

In the Book of Isaiah, we are reminded, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all people.” (Isaiah 56:7) This verse speaks of inclusiveness and *keruv* (“to draw near, to approach, to welcome”) which is central to both the future of Judaism as well as individual congregations. In this light, the teaching based on Gittin 61a with Tosefta Gittin 3:18 is also important to understand. For there it is written, “The Rabbis taught: One supports the poor of the gentiles as one does the poor of Israel: one visits the sick among the gentiles as one does the sick in Israel; one mourns and buries the dead of the gentiles as one does the dead of Israel: one comforts the mourners among the gentiles as one does those in Israel – for the sake of peace.” The language used is a direct translation, which can also be found on page 11 of our daily *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*.

We here at CAS already and intuitively support, visit, and mourn with our non-Jewish friends and members of our families. It is now time to embrace the burial side of the equation. In 2010, a teshuvah (halachic opinion) of the Conservative movement on “Burial of Non-Jewish Spouse and Children” was written by Rabbis Kassel Abelson and Loel M. Weiss. It was accepted and passed as the majority opinion of the Conservative Movement by The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards by a vote of 10-1-3.

Within the teshuvah it recommends in its “Piskei Halacha” (Halachic Rulings) that a “mixed burial” section in Jewish cemeteries be created where non-Jewish spouses and children may be buried alongside Jews [their spouses and parents]. The mixed section should be its own section within the larger cemetery. It further reads that a funeral ceremony should be conducted by Jewish clergy and not contain non-Jewish rituals. The ceremony may include Psalm 23, a eulogy by the rabbi, and other appropriately worded prayers. It goes on to say that if there are surviving Jewish family members, they may recite the Kaddish, and that the tombstone should not have non-Jewish religious symbols engraved in it. There is also a new ceremony for the cleansing (taharah) of the non-Jewish individual’s body. All caskets must also adhere to halacha and Jewish standards.

In agreement with this teshuvah and our goal of *keruv*, the cemetery committee and I have come up with a similar policy with the support of the religious committee, Cantor Dorman, and the formal approval of CAS’s Board of Directors at its August meeting. It is in this light that we will be consecrating a mixed burial section in our cemetery based upon the provisions above and additional bylaw changes, such as the number of plots to be purchased and the location of the section. This is a big step forward for the congregation religiously, culturally, and in terms of *keruv*. I do not doubt that this is an important evolution in the life of our congregation.

As I know that this is a big change for many among us, I will be teaching the *teshuvah* in the future, just as I did for the cemetery committee and our Board of Directors. The *teshuvah* is also available for reading. In the meantime, if you have any questions as to the *teshuvah*, please feel free to reach out to me, and for questions on policy, please feel free to contact our Executive Committee or a member of the Board of Directors.

I have no doubt that as an openhearted community, our ability for *keruv* from the time of birth and up and including end-of-life issues will help us move forward in a warm and welcoming manner.

B'Shalom and Friendship,

Rabbi Andrew Bloom