

Jenny knew Alan was Jewish even before she was formally introduced to him by one of her sorority sisters. She had had a crush on him for over a year now and wasn't about to pass up this opportunity. She was very interested in this promising man who was going to go to Medical School in the fall and was always very popular. It wasn't bad that he was great looking also.. Of course they hit it off and decided to work to maintain the relationship despite the fact that he would be starting Med School at the same time she would be completing her last year of college. They were so in love and wanted it to work out. As they dated and got more serious, the issues of their different religious backgrounds didn't come up too much. He thought it was neat to go to her house for Christmas. All the festive lights and decorations the foods and smells and her Mom's great praline chocolates.

Jenny loved his family too, and their Jewish traditions. She liked the simplicity of Chanukah and she discovered how delicious the latkes (potato pancakes) were. The differences were interesting, but in the flush of their romance, neither confusing nor troublesome. Each retained their own practices and identities during these dating years. Through comments of friends and family, they knew they were going to face challenges in their marriage: but did they really? A serious contemplation of their differences might be a red flag for those watching for it, and what makes for interesting times during dating doesn't necessarily make for a good situation in a marriage. But denial is a problem for everyone, isn't it. And especially when you're in love, there are things you just don't want to look at.

It was after the children were born that the fights suddenly got overwhelming. Alan and Jenny even thought at this point they needed to seek professional help because the children were suffering due to their parents' unresolved conflicts. Neither of them were religiously anchored before they got married but as the children grew older and started asking "Mommy what religion am I," they both realized they would need to have a better solution than a shrug of the shoulders. Letting the children decide for themselves wasn't the responsible thing to do. The kids looked to them for answers, and rightly so.

They didn't know what to tell them. And telling the children they were "both" was confusing, not the kind of answer a child can understand or share with friends. Of course both Alan and Jenny felt much more attached to their own beliefs and backgrounds than they realized before they got married and had children.

While you are happily dating and the love feels very strong, it is hard to imagine that religion will become a major issue later on, but the issue usually looms large after the children are born, an issue that won't just go away. Parents want their children to share the formative experiences they themselves had, and no parent wants to be a stranger to his or her children, or for the children to feel remote from their parents' childhood.

Even though it can be uncomfortable, or even a deal breaker, familial religious identity is a crucial issue to be discussed before marriage occurs. Studies show it is better to have a household made up of one religion rather than both, and letting the children pick and choose is a cop-out that more often than not leaves them feeling cheated and unsupported. Many Jews

and Gentiles find that Messianic Judaism provides a singular focus allowing both marriage partners to honestly retain their individual backgrounds while committing to a common path.