



## Since Sinai: A Convert's Path to Judaism

**Shannon Gonyou**

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Shannon Gonyou announced her desire to convert to Judaism on the way to a Christmas celebration: this is the first appealing revelation of her thoughtful memoir, *Since Sinai*.

Raised Catholic because of a promise made to her birth mother, Gonyou puzzled her parents by taking to the faith in a way they never did. By high school, it was she who insisted on attending Mass; she who championed the Church's political positions, including anti-choice ones; and she who planned out activities like mission trips. But something was missing in this for her.

In college, Gonyou remained a devout Christian, but also found herself drawn to Jewish classmates whose traditions she admired. Something in her, she later realized, was calling out to their beliefs, which spoke to her more than did the staunch positions that she upheld aloud, but sometimes had trouble justifying internally. Her memoir walks through her gradual process of self-acceptance, which required her to rethink her beliefs—including about herself. Eventually, a kosher, liberal Jew stood where a conservative Catholic once had.

To detractors, Gonyou notes that “changing one's mind is a sign of strength, not flimsiness.” She remarks on variations between religious approaches: her childhood faith required acquiescence; her adopted tradition celebrates floods of questions. Catholicism had strong ideas about sex and women's roles; Judaism allowed her to be more authentic in both respects. And in time with her own excited conversion process, the book celebrates that her husband found a home in Jewish spaces, too—a reality that left two once-Catholics raising Jewish children, without anyone around them blinking.

“I wanted to be Jewish because the idea came to me and refused to leave,” Gonyou says. It's one of many musing, sympathetic moments in *Since Sinai*, a conversion story that stands to strike a chord with many.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2022)

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