

In October, 2008, the Council of Progressive Rabbis of Australia, New Zealand & Asia (the *Moetzah*) passed a resolution confirming and clarifying its position to accept the *presumptive* Jewish status of a child born of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. This has been the position of the *Moetzah* since the US Reform movement made its decision about "patrilineal descent" in 1983. The *Moetzah* clarified that each rabbi will determine a child's status (as in the case of conversion) and that such status is based upon *exclusive* identification with Judaism. The motion includes the following:

- 1) All rabbis of the *Moetzah* accept the *presumptive* Jewish status of a child under the age of thirteen with one Jewish parent;
- 2) This presumptive Jewish status will be *confirmed* upon the timely celebration of bar or bat mitzvah in a synagogue setting under the supervision of a recognised rabbi of the *Moetzah* at which time a certificate of affirmation (including certificate of bar/bat mitzvah) will be issued; and
- 3) Requirements leading to the timely celebration of bar or bat mitzvah in a synagogue setting may vary from congregation to congregation and may include but not be limited to: Jewish education, timely acts of Jewish identification, mikveh, circumcision, and hatafat dam brit.

The rabbis further added this proviso: "Notwithstanding the above, we recognise that our determinations of Jewish status may not be recognised in all Jewish communities around the world," thereby acknowledging that questions of Jewish status remain fluid. Those recognized as Jews in certain communities may not be so recognized by others, including within the Orthodox world. Around the world at this time, Jews are rallying in solidarity with the State of Israel yet many of them will be prohibited by Orthodoxy from marrying in their synagogues, for a variety of reasons beyond this decision about patrilineality.

In the recent AJN article (reprinted from [www.oztorah.com.au](http://www.oztorah.com.au)) it was as suggested that this decision "will irrevocably split the Jewish people". This statement is incorrect for the Orthodox movement already rejects all converts outside Orthodoxy and we are still one people.

This resolution on patrilineality addresses the question of whether the Jews are a race, people or religion. From the perspective of Torah or

the foundation of the modern State of Israel, the answer is that we are a *faith people*. We are one people who share historical heritage, tradition, memory, land and language; we express our values through our faith. As a people we have *unity*, but even a cursory look at Torah and tradition would remind us we have never had *uniformity* in faith. For example, the opening prayer of the Amidah speaks of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, each of them believed in the one God but had different understandings of what that meant. The issue of patrilineal descent highlights the reality of being part of one people but with different approaches to our faith.

The assertion that having a Jewish mother has *always* been the "right of entry" into the Jewish people is not supported at all by the Torah or the rest of the Bible. We bless our boys "to be like Ephraim and Manasse", the sons of Joseph whose mother was Asenath, the daughter of Poti-phares priest of On.

Moses was married to Tziporah, the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite priest. Tribes and status were organized according to the father's lineage and most of the kings descended from David only on the paternal side, having non-Jewish wives and mothers. Only since the time of Ezra, and certainly since the rabbis' Talmudic interpretation of Deuteronomy 7:3-4, has a Jewish mother determined one's automatic entry into the Jewish people.

This too changed with the modern State of Israel which permits one to make aliya and be counted fully as part of the Jewish people provided one has one Jewish grandparent, a far more extensive opening into the people. In that sense, the 1983 decision by the Reform movement of the United States to extend admission into the Jewish people to one whose father was Jewish was far more restrictive than the State of Israel's Law of Return.

The reality is that there really are many ways to practice (or not) the Jewish faith while being part of the Jewish people. We honour and respect those who express their Judaism in more traditional ways and we welcome and celebrate with those who wish to express those same traditional values in a more contemporary manner.

