

Choosing Teams

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I was inspired to speak at this year's Open Mic by Arnie Kanter, after he asked me recently, "So what's it gonna be, Marie, the Red Sox or the Cubs? (Put on Red Sox cap.)"

I said, "The Cubs." A shocking conversion for a lifelong Red Sox fan, who rejoiced when the Red Sox won the World Series in 2004, after an 86-year wait. This was manna from heaven for a Red Sox fan.

So why did I tell Arnie I was a Cubs fan?

This got me thinking about my other important conversion journey, from Catholicism to Judaism.

We're usually born into a religious tradition, just as we're usually born into a family with a sports team tradition. That doesn't always mean we stay in these traditions. I traded the Sacred Temple of Boston's Fenway Park for the Holy Confines of Wrigley Field. And I left the Catholic Church to join the Jewish people.

I've learned there are two things that make a conversion journey possible:

You don't have to completely reject your past; and

Your next step is a better fit for you.

Take baseball—I still have feelings for the Red Sox. I check how they are doing every day, and I feel happy when they win.

But I live here now, a decade longer than I lived in Boston. It was easy to gradually transfer my feelings from the Red Sox--sacrificed every year to the Curse of the Bambino, to the Cubs, the annual Burnt Offering to the Curse of the Billy Goat.

When Theo Epstein (a smart Jewish boy from Brookline, Massachusetts) moved his management skills from the Red Sox to the Cubs in 2011, I took that as a sign. If there were a mikveh for baseball conversion, I would have jumped in. This conversion does have a symbolic act, however. (Replace Red Sox cap with Cubs cap.) And then last year the Cubs did it! After a 108-year wait.

With religious choice, I see the same pattern of taking some of my past with me into something that is a better fit. There are many connections between Catholicism and

its parent religion, Judaism. Just to name a few--the Ten Commandments, a focus on caring for the underdog, and, of course--Jesus was a Jew.

I grew up loving Catholic rituals. Judaism has them and they are much more accessible to ordinary people. As a Catholic, I could never be an altar girl, and being a priest was out of the question.

Now, I can lead a worship service, chant from the Torah, and present a discussion of the parsha of the week.

What attracted me the most to Judaism is its emphasis on sanctifying the moment. For example, there are blessings for many things, both special and mundane. This is more appealing than Catholicism's emphasis on suffering and on feeling sorry all of the time.

As a Jew, I am asked to spend 10 days out of the year working on self-improvement. And I do that in the warm embrace of a community that has accepted me fully.

I received an unexpected vote of affirmation about my choice to become a Jew at the mikveh on Touhy Avenue in 1978. I met Rabbi Shapiro, a member of the Bet Din. We'd both arrived early. He asked, "So you want to be Jewish?" I almost blurted, "Yes, Father!" but caught myself in time and said, "Yes, I do." Rabbi Shapiro asked me what I had been before and I told him a Catholic. He smiled, and said, "Ah, Catholics. They make our best Jews."

I knew I'd found my new team.