

Are Converts Full Jews?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Is a convert fully Jewish? Here (abbreviated) is the classic letter of Jewish law's greatest authority, the Rambam (Maimonides) to Obadiah the Proselyte, in the 12th century:

I received the question of the master Obadiah, the wise and learned proselyte... You ask me if you, too, are allowed to say in the blessings and prayers you offer alone or in the congregation: "*Our God*" and "*God of our fathers*," "You who have sanctified *us* through Your commandments," "You who have separated *us*," "You who have chosen *us*," "You who have inherited *us*," "You who have brought *us* out of the land of Egypt," "You who have worked miracles to *our fathers*," and more of this kind.

Yes, you may say all this in the prescribed order and not change it in the least. In the same way as every Jew by birth says his blessing and prayer, you, too, shall bless and pray alike, whether you are alone or pray in the congregation... Ever since (Abraham) whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father, peace be with him. These men are Abraham's household, and he it is who converted them to righteousness.

Do not consider your origin as inferior. While we are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you derive from Him through whose word the world was created. As is said by Isaiah: "One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob" (Is. 44:5).