

...and so it begins

I have been trying to be a Jew for a real long time. Maybe forever. One of my favorite movies is Yentl for crying out loud. It always has been. I'm not sure if it was the sexual frustration and confusion that was speaking to me as a kid, or the desperate need to light candles, pray and learn. Probably all of the above. Maybe you're reading this thinking that you agree, that you've been trying to be a Jew your whole life too so what's the big deal. The big deal is that I grew up in rural Arkansas as a Southern Baptist.

There. Do I have your attention now?

That's right. I was a Southern Baptist and now I'm converting. I'm not sure I know how to explain why I want to convert other than I feel it in my gut. I know it's what I'm supposed to do. I've heard it said that some people are born with a "Jewish Soul" and that they never feel fully satisfied and whole until they go through a conversion. Maybe that's a little out there. I don't know if I buy it myself. What I can tell you is that I've got a Jewish Soul and it's time that it came out of the closet. That's really all I want to say about it.

For the last few years I've taken classes, talked to rabbis, consulted friends, prayed, worried, wondered. This is not an easy process, friends! I've been on a path to conversion for a long while. I began an official process to convert back in October. Then? I quit my job and started waiting tables, which didn't really work well for attending Temple services. Friday and Saturday nights are big money nights in restaurants. You have to work weekend night to make money.

I've gradually become more and more frustrated with my restaurant schedule. I don't want to work every weekend. Not only do I want to go to temple on Friday nights, I also want

to see my husband and our friends. I want a life, y'all. I deserve a life with a normal schedule. So? Last week I talked to my manager and changed my work availability. I no longer work on Friday nights. Friday nights are for Temple. It's time to focus on more important things than selling food to strangers.

As I begin to focus more on this process, I want to share and I guess sorta journal what happens. I think I'm technically supposed to keep a written journal but I like the idea that somebody, somewhere could be thinking and feeling the same things that I am and that reading what I'm going through might help them. When Whitney and I started this blog I had this whole journaling my conversion for the blog idea in the back of my mind. JewHungry has been such a wonderful outlet for me. It's kept me feeling creative and kept us fed. It has also been one of the things that has connected me to my Jewishness when I haven't had time for temple or meetings with my Rabbi. I suppose it's time to nourish my little Jewish Soul. I hope you'll enjoy and/or get something out of what I write about each week...

Tonight was my first Shabbat. I went to services with my in-laws. I was a little nervous. Mostly though? I was excited to get started. I've put this off long enough. What I can say about tonight is that it was both awesome and awful. Isn't everything?

I've been to services before. I know what to expect. I also realize that it was my first temple experience of many to come, so I need to be patient. BUT? The Hebrew is killing me at the moment! I don't know the tune of the songs. I obviously don't read Hebrew so that's a problem. Sure there's the transliteration but even that gets difficult. Is that a long A or a short A? It's very hard. I'm a smart literate guy. Not being able to read and understand is one of the most frustrating and challenging aspects of services at the moment. I don't like not knowing.

That being said? When I got frustrated I read the English translation to myself. Near the end of services I thought...screw it. I'm singing some really off-key and rocky Hebrew. Who cares. G-d's just happy that I showed up. There were maybe 20 people there. What am I worried about?

That wasn't so negative, was it?

I can tell you that the experience was also very emotional. I went with Andy's parents. It was just the three of us. I sat in the middle. They pointed me in the right direction when I looked lost. They guided me. They held my hand. It was really extraordinarily beautiful. I felt safe.

Though, I have to admit to you that I sat there thinking to myself...Alright. I'm crazy. There's all of this Hebrew. There are all of these songs. I feel illiterate, I feel lost. What am I going to gain from this experience. I tried to be quiet and listen for a little whisper from G-d. It's always in the whispers. I believe that if you're quiet and still enough, you can hear the message. Your phone will ring.

You guys. My phone rang.

As I'm dragging myself through negative-town, hating the Hebrew and questioning my sanity, we read something in English. I wish I had the prayer-book with me right now so I could quote it exactly as it appeared. It was something along the lines of...we're wondering in the desert, we can't make it alone, we have to hold hands and walk through the trials together...we'll make it through the desert. Maybe it sounds corny and cheesy. I had to bite my lip. Tears came to my eyes.

First off? How many people are lucky enough to love their in-laws? LOVE. I love them. I was standing between my two biggest cheerleaders. If there were ever a Team Jeremy? These two would be Co-Presidents of its fan club. I was surrounded by love. They gave up their Friday night to come

to temple with me. ME. And not even just for tonight. We now have a long-standing temple date. I'm on their calendar. There they were standing next to me, waiting to hold my hands and walk me through the desert. Maybe that desert is a conversion, maybe it's Hebrew, maybe it's any number of things. All I know is that passage that we read reminded me how lucky I am. Things have been complicated for me lately. I don't want to throw a pity party for myself, let's just say I'm in the desert and it's getting hot, y'all. The reading reminded me to be grateful, to be thankful.

Wherever you are. Whatever your desert is? I hope you have a Steve and Sherry to hold your hand and walk you through it.

xo