud, Sanhedrin 44a.:

אמר רבי אבא בר זבדא אף על פי שחטא ישראל הוא - Rabbi Abba said, "Even though they have sinned, they are still called 'Israel' ." Some authorities, Rashi among them, have interpreted this to mean that an apostate is still considered to be a Jew.<sup>13</sup> It is much more likely that this passage was intended to refer in general to Jews who sinned rather than to apostasy and it would be tempting to negate its application to apostates and thus eliminate their standing as Jews completely.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless in other passages it is clear that the Talmud considers a *mumar* to still be an Israelite, albeit an apostate. Yebamot 47b, for example, states that if a gentile converted to Judaism and then reverted to his previous religion but enters into marriage with a Jew, the marriage is valid because "he is considered to be a *mumar Yisrael*."

---

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Theodore Friedman "The Halakhic status of an Apostate," that appeared in Conservative Judaism XLI 2 Winter 1988/89. See appendix B.

<sup>13</sup> See EJ Vol 3, p.211.

<sup>14</sup> For an extensive discussion of this viewpoint see Louis Jacobs, op cit, page 106 and J.Katz, "Though He Sinned, He Remains An Israelite," (Heb)in *Tarbitz*, XXVIII, Nos. 2-3, Jer., 1958, pp.203-17. For references to this in the codes see "The Divorce or the Lapsed Convert" by Rabbi Michael Knopf.

טבל ועלה הרי הוא כישראל לכל דבריו: למאי הלכתא דאי הדר ביה ומקדש בת ישראל מומר קרינא ביה  
וקידושו קידושין: As Rashi puts it, this is so "because a *mumar Yisrael* is an Israelite." If a  
convert to Judaism who returns to his previous religion is still considered a Jew from the point  
of view of Jewish Law, it would seem that a Jewish apostate is also still a Jew. See also  
Rambam Yad, Ishut 4:15 who rules ישראל מומר שקידש אף ע"פ שהוא עובד עכו"ם ברונו הרי אלו קידושין  
- If a Jewish apostate married (a Jewish woman), even though he worships  
idols, his marriage is legitimate and she requires a full *get*. On the other hand, according to the  
Shulhan Aruch Y.D. 345:5 one does not observe mourning rites for an apostate – וכן המומרים –  
והמוסרים כל אלו אין אוננים ואין מתאבלים עליהם. The issue is complicated indeed. On the one hand,  
the Jew who converts to Christianity, including any 'Messianic Jew,' is considered a Christian.  
On the other hand, in certain limited matters he/she is still a Jew.<sup>15</sup>

The Meiri attempts to reconcile these conflicting views::

“Whoever leaves the Jewish religion and adopts another religion is considered a  
member of that religion in every respect except in matters of divorce, marriage,  
or any matter of familial affairs”<sup>16</sup>

The Meiri is asserting that the apostate belongs to the new faith and is no longer a Jew *except*  
for matters of personal status. He is still responsible to issue a *get* when called for, and, should  
he marry Jewishly, his marriage is a marriage. However in other matters such as reliability as a  
witness, inheritance, and usury the apostate was considered an alien by many medieval

---

<sup>15</sup> See the Friedman article for a more detailed description of the history of this question.

<sup>16</sup> Bet Ha-Behirah to A.Z. 47b, Sofer ed .p.61.

authorities<sup>17</sup>. The components of Jewish belonging are thus divisible, and individual communities must often decide what is appropriate. As Aharon Lichtenstein once put it, "...if we ask whether a *meshumad* has anything of Jewish personality and ...continues to be endowed with the personal status of a Jew, the answer is a ringing no. He remains a Jew without Jewishness."<sup>18</sup>

One positive side of this anomaly is that the child of an apostate mother technically remains a Jew and may be received back without undergoing conversion, as may the apostate her/himself. As one of the versions of *Birkat HaMinim* puts it: May there be no hope for the *meshumadim* if they do not return to Your Torah...<sup>19</sup>

In view of this it may be said that any Jew who believes in Jesus as the messiah has joined the Christian religion. As such he/she has changed status from 'Jew' to 'apostate Jew' who is no longer entitled to the rights and privileges of Judaism. 'Jews for Jesus' and similar organizations are considered by Judaism to be Christian sects, not Jewish sects. At most they could be called 'Apostate Jews for Jesus.'

## **PISKEI HALAKHAH**

### **1. Are 'Messianic Jews' still Jews?**

---

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Blidstein, "Who is not a Jew?-The Medieval Discussion" in Israel Law Review 11 (1976), pp377.

<sup>18</sup> "Brother Daniel and the Jewish Fraternity," Judaism 12:3 Summer 1963, page 267. He uses the term *meshumad* as an apostate.

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Mann, "Geniza Fragments of the Palestinian Order of Service," Hebrew Union College Annual 2 (1925), Fragment No.7 9.306.

The literature and website of the Jews for Jesus organization make it very clear that they are Christians in belief, even if some of their outer trappings resemble Judaism. They believe not only that Jesus was the messiah, but that he was God made man. They believe in the trinity, the virgin birth, original sin, salvation through Jesus alone and the sanctity of the so-called 'New Testament.'

There is no question, therefore, that from the viewpoint of the *halakhah*, becoming a 'Messianic Jew' means becoming a Christian in matters of religious belief, even if technically one remains a Jew in certain limited matters. Any Jew becoming a Christian is an apostate and whatever laws apply to an apostate apply to any so-called 'Messianic Jew.'

**Psak.** Members of so-called 'Messianic Jewish' groups are considered Christian, because of their Christian beliefs. As Friedman concludes, "There is more than ample ground for considering Jewish apostates today as *minim*. And it was rabbinic policy, as we have seen, to remove the *minim* from the Jewish community. We can and should do no less."

As noted above, The CJLS on Sept. 12, 1978 declared that "Hebrew Christians are indeed Christians" and we reaffirm that ruling. A Jew who accepts the basic teachings of Christianity concerning Jesus as messiah and as God enters the status of a Jewish apostate who has become a Christian and must be treated as such. As the Meiri stated, in matters of personal status he/she remains a Jew, but in no other way and therefore has removed him/herself from the community of Israel. Should a messianic Jew be married to a Jewish

spouse and a *Get* be desired, if it is impossible to attain it from the messianic partner the case should be referred to the *Joint Bet Din* for the possibility of *Hafkaat Kiddushin*.

## **2. May they be members of a synagogue?**

**Psak.** Since the synagogue is by definition a Jewish organization, full synagogue membership is only for Jews. Although in certain instances non-Jewish spouses are granted some synagogue status, 'Messianic Jews' as apostates are in a different category. Having become Christians they may not be accepted as members in our congregations. This is especially important since experience has shown that such membership may very well be used as a method of recruiting other Jews into that group.

## **3. May they receive an *aliyah* or other synagogue honors?**

In regard to Karaites, Maimonides ruled that they were not to be counted in a *minyan* or given other synagogue rights and honors.<sup>20</sup> His reason was that although they were Jews by birth, their denial of rabbinic authority and of the validity of rabbinic law placed them outside of the realm of authentic Jews. If that is the case regarding Karaites, certainly someone who has accepted certain Christian beliefs which are antithetical to Judaism may not be considered a Jew for purposes of participation in Jewish rituals.

---

<sup>20</sup> Hilkhhot Tefillah 8:6. אלו שאינם מוים בחוקים אלו כלל בודאי שאינם מצטרפים למנין...ולא לשום דבר.

Isserles rules that whereas it is permissible to accept donations to a synagogue from a

Christian, it is forbidden to accept them from a Jew who has converted to Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

This would certainly apply to participation in synagogue ritual.

**Psak.** Even though ways have been found to permit non-Jews to participate in limited ways within the ritual of the synagogue, this does not apply to a Jew who has become an apostate. The public appearance of such a person in a synagogue ritual can only be understood as approval of that person's status and is therefore prohibited. However, if such an honor was unwittingly given, the rabbi must consider whether in the particular circumstances, it would be not be ethically better to allow the ritual to proceed, rather than to interrupt the service, thus embarrassing the recipient and publicizing the apostasy. *Kvod HaBriyot* should be taken into account in all such matters.

#### **4. May they receive a Jewish burial?**

The CJLS has dealt with this issue in a Responsum by Rabbi Paul Plotkin<sup>22</sup>. The Responsum concludes: "Despite the fact that halakha would allow for Jewish burial of an Apostate even while forbidding mourning, we would prohibit such Jewish burial rites to the Apostate. Today's environment makes it necessary to prohibit such Jewish rights and privileges including burial in a cemetery to an apostate. It is hoped that such a public statement would speak loudly to the lie of the "Jews for Jesus" and others, who would advocate the position that one could remain a Jew and practice Christianity at the same time. Thus we hope to establish in the minds of the community, the distinctiveness of Jew and gentile" ..

---

<sup>21</sup> Yoreh De'ah 254:2

<sup>22</sup> Paul Plotkin, "Burial of Jews Practicing Christianity", in Responsa 1991-2000 Rabbinical Assembly pp 400-402.

**Psak.** We reaffirm the position of the CJLS prohibiting a Jewish burial for 'Messianic Jews.' Should there be questions about whether the apostate had done *Teshuvah*, they should be referred to the *Mara d'atra*. Although in recent years there have been new developments in cemetery procedures in which interfaith sections have been established in some Jewish cemeteries for the burial of mixed married couples, this does not apply to apostates. Once again we make a clear distinction between a born Christian and a Jew who had become a Christian and is thus an apostate. The *teshuvah* by Rabbi Kassel Abelson and Rabbi Loel M. Weiss (Feb. 2, 2010) on Burial of Non-Jewish Spouses does not alter this decision since it applies specifically to instances of intermarriage and cases in which the individual is part of the community

#### **5. If a 'Messianic Jew' desires to return to Judaism what must he/she do?**

On behalf of the CJLS, Boaz Cohen in the 1930's declared that a repentant apostate must make a statement of his repentance and desire to return to Judaism at a service, appear before a Bet Din and undergo *tevilah*.<sup>23</sup> Later Rabbi Isaac Klein, in his book, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* wrote:

“Theoretically, an apostate never ceases to be a Jew. Nevertheless, there is the feeling among the authorities that readmission to the Jewish community must be marked by a ritual akin to the conversion of a Gentile. Here, too, we must be first convinced of the candidate’s sincerity. He should be required to declare his repentance before a court of three. He then should undergo immersion in a miqweh and be readmitted formally into the Jewish community ( *Y.D.* 268:12 in Ram; *Melamed Leho’il*, 2, resp. 84; Cohen, and

---

<sup>23</sup> RA Proceedings 5 1933-1938, page 369

Drob, 'Supplement on Jewish Law,' p.9; Rabbinical Assembly Law Archives, 2; H323)"<sup>24</sup>

**Psak.** A 'Messianic Jew' is not simply an apostate, but rather an apostate who has undergone a period of indoctrination into a cult-like organization and may require a process of re-education to make certain that he/she understands what Judaism is as opposed to the specific brand of Christianity that he/she has been practicing. Therefore we recommend that such a person who has a change of heart and wishes to return to Judaism should meet with the local Rabbi, and indicate his/her desire to return to Judaism. The Rabbi will determine his/her sincerity in giving up any Christian beliefs and determine what, if any, period of study is required. Upon successful completion of whatever course has been required, he/she will appear before a Bet Din. There should be immersion in the *Mikveh*, not as an act of conversion but as a symbolic cleansing of the years of apostasy, followed by a ceremony of return and welcome into the Jewish community. In the case of the male who was born to a Jewish mother who had become a member of a Messianic sect, if not circumcised, he requires a brit milah. If circumcised, *hatafat dam brit* must be performed. If such a person on his/her death bed indicates a sincere desire to return to Judaism, he/she may be accepted and receive a Jewish burial.

### **Summary of Piskei Halakha**

---

<sup>24</sup> Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice p 446, JTS, New York, 1979.

1. A Jew becoming a Christian is an apostate and whatever laws apply to an apostate apply to a 'messianic Jew.' In essence, 'Messianic Jews' have become Christians, even if technically they remain Jews in certain matters of personal status.
2. Synagogue membership is only for Jews. Therefore since 'Messianic Jews' have become Christians in their religious belief and affiliation they may not be accepted as members in our congregations.
3. They may not receive synagogue honors or participate in Jewish rituals.
4. 'Messianic Jews' may not receive a Jewish burial or be buried in a Jewish cemetery. If there are questions about whether the apostate had done *Teshuvah*, this should be referred to the *Mara d'atra*.
5. If a 'Messianic Jew' has a change of heart and wishes to return to Judaism, he/she should meet with the local Rabbi, and indicate his/her desire to return to Judaism. The Rabbi will determine his/her sincerity and decide what if any period of study, is required. Upon successful completion of that course the individual should appear before a Bet Din. There should be immersion in the *Mikveh*, a symbolic cleansing of the years of apostasy, *brit milah* or *hatafat dam brit* if necessary, followed by a ceremony of welcome into the Jewish community.

*P'sak #6 was approved by the CJLS on June 4, 2013 by a vote of eighteen in favor, none opposed and two abstentions (18-0-2). In favor: Rabbis Pamela Barmash, David Booth, Elliot Dorff, Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Susan Grossman, Reuven Hammer, David Hoffman, Joshua Heller, Jeremy Kalmanofsky, Adam Kligfeld, Jane Kanarek, Gail Labovitz, Amy Levin, Jonathan Lubliner, Daniel Nevins, Paul Plotkin and Avram Reisner. Abstaining: Rabbis Aaron Alexander and Elie Kaplan Spitz.*

6. **Are children born to a Jewish woman after she has become a 'messianic Jew' considered to be Jewish?**

**Psak.** In view of the fact (discussed above) that the halakhah has been ambivalent regarding the question of the Jewish status of an apostate and that in certain matters of personal status many (such as Rashi) have indicated that once a Jew always a Jew, we may consider such children to have the same status as the mother – i.e. apostate Jews – *meshumadim*. This status will continue to be passed down through females so that descendants through the female line would be considered apostate Jews and therefore all of the decisions in this teshuvah would apply to them including the method of returning to Judaism. However descendants whose mothers were not Jews or apostate Jews, even if raised as 'Messianic Jews,' would be required to undergo a full conversion process should they desire to become Jews.