

## May a Traditional Rabbi or Cantor Attend an Egalitarian Service?

*One particular synagogue's constitution identifies the synagogue as a traditional Conservative synagogue. Because of the petition of a few very vocal women and a number of male supporters, the congregation now contemplates arranging an alternative egalitarian service which the rabbi and cantor would be expected to attend. May a traditional rabbi or cantor be expected to attend an egalitarian service?*

An alternative egalitarian service in a traditional synagogue is in itself misleading, inappropriate, and essentially inconsistent with tradition (See *Tomeikh kaHalakhah*, vol. 1, *Orah Hayyim*, no. 7). But if such an illicit service were to be organized, traditional rabbis and cantors would be strongly advised to avoid any participation. If merely hosting an egalitarian service in a traditional synagogue would give tacit approval to the practice, participating in such a service would give much more than tacit approval; it would appear to be a conscious endorsement.

The Tosefta cited in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Demai* 2:2, end) states that one who is careful in his observance of tithes should not cater a meal for those who are not careful in observing the tithes, unless the careful person who had prepared the food removed the appropriate tithes himself. The Tosefta adds that if one who is careful in his observance of tithes does, in fact, cater a meal for the less careful, it is presumptive evidence that tithes had been properly taken. In other words, the very appearance of an observant person in the company of those who are not observant sends signals which can immediately be misinterpreted.

This is especially true of rabbis. As the Jerusalem Talmud clearly indicates above (*Demai* 2:1) that because Rabbi Meir was once observed eating the produce

of a certain field, it was assumed—incorrectly—that the area in question was exempt from the agricultural restrictions of the Sabbatical year. Therefore a principle was established that forbade doing anything publicly that could cause people to conclude that what is forbidden is actually permitted.

Therefore, attending an egalitarian service would create a misconception that the rabbi or cantor condones the practice and finds it consistent with Halakhah. (See also *Tomeikh kaHalakhah*, vol. 2, #11, end.) They therefore may not be expected to attend such a service.

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