Progressive Jews are authentic Jews

As Moses is about to climb Mount Sinai to receive the Decalogue, the Israelites gather at the base of the mountain, and affirm their commitment to fulfilling God's commandments. I like to think of the Torah as Ancient Israel's mission statement. God and Moses both knew the Children of Israel needed a document that stated the purpose of the people, and pointed them towards their destiny. It had to be a statement broad enough to encompass a variety of interpretations, yet compelling enough to be shared by everyone. The variety of opinions concerning the Torah today testifies to the sheer power and success of this most influential document. The Torah formed the Israelite people: a disparate people with competing agendas, into a unified nation with a shared purpose.

Having a shared purpose defines community. For us Progressive Jews, it is our bond with the Jewish tradition and all Jews, and our understanding that all humans are equal, regardless of race, gender identity, age, disability, national origin, and sexual orientation. Our goal is to make this world a better place — step by step, and I am sure that we share this with most Jews all over the world.

But reality proves that not everyone shares those values with us, and too often these others are fellow Jews. Last week's Jewish Report contains again one of those hurtful examples in which the respect we offer to others, is rudely rejected. Vilifying Progressive Rabbis as "uneducated" and accusing us of destroying the Jewish people is outrageous, because it destroys the idea of Klal Israel, one Jewish people. It uses the same methods anti-Semites use in their approach to de-legitimise Israel as an unworthy state. But as much as the anti-Semites are wrong in making Jews second class humans, the author of this statement in the JR is wrong in his approach to make Progressive Jews second class Jews. With his hate-speech, he is leaving behind the common ground our ancestors once created by accepting the Torah.

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