

## ***Choosing a New Religion***

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ONFAITH.COM

Published: JUNE 5, 2008

When a person gets dressed in the morning and they don't like their shirt, they change it. If their shoes aren't comfortable, they put in a new pair. And according to a recent survey by the PEW Forum on Religious and Public Life, if a person doesn't like their religion, they just swap it out for a new one.

The results of the survey, released last March, point to a constant shifting in the religious make-up of America. Among the findings most widely reported, 44% of those surveyed said they are no longer tied to the faith of their childhood. But how easy is it really to take on a new religion?

Earlier this month in Israel, a controversy broke out regarding the conversion of thousands of Jews over the last two decades. The Supreme Rabbinic Court found that a woman who had converted fourteen years ago had not only abandoned strict, orthodox ritual law, but at the time of her conversion she never even intended to be so observant. This ruling meant her conversion was null and void, her marriage was invalid, and her kids were not Jewish. But it doesn't end there – the target of the court ruling was the rabbi who had performed the woman's conversion. The court essentially said that all the conversions he performed were now under suspicion. That's thousands of people, their families and their children who might be told they are illegitimate Jews. What a way to make people feel welcome!

With this episode as a backdrop, a question remains – who is Jewish? Or more broadly, what are the standards if someone says I want to be a Catholic, a Buddhist, or a Jew? While not every religion has a supreme court, the underlying question remains the same. Does a person's faith have to be proven through a lifelong adherence to strict religious law, or is their faith shown by the fact that they are converting in the first place? When a person accepts Jesus as their personal savior, there is no court who says it was genuine – it's proven through a lifetime of actions.

On Sunday night, Jews around the globe will celebrate the holiday Shavuot. It's a spring holiday that celebrates the first harvest, the ripening of the first fruits, and most importantly, the giving of the Torah. On this holiday, it is customary to read the biblical

story of Ruth, the first official Jewish convert. But Ruth didn't have to be sanctioned by a committee. She simply declared to her mother-in-law: "Your people will be my people; your God, my God." And that was enough.

It shouldn't matter if a conversion ceremony was elaborate, or a simple declaration followed by righteous deeds. Religions should be open to everyone searching for meaning, and Shavuot is a good time for Jews to recognize and appreciate all those who have chosen to become part of the community.

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