

Steven M. Cohen: U.S. Reform Jews Accept Patrilineal Descent

Posted At : February 17, 2011 9:15 AM | Posted By : Seth Chalmer

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*A letter to the editor from BJPA Director Steven M. Cohen recently **appeared on the JTA**:*

To the Editor:

Sue Fishkoff correctly reports that Reform leadership around the world has refrained from adopting patrilineal descent. However, Reform people (at least in the U.S.) have widely done so. As early as 1988, reporting on results from an AJC-sponsored survey of American Jews, I reported on the results to this question:

Traditionally, membership in the Jewish faith was transmitted through the mother. Now, Reform rabbis say that someone who identifies as a Jew, but whose mother was a non-Jew and whose father was Jewish, is to be considered Jewish. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis would require such a person to convert. Do you accept the Reform rabbis' definition of a Jew?

About three in five (60 percent) said yes, less than half as many (29 percent) rejected the Reform definition, and the remaining 12 percent were uncertain. Thus, by a two-to-one margin, the sample favored patrilineality.

The entire report can be read at the Berman Jewish Policy Archive @ NYU Wagner.

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