

**PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF TONY, A NON-JEWISH FATHER MARRIED TO LINDA,
A JEWISH WOMAN. THEY HAVE TWO CHILDREN.**

Do Jewish clergy really get the value of somebody not having been reared a Jew? It's like an expectation. You are supposed to get with the program and connect to this experience. There is not enough of an attempt to find a way for people who weren't reared that way but are involved to feel connected around what is the essence. Always welcoming but ... chant the way we're chanting and transliterate and are in the space in the same way with the same enthusiasm. I can't have the same enthusiasm being in the sukkah, it just doesn't resonate.

Some clergy don't get it. They don't get the deep core in the essence of what it means to be reared in another religion that can be useful and, in fact, paradoxically, is the very thing that allowed you to rear your children in another religion ... knowing what it feels like to really be an other ... what it feels like to really have to make a space to connect to something in your own way.

It was a process that started before we got married, obviously, before we had children, and the process for me and for my wife, who is obviously the one who is Jewish, was different. My process was an agreement that I understood this was important for her for a number of reasons. So I was consciously agreeing to it but emotionally, it was a long process.

People that I couldn't have imagined at the beginning of this process have impacted me. For instance, my undergraduate college, I went to a Jesuit college.... So I think that that prepared me in some way for this questioning. And when I showed up at college I had already been Catholic by Baptism and you know my childhood, alter boy, choir boy, the whole deal. ... in my teenage years stopped going to church because I didn't really believe that I believed anymore. And Jesuits helped me to think that that was ok. The person who was like a mentor to me at my first job was Jewish and Russian and spoke Yiddish and Russian and was like a father figure. And I was already dating my wife and there was something about the synergy of his input that I think also kind of prepared me to feel comfortable that I wasn't so much of an other. So those are some people that come to my mind ...

It took a number of years for me to connect to it, and it wasn't really until my kids were in elementary school where I felt my connection to the process of their being reared as Jews. One of the things, getting back to their education, my education, not only their education as Jews, but as particular kinds of Jews because they're Jews who have a father who is not Jewish. When both of your parents are Jewish, there aren't the same kinds of questions! In a funny way some of my kids' friends who have two parents who are Jewish, especially if one is not very religious, they flounder.

I'm a recovering Catholic. My wife is a Reform Jew. Our children see themselves as Reform Jews with questions in their minds. Our family is Reform Jewish and Italian, very distinctively and not at odds with each other.

Most people who are Jews would say that, well you can't say that about yourself, you didn't convert, you're not. But I think of myself as being part Jewish, how could I not? These children who are a piece of me are Jewish, there's no question in my mind.

What I think has been absent for some people is this acknowledgement that you're really not of this world, but there are things about your experience that will make it identifiable.

Like preparing for Shabbat, it takes the place for me when I grew up my family would go to church in the morning on Sunday. Then we would have a big meal in the middle of the day on Sunday like a lot of Italians do. We would come home from Mass, and there would be this big meal in the middle of the day on Sunday, the Sabbath. So it's another version.

My mother was 97 when she died recently. We were at the cemetery, and my daughter who's been questioning her religion turns to my wife and I at the end of the service and she says, "This isn't right. We're not doing what we're supposed to be doing here." We both explained it's different. So she said, "Let's put a stone for Grandma." And the headstone is there because with my father's passing, it's a double wide. We go over and put the stone. Then our daughter says to us that we have to say Kaddish. Here is this girl who says, "I don't believe in God", but she knew that she had to do this. I give most of the credit to my wife for having gotten her to that moment. But what an interesting thing to negotiate those attachments and the connection to this grandmother who is this super Catholic woman, and this religion in that moment, to see that it was possible to exist in that space in both ways, these are transformative moments, as is Shabbat.

We always do Shabbat at home. We always had holidays at our house and we always had a full group of people at our house, we still do, every year.

The time is important. It never occurred to me before, but there is something about welcoming the bride on Shabbat, turning, and there is this moment; it's another one of those experiences that encapsulate a lot of potential for transformation in people, you can really help them to move with it.