

Founded in 1847

REFORM CONGREGATION KENESETH ISRAEL

YORK ROAD AND TOWNSHIP LINE, ELKINS PARK • PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19117

TUmer 7-8700

June 10, 1969

BERTRAM W. KORN, D.H.L., LL.D., D.Litt., D.D.
Senior Rabbi

3
Rabbi Max Eichhorn
85-14 66th Avenue
Rego Park 74, L.I., N.Y.

My dear Max:

I am very happy that someone has been farsighted and industrious enough to get to work and compile a list of our colleagues who will perform an inter-marriage without requiring the non-Jewish partner to convert. This has been our policy for several years now and, as far as I know, there is only one other Reform rabbi in the greater Philadelphia area who goes along with this philosophy.

We do set certain conditions: 1) that this be the only religious ceremony performed for this couple; 2) that the couple make a verbal promise, at a pre-marriage interview, that their household will be oriented towards Judaism and that the children that issue from this marriage be raised as Jews.

You may add my name and the names of Rabbi Alan D. Fuchs and Rabbi Arnold G. Fink, at this same address, to your list. We are looking forward to receiving your completed list as soon as it is ready.

I hope that all is going well with you and that your summer will be relaxing and refreshing. With warm personal regards, I am

Faithfully,

BWK
Dr. Bertram W. Korn

BWK/hg

September 23, 1975

Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld
Fairmount Temple
23737 Fairmount Blvd.
Cleveland, Ohio 44121

Dear Arthur:

For some years now I have been asking myself why I should be a member of the CCAR.

It is easy to see why pulpit rabbis should belong. The CCAR is their labor union, and they are dependent on it for their placement and their pension. But this does not apply to me.

I can also understand that, at one time, the CCAR was a fraternity of like-minded religionists, and thus effective in the religious realm. But that time is past. The CCAR may indeed represent an interesting and fascinating spectrum of religious and anti-religious points of view; but it is certainly no more interesting and fascinating than the spectrum I encounter at meetings of the American Academy of Religion (for an annual membership fee of \$15.00!). I could not possibly look upon the CCAR as a group of ahim lede'ah, when that group also consists of atheists, agnostics, ignostics and mixed-marriers whose goals and objectives are absolutely antithetical to my own. I have more in common with Seymour Siegel than with Alvin Reines, more in common with the Lubavitcher Rebbe than with Sherwin Wine, and more in common with the Orthodox British Chief Rabbi than with Michael LeBurkien. Obviously, therefore, the CCAR as such cannot represent my religious identification.

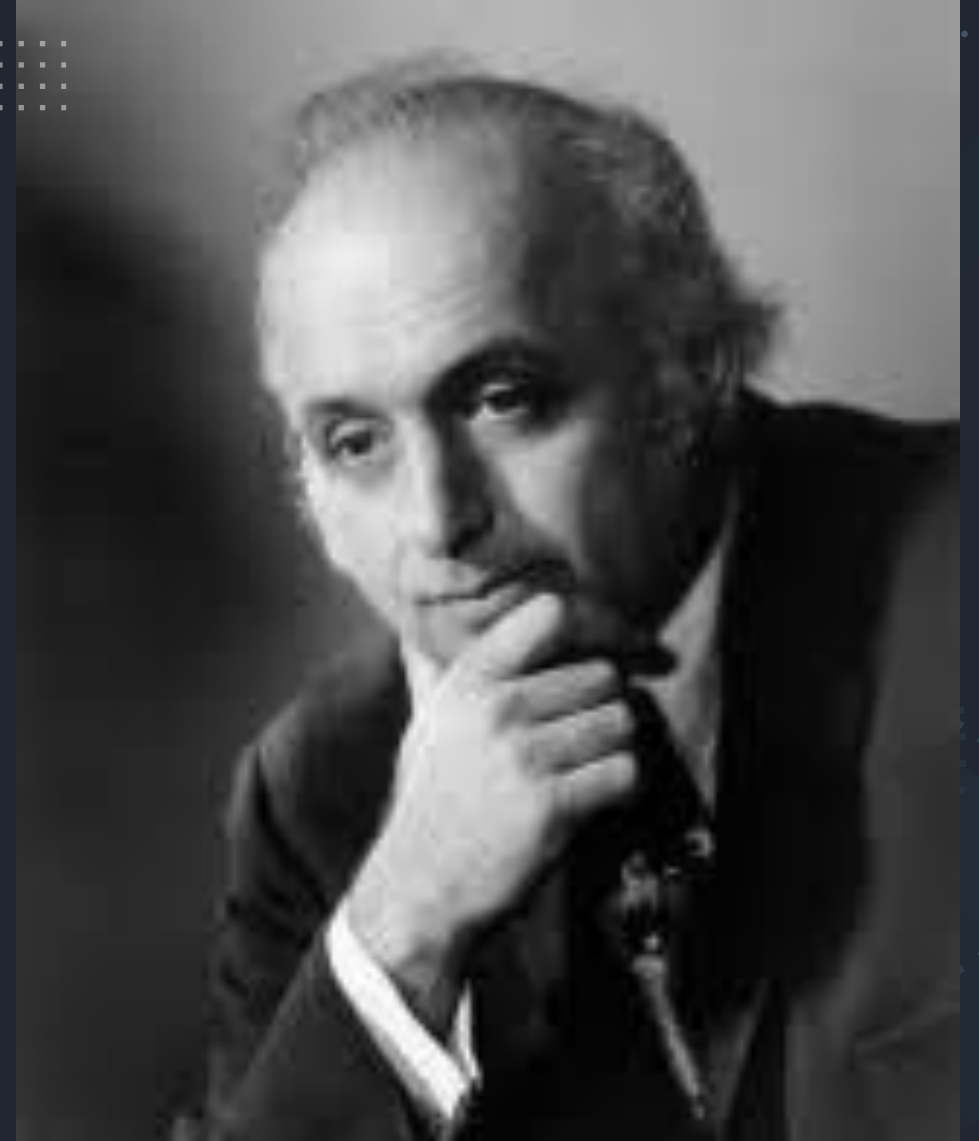
When it comes to the political activities in which the CCAR engages, the rousing, radical resolutions which it routinely passes, the boycotts of which it approves, etc., need I say more than that I am political conservative, and that this whole aspect of CCAR activity and expenditure is utterly repulsive to me?

What is left for me, then, is simply the opportunity of keeping in touch with former students and old friends, and being able to be of assistance to them in their research projects, graduate work, or simply torah lishmah.

(more)

“I begin with the recognition of a reality: the tide of intermarriage is running against us. The statistics on the subject confirm what our own experience teaches us: intermarriage is on the rise. Between 1966 and 1972, 31.7 percent of all marriages involving a Jew were marriages between a Jew and a person born a non-Jew. And a recent survey shows that the acceptance of such marriages among Americans in general is on the rise, most dramatically, as we might expect, among Jews.”

“I believe that we must do everything possible to draw the non-Jewish spouse of mixed marriage into Jewish life. The phenomenon of Jewish drift teaches us that we ought to be undertaking more intensive Jewish programs which will build on and build up these existing ties, this fledgling sense of Jewish identification. If non-Jewish partners can be brought more actively into Jewish communal life, perhaps they themselves will initiate the process of conversion. At the very least, we will dramatically increase the probability that the children of such marriages will be reared as Jews.”



Rabbi Alexander Schindler, Speech presented to the Union of American Hebrew Congregation's Board of Trustees: December 2, 1978 in Houston, Texas

Sheldon Zimmerman: Speaking con, against the amendment, Mr. Chairman. We began this meeting with a discussion to enlarge somehow that class which we call the Jewish people, to reach out to children of mixed marriages, and to include as part of our people both the children of Jewish mothers and the children of Jewish fathers. The amendment comes along to tell us that not only shall we not enlarge the group, we shall diminish it. I am a rabbi who does not officiate at mixed marriages. Now I am told that any child of a Jewish mother in a mixed marriage (whom I have considered a Jew up to this point) who has not received a Jewish education is not a Jew. Here I am their rabbi supposedly not performing mixed marriages, but in fact—by our new definition—having been performing mixed marriages. How can we as rabbis maintain such a position of exclusion when we talk about diminishing Jewish population? How can we maintain such a position of exclusion after Auschwitz? How can we in good conscience say to anyone who wants to be a Jew, “You are not a Jew because your parents did not give you a Jewish education”? This Conference must never, in principle or in name, never go on record with that kind of a statement. This amendment is basically against the Jewish people, Mr. Chairman.

Michael Stroh: I have been nominated by the Canadian Region of the CCAR to speak on their behalf in opposition to the motion. We have had from the committee that prepared the motion three speakers this evening, each one disagreeing with the others. The first proposed accepting the motion as it stood, which would enfranchise as Jews all children of Jewish fathers. The second recommended not passing the resolution as it stands at all. The third recommended a resolution which, if passed, would have the possibility of disenfranchising the children of Jewish mothers. If there is this much division on the committee, can you imagine how much division there is in the CCAR on this issue? I hope everyone recognizes that the amendment we passed turned upside down the proposal that Rabbi Schindler had made, and we are now voting on disenfranchising the children of Jewish mothers. The resolution says that they're Jewish “when they participate in Jewish life.” I have not a clue as to what “participation in Jewish life” means. Does it mean going to the “Y” or joining a Zionist organization? I suggest that every rabbi will consider different people Jewish, and we will no longer have a consistent position on who is Jewish and who is not in the Reform Movement. Anyone can interpret the resolution the way he wants.

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

NINETY-THIRD ANNUAL CONVENTION

JUNE 27–JULY 1
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-TWO
NEW YORK, NEW YORK





“The world movements of Conservative and Reform Judaism have for years struggled successfully to prevent the amendment of the Law of Return which would invalidate conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis abroad. As of now, the State of Israel and its secular institutions recognize Reform converts as Jews in every respect. However, the proposed CCAR resolution, which abandons the requirement of *Giyur* (conversion), would result in a situation whereby persons recognized by our movement in America as Jews would not, even under the present law, be recognized by the State of Israel as Jews. Furthermore, the resolution will undoubtedly weaken the determination of those forces in the State of Israel who stand with us in opposition to amending the Law of Return. It is one thing for us to demand that the State of Israel recognize, as it now does, conversions performed by all religious movements abroad; it is quite another thing to expect the State to recognize as a Jew someone who has not been converted at all. Our continuing concern is not motivated by political expediency. We know that the Orthodox establishment and the Chief Rabbinate may never recognize the religious acts performed by us as authentic. However, the State of Israel and the majority of Jews in the State have recognized our authenticity. In discussions which we have had with members of the Knesset and leading political figures we have been warned that passage of the resolution may well serve as a pretext for those who, until now, have supported our position, to change their vote. We believe that an amendment to the Law of Return invalidating conversions performed by Conservative and Reform rabbis abroad will prove extremely deleterious to Israel-Diaspora relations.”

-- Moses Cyrus Weiler Speech (on behalf of MARAM) before the CCAR, March 1983

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

NINETY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION

MARCH 13 TO MARCH 16
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-THREE
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent on the Status of Children of Mixed Marriages

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of one Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people. The performance of these mitzvot serves to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life.

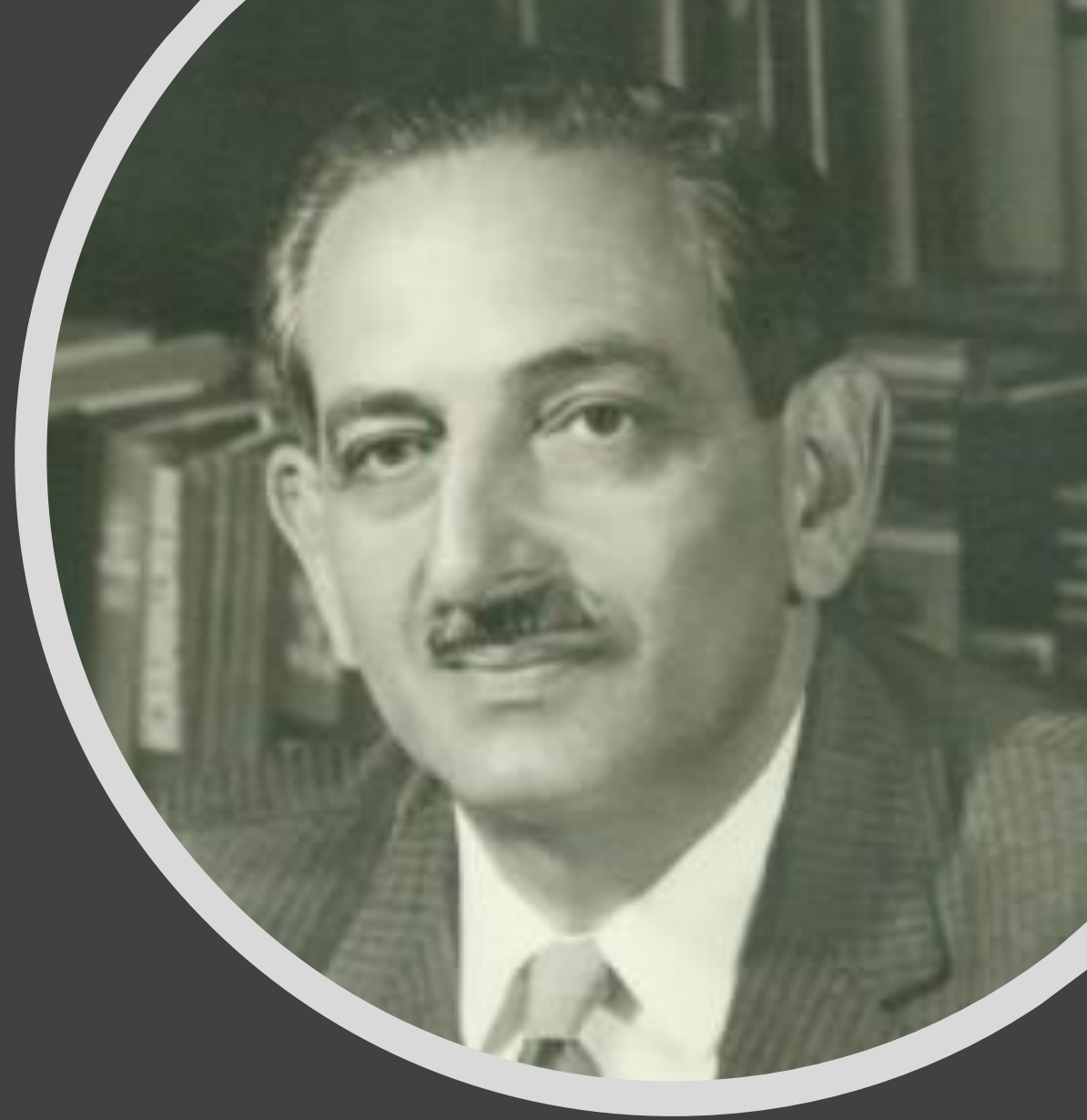
Depending on circumstances, mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the covenant, acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.

“What are we uneasy about—being *machmirim*? We have been condemned over and over because we have taken the easy way out or have seemed to take the easy way out. If there is a *safek* about the Jewishness of a child who has one non-Jewish parent, then it applies equally and the *safek* has to be resolved.”

-- Jerome Malino

“Let me give you a dramatic case in point: Traditional Judaism denies the Jewishness of Ben Gurion’s grandson, because his mother was converted to Judaism by a Reform Rabbi. Yet it accords Jewishness to a grandchild of Khrushchev because the mother, Khrushchev’s daughter-in-law, was a Jewess.”

-- Alexander Schindler





Will the orthodox discard their fealty to the law and acknowledge the wisdom of Reform or Conservative improvisations? The time for that would seem to have been in the nineteenth century. Orthodoxy has survived and recovered from the impact of modern dissent. Individuals, indeed, continue to drift away. There has been a well-known cascading from orthodox to Conservative, and from Conservative to Reform groups. But Reform does not swell as it might, because of attrition into disinterest and loss of identity. Nor, curiously, does orthodoxy seem to diminish.

-- Herman Wouk, *This is My God* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 251

Q: I don't want to be on trial here. The question is how you feel about [Reform] Jews like me?

A: I don't feel about you. I don't even think about you. I hate to be mean, but when I stop and think about it, I say you must have a hell of a problem. I've got it made ... And when I look at our Orthodox community in Brookline, I see that we haven't yet lost one person. Not one kid has rebelled or opted out."

-- "Doing and Believing," *Moment Magazine* 3 (September 1979): 43

Reform Judaism's Diminishing Boundaries: *The Grin That Remained*

Jakob J. Petuchowski

This time [the Cheshire Cat] vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, chapter 6.

IF I WERE an Orthodox rabbi, I would not join in the hue and cry against Reform Judaism that has become fashionable of late in Orthodox circles both in the State of Israel and elsewhere. The current Orthodox attacks on Reform Judaism treat Reform Judaism as though it were a serious competitor for the souls of religiously committed Jews. There was, indeed, a time when Reform Judaism represented such a threat to Orthodoxy. But that time is gone. Reform has passed through a number of metamorphoses since then, and the souls that it attracts today are hardly the souls of people for whom Orthodox Judaism would represent a live option.

If, therefore, I were an Orthodox rabbi, and if I also knew American Reform Judaism as intimately as I in fact do, I would watch the curious phenomenon of American Reform Judaism with equanimity. I would not be frightened at all by the increased numerical strength periodically claimed by Reform spokespersons. I would simply sit back for a while and watch Reform Judaism vanish from the Jewish scene.

For, in terms of its religious contents, that is, indeed, what American Reform Judaism is doing. Today's American Reform Judaism is not the religious "heresy" that was fought, in the nineteenth century, by the likes of Rabbi Moses Schreiber and execrated by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and his disciples. It shares nothing at all with the British Reform Judaism of the last century, which was

JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI is The Sol and Arlene Bronstein Professor of Judaean-Christian Studies and Research Professor of Jewish Theology and Liturgy at HUC-JIR, in Cincinnati.

It was, therefore, entirely illogical for the final resolution on patrilineal descent to assert that the child of one Jewish parent is presumed to be Jewish, but that the truth of the presumption must be established by the child or the parents. If the word *presumption* was to be retained at all, the resolution should have been amended to this effect:

The CCAR declares that the child of one Jewish parent is presumed to be a Jew.

This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage shall persist in the absence of public and formal acts of identification with another religion.

Such a declaration would have been concise, logical, internally consistent, easy to understand, and easy to apply. It would have established the child's Jewish status while defining a boundary beyond which the child could not pass without forfeiting that status. Finally, it would have avoided the successful resolution's confusion of requirements to establish Jewish status with requirements for conversion.

An alternative to the presumption formula would have been:

The CCAR declares that the child of one Jewish parent has the right to claim Jewish status.

In order to exercise this right, the offspring of any mixed marriage shall declare the intention to live by the Jewish faith. In the case of a child, the right may be exercised on the child's behalf by the Jewish parent by declaring the intention to raise the child as a Jew.

This alternative would have replaced the logically inconsistent "presumption"/"establishment" language with a "right" and the "exercise" of the right. It would have placed the child of one Jewish parent in a special category with rights superior to, and different from, those of a prospective convert, and it would have made our resolution on the status of such a child consistent with our position on the standards for conversion.

Arguably, these alternatives are two sides of the same coin. The first would confer Jewish status upon the child of a mixed marriage, but would provide for its possible forfeiture. The second would confer the right to claim Jewish status, but require that the right be affirmatively exercised. I would have voted for either approach in Los Angeles, but I could not bring myself to vote for a resolution amended and debated in haste, without sufficient reflection on its internal logic or its relationship with other enactments.

The National Jewish

Post & Opinion

FEBRUARY 13, 1985

So says Dr. Gerson Cohen

Conservatism studies Patrilineal Descent

PALM BEACH, FL — In an outspoken interview in The Palm Beach Jewish World, Dr. Gerson Cohen, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, said that the Seminary is "studying the question of patrilineal descent."

He told Martin Pomerance that "...we will be raising that question all over again, and I think retracting the monolithic posture of the first response of Conservative rabbis that we must abide by the sole validity of matrilineal descent."

DR. COHEN said that he and one of the senior scholars differ on the time when the law of patrilineal descent in the Bible was changed to give primacy to matrilineal descent. "He and I," he said, "are in dispute only on a pedantic question as to the date on which this switch happened. I claim that it happened somewhere around 250 BC and he claims a little later, perhaps in the Roman period."

Earlier in the interview, Dr. Cohen told of the difference

Conservative view on halacha. "To us," he said, "religion and halacha are responses to life based on certain principles that have come down to us from the days of the Bible and the rabbis as to how Jewish law is to be applied. To some...religion constitutes only continuity with the past."

TWO OTHER ISSUES facing Conservatism were commented on by Dr. Gerson. One was questions on medical ethics such as abortions, transplants and medical experimentation, and the other was whether women can be witnesses under Jewish law. "They have so far been disqualified," he said. "But we will take up the matter again...I will not venture to pre-

dict right now how that issue will turn out."

Dr. Cohen made the point that the Seminary itself does not issue pronouncements on social questions. "It is an academic institution...but the Seminary is also a fountainhead for Conservative Judaism...It is looked to as the pace setter..."

DR. COHEN conceded his role in the passage of the resolution that would permit the ordination of women as rabbis. "In a world where women assume such roles of leadership and have such great educations, and are the equal of men in every way conceivable...we felt we had no right to prevent them from being rabbis. Our conscience made us cope with this."

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 1985

Conservatives Reaffirm Rule On Determining Jewishness

By ARI L. GOLDMAN
Special to The New York Times

MIAMI BEACH, March 11 — Conservative Judaism began today to struggle anew with the question of whether Jewish lineage can be transmitted by a father as well as a mother.

Dr. Gerson Cohen, the chancellor of the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, said at a meeting of Conservative rabbis here that the time had come to reconsider the 2,000-year practice of considering the religion of the mother only in determining who is a Jew by birth.

Dr. Cohen was quickly rebuffed by a resolution adopted from the convention floor reaffirming the historical matrilineal view. The vote on the resolution was 49 to 21.

Two years ago, the more liberal Reform branch of Judaism declared it would accept both patrilineal and matrilineal descent. The Orthodox and Conservative branches have continued to require the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother to be converted to Judaism.

Concern About 'Deadwood'

"I am concerned that we not be deadwood and come 25 years from now and say 'me too,'" Dr. Cohen said in an interview before the vote. Faced with a fast-shrinking Jewish population, Dr. Cohen said, "Jews should look to retain as many as they can without putting up additional roadblocks."

Dr. Cohen, a rabbi and Jewish historian, said there was enough historical precedent for the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards to reconsider the issue. Until the third century before the Christian era, he said, Jewish lineage followed the father and not the mother. He said the reasons for the change then should be reconsidered in light of Jewish law, history and ethics.

However, Rabbi Alexander M. Shapiro, the president of the Rabbinical Assembly, took issue with Dr. Cohen and urged the passage of the resolution reaffirming lineage from the mother only.

Problem With Marriages

Rabbi Shapiro said the law committee had ruled several times in the past against a change. "Our path," he said, "must remain that of matrilinealism, motivated as we all are by our concern for klal yisrael." Klal yisrael, literally the congregation of Israel, is a term used for the unity of the Jewish people.

by the Reform branch, some Orthodox and Conservative rabbis will consent to perform marriages involving Reform Jews only after investigating their lineage.

The vote on the patrilineal resolution came when there was barely a quorum in the room at the Eden Roc Hotel where the business of the Rabbinical Assembly was taking place. Only moments before, the room was packed with 300 delegates for a report and vote on the admission of the first women to be ordained as rabbis of the Conservative organization.

After the women were approved, the delegates, apparently unaware of the next issue on the agenda, filed out into the lobbies or to the sunny beach.

Acceptance in Mail Vote

The acceptance of the first woman, Amy Eilberg of Bloomington, Ind., was made possible by a mail ballot that was completed last month. Rabbi Shapiro, the president of the assembly, read the results of the vote, 636 to 267, and introduced Miss Eilberg, who will automatically join the assembly upon her ordination as a rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York, in May.

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rabbinical Assembly
Faculty
Students

DATE: March 14, 1985

FROM: Gerson D. Cohen

SUBJECT: New York Times Article

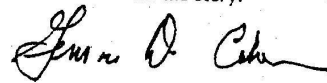
The New York Times article of March 12th concerning the Rabbinical Assembly convention session of the previous day is both inaccurate and misleading. I never mentioned the question of patrilineality either on the floor of the convention, or at any of the press conferences. Indeed, I sat through the session at which the subject came up without participating in the discussion at all. In my own address, which came too late in the evening to be included in the press story, I did not mention the issue.

You may then ask what did happen. Simply, the convention voted to continue the Conservative Movement's traditional stand on the question of who is a Jew — to wit, the child of a Jewish mother, or one halakhically converted. This decision was made on the merits of the issue as those present understood them. The vote was taken on a resolution — one of a dozen or more submitted to the convention by its resolutions committee. It could not have been a rebuff to me, since my views on the subject were not known to the convention. The author of the Times story may have felt that he knew my views, since we had discussed the matter privately — but he had no way of knowing what the convention's reaction would have been had I decided to raise the issue — nor could he have known what view I might then have presented.

In all honesty I must tell you that I would not oppose having the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards address themselves to this issue. There are very few questions which could not be clarified by open discussion among scholars. But authorizing or endorsing such a discussion in no way prejudices its results. In that, as on all other matters of Jewish law, I, and the Conservative Movement, will continue to be guided by the halakhic process as we understand it, and, as our official decisor, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, interprets it.

I regret any misunderstandings which have arisen from the story.

GDC:fm



UNION for TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

In the spirit of Solomon Schechter

Post Office Box 4499
Grand Central Station
New York, N.Y. 10163

Sunday, March 31, 1985

Dear Colleague,

We are not reassured by the Chancellor's disavowal of the New York Times article. In his letter to the RA, he neither denies nor apologizes for having repeatedly gone to the press as a champion of patrilineal descent.

Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, of course. But there are several things about Dr. Cohen's actions which trouble us deeply.

First, we are concerned by the nonchalance with which he overreaches 2300 years of Jewish law to find a historic "precedent" for his position. His effortless dismissal of universal rabbinic opinion only underscores how far removed he is from our concept of the halakhic process.

Secondly, we are distressed by his eagerness to take this radical move when Judaism already provides a legitimate alternative for gentile fiancées, spouses, and children who are sincere about making a Jewish commitment: halakhic conversion is readily available to them. To relinquish the halakhic approach in favor of patrilineality is to remove all incentives for conversion and consequently to institutionalize intermarriage.

Thirdly, we believe that Dr. Cohen's stance on this issue is not an aberration, but part of a larger pattern which stresses the need for change over the mandate of tradition. This passion for change ostensibly emerges from a fear that if we maintain halakhic norms we will soon become "deadwood."

Our experience has led us to another conclusion. While not denying that responsiveness to the challenges of modernity is essential, we are convinced that more can be done to stem the tide of assimilation by vigorously advocating our tradition than by rewriting it.

Lastly, we are disappointed. In recent months, we had been told

time and again by the RA leadership that as soon as we would get the ordination issue "behind us," we could move on to our common agenda as a Rabbinical Assembly and as a Movement. Sadly (and predictably enough), things have not worked out that way.

Our confidence is hardly inspired by Dr. Cohen's claim that whatever his personal opinion, endorsement of an "open" discussion among scholars "in no way prejudices its results." That approach, employed so recently, is all too painfully familiar to us.

Though not at all surprised by Dr. Cohen's actions, we are disturbed and disconsolate. Anyone who thinks that this incident can be blamed on the press, defended as mere academic speculation, or excused as a minor political indiscretion is deluding himself.

Those who see the situation for what it is have a responsibility to speak out now. Whether or not you are a member of the UTCJ, whether or not you have voted with us in the past, we urge you to register your opinion with Dr. Cohen by sending him the enclosed postcard. You can help us determine how broad a consensus there is among our colleagues on the question of patrilineal descent by sending us the other enclosed postcard.

Thank you for reading this letter.

Sincerely,

Rabbinic Members of the Steering Committee

David Novak, Co-Chairman

Bruce Ginsburg, Vice Chairman

Hershel Portnoy, Treasurer

Gerald Sussman, Newsletter Editor

Alan Yuter, Member at Large

Encl.: 2 Postcards

New York Times Article

Statement on Patrilineal Descent, Panel of Halakhic Inquiry

אגודת הרבנים הארצות הברית וקנדה
THE UNION OF ORTHODOX RABBIS
OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
235 EAST BROADWAY
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10002

964-6337
6338

January 16, 1984

Central Conference of American
Rabbis
21 East 40 Street
New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

In the name of hundreds of learned, venerable rabbis who are steadily engaged in the struggle to preserve the sacredness of the Jewish family and who agonize with the whole Jewish nation over the many breaches made in the fortress of Torah-Judaism, by willful wicked elements from within, we, the undersigned, members of the Beth-Din, turn to the leaders of the Reform Movement with an urgent plea to reject and drop all attempts to introduce into Judaism any proposal to recognize the child of a non-Jewish mother as being Jewish. A child whose mother is not Jewish is a Gentile and can in no way be classified as a Jew (except by proper conversion).

We urge you to publicly repudiate your Declaration of Patrilineal Descent in the same public manner in which you issued that prohibited and deplorable Declaration last March.

Should you, G-d forbid, not repudiate it, we will be forced to promulgate a Halachic Prohibition for Jews to marry members of your communities and congregations.

The burden of guilt for this harsh but unavoidable step will be upon you forever, while the people of Israel and the Beth-Din will be innocent before G-d.

BETH-DIN OF UNION OF ORTHODOX RABBIS
OF UNITED STATES AND CANADA

S. Elberg
Rabbi Symcha Elberg, Chairman Admin.
Committee

M. Ginsberg
Rabbi Hersch M. Ginsberg, Director

P. Hirshprong
Rabbi Pinchos Hirshprong, Vice Pres.

I. Liebes
Rabbi Isaac Liebes, Vice Pres.

M. Savitsky
Rabbi Mordechai Savitsky, Hon. Pres.

An Open Letter To American Reform Jews

We take the liberty of addressing you publicly through the pages of the New York Times in order to assure that our message—emanating from hearts filled with pain and great concern—will reach every one of you, clergy and laity, in the hope that you will accept it in the sincere spirit in which it is written.

At your recent convention in Los Angeles (March 15, 1983), you dealt with the very serious problem of intermarriage plaguing American Jewry. Since Jewish law dictates that children of intermarriage assume the religious status of the mother, and since the majority of intermarriages are between Jewish men and non-Jewish women, their children, according to Jewish law, are not Jewish. The result is a decimation of the American Jewish population.

To solve this problem, the convention adopted a resolution by a show of hands to institute a principal change by conferring Jewish status upon these children, thus "solving" the problem and "insuring" the Jewish future in America.

It would be amusing, were it not so tragic, since this solution is tantamount to treating an epidemic by declaring its symptoms to be the mark of good health...

A three-fold question may be asked:

1. By what authority does your organization arrogate to itself the right to institute a radical change in the very definition of what is a Jew, in complete contradiction of the Biblical sine qua non of Judaism?
2. What right does any Jewish organization have to deny an innocent child his Biblically endowed heritage and status?
3. By what authority does an organization confer Jewish status upon a person without the prescribed procedure of conversion?

Being a Jew is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of fact, based on principles established and prescribed by the Torah. In a case of intermarriage, the child, having been an integral part of his mother for the nine months of its embryonic state, is naturally endowed with the religious status of its mother. If the mother is Jewish, the child is Jewish. If mother is non-Jewish, so is the child: no one has the right to change the status of such a child without a conscious choice on the child's part upon reaching maturity.

For much of our history, we were the victims of acts of coercion which sought to deny us our Jewish heritage. Dare we now be guilty of such a sin?

Your resolution will cause great confusion in Jewish life and will **place a cloud over the Jewish status of every one identified with the Reform movement.** Since the overwhelming majority of Jews the world over adhere to the clear and explicit Biblical requirements as to the status of children, every member of a Reform family will henceforth be subject to scrutiny to determine whether he or she is genuinely Jewish by Biblical definition, or is an *ersatz* Jew by convention resolution. Children brought up in the belief that they are full-fledged members of the Jewish people will discover, as they approach marriage, that the bulk of **Klal Yisrael** does not recognize their status, with potentially tragic results.

It destroys Jewish unity. In our efforts for the State of Israel and in our communal undertakings here in the United States, American Jewry has adopted as its rallying cry, "**We are One**", indicating that differences in philosophy and attitudes may be overlooked in order to facilitate working for a common cause as a united Jewry. That unity will be totally shattered by the Los Angeles resolution, which has introduced for the first time a difference in the very definition of being Jewish. Such disunity may well affect adversely the campaigns for the United Jewish Appeal, Federation, Israel Bonds, and others.

It advances assimilation. The conference's deliberation was a reaction to the dangerous inroads intermarriage has made on American Jewry in the last decade. If until now concern for the status of children served as a deterrent to intermarriage, your resolution will remove this barrier and will encourage and legitimize intermarriage.

In the name of Jewish unity, for the sake of your own children's right not to have their religious status clouded by uncertainty, we appeal to all our brothers and sisters in the Reform movement to stand up and be counted, to urge your clergy to rescind this ill-conceived, ill-advised, tragic step and to prevent the irreparable harm and ultimate detachment from Klal Yisrael to which your resolution may lead.

We place our hopes in the words of the great Prophet Isaiah, (LXVI, 22) "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I make remain before Me, said the L-d, so will your children and your name remain."

Committee for the Maintenance of
Jewish Standards
Merkaz Horabonim—
United Orthodox Rabbinate

Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz, Chairman

"...[due to] re-entrenchment of the respective positions of the Orthodox and Reform camps, not to mention the movement to the right of Orthodoxy [...] a cataclysmic split within the North American Jewish community [...] may result in the total renunciation of a significant number within the Jewish community by another group, and the separation-cum-divorce of these two movements into a mainstream Judaism and a new religion."

-- Reuven P. Bulka, *The Coming Cataclysm: The Orthodox-Reform Rift and the Future of the Jewish People* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1984), 13

"Reform Judaism has been shown to be the sham we have always insisted it is, it is not a 'holding action' stemming assimilation for some Jews. It is a transmission belt for assimilation."

-- Yaakov Elman, "Reform Judaism's Chesire Grin," *Jewish Action* (September 1988), 27-28

[Reform policies] increase the likelihood that at some time Orthodoxy will see Reform as it saw Christianity: as a separate religion.

Jonathan Sacks, *One People? Tradition, Modernity and Jewish Unity* (London: Littman Library, 1993), 224

AGUDAS HARABONIM **(Union of Orthodox Rabbis of U.S. & Canada)** **Warns Not To Pray** **In Reform or Conservative Temple**

In view of the coming High Holidays, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis whose President is the world wide accepted Torah authority Hagaon Reb Moshe Feinstein shlita, declares, that it is a serious violation of the Halacha (Jewish Law) to pray in a Reform or Conservative Temple, whose Clergy have long rebelled against numerous sacred laws of the Torah and mislead thousands of innocent souls.

Every Jew must make every effort to find an Orthodox Synagogue to pray in, and absolutely not to enter a Reform or Conservative Temple. If you do not have an Orthodox Synagogue within walking distance then you should pray at home even on Rosh Hashano and Yom Kipur.

Wishing Klal Israel a Ksiva V'chasima Tovah.

Union of Orthodox Rabbis of U.S. & Canada

"I close with a final comment. When I was a boy, no Jewish ceremony had a greater impact upon me than the ritual of *duchanen*, which took place in my family's synagogue, as in all traditional synagogues in the Diaspora, during the *Musaf* service on the three pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. As the priest would bless the people, a sense of *kedusha*, of holiness and mystery, would pervade the room. I recall that ceremony at this moment because the priests, immediately prior to their recitation of the priestly benediction, would recite the words, "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron and commanded us *levarech et amo Yisrael be-ahava*—to bless God's people Israel with love." It is the only *beracha*, blessing, that I am aware of that demands love, *ahava*, as an essential component in its fulfillment. Action and intention must be one. The priest must bless this people Israel "with love." Otherwise the mitzvah is not complete. In an unredeemed world we cannot strive for less. In serving this people Israel out of love and with compassion, we do honor to ourselves and make our most enduring contribution to *Kelal Yisrael*. Let the worst accusation hurled against us as a movement be this—that we are attempting to serve this people Israel with too much love, too much compassion. *Eimatai hu yitaleh?*—When is God exalted? It is then that God is exalted."

-- David Ellenson, "The Integrity of Reform within Klal Yisrael,"
CCAR Year Book 97 (1986): 30-31

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The patrilinear decision: A blow to Jewish unity

By IRVING GREENBERG

On March 15, 1983, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), in convention assembled, voted to declare "that the child of any one Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent." By an overwhelming margin (3-1), the collective voice of the American Reform rabbinate voted to abolish the distinction between matrilinear and patrilinear descent as a source of Jewishness.

Adoption of the resolution is a triumph for ethics, feminism, sociology, and Americanism and a defeat for halachah (Jewish law). Klal Yisrael (the totality of the Jewish people), and respect for tradition. Above all, it is a warning of stormy waters ahead for Jewish unity and community.

There is less to the resolution than meets the eye. The resolution did not state that a child of a Jewish father shall automatically be considered to be Jewish just as the child of a Jewish mother is, according to halachah. Rather, the resolution stated that, "This presumption (of Jewish descent) is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people."

According to the 1909 Rabbi's Manual of the CCAR, a child of a Jewish father is to be regarded as a Jew if the child attends a Jewish school and goes through appropriate life cycle ceremonies. Supporters of the March 15 declaration pointed out that most Reform rabbis have been following this recommendation since 1909. One can argue, then, that far from expanding conflict of Jewishness by birth to children of Jewish fathers, the resolution has withdrawn that automatic conferral from children of Jewish mothers.

Now, matrilinear Jewish children also have to practice Judaism in some form (it is order to be considered Jewish). By this resolution, the Reform rabbinate is now more *matrilineal* (restrictive) on children of Jewish mothers than are Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. At least, theoretically, there are children of intermarried Jewish mothers who will be considered as Jews by birth by the Reform rabbis, but not by the Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. Those children who have performed no "public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish people."

Ethics and Feminist Triumph
Nevertheless, the resolution is a triumph of ethics and feminism as normative principles for Reform rabbis. The logic of feminism is that all criteria and treatment applied to women should be equal to those applied to men. By this resolution, Reform rabbis have voted to do that; henceforth, they will require of children of Jewish women the same obligations as are required of children of Jewish men.

Moreover, if you do not consider inherited halachic categories to be immutable and you consider being deemed a Jew to be a privilege, then there is an ethically compelling argument for the resolution. Why should a child of one Jewish parent suffer because that one parent happens to be a father rather than a mother? The ethical base of the resolution is a strong one.

Of course, by voting their ethical judgments, the

Reform rabbis have overridden the claims of halachah and respect for a millennia-old tradition. The framers of the resolution dismissed the argument from tradition. Past practice, they were motivated by "the fact that the woman with her child had no recourse (in ancient times) but to return to her own people," but this is no longer true, socially.

With this sociological put-down of the matrilinear tradition, the sponsors ignored both the classic belief that the categories of descent are divinely ordained and the historical passion of Jews who defied the rape of Jewish women by persecutors by specifically affirming the Jewishness of children of Jewish mothers more than those of Jewish fathers.

A much stronger argument for changing the inherited tradition was the contention that, in the light of the Holocaust, children of any one Jewish parent should be deemed Jewish, if possible, since their lives are on the line and they will be deemed as Jewish as the other when it comes to martyrdom. Against this argument, however, the upholders of the tradition argue that the lesson of the Holocaust should be to solve all problems in the spirit of Klal Yisrael and not to reject solutions that are good for any one denomination but come at the expense of the unity of community and fate of all.

Adoption of the resolution is a triumph for ethics, feminism, sociology and Americanism and a defeat for halachah, Klal Yisrael and respect for tradition.

Motivated by Sociology

The main driving force behind the resolution was sociology. There has been a "gigantic jump" in intermarriage in the past decade — such marriages now approach being 50% of all American Jewish marriages. Most of these intermarriages are between Jews and non-Jews, not between Jews and Jews.

A lot of Jewish parents — many are members of Reform congregations — want their grandchildren to be Jewish, or at least, to be considered Jewish whether or not the non-Jewish parent converts to Judaism. Most of the parents of intermarried couples and three-quarters of the voting Reform rabbis felt that it is more urgent to make a symbolic statement of encouragement to those mixed married families — and to themselves — than it is important not to offend the Orthodox and Conservative Jews who uphold the present halachic ruling.

The obvious question is: how significant is this gesture and what is its value in motivating Jewishness? Those who care to be Jewish in some active way would likely be willing to undergo conversion. As for those who do not care, what significance can the bestowal of Jewish status have for them?

The resolution was also a triumph of Americanism over the spirit of Klal Yisrael. In America, the intermarriage rates are high and the sense of the binding force of halachah is weak. In Israel, the proportions are reversed — the intermarriage rate is

extremely low and the respect for the authority of halachah especially in matters of personal status is high even among non-observant Jews.

No wonder then that the Israel Council of Progressive (Reform) Rabbis objected to the resolution, stating: "The motivation is to resolve a pressing problem for the American movement," but "if we affirm that we are an integral part of the Jewish people, we cannot limit our horizons to the Reform movement in North America alone."

Said the Israeli Reform rabbis: "The recognition that the Reform rabbi serves in these matters as an agent of the entire Jewish people imposes on us an obligation to give serious consideration to the positions of other Jews and to their reaction to our acts and judgments. This is a price we should be willing to pay for the privilege of belonging to the Jewish people and for maintaining unity whenever possible both within the Reform family and within Klal Yisrael."

"Thinking American"
The Israeli Reform rabbi considers that, in Israel, Reform is a small minority which must live with the Orthodox community and rabbinate. The American Reform rabbinate believes that the majority of American Jews are Reform or non-observant that Reform can shake off Orthodox objections. But this constitutes "thinking American" rather than deciding on a worldwide basis.

Israeli Reform believes that, through dialogue, self-restraint and respect for tradition, it can legitimate itself either with the Orthodox establishment or with the non-observant majority of Israel which demands a decent respect for tradition as the credential of any religious movement. American Reform spiritual leaders have made the judgment to write off Orthodox concerns. In the words of one Reform Rabbi defending the resolution, this will not add divisiveness because "The Orthodox community has considered us outside of the realm of 'Torah true' Judaism for a long time."

The pity is that there is truth to this last statement. After decades of trying to meet halachic expectations by requiring circumcision, immersion and ritual observances from converts, the Reform Beth Din, led by Rabbi Gunther Plaut in Toronto, found that the Orthodox rabbinate would still not give its status a scintilla of legitimacy. Still, people like Rabbi Plaut (who is the incoming president of the CCAR) opposed the resolution because they still hope for dialogue and some unified approach to be worked out with the rest of Klal Yisrael, especially the Conservative and Orthodox rabbinate.

The last time this resolution was introduced at the CCAR convention, a majority voted with Plaut to table the matter. The passage of the resolution this time shows that the majority of Reform rabbis have given up on dialogue with Halachists. Reform spiritual leadership's priority is to dialogue with and please its bordering group — the mixed married, etc. — rather than traditional Jews.

Decline in Cooperation
Given the swing to the right in Orthodoxy, this new ruling may be a politically astute judgment as to the group — the Orthodox or the intermarried — is the more promising partner for the future, but the decision

Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapiro:

Chief rabbi urges greater unity in U.S. Orthodoxy

By WALTER RUBY

It is extremely difficult to unite the rabbi here (in New York). The politics of rabbi is so complicated that even politicians would never be able to understand it," said Avraham Shapiro, the Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Israel, at the conclusion of a ten-day visit he made to the United States together with Mordecai Eliyahu, the Rishon Le Zion (chief Sephardic rabbi).

In an exclusive interview with the *Long Island Jewish World*, Shapiro said, "We are very happy to be in the United States together with Mordecai Eliyahu, the Rishon Le Zion (chief Sephardic rabbi)."

Among leading figures in the Orthodox Jewish community who met with the chief rabbi were Rabbi Joseph Dov Solovevitch of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Moshe Steinberg, head of the Beth Din of the Rabbinical Council of America, the Bobover Rebbe and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Shapiro also spent a Sabbath at the home of Julius Berman, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

One top leader who did not meet Shapiro, however, was Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America. According to the Hebrew language newspaper *Hamasaker*, Sherer cancelled a reception he had planned for the chief rabbi after receiving a call from Rabbi Eliezer Schach of Bnei Brak, who is co-chairman of Agudath Israel's Council of Torah Sages. According to unidentified sources, Schach was apparently miffed at a statement by Shapiro in which the chief rabbi indicated a willingness to countenance religious women doing some form of civilian national service (*shevat leumi*) in the place of serving in the Israel Defense Force.

Shapiro also held meetings with Conservative or Reform rabbis or religious leaders. Asked why he did not meet with them, Shapiro replied, "They did not invite us. We met only with the religious leaders who invited us, and our schedule was so full we were unable to meet many rabbinical leaders we had planned to meet."

Sixth Generation Jerusalemite
Elected chief Ashkenazic rabbi in June 1983, Shapiro



Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapiro: "The Jewish community here should create a united secretariat... that will meet to deal with issues of mutual concern."

is a sixth generation Jerusalemite who comes from a long line of rabbis and *doyanim* (judges). Shapiro studied at a yeshiva in Hebron during his youth. He has spent his entire adult career at Mercaz Ha Rav (Torah) where he has taught and held a variety of scholarly positions before becoming the *rosh yeshiva* in 1981. He served on the Bet Din Ha Gadol and on the Council of the Chief Rabbinate before being elected chief rabbi.

Since assuming the position, Shapiro and his Sephardic counterpart, Chief Rabbi Eliyahu, have worked closely together, in sharp contrast with their predecessors, Shlomo Goren and Ovadia Yosef, who often feuded.

In personality and style, Shapiro is strikingly different from his predecessor as Ashkenazic chief rabbi, the imperious and frequently controversial Rabbi Goren. A friendly and unpretentious man with a lively sense of humor, Shapiro transmits a sense of personal warmth and openness, combining the directness and simplicity of the *rebbe* with the mystique aura of a white bearded *zaddik*.

In his remarks to the *Jewish World*, Shapiro expressed traditional opinions on matters like the Reform movement's liberal policies on "Who is a Jew," the place of women in Judaism and the inviolability of the Land of Israel. But he spoke in a tolerant, non-judgmental manner and was quick to point out the humorous side of religious controversies. Questioned about his stand on the *shevat leumi* issue, for example, Shapiro explained that although, "The Torah says that a woman's place is in the home, nowadays only the daughters of rabbis accept that (principle)." The question was somewhat irrelevant, Shapiro suggested, since few women consult rabbis on the question of whether or not to perform *shevat leumi*.

Common Jewish Concerns
Shapiro said that he and Eliyahu decided to make this

visit to New York, the first trip to the U.S. by both men, because, "the Jewish world is one world, and it has become very small. New York is only ten hours from Israel. We have many common concerns, such as problems of kashruth, Jewish divorce, conversions, aliyah and Torah."

Shapiro said, "We wanted to meet and visit with as many rabbinic authorities as possible. Although we were not able to meet with many people whom we had hoped to meet, I believe our trip had very good results. We have established a more active connection (to leaders of the Orthodox community in the U.S.), and that will make it easier to actively address common problems."

Shapiro said that he believes the various factions and organizations in American Orthodoxy should form an "umbrella organization" in order to bring greater unity to the community. He commented, "The Jewish community here should create a united secretariat with representatives of the various organizations that will meet to deal with issues of mutual concern. When God willing, this will happen, it will make it much easier for the Office of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel to work with the rabbinate in the United States."

Shapiro also said that he had talked with leading American rabbis about the idea of setting up a liaison office of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in New York, but that nothing concrete had been decided.

Need for Clear Standards in U.S.
Asked why he was concerned with the affairs of the American Jewish community, Shapiro replied, "There is a large aliyah from the United States. Yet when a Jew makes aliyah from America and comes with a *get* (a Jewish divorce), we do not know exactly how we can trust in the authenticity of that *get*, since there is no organized rabbinate in this country."

"In Israel, there is only one rabbinate — the Chief Rabbinate — and we have special religious courts and rabbinical experts who deal only with the issues of *get*. It is possible to trust their judgment. Here (in the U.S.), things are completely disorganized, and every rabbi is considered an expert. The American rabbinate needs to become more organized in this area, with clear standards."

Shapiro said that he had heard about Gov. Cuomo's recent signing of a "get bill" in New York State, a move which he praised as "very humane and very responsible," and added, "This will help to prevent many personal tragedies." Asked if he saw any difficulties in a secular government becoming involved in religious matters, Shapiro replied, "No, I do not see this as a case of government interference in religious matters, but an effort to deal with an ethical question that occurs when a husband abandons his wife but does not give her a divorce. This is first and foremost an ethical issue."

Objects to Reform Criteria
Shapiro was adamant in his opposition to the criteria for conversions used by the Reform movement and its recent decision to allow a patrilinear definition of Jewishness.

"Any rabbi who feels he has the right to change the Torah to suit his will simply proves that he is not a rabbi at all and that he does not understand the nature of Torah," said Shapiro. "It is a serious ethical problem as well as a legal problem when a small group begins to call people Jews whom the Jewish nation cannot accept as Jews. What if New York State were to give U.S. citizenship to anyone who wanted it (regardless of Federal laws to the contrary)? The Jewish nation has laws, just as the American nation has laws."

When asked if he was taking into account the fact that the majority of American Jews are not Orthodox,

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"Perhaps, in 1996, we should try to find every possible way to reach Jews before they are even further away from any vestige of Jewish tradition ... Can an Orthodox outreach group go into a non-Orthodox synagogue (not during services and not in the sanctuary) to teach Hebrew, and to explain mitzvos? Is there any variation depending on who asks the question and which city we are asking about? How broad is the issue?"

-- Elchonon Oberstein, "Defining the Agenda with Reform: Beyond the Battlefield," *Jewish Observer* 29 (November 1996): 40

"Even we Orthodox can become desensitized ... and subtly slide into the trap of regarding non-halachic movements as, for some Jews, better than nothing."

-- Avi Shafran, "Why 'Jewish Religious Pluralism' Must Matter to Us," *Jewish Observer* 29 (December 1996): 6

"The following thoughts have been percolating in my mind the past few weeks. To some they may seem novel; to some, even questionable. But to me they reflect an unquestionable reality ... We are witness to a new stirring in the hearts of Jews that deserves our attention and reflection. The fact that this expression, this cry, has the official imprint of the Reform movement is all the more astonishing, given its ideological denial of Revelation and the sanctity of the mesora ... Is this the voice of the citadel of kefira? No, it is the voice of Jews lost in the wilderness ... We ma'aminim would be totally remiss in our understanding of Hashgacha were we to treat the publication of this manifesto with cynicism ... The call to mitzvos should inherently lead to the callers and followers, if they are serious seekers, to real teshuva, return. The manifesto is therefore only a beginning, albeit a historic one."

-- Yaakov Perlow, "I am Thus Sharing my Personal Thinking with the Readership of The Jewish Observer," *Jewish Observer* 32 (June 1999): 40

