

when to bow or which way to turn. Like Jacob, I felt as though I were fooling someone.

Discuss my plans with my parents.

This was a difficult step for me. I knew my parents wouldn't reject my decision, yet I was introducing new ways of being together as a family that had the potential to distance us. Would they feel that I was abandoning them and their traditions? How could I commit to Judaism and treasure and honor my unique

roots and the people I love? This was the moment in my conversion that I was most aware of what Sarah Luria called the pressure to "assimilate rather than preserve my hyphenated self." Fortunately, my parents encouraged me to make my own choices, and I never felt I had to sever ties to our rich past.

Today, when asked my religion, I answer, "I am Jewish. But there's more to my story..."

Living Jewish without Converting

Abigail Auer

Last year, at a dinner with colleagues: one mentions to another during conversation that I am Jewish. Of course she thinks so. I don't work on the Jewish holidays and am forthcoming about our weekend activities. The newest member of the group says "I didn't know that" and here I go again... Which explanation do I launch into? "Well, kind of, but not really. Technically, no. My husband's Jew-

identity for my family, but also detached individually.

I hear stories of women who converted because of external pressures or a certain self-imposed pressure. Many of these women later resent the people or reasons that pushed the decision to convert, or wish they could have arrived at their decision after a longer, more personal consideration. I would rather wait and see if I reach that conclusion through my own intrinsic exploration.

Some women visited the mikvah while pregnant to ensure the Jewish "legitimacy" of their children. I understand some people will judge my children's "Jewishness" but I'm confident God will not be among them. And when they encounter the inevitable pressures of life, I hope my children will learn from my example to follow their instincts and be true to their convictions first.

I've been asked if my initial introduction to the Jewish community played a role in my reluctance to convert. A more welcoming and supportive community would likely increase conversions overall. As they say, you never do get a second chance to make a first impression. And if I do convert, I don't want an asterisk next to my name, always signaling, explaining who I was, who I am. That public asterisk demeans the legitimacy of conversion and the acceptance of a convert into the community.

I appreciate the privacy I've been awarded when it comes to questions about whether I'll convert. It's too hard to explain why I don't feel something. We're all on our own spiritual journeys and conversion is just as intimate as any. For me, if such a path draws me, it will come from my heart and gut, and there will be no need to explain.

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ish; we're raising our children Jewish." Really, how exactly does an unconverted Jewish mother respond?

Clearly, I *am* a Jewish mother. I bake a great challah, play mah jong, and make every attempt to bring my family together for Shabbat dinner. I shuttle my children to tot Shabbat, Sunday school, Temple preschool, JCC intramural sports, and camps. I haven't attended church in over a decade; never feel a desire to do so; and am the first to announce that we are a Jewish family in social contexts. My children hear "tzedakah" and "mitzvah" at least once a week. I am truly devoted to my children's Jewish identity and, personally, love much of Judaism. I will never return to my Catholic roots although many of the images and sounds of my church childhood still give me a warm, homey, familiar comfort.

I just haven't felt a sincere calling to conversion. Perhaps I will someday, but right now I don't feel I am a Jew. I am both affectionately attached to Judaism and a Jewish

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November 2008

Kislev 5769

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