



# Ask The Rabbi...



January 29, 1994 Issue #8

This edition contains:

1. Why Judaism only accepts matrilineal descent.

J. from Pittsburgh writes:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I recently had a conversation with a Reform acquaintance of mine who told me that they accept patrilineal descent in determining Jewishness. I know that Judaism only accepts matrilineal descent, but what are the sources on this matter so that I can be more informed at further discussions?*

Dear J.,

First of all, let's explain what Judaism uses as the source for Matrilineal descent. The Mishna in Kiddushin 66b states that if a child's mother is not Jewish, then the child is "like her," (i.e., not Jewish). This Halacha is codified in the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 8:5, without mention of any dissenting opinion. No source in the Torah teaches otherwise, and this question has never been raised in any classical Halachic text. It is an obvious and accepted axiom given to us at Sinai.

What happened in the Reform movement? For reasons known to them, they decided to "change the rules" regarding patrilineal descent. Since they did not feel bound to the Halacha, or even the literal Written Law, the Torah, they felt justified in doing this. Since Reform Judaism "plays by different rules," it makes it difficult—if not impossible—to debate patrilineal descent with them.

Clearly, we are discussing this question based on purely Halachic considerations, and therefore our discussion is not to be confused with the more political issue of "Who is a Jew?" regarding that person's status in Israel.

Source:

- Mishna, Tractate Kiddushin page 66b

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