

“When Do You Become Real?”

Questions of a Convert to Judaism

I guess the over-arching issue for me (several years into my conversion) would be "When Do You Become "Real"?"

Do you remember the children's story "The Velveteen Rabbit" when at some point the rabbit transcends mere stuffed-animal status and becomes "real"?

Can and do converts ever not just "feel" real but actually "become" real? What role do born Jews play in keeping converts from "becoming" real and in helping them become real? What role do converts play in redefining what "real" is?

From this stems questions such as:

1. If I am considered a Jew - and as much of a Jew as a person born a Jew - once I go through a formal conversion - why don't some people in the Jewish community accept that? Why do I feel separate and not as valuable sometimes?
2. Do I want to "come-out" as a convert and to whom and under what circumstances or do I want to try to "pass" as a born Jew? Why does it make me so upset when people "out" me to others when I haven't given them permission?
3. Why is it when some people find out I'm a convert they treat me differently (or I feel treated differently?) Suddenly the focus is on my Christian background or they stop sharing "insider" stories about their Ashkenazi traditions or somehow a distance is formed and I feel less valuable.
4. Do I have my own prejudices against converts? That is, do I value or think more highly of people who are born Jews?
5. What does it mean to turn your back on your entire life history (45 years in my case) and never mention your childhood memories if they involve anything remotely Christian to your Jewish friends? What takes the place of the Jewish childhood and memories you never had?
6. Is it ok to get misty eyed when you hear, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"? In the excitement of converting you see only the positive aspects of your choice and deny there is any loss. Why does it feel "bad" when memories of Christian holidays from your childhood pop in your mind?

They are the same memories (good food, being with family, gifts exchanged) that Jews have about their childhood Passover or Hanukkah times.