

August 5, 2004
18 Av 5764

Dear Friends:

When I was elected senior Rabbi three years ago, I told the Board that I would be reflecting on my position on officiating at weddings between Jews and non-Jews. Since then, after many hours of conversation with congregants and colleagues, much study and prayer, along with twelve years of experience meeting with couples, I have formulated a position that I pray will serve our people, our tradition and our community into the future.

My goal in sharing this by letter is to inform you of my position as well as to help shape our collective conversation about what it means to get married at Mount Zion. I hope to be clear and consistent even as I articulate a position that is not black and white. This issue is not about "will he" or "won't he," but rather, "under what conditions can one be married at Mount Zion?"

One of the most profound influences on my position has come from teaching Confirmation. In the last few years, I have asked the students to imagine their future life partner: "Is it possible that that person will be Jewish?" To my surprise, only a few out of the 50 have said "yes." However, when I asked them to picture—in the far future--a child of theirs turning 13: "Would you want him or her to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah?" they have all raised their hands. I then say that if they keep that vision of raising a Jewish child in mind with whomever they date, they will have a greater chance of seeing it fulfilled.

I have come to understand that there is little I can do to persuade these teens to date and marry only someone Jewish. I believe, however, that I can help them articulate their own desire for a Jewish home and family, and guide them in achieving that, whether their future partner is Jewish or not.

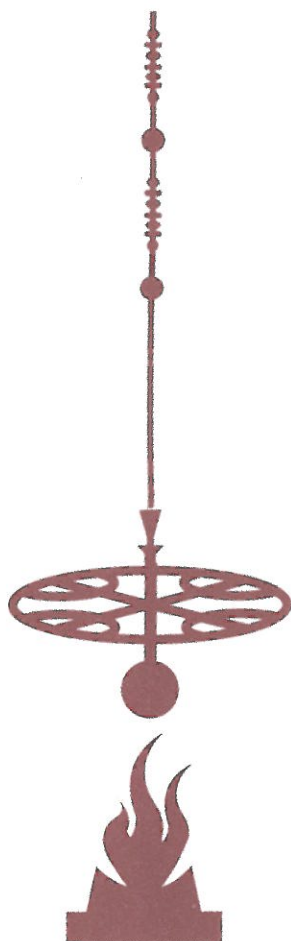
There have been times in Jewish history when radical departures from accepted norms in tradition and law have been required. In my judgment, this is such a time.

I will therefore officiate at weddings - whether between two Jews or interfaith - when the couple agrees to:

1. Participate in pre-marital counseling with me at least 6 months before wedding.
2. Attend a pre-marital class on creating a Jewish home and raising a Jewish family.
3. Establish and maintain an exclusively Jewish home and, if blessed with children, raise them as Jews.

A WELCOMING AND VIBRANT JEWISH SPIRITUAL HOME

Mount Zion Temple is a Reform Jewish congregation devoted to life-long learning, worship and acts of loving kindness. In our holy community, we celebrate, comfort and create meaning in our lives while we seek justice in our world.



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Esther J. Adler

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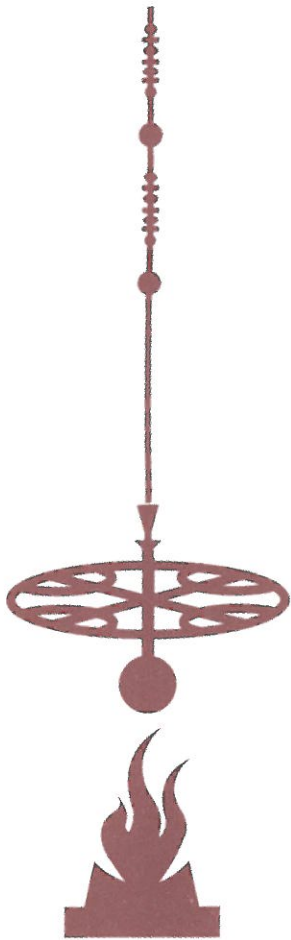
1300 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55105

TEL 651.698.3881

FAX 651.698.1263

mountzion@mzion.org

www.mzion.org



- Affiliate with Mount Zion or, if they will live outside Minnesota after the wedding, with another synagogue. (I will officiate only for a current member of Mount Zion or a child of a member.)
- (For interfaith couples only:) Take Mount Zion's *Introduction to Judaism* course.

I see my role as rabbi as being a third party to the couple in the creation of a new Jewish home. The chuppah itself represents this *mikdash m'at*, the small sanctuary of the Jewish home. The wedding ought to reflect with integrity this Jewish commitment of the marriage. Therefore, I will not officiate with any non-Jewish clergy.

The guidelines outlined here will be the policy for officiating at weddings by all Mount Zion clergy. However, we will continue to respect the position of each rabbi or cantor who does not officiate at interfaith weddings or who officiates with additional conditions.

Please know that I want to meet with all couples who are considering marriage, even if I will not be able to officiate. I strive to meet in person and not only talk by phone. I always affirm that the potential for holiness within a relationship can be the same irrespective of faith differences. I have in the past and will continue to offer pre-marital counseling for all who desire connection to Judaism and/or their rabbi. In addition, we offer a blessing on Shabbat for any engaged or recently married couple who requests this honor. This marriage blessing grows out of our vision of being inclusive and welcoming to all who come to Mount Zion.

While no one can fully know the long-term impact of interfaith marriage on the Jewish community, we know is that it is a reality that has, in many ways, proven to strengthen Judaism in 21st century America. My prayer is that my position on officiation will likewise strengthen our people and give honor to God, Torah and the people Israel.

Please feel free to contact me with any comments or questions.

L'Shalom,

Adam Stock Spilker, Rabbi

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