

Is Jewish Birth the Basic Qualification for Being a Jew?

No. Being born a Jew is doubtless the most natural condition which results in one's being a Jew, but it is not the most basic qualification. Many persons born Jewish have become renegades, and have often evinced the greatest hostility to Judaism. On the other hand, many converts to Judaism have been distinguished by their understanding of Judaism and their devotion to it.

The basic qualifications for being a Jew are

- 1) The identification of oneself as a Jew, i.e. the acceptance of the Jewish People with its past, its present and its future as one's own People;
- 2) Belief in the spiritual values of the Jewish tradition, i.e. the conviction that the Jewish spiritual heritage affords inspiration for living, and constitutes a worthy contribution to the totality of man's spiritual wisdom; and
- 3) Participation in Jewish life, i.e. sharing in those activities which help to insure the perpetuation of the Jewish People and the advancement of its civilization.

These qualifications, and not Jewish parentage, have been stressed in the bulk of our tradition. Jews were enjoined to qualify themselves for the study of Torah (i.e. Judaism) "because it is not subject to inheritance." Converts, on the other hand, were told to address God in worship, in the same terms as born Jews as "Our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob," because converts are regarded as authentic Jews (*na-asu ikkar k'yisrael*).

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