

Who is a Jew?

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Question

What factors determine the Jewish identity of one's offspring? Assuming that the Jewishness of one or both of the parents has bearing on the status of the children – is one's maternal ancestry the most decisive component, or one's paternal lineage? Whatever the case, what are the explanations provided in Jewish law for these differences.

Machon Shmuel notes:

The following essay is based on the accepted premise that the rationale provided by the Torah for various Mitzvos plays no role in determining the application of the law. *Even if the plainly stated reasoning of the Torah does not appear to be relevant in particular circumstances, the law of the Torah remains immutable.*
