

Questions raised by Quora readers, related to conversion to Judaism, each followed by my response:

Can you convert to Judaism? You can't really choose to be of a chosen people, right?

Yes, you can convert to Judaism. Yes, you can choose to be one of the chosen people. If you really want to pursue this path, you can succeed if you are persistent. You will need to find a rabbi and convince him or her that you are serious, and not be discouraged by those who turn you away. You will need to learn about Judaism and Jewish history because becoming Jewish means taking on a new identity, identifying with the Jewish people, as well as taking on a new religion. Converting to Judaism will take time and commitment, but if you persist you will succeed. Good luck in your journey to Judaism!

I'm "post-Zionist." Can I convert to Judaism?

"But I struggle to understand the relationship between Israel and Jews; to me it's like the distant nostalgia I feel for Ireland as the home of the great-great-grandparents I never met."

Zionism is fundamentally a political ideology. Many Jews don't subscribe to it, so there is no reason why you can't convert to Judaism if you are "post-Zionist."

However, if you want to be Jewish, then you have to not only buy into the religious aspects of Judaism, you also have to buy into the peoplehood aspects of Judaism — you have to adopt both the faith and the family of the Jews. Jewish history has to become your history, and in order for that to happen, you need to come to an understanding of how the land of Israel is intimately connected with being Jewish.

What I would suggest is that you spend some time focusing on this issue, studying Jewish history, Jewish texts, Jewish liturgy, etc. trying to see if you can identify with the yearning that our people have always had for the land of Israel, of the connection that we had with an Israel which we had not seen for many generations, of the promise that one day we would be able to return.

The goal is not to identify with the present state of Israel, but rather to identify with the generations of Jews and their yearning, our yearning, to come back home. If it never progresses beyond the "distant nostalgia" you feel for Ireland, then probably Judaism is not for you.

May God bless you in your attempts to gain this understanding, and may you then succeed in becoming a member of the Jewish people.

If I'm a Conservative Jewish convert, and wanted to attend a Chabad service, are they (including the rabbi) going treat me as if I'm a non-Jew?

Once you are comfortable attending Conservative services and other events, and feel really comfortable in your Jewishness (this may take a year or two), you will have no problem attending any Jewish service.

Someone may ask you if you're Jewish, especially if you don't "look Jewish" (whatever they might mean by that), but you will respond, "of course I'm Jewish" and mean it, and that will be that.

No one should ask you if you're a convert, because it's not their business, and because that question is frowned upon by the tradition since a convert has the same status as a Jew.

Two cautionary notes.

If you or your children get married in an Orthodox setting, you will need to present your background, but that doesn't apply to attendees at a service.

If you are called up for an aliyah, then you will be asked to present your Hebrew name. Since most converts are assigned the name "son/daughter of Abraham and Sarah", that's sort of a give-away that you're a convert. Indeed, some congregations may mendaciously offer strangers an aliyah in order to find out if they are converts.

In that case, you have three options. 1. You can decline the aliyah, but you may need to explain why you are rejecting the offer of this honor — and declining to honor God, Torah, and Shabbat — to which you can respond that this is your first time here and you just want to be an observer — of course that excuse only works once. 2. You can accept the aliyah, and the consequences (if any) of your outing yourself; if you feel that the congregation is welcoming, then you make this choice. 3. Or you can give a name that does not reveal your status — in which case you should choose that name carefully and practice saying it beforehand. God will overlook this prevarication, since it's more important that you be able to participate comfortably in a service.

Indeed, if you're thinking of converting I would encourage you to resist taking on the name traditionally insisted upon by rabbis so that you can more easily "pass" as a Jew, since you are a Jew. If you have already converted and experience anxiety about revealing your Hebrew name, I would encourage you to consider changing your Hebrew name.

Perhaps some Quora converts to Judaism could share their thoughts and experiences on this question (anonymously if you prefer).

Is it possible to get help to be Jewish?

You can get in touch with any rabbi and discuss with him or her how you can convert to Judaism. The rabbi does not need to be Orthodox. Either the rabbi will work with you directly, or will refer you to someone else.

Converting to Judaism involves a big commitment since you are not only adopting a new religion but are also becoming part of the Jewish people. As a result, whoever you speak to will want to make sure that you are sincere and will expect you to learn what you're committing yourself to; this may indeed take a year or two.

Since you will be working with this rabbi for quite a while, you should talk to several rabbis and find one with whom you feel compatible.

If you decide to embark on a journey to Judaism, may your travels be successful and may you arrive at the destination that you are seeking, finding many blessings along the way.

How does one become wholly Jewish?

How do you become a Jew?

Let me begin my response by encouraging you to learn about Judaism and, if you decide that Judaism is right for you, to persist in trying to adopt the Jewish faith and to become part of the Jewish people.

If you want to become a Jew, find a rabbi who will guide you in the process. The rabbi does not have to be Orthodox, as many Quora respondents would have you believe, but the rabbi does have to be someone you can trust to be a person who takes you and your questions seriously.

The process to become a Jew will take some time, and you will often ask yourself whether you really want to make this commitment, but if you are determined and persistent, you will succeed in becoming a Jew.

Many Quora respondents will tell you that there is no need for you to convert to Judaism, that all that Judaism expects of non-Jews is that they live moral lives, that if they follow the seven Noahide laws, that will get them into heaven. And that is all true.

But it may all be irrelevant to you. That's because your concern is finding a meaningful life right here on earth, and you are missing that, either because you have no faith or your faith is not helping you achieve that goal.

Don't listen to those who would discourage you, who tell you that you don't need to become a Jew, because it may be that you do need to join the Jewish people, that the Jew inside you needs to be acknowledged.

If you do decide to follow a path to Judaism, may you have the courage and persistence to take this spiritual journey, and may your travels be crowned with success. I welcome you to Judaism!

How do Noahidists try to popularize the noahide laws among the Gentile population? Have they met any degree of success?

As far as I know, there is no religion called Noahidism, nor any followers of it called Noahidists. The Noahide laws are a theoretical set of rules in Judaism that all human beings have to obey in order to maintain functioning and stable societies. In general, the seven Noahide laws make sense but, as far as I know, no one has promoted these laws, or tried to organize a religion based on these laws. Indeed, any religion incorporates most, or all of these laws within its own standards. From a Jewish perspective, any person who observes these laws is living an ethical life, as is any society that incorporates these laws.

What is a gentile observing all Seven Laws of Noah called? Can he/she identify their religion as Judaism?

The Noahide laws are what everyone should follow if they want to be part of a civil society. They aren't intended to establish a religion, but the people who follow them can reasonably be referred to as civilized human beings.

Are there any pre-Talmudic recordings of the teachings of the 7 Noahide Laws?

It is true that many years ago, the sages formulated seven rules which all civilized people should observe. What do you call people who observe these laws, some one asked on Quora a year or so ago. My answer is that a person who observes these laws can be called a civilized person.

There was never the idea that these laws formed the basis of a religion, that people who observed these laws would be called "Noachides." People and societies that observed these laws were simply "civilized."

To the best of my knowledge, it is only in recent years that the argument has been made to possible converts that they don't need to become Jewish because being a Noahide is sufficient, that they get no benefit from becoming Jewish.

This is just a newly minted method for discouraging converts, so if you encounter someone who tells you this, run away from them as fast as you can, and find someone else with whom you can discuss conversion.

In past centuries, conversion to Judaism was prohibited, and the punishment in both Christian and Moslem societies was death to both the convert and to his mentor. So to protect ourselves we Jews internalized the perspective that we discourage conversion, and the remnants of that self-protection still exist.

Every practicing Jew will tell you that there is something special about being Jewish, so that if that is where your journey is taking you, don't be deterred by such negative remarks.

You may find that Judaism is not what you want, that some other faith community is more special to you, but don't be deterred by the babble that being a Noachide is sufficient for you because you were not born a Jew.

How do I tell my friend, who happens to be Jewish, that I have for a long time, even before I met them, been thinking about converting to Judaism without sounding weird?

That doesn't sound weird at all! Go ahead and tell them. And, of course, seek out a rabbi who can help you figure out if this is what you really want and, if it is, how you can convert. If you and the rabbi don't hit it off, don't give up. Just find a different rabbi. If you really want to convert to Judaism, and you are persistent, then you will achieve your goal. Good luck.

As a Muslim, how would I go about converting to Judaism (I live in Australia)?

You should also consider non-Orthodox ways of converting to Judaism. The process is much the same, except that you would seek a non-Orthodox rabbi who could serve as your mentor. The process will take several years and will require dedication on your part, for in addition to changing your religion, you will also be joining a people.

Orthodox responders would prefer that you remain a non-Jew rather than to become a non-Orthodox Jew, but non-Orthodox Jews are much more welcoming of converts, even those who choose to become Orthodox.

No matter how you become Jewish, there will always be some more extreme Orthodox Jews for whom your conversion is not Orthodox enough.

So examine different paths to Judaism and choose the one that is right for you. May God be with you at every step of your journey.

How come Judaism doesn't proselytize?

Judaism doesn't proselytize because for 2000 years it was not allowed to proselytize! Until recently Jews have always lived under Christian or Moslem rule, where at best they were tolerated.

If they tried to convert someone to Judaism, they would be executed and, if they were successful, the new Jewish convert would be executed as well.

As a self-defense mechanism, Judaism instituted a policy against proselytizing and even against conversion. Because of these old fears, many people who were interested in exploring the possibility of becoming Jewish were turned away.

However, in the United States and in many European countries, it is possible to convert to Judaism without any risk.

If you are interested in exploring Judaism, seek out a rabbi with whom you can discuss your interest and can help you find an appropriate path. If the rabbi you speak to is not helpful, find another rabbi. Don't just give up. There are lots of different rabbis around. I wish you luck in your search.

If you decide to commit yourself to some form of Jewish beliefs and practices, and wish to become part of the Jewish people, I for one would welcome you, as would many other Jews.

Do Jewish people accept those who convert to their religion from Christianity?

The simple answer is "Yes". If you want to become a Jew, you will have to accept the Jewish religion and join the Jewish people, but you first have to learn about and then commit yourself to both the religion and the people. That process takes some time, and

must be done under the guidance of an experienced rabbi. If you are sincere in your desire to convert to Judaism, you will be successful. I wish you good luck and many blessings in your journey.

How do aliens fit into Judaism?

In order to convert to Judaism, an alien must first become human. But if the alien's mother is Jewish then, from a traditional perspective, the alien is automatically Jewish. This doesn't apply however to species of aliens where there are more than two biological parents. That situation has not yet been resolved, but I believe that rabbinical scholars are working on this important question. For example, if three parents are needed to produce offspring, then it seems clear that for the alien to be considered a Jew by birth, at least two of the parents should be Jewish, but some think it should be all three since it may be hard to pinpoint which one of the three parents could actually be called the "mother." The more liberal branches of Judaism seem to agree that two out of three is enough.

When converting to Judaism, would you convert to an Orthodox Bet Din if you intend to only live in the Conservative sect of Judaism?

The only reasons for having an Orthodox conversion are that (a) you intend to live as an Orthodox Jew or that (b) you want your conversion to be recognized by the Orthodox courts. The latter is only relevant if you live in Israel or are considering living there, where the Orthodox courts have control over family issues, including marriage. Whatever you decide to do, the more you learn about Judaism the better, and you shouldn't consider your conversion as the conclusion of your journey to Judaism.

Why do rabbis turn away a request for conversion three times?

It is correct that the person conducting the conversion has to be convinced of the commitment of the potential convert and the genuineness of their desire to convert to Judaism, that is, both to accept the Jewish religion and to become a member of the Jewish people.

However, it is only Orthodox rabbis who insist that a convert commit in advance to keeping all the laws in the Torah and the Talmud, as well as those laws promulgated by the rabbis of subsequent generations. There are in fact many ways of accepting and practicing Judaism, not just the Orthodox way.

If you are interested in becoming a Jew, if you are looking for a spiritual home and have not yet found one, seek out an experienced rabbi who can lead you on a path to

Judaism, and whose guidance you respect. You may have to interview several rabbis before you find the right one for you.

Your journey to Judaism will likely take a few years, and when you are ready, you will become a Jew. Good luck and many blessings on this journey.

My 23 and me test revealed Ashkenazi Jewish heritage and I am thinking of exploring Judaism, a religion I know little about since I was raised in an orphanage. Where should I start?

I wouldn't start by asking only people who would promote their own point of view, such as Chabad and Aish. There are many perspectives on Judaism and what it might mean to a person, and you should explore them all, or at least a number of them, including those mentioned above. You can find rabbis and teachers in your area and ask them if you could have a conversation with them. Some will be friendly and helpful and, unfortunately, some will not. Ask them what you should read and whether they would be willing to answer your questions, ask them if they have conversion classes and whether they would permit you to participate even if you have not yet decided whether Judaism is for you. Spend some time exploring and learning and asking questions and thinking about what makes sense to you. Then, if you decide that you are really interested in reclaiming your Jewish heritage, find one or two people and ask them if they are willing to guide you on the path back to Judaism. May your journey be successful!