
grasping some of the motivating reasons for the decision, they settled on the biological definition and just extended it equally to fathers as well as mothers. The media misunderstood and wrongly portrayed the decision, as did many in the traditional communities.

The publicity brought with it a storm of protest from the traditional camps. They claimed that we were destroying *klal yisrael* and making it impossible for their rabbis to accept the Jewishness of anyone raised in a Reform Temple (for who could trace all the lines adequately as to who was who). A minus perhaps! But very few, if any, Orthodox rabbis accept Reform conversions, even when the ritual requirements are followed carefully and "properly". Was there really a sense or acceptance of *klal yisrael* or any acceptance by the traditionalists of the legitimacy and authority of the Reform rabbinate in those matters anyway?

Lastly, there has been in certain places a drop in conversions. Although statistics are not easy to come by in these cases, it seems that in certain places the number of conversions of the non-Jewish parent dropped. Since the child was accepted, there seemed to be little reason or motivation for the non-Jewish parent to come closer to Judaism and Torah in his or her personal life. Although not universal, this drop has been experienced and attested to in a number of cases. Another minus!

What Will Be?

Yet the issues still remain. With the increase in interfaith families, is a birth definition adequate for determining the Jewish identity of their children? Do the reasons once established for the child's Jewish identity being determined by the

Doesn't a Jewish father in an interfaith marriage have a claim on the religious and group identity of his child?

Jewishness of the mother still hold (in the Torah, it would seem that the patrilineal line often determined the group to which the children belonged, e.g., children of Moses, Joseph, Isaac, etc.)? Doesn't a Jewish father in an interfaith marriage have a claim on the religious and group identity of his child? Aren't mitzvot, etc. *required* in order to establish identity of children in interfaith marriages? Does the argument of a break with *klal yisrael* still hold in the light of the nonacceptance of the legitimacy of Reform rabbis by the traditionalists?

The verdict is still not in. A variety of responses exist. The fact remains that thousands of children and their families have come closer to Torah. Only time will tell if their initial excitement and commitment hold. In the interim, we in the CCAR and the Reform movement need to heighten and expand our efforts to bring the non-Jewish parent closer to Torah and hopefully to an acceptance of Torah. We need to remind our people that "patrilineal" is more than birth. The issue of *klal yisrael* remains, but in the absence of acceptance of our legitimacy by others, we must do what we in conscience believe to be the Eternal's demand of us in our time. □

Patrilineal descent: a ten-year review

Daniel Zemel

The issue of patrilineality is not the wording of the ten-year-old resolution with its sometimes awkward, even illogical, language. (Why, for example, does it only apply in North America? According to the wording of the resolution, one can reasonably conclude that one can board an airplane in New York as a Jew and disembark in London as a non-Jew in the eyes of the CCAR.) Nor is "patrilineality" itself as a principle to determine Jewish status the key issue. The question for us is "lineality" altogether.

How do we determine who is a Jew?

Consider the following, admittedly extreme, scenarios so chosen to illustrate a point:

1. Shortly before Shabbat services are to begin, I am approached by a stranger informing me that, although he has been living in town for ten years, he has never before entered a synagogue. He produces documentation proving that his mother was Jewish but relates that he had been raised in a totally non-observant home, received no Jewish education whatsoever and decided to come to services that morning out of curiosity. Now in a synagogue for the first time in his life, not knowing anything at all about Judaism, he would like to participate in the service. Would I in good conscience offer this worshipper an *aliyah*? Do I consider this person Jewish?

Daniel Zemel is the rabbi of Temple Micah in Washington, DC.

2. Again shortly before services I am approached, this time by someone who was not born to Jewish parents and who also knows nothing about Judaism at all but had heard the day before that Judaism offered a way of life centered on prayer, study and family life, provided moral and spiritual guidance and a supportive community and had decided to be Jewish. This person also wanted to participate in the service. Could I in good conscience offer this person an *aliyah*?

3. Now consider a third case, similar to #2 but in this case the person, while not born to Jewish parents, had studied Judaism in a remote region of Alaska for his entire life and in his own mind, without the benefit of a Jewish community, had regarded himself as a Jew and had, in fact, practiced Jewish rituals alone and, insofar as he had been able, lived a Jewish life. This person knew Hebrew, the Bible, the *siddur*, and was, in fact, more knowledgeable than any member of my congregation. Could I in good conscience offer this person an *aliyah*?

Determining Who is a Jew

These cases while theoretical and admittedly extreme, point me towards an answer to my question. I will regard anyone as Jewish who regards themselves as Jewish, possesses enough knowledge to know to some measure what being Jewish entails, and demonstrates in their life some commitment to the Jewish people and faith. In the community of Reform Jews in which I spend much of my time, any person displaying these qualities would unequivocally be accepted as Jewish. My definition of who is Jewish, therefore, is non-linear altogether. Having said that, I ask myself, do I really want to go so far? Do I want to cut myself off completely from a definition of

Jewish status that has seemingly served the Jewish people so well for its sheer simplicity and, until recently, universality? My answer is a

My definition of who is Jewish, therefore, is non-linear altogether.

simple yes for I find no compelling reason not to. The force of the arguments of faith, knowledge and commitment seem so much stronger than the argument of halakhah and tradition. The resolution on patrilineality has forced me to examine how I measure a person's Jewishness. Judaism is transmitted neither through blood line or gene pool. It is rather through the life that is lived and acted out. To my way of thinking, the accident of birth is not, by itself, enough to make one a Jew. Being a Jew means living as a Jew and participating in a Jewish community.

Fitting in the Details--What About Conversion?

To my way of thinking, this approach to Judaism does not impact the question of conversion to any great extent. Conversion to Judaism is open to all people who wish to become Jews and live a Jewish life. The rituals of *mikvah* and circumcision act to confirm the commitment that has already been made manifest. In my rabbinate, these are not requirements to be met before the conversion can be complete, these are rituals which articulate symbolically what has already in fact taken place. In this regard, in fact, conversion takes its place with other rituals in Jewish life that bespeak personal status. The thirteen year old, is, in fact *bar mitzvah*, with or without the *bar mitzvah* ceremony. Similarly, the tradition recognizes what we call common law marriage, marriage without benefit of *chupah* or *ketubah*. We advocate and embrace these rituals because of their symbolic significance, their beauty, and their profound meaning. In our world, they are public statements of what has already occurred. The boy or girl has reached a certain age, the couple has made the commitment to share their lives together. Conversion can be viewed in much the same way.

Intermarriage

There are those who said ten years ago, that the CCAR resolution on patrilineality was simply a way of giving a go-ahead to intermarriage. "Don't worry, the offspring will still be Jewish." Statements of this sort so completely misunderstand American culture and the phenomenon of mixed marriage that they hardly merit a response. To my way of thinking, no rabbinic resolution of any sort, be it by the CCAR, RA or RCA has any impact on the frightful rate of intermarriage in the country. In fact, a non-linear approach to Jewish status, emphasizing the life that is lived, might do more to motivate full Jewish living than the traditional matrilineal one. For matrilinealists, simply having a Jewish mother is enough to make you a Jew. A Jewish woman can in fact rationalize her "marrying out", by reassuring herself that "no matter what" her children are still Jewish. With a non-linear determination of Jewish status that is not the case. There is no easy way out for anybody. Each of us must live a Jewish life and we must raise our children to do so as well.

The Problem

When all is said and done, non-linear Judaism poses two challenges, one denominational, one vis-a-vis Zionism. How do we maintain a commitment to Jewish unity when our definitions of who is Jewish are so different? The

question is not solely mine nor is it limited to conversion. There are so many areas of Jewish life in which there are denominational disagreements. Can we not find a way to accept our diversity as a strength and not as a weakness or is the very notion of diversity only a value of the religious liberal? I am prepared, within reason, to accept anyone as a Jew who tells me honestly they are one, and whose way of life seems to confirm their statement. There are after all some community standards. Brother Daniel, despite his Jewish mother, was held by the Israeli courts not to be Jewish.

Judaism is Not Genetic

The difficulty, if you insist on seeing it as one, is with the other two-thirds of the community who abide by matrilineality. For me it is not a problem because I am prepared to acknowledge their right to hold to a different definition and require in certain cases conversions of people whom I consider already to be Jewish. This is not troubling for me. It is simply a matter of different beliefs and principles. Nor is it a new problem. Although my Conservative colleagues may have accepted my conversion which employed both *mikvah* and *milah*, my Orthodox colleagues never did. There were always Jews whose status as such was questioned by others.

The larger problem for me is the challenge of Zionism. We all know, from our experience of working with converts that the most difficult aspect of Judaism for the convert to fully embrace or grasp is the one I call by the name of Zionism, namely that Jews the world over are part of a family. This is a religious idea that is unique to Judaism. The tenet of peoplehood which I see as so fundamental to Judaism is most challenged by non-linealism. We are, each one of us, born into a family. That is why we view conversion as a kind of adoption into the family of Israel. We are obligated to preserve the concept of Jewish peoplehood in a non-lineal Judaism. Yet I take it as a matter of course that the concept of peoplehood ultimately must be taught to the matrilineal Jew as well. It is not genetically encoded from birth within any of us. It is simply a fundamental principle of our tradition.

Judaism is Taught and Lived

In summation, a ten-year review of patrilineality reveals a world of liberal Judaism in which some (many?, most?) have embraced a definition of Jewish status that is non-lineal. Non-lineality prefers a life of deed and action to status by birthright alone. The prevalence of intermarriage and assimilation do not impact this definition at all. If anything, they serve to underscore the need for Jewish

lives that manifest devotion to Jewish religious life and the Jewish people. The non-lineal Jew, by definition, embodies these commitments. □

But others say about...

Reconsidering the New Left

Riv-Ellen Prell's memories of the 60s (*Sh'ma* 24/460) stirred up my own. My life was thoroughly intertwined with the New Left: president of Cornell SDS, civil rights worker in Tennessee the summer of 1965, full-time organizer in SDS's JOIN program in Chicago...

I am glad that Riv-Ellen Prell is reconsidering her intolerance for people with whom she disagrees. But I would hope that she is able to listen and hear the holiness in the views of people with whom she disagrees. That is not a mode of listening that I see on the Left. That is part of the reason my leftist faith began to wane twenty years ago.

Perhaps the first step is to be really honest in one's memories. I suspect that the person I was in 1967 or 1968 would have felt that Damian Williams was justified in throwing a brick into the head of Reginald Denny and then dancing with glee afterward. Today, what makes me sick is not only the cruelty that Williams displayed but the idea that I once, as a proud new leftist dedicated to the liberation of humanity, would have forgotten the basis of moral life, the individual's responsibility for his or her actions.

Henry B. Balser
Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Peace Accord

The pieces by Michael Berenbaum and Arnold Jacob Wolf (*Sh'ma* 24/459) are incredible examples of short or selective memory. Their self-congratulatory tone in response to the peace accord of September 13 made me feel somewhat queasy.

If the objective of Peace Now and similar groups had merely been to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians--*dayenu*. However, they engaged with relish in a great deal of Israel-bashing in the process and for that reason they were vilified by some of the mainstream organizations. The above writers seem to forget, also,

that the PLO, for most of its existence was a sworn enemy of Israel whose charter called for the destruction of the Jewish State. At no time, until Arafat's arm was twisted several years ago, did the PLO give any sign that it was willing to renounce--even *de facto*--the terms of the charter. How could any Jews get cozy with such an enemy?

In any event, the self-righteous attempts by the writers to prove that their stance has been vindicated is sheer *chutzpah*. The peace process took place because of Israel's strong position and the military, political, and economic weakness of the PLO. As an official of the Israeli Embassy pointed out in a recent address in Philadelphia, the Arabs have more to fear from Islamic fundamentalism than they do from Israel and that is why the PLO was willing to negotiate at this juncture in history.

The negotiations took place in the best possible circumstances, secretly and without interference from American Jews--hawks or doves, and even without the participation of the American Government. As Arthur Hertzberg's article implies, they got along fine without us, so no one has the right to gloat over the historic event that occurred on September 13.

Robert Layman
Philadelphia, PA

Just as the famous handshake at the White House in September was a victory for both Israeli and Arab moderation and for world peace, so was it a culminating event for an essentially secular expression of the Jewish spirit which we know as Zionism, and particularly for the wing of that movement not led by Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. The fact that so many religiously motivated and traditionally oriented Jews have identified with Zionism over the years illustrates the artificiality of separating the "secular" from the "religious" in Jewish life. A rabbi who nevertheless insists on making that divisive distinction needs to be reminded of what the "secular Leadership" of the Jewish people advocated and achieved through Zionism during the past century.

Daniel Mann
Bethesda, MD

Once again, Sh'ma invites you to send us your hilarious, outrageous, silly or just downright funny pieces for our annual Purim issue.

In the spirit of the Peace Accord, our special theme will be "*Surprising Reconciliations*", or "*When the Messiah Parties*".

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Book Reviews

SUMMONING

Ellen Spolsky, ed. SUNY. \$18.95.

How might a religious idea--that of the covenant--help us "read" literature better. The Bar Ilan Conference that produced these papers has now given non-academics a chance to share in the many insights. Less jargon would have eased our way.

FAMILY BLOOD

Wolf and Attebery. Harper Collins. \$22.

Everything you don't want to be true of a Jewish family (this time in Los Angeles) that "made it," including a murder of the parents on Yom Kippur, is given here in schlocking detail, unfortunately in equally vulgar style. Occasional decency appears--rarely.

JEWISH BOOK ANNUAL, 1993-94/5754

Jacob Kabakoff, ed. Jewish Book Council. \$35.

Who else reminds us of Nahmanides' 800th birthday? Or surveys Israeli Bible scholarship of the past decade? Or follows an article on the *Tzene-rene* (the Yiddish women's Torah commentary) with one on Levinas (the academically hot French Jewish philosopher)? Or celebrates literarily the coming 70th birthday of your reviewer?

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