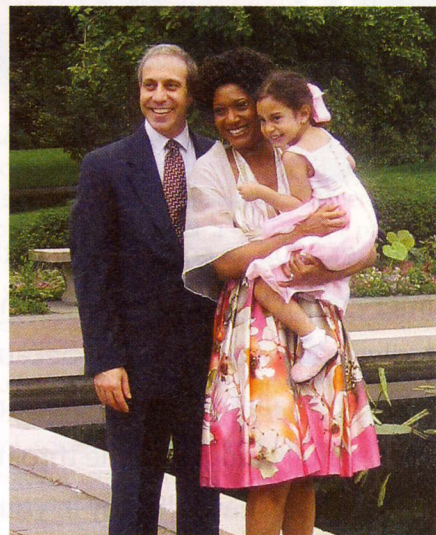




THE TIE THAT BINDS Timberly's parents took her to Israel as a teenager. Now Raina, who is learning to speak Hebrew at her Jewish day school, is heading to Israel to celebrate her cousin's Bar Mitzvah this summer.



Faith, Race & Family

Bridging divisions is a way of life for the host of the award-winning Hallmark program *New Morning* and the mom of a biracial daughter who's being raised Jewish.

Despite coming from different backgrounds—she's African-American and the daughter of Christian missionaries, he's Caucasian and Jewish—Timberly Whitfield felt an immediate spark upon meeting her now husband, a former police lieutenant in New York City. That was almost 10 years ago. Today, they have a 5-year-old daughter named Raina. Although Whitfield didn't convert to Judaism, the couple made the decision to raise their daughter Jewish.

"Judaism and Christianity share the Old Testament," says Whitfield. "But what's important to me is that my daughter has a connection to faith."

Whitfield, the host of the Hallmark Channel's spiritually uplifting series *New Morning*, has a unique perspective on handling issues of faith, race, and parenthood.

As a child, she went to school with kids of different ethnicities while living in Tanzania and Nigeria and has since visited more than 20 countries. Her strategies for navigating the waters of race and religion at home:

■ APPLY TEACHINGS TO REAL LIFE

Raina is learning about the virtues of forgiveness, compassion, and sharing at her Jewish day school, and Whitfield makes sure Raina applies those lessons to her daily life. "We'll go into her room and pack up a box of toys and clothes and send it to Africa," she says. "Sometimes the kids there will send pictures back holding the toys or wearing the clothes. Raina loves it. It's so important that she's giving back."

■ ADDRESS ISSUES EARLY

When Raina was 4, she told her mother that she didn't like her curly, dark hair. Instead, she wanted straight, blond hair like her friend. Whitfield immediately took action.

"It's easy to say, 'Oh, she'll grow to love her hair,' but you never know what's going to stick with them for the rest of their lives." Whitfield bought African-American and biracial dolls (by Real Kidz) so Raina wouldn't have only her blond Barbie to play with. She also used the dolls to start a dialogue with her child. "We made up stories with the dolls that reflected Raina's situation—I think it helped because she hasn't said anything about wanting straight hair in a while."

■ GIVE YOUR CHILD A SAY

Whitfield wants her daughter to enjoy her spiritual practice, so she doesn't push the issue if Raina doesn't want to pray. "We give her the option because as soon as you make something mandatory kids tend to become resistant to it," says Whitfield. "You want it to be a good experience for them." 

 For more insights and strategies from interesting parents, go to child.com.