

Dovetail

A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families



Choosing a Single Faith for Your Household: Couples Who Make this Choice

The premise of Dovetail's existence is that interfaith families who are informed and connected to other interfaith families can make the best decisions about their spiritual and religious lives. We work hard to provide a wide variety of ideas, approaches and opinions. Our belief is that no one approach is right for every family, that a couple who works hard to communicate honestly and search deeply will come up with its own right answers. Often, since resources for those who choose to include both religions fully in their common life are scarce, Dovetail profiles families, groups and programs geared toward such choices. In this issue, however, we are looking at another group: couples who have chosen to rear their children within a single faith.

This decision is not taken lightly by such families. As you'll see in the following articles, it is often based on years of search and struggle. The partner whose religious tradition is not chosen as the family faith must come to terms with the personal loss this decision represents and must give up any dreams of sharing a religious identity with the children. He or she must face the loneliness of being the only family member to practice that faith, of attending church or synagogue alone (or with a spouse and kids who are not members), and struggling to explain this faith to the children without encouraging them to believe in it. The partner whose religious tradition is chosen must accept the tremendous responsibility of being the primary religious teacher and activity planner for the family. Of course, in

practice both parents are involved to some degree in the religious education of their children. And sometimes the parent whose religion is not the family's ends up taking on the task of educating children about a faith that is foreign to him or her.

Until recently, the decision to choose a single household faith has been supported almost universally by psychological studies and religious leaders. Alternative choices—such as raising children with full exposure to and identification with both faiths—have been roundly criticized. In the abstract of a 1991 article in *Psychotherapy in Private Practice* (vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 79-83), Dr. Aphrodite Clamar, a psychotherapist in private practice, writes that "children of Christian-

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Jewish marriages are psychologically healthier if they are raised in the religion of one of the parents rather than in both faiths or none at all. While it is important to respect the double heritage of children whose parents come from different religious backgrounds, such children cannot grow up with a clear sense of religious identity if they are not fully at home in either the mother's or father's faith." Dr. Clamar goes on to admit that "the literature in this area is meager; the waters remain all but uncharted."

Writes Rabbi Samuel Silver—a pioneer in supporting interfaith couples who want to marry—in his 1977 book, **Mixed Marriage Between Christian and Jew**, "children are more comfortable if they grow up naturally in one religious environment and . . . are no more capable of deciding on how to say their prayers than they are on what to eat or what to wear in their early years."

And Andrea King, in her 1993 book, **If I'm Jewish and You're Christian**,

What Are the Kids? (published by the Reform Jewish UAHC), opines—based on her own experiences with interfaith families—that "children of intermarriage benefit from having a single-religious orientation."

This is not to suggest that those who make this choice have necessarily been swayed by outdated, unsubstantiated claims. It is rather to acknowledge that their choice is the most acceptable to the majority of professionals who work with interfaith couples, and that they are welcomed accordingly.

More of the couples profiled in this issue have chosen Judaism than have chosen Christianity as the family faith. According to a survey cited in Ned and Mary Heléne Rosenbaum's 1994 book, **Celebrating Our Differences: Living Two Faiths in One Marriage**, a far greater percentage of Christians married to Jews have converted to Judaism or adopted Jewish practices than the converse. Though results of other studies differ, if this conclusion

holds, it may explain why we had difficulty finding mixed couples who'd chosen the Christian option.

There is no easy answer for interfaith families. Luckily, we can be grateful for the special intimacy and spiritual closeness that many feel they have gained from grappling honestly and deeply with these hard decisions. And we can know that, if we do this difficult work, the outcome will be right for us. We hope you gain something from the stories shared in this issue of **Dovetail**.

We also hope you'll enjoy the new columns we've added to **Dovetail**. Beginning on page 15, you'll find new regular features on topics of interest to interfaith families, including food and family, activities for children, and calendar events. As we strive to bring you the broadest and best coverage, we'll continue to respond to your requests and suggestions. Send your ideas and articles to **Dovetail**, care of the editor. 

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Dovetail's mission is to provide a channel of communication for interfaith couples, their parents and their children. The more families can share their ideas, experiences, resources, and support, the more they can make peace in their homes and communities. Jewish and Christian perspectives can dovetail.

Believing that there are no definitive answers to the questions facing interfaith families, **Dovetail** strives to be open to all ideas and opinions. Editorial content attempts to balance and respect the perspectives of both Jewish and Christian partners in interfaith marriages, as well as the diverse perspectives of parents and children of interfaith couples. Inclusion in **Dovetail** does not imply endorsement. **Dovetail** accepts a thoughtful and constructive discussion of all related issues in the Letters to the Editor section, and reserves the right to reply.

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Dovetail welcomes article submissions (query or completed manuscript), letters to the editor, and comments or suggestions. Send to Joan C. Hawxhurst, Editor, at the above address. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Choosing Judaism for Our Child

by Robin Cohen Anderson

I am a Jewish woman married to a Christian. When I met my husband Greg over eight years ago, I was a secular Jewish atheist, raised nominally Reform by parents who had great contempt for religious observance. I left Judaism right after my bat mitzvah, and only returned at the age of 36.

I returned to Judaism because I married a Christian with deep religious faith. He was the first person in my life who experienced genuine peace, hope, joy, and ethical guidance because of his religion. I wanted desperately what he had, but could not find it in Christianity. So, two years ago, I took my first halting steps back to Judaism. Because of my husband's sincere faith in God, I have come to find comfort and joy in my own belief in God. Because of my husband's love and support for me, I have been enthusiastically exploring Jewish prayer, observance, and study. I say the Hebrew blessings at meals, *daven* morning and evening prayers, study Torah, observe Shabbat, and share Shabbat services with Ashlynn each week. I view the *mitzvot* not as commandments handed down, but as disciplines given by God to help me focus and grow into greater love for myself, for God, and for other people. At home, I started with traditional liturgy, but I am modifying it to stress the universalist aspects of Judaism, to speak more to my sense of God as a loving force for just action and spiritual peace, and to incorporate the image of *Shekhinah*, She who dwells within, one of the many Jewish images of God.

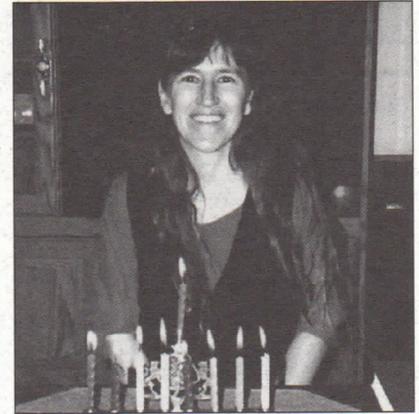
Neither my husband nor I believe that any one religion is "right" and other religions are "wrong." We

respect any faith that leads people in the paths of peace, compassion, and good work in the world. However, Judaism is part of my own heritage. It has been a very healing and redeeming experience to draw joy, wisdom, and comfort from it after so long away. And I want to pass it on to my daughter. So I suggested that we simply tell Ashlynn that she is Jewish.

Initial Discomfort

At first, Greg felt uncomfortable with this idea. For two people whose spiritual paths had spanned decades of searching, it seemed something of a preemptive strike to tell a child what faith he or she must follow. But being Jewish is more than a question of choosing a set of religious principles. It is about being part of a people, wherever you go and whatever you do. To be Jewish is to be part of a world-wide family. I want to pass on my faith—not as a religion my daughter must follow, but as a rich resource for spiritual growth and ethical action. And I want her to know that apart from her spiritual beliefs, she is a member of the Jewish people, and can find her own level of participation as she grows.

My husband appreciates the wisdom of Judaism in simply welcoming Jews to be part of a nation, a community, a history from birth. He sees the havoc wrought in our country by people with no community, no history, no sense of being part of anything larger than themselves. So he is very supportive of the idea that our daughter will know who she is, what her Jewish foremothers and forefathers believed and did, and



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what wisdom Judaism has to guide her and comfort her in life. He recognizes that we need to teach her these things, and not simply hope that one day she will find out for herself. And we both agree that, as Ashlynn grows older, she will decide on her religious and spiritual beliefs. But she will decide based on knowledge of the Jewish faith, not based on ignorance of it.

Greg and I are very fortunate in having a great deal more in common concerning religious and spiritual beliefs than the difference in our religions might suggest; these similarities are crucial for our family harmony. We believe in the necessity of compassion for healing ourselves and each other. We believe in a God who cares about us and loves us, who cares about how we act and how we feel. We believe that we should see each other as people made in the image of God, and have reverence for the God in each other. We do not feel that much time should be wasted in argument about theological differences when God's work in the world is calling to us. So, we try to stay focused on all the essential areas of harmony.

The Process

And yet, despite all these similarities, we are teaching our daughter about Judaism as a religion separate from Christianity, and keeping the religious rituals separate as well. We live in a Christian-centered culture that can be very dismissive of Judaism as a failed faith. For many years, I believed love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness originated with Christianity, only to find that they

are deeply rooted in and essential to Judaism. Because Judaism is a minority faith, I feel it is important to keep it separate. I want Ashlynn to learn about Judaism on its own merits, to feel that it comforts and inspires and endures in and of itself. So, on Saturdays, Ashlynn and I attend synagogue together; on Sundays, we all go to the Unitarian fellowship to worship as a family. We have a Christmas tree with just a few presents under it; when we light the candles of the Chanukah menorah, we discuss a mitzvah we can do to bring light and hope to another person in our community.

But the religious holidays are a small part of our family life. The everyday path is the one we concentrate on. Each week, we light the Shabbat candles and welcome 25 hours to simply meditate on the wonder of being. At the Shabbat table, we talk about the necessity of doing *tikkun olam*—the holy work of repairing the world. At the synagogue, Ashlynn sits in my lap, swaying with the prayers, wrapped in my tallis. When the leaves change color in the fall, I say the traditional Jewish blessing thanking God for bringing such beauty into our world. Each week, we do the mitzvah of leaving groceries at the community center for distribution, fulfilling the commandment to feed the hungry. At bedtime, we sing "Shalom Aleichem" and ask the angels of God to bring peace to our home and the world. May it be so. 

Choosing Christianity: An Interview with Leah Ingram

While most of the families who agreed to share their stories for this issue have chosen Judaism as their household religion, there are also those who choose Christianity. Leah Ingram and Bill Behre are one such couple. Leah grew up attending a Conservative temple on Long Island, while Bill was raised in a Catholic family, also on Long Island.

Long before Leah and Bill made the decision to marry, they addressed the issue of how they would raise any future children. In a group of friends and family, they explored the hypothetical questions involved in interfaith marriage, and from this early discussion realized they had many issues to resolve.

Mixed Messages

Leah's mother was raised as a United Methodist, and she converted to Judaism in order to marry Leah's father. So Leah was raised as a Jew but was exposed to Christian holidays and rituals by her mother's family. In fact, Leah spent Christmas with her Christian grandparents in Maine.

Leah's childhood temple had a rabbi who, in her words, "was the opposite of anti-Semitic: he was anti-Christian. He tried to teach us that all Christians wanted to do was oppress us Jews. He really turned me off. After I was bat mitzvah, I never went back to that temple."

Leah's mother really tried to raise her in a Jewish home, but wasn't familiar enough herself with the rituals and the holidays to do a very thorough job. Neither she nor Leah ever learned Hebrew enough to use it.

Leah considers herself Jewish, but she doesn't "love the religion enough to keep kosher, learn Hebrew, switch the dishes at Passover or light Shabbat candles."

Leah's parents divorced, and her Jewish father remarried the year after her bat mitzvah—to an unconverted Catholic woman. Her father and his new wife did not share participation in common holidays. He lit the menorah by himself, and she put up the Christmas tree alone. Says Leah, "I got lots of mixed messages. I feel as if my parents failed at giving me a religious identity."

The Long Island Jewish community, in Leah's eyes, was too materialistic, focusing on High Holiday outfits, cars and gold jewelry. She found the whole culture unappealing and never wanted to be a part of the local Jewish community.

Making a Choice

Bill, on the other hand, has wonderful feelings about his Catholic upbringing. A history teacher by profession, Bill has been able to teach Leah about his faith and about religious history in an objective, non-threatening manner.

Partly because of their extended families' high expectations for their wedding, when the couple decided to get married they eloped. They practiced no religion until Leah became pregnant with their first child. Then the issue became more pressing.

Both agreed they didn't want their child to be without a comfortable, rooted religious identity. They had grown up with kids from interfaith

*Leah Ingram, 31, is a writer living in Ann Arbor, Michigan with her husband, Bill Behre—also 31, and a Ph.D. candidate in education at the University of Michigan—and their fifteen-month-old daughter Jane. The couple expects its second child in June, 1997. Leah's most recent book, due out in September, 1997, is *The Portable Wedding Consultant* (Contemporary Books).*

homes where both faiths—or no faith—had been practiced, and these children seemed to both Bill and Leah to lack a sense of rootedness. It was relatively easy for the couple to decide their home life should revolve around a single faith.

Bill explained to Leah why it was so important to him that his child be baptized and raised in a church community. Leah's response: "Frankly, I felt relieved not to have to pretend I'm fully Jewish, not to have to do what was expected of me by my family." She readily agreed to Bill's wishes.

So, when Leah was about six months pregnant, she and Bill went church shopping. They sought a church where each of them felt comfortable. They found a local parish with a young, down-to-earth priest who was warm, accepting and creative in his use of non-traditional forms of worship. They joined this church (St. Thomas, in Ann Arbor, Michigan) and their daughter Jane, born in July 1995, was baptized there.

The Outcome

Leah still has qualms about the Christian symbolism. "I don't feel comfortable with the crucifix. Bill says he doesn't particularly like it either, but he tries to remind himself that it was the form of capital punishment available in Jesus' day."

Leah is happy the primary responsibility for religiously educating their children will fall to Bill. "Religion is not a big part of my identity. But I don't feel excluded by our decision to raise our children as Catholics. And Bill wants this responsibility."

She admits the decision has not always been painless. "Sometimes I feel a sense of loss. Sometimes I work hard to identify with the other Jews in a roomful of people. I cry when I hear Hebrew music." And, while she generally feels acceptance when she attends the local Catholic church, occasionally there are moments of discomfort. "I don't like that Bill can take communion and I can't. I don't appreciate it when the church sends me information on their conversion classes."

While they won't push religious education on their children, if their daughter shows an interest in taking part in catechism classes or other Catholic education, Leah and Bill have agreed to be supportive. Leah is fully involved in the family's Christmas preparations, and she found herself quite comfortable this year as she explained to fifteen-month-old Jane about the baby Jesus in the manger at her daycare. Leah understands Jesus as "another facet of religious history on which I haven't focused. I can understand Christianity the way Bill explains it. He doesn't believe literally, but rather in the Christian allegories and what they represent."

Their two families have responded in predictable ways. Leah's mother was quite surprised to learn the couple would be raising their children as Catholics. Leah's father and much of the rest of her Jewish family were offended and insulted by her decision. Bill's family, on the other hand, has been effusive and thrilled to know their grandchildren will be Catholics. 

Religion in an Interfaith Family: Understanding the Different Approaches

by Ruth Levenstein

I was brought up in a religious yet liberal Lutheran home. My Jewish husband of eleven years and I have created a Jewish home and family. Though I have not yet converted, my practices and personal identification are completely Jewish.

I used to be puzzled at the many Jews I knew who took great pains to keep Judaism distinct from Christianity. I thought we all knew the difference, and could respect each other. Then I listened to a Catholic priest addressing a group of intermarried couples. He tried to refer to symbols common to both Judaism and Christianity; though there was nothing particularly offensive about anything he said, I realized I could not tell whether he respected Judaism as a separate and complete religion or merely as a forerunner of Christianity.

This was a real "Aha!" experience for me. I realized that, without clear distinctions between the religions, Judaism could be lost within Christianity.

Choosing One Faith

We have chosen Judaism for our children. Because of that we work at keeping the two religions separate. Couples like us tend to refer to ourselves as "intermarried" and will concentrate on making clear distinctions for our children. For example: just the other day we played a game with our seven-year-old where we would mention a holiday or practice and she would identify it as being Jewish, Christian, neither or both.

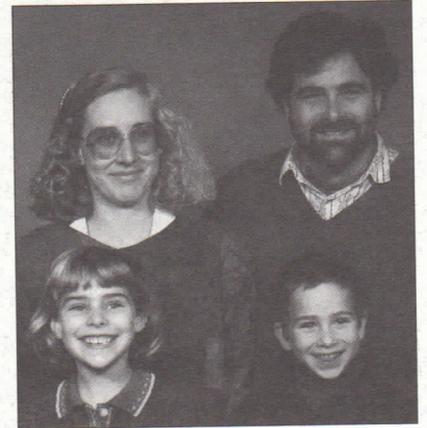
If our decision had been to choose Christianity for our children, the need to draw distinctions would

dwindle. Such families are likely to refer to themselves as "Jewish-Christian" and concentrate on balancing, blending or even combining practices. In fact, such couples would be irresponsible not to expose their Christian children to Jewish practices and ritual. Not to do so would imply that Judaism is not a valuable or viable religion, and could lead to anti-Semitic attitudes. Unlike the reverse case, there is no conflict of interest here. Jewish ideas and practices would not make the children's Christian identity ambiguous but would enhance and authenticate it.

The reason for these starkly different approaches is this: once a Jew begins practicing Christianity, that person is no longer Jewish. On the other hand, a Christian can practice Judaism without ceasing to be a Christian. This is perhaps similar to a mixed race marriage. You can tell a child she is part white and part black, but the world will see a black child.

Distinguishing Choices

It is my experience that most intermarried couples will eventually lean toward one religion or the other. The best approach to take depends on that choice. If your choice is Judaism, drawing distinctions is the best way to go, and if your choice is Christianity then blending and combining is the best way to go. The first approach is aimed at raising children who will be comfortable healthy Jews from intermarried families. The second approach is aimed at raising children who will be healthy and respectful Jewish-Christians. ▀



Ruth Levenstein lives in Rochester, Minnesota, with her husband Sheldon and two children, 8-year-old Jenelle and 6-year-old Dustan. Ruth teaches science in the Rochester Public Schools.

Interviews with Single-Faith Households

To give our readers access to as many experiences of families who have chosen a single household faith as possible, Dovetail interviewed a number of couples who have made that decision. Following are some of their thoughts and perspectives.

Deciding Early

Judy Kass is a Catholic woman married to a Jewish man. She and her husband are raising two daughters, ages 7 and 4, as Jews in a Jewish home.

Judy remembers the discussions about children she and her future husband had before they were married. "We were both strongly religious, and we both agreed that we didn't want our children to be confused. I had had conversations with other interfaith couples who were trying to practice both faiths in their homes, and I had spoken with adult children who had grown up in dual-faith homes. These conversations convinced me that having both faiths in our home would be confusing for the children.

"It was very clear to my husband that he wanted to raise our children as Jews. I had been through twelve years of Catholic school, but I considered myself to be pretty flexible, despite the rigidity of my Catholic upbringing. So I didn't really advocate raising the kids Catholic. If he hadn't felt so strongly about it, I guess the children might have been Catholic.

"I suppose I am making a sacrifice on some levels, especially on a personal level. I do my own thing—attending mass, celebrating holidays—and sometimes it gets a little lonely. But I feel no resentment and am willing to support my family's

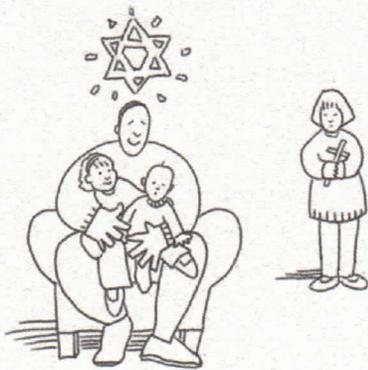
Jewishness wholeheartedly. It has gotten easier over the years to be comfortable with this arrangement.

"Christmas is hard for me, because my extended family is not nearby. Our family doesn't celebrate Christmas in a religious sense, and this is hard for me, but it is a choice I have made. We do celebrate Christmas in a cultural sense, and we do have a Christmas tree.

"But my own family's distance makes implementing our decision to raise our children as Jews easier than it would be if they were on the scene. My mother is not very accepting of our choices. Every once in a while she gives me a hard time on the phone. She seems to feel that I am abandoning my religion.

"I am becoming quite educated about Judaism. It helped me at first to realize that there are quite a few Jews who don't know a lot about Jewish traditions, either. What I really like about Judaism is the cultural aspect—it's a rich way of life, wonderful for a family.

"My husband's extended family lives nearby, so we share Jewish holidays with them. We are getting more and more involved in local Jewish life. Recently the principal of the Conservative temple's Hebrew school, where my daughter attends, asked me—knowing that I was not Jewish—to be the liaison between my daughter's class and the temple's board of directors. The temple's openness to interfaith couples—and to somebody like me, who is not Jewish and does not want to change her faith, but who wants to be active—is encouraging.



“Our seven-year-old started asking questions early, about God, about death and heaven. She equates the temple with a church. She doesn’t yet understand the differences between the two religions, but she does understand that there are different religions. She has been to church with me, especially when Grandma is visiting. Every once in a while she asks me if she can be Catholic, but she doesn’t really know what that means.

“I feel really good about where we are with this process. It is something we have to work at all the time. If I could give advice to other couples, I would suggest that they try to lay the issues out on the table as quickly as they can, before getting married if possible. You need to know what the potential issues are. It’s not an easy choice to make, marrying someone of a different background and religion. Love doesn’t conquer all. Children will complicate things and test your marriage in ways you cannot imagine. Compromise is important, but it doesn’t mean that one person always has to give in.”

Making Adjustments

Renee Weisman Michelsen is a Jewish woman married to a man who was “brought up Lutheran, but whose mother is Jewish, so he has many Jewish relatives.” Renee’s parents assimilated into American culture and did not give her many positive feelings about being Jewish. “Being Jewish was a fearful thing when I was growing up.”

When Renee and her future husband talked about children before they were married, she remembers, “The world of religion looked very

different than it does now.” The couple was ready to be completely neutral: to celebrate holidays— not in a religious way, but in an “American” way. They would share the Christian and Jewish holidays with their respective families.

When their first child was imminent, Renee remembers hoping that it would be a girl, so that they wouldn’t have to make a firm decision about whether or not to have a bris. Her hope became reality, and it was not until their daughter Sarah went off to nursery school, coming home with stories from her friends about Jesus, that Renee was startled into action. She asked her daughter more about what she was learning, and suddenly realized that, even if she wasn’t provided with religious education, Sarah would nonetheless be affected by others’ religious expressions.

Renee’s husband, raised in the Lutheran church, was adamant that he did not want to be involved with organized religion of any kind. When she asked him if he would support her in providing their children with a Jewish upbringing, he was clear that he would not be willing to participate but would not stand in her way.

Once Renee enrolled her daughter in a Jewish program, there was a rapid evolution in how both she and her husband felt about religion. His fears of dogmatic indoctrination dissipated as he met other families facing similar choices. While she was still primarily responsible for ensuring their daughter’s religious education, he began to feel more comfortable participating by driving Sarah to her Jewish school.

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Meet Dovetail’s Editorial Advisory Board

In response to inquiries from our readers, we’re introducing a different member of our diverse and experienced advisory team in each issue of Dovetail.

Reverend Julie Faith Parker

The Rev. Julie Parker is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. She serves as the Protestant Chaplain at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. Her ministry includes interfaith presentations and programs with her Jewish, Catholic and Muslim colleagues. She is currently studying Hebrew.

Ms. Parker is also the author of four books. Her first book, **Careers for Women as Clergy**, received an award from the New York Public Library. Her subsequent work has focused on the topics of homelessness, teen ethics, and leadership.

Ms. Parker grew up in the New York area and is a graduate of Hamilton College and Union Theological Seminary (New York). She is married to the Rev. Bill Crawford and they have two children, Graham and Mari, ages 5 and 3.

Raising Our Children Jewish by Irene Bleiweiss



Bernice Kiebard

Irene Bleiweiss is a communications lawyer who works in Washington, D.C., and lives in Arlington, VA. She has been happily married to Charles H. Wagner, a writer and actor, for 12 years. They have two children, Elizabeth and Andrew, ages 7 and 2.

Six days a week, our children are known as Elizabeth Rachel and Andrew Cameron. But at our weekly Shabbat dinner they become Rachel Elisheva and Avner Amiron. Our kids are Jewish, a choice we made before we got married, so we gave both children Hebrew names which honor deceased relatives, following traditional Jewish practice.

What makes our family a bit different is that our son is named in memory of a wonderful person who happened to be Catholic—my husband's grandmother Clara. Our son's Hebrew name, like Clara's Christian name, connotes clarity and brightness. It is a small thing—a name used once a week by a child. But to us it represents something bigger. It is one of the ways in which our children, who are fully Jewish, can develop their Jewish identities while bringing honor to their Christian father and relatives.

Selecting Mom's Religion

We wanted to raise our children in a single religion. But we also agreed our children should be free to question and not to view themselves as being on the only correct spiritual path. Judaism, my religion of birth, would allow us to present that message. Judaism doesn't require anyone to "be a member of its club" to reach heaven. It allows and even encourages questioning and interpretation of its sacred writings. And it teaches that we are all innately good.

We also recognized that Jews are a minority in America. We thought that the children's Jewish roots could too easily be lost, simply by assimila-

tion with the majority culture. So we are raising our children as Jews and trying to give them a solid Jewish identity.

It has helped us that the definition of a good Jew is not based on whether one attends synagogue regularly. We have not yet found a synagogue where we both feel comfortable. But this has not been a major obstacle because in Judaism the central focus is on the home, not on the place of worship.

So we began to develop ways in which our Jewish children can connect with God at home, with their Dad's participation. For example, our children received their Hebrew names in our living room—not on a synagogue *bimah* (dais). At home my husband, who could not have participated in most synagogue ceremonies, could light candles of celebration, and offer his own hopes and dreams for the baby's future. His aunt could bring the baby into the room and say a few words, without compromising her own beliefs. Seven years later, friends and neighbors still speak of the beauty of our daughter's naming ceremony, and how its symbolism meant more to them than others held at a synagogue.

We also have a special dinner every Friday night at the beginning of Shabbat. Some elements are rooted in ancient Jewish culture, such as blessings over candles, wine and the special braided challah bread. Other parts are our family's own creations, only a few years old but just as important to us. These range from the spiritual (like sharing something we are thankful for), to pure fun (like taking turns choosing dessert). With

our own additions, my husband can be a full participant.

This weekly tradition has not always been easy to keep in a majority Christian community. My daughter could not join the Girl Scouts: all the troops met on Friday nights and the leaders were not willing to change for a single Jewish child. It was a disappointment for her, but also an opportunity to learn that different religions observe sabbath on different days and that, for us, home and family come first.

While there are many Jewish things we actively do throughout the year, sometimes the absence of Christian-based traditions is more noticeable. Our home does not have a Christmas tree or a visit from Santa. Our decorations are generic winter symbols: snowflakes, mittens, ice skates.

We celebrate Chanukah and exchange presents, but try to teach our children that it is a minor Jewish holiday, not a Jewish version of Christmas. We explain that the miracle of light and freedom Jews believe occurred on Chanukah is of a completely different nature and magnitude from the miracle of birth Christians believe occurred on Christmas.

Acknowledging Dad's Upbringing

Although Christmas is not celebrated at our home, we acknowledge that it was a big part of my husband's upbringing. It is important to him that we be with his mother and siblings for the songs, presents and family togetherness he has known since childhood. It is a seven-hour

drive, but still we do it each year. I explain to our children that though the holiday is not our own, we can enjoy Grandma's beautiful decorations and the nice feeling of being with Dad's family at a time that is joyful for them. I believe that this is similar to how we invite non-Jewish friends to join us at our Passover Seder.

The one thing we ask of our Christian relatives is that they not give our children presents which contain symbols of Christmas, because we don't feel those would be appropriate to bring back to our own home.

Otherwise, we try to honor my husband's upbringing by continuing the non-religious traditions from his childhood. Wednesday was always "pizza night" when he was growing up. So we, too, have pizza on Wednesdays. We've learned that all family tradition need not be based on religious belief. And raising children in a single religion need not mean forgetting our pasts. We believe that relatives who live good lives can serve as role models, even if they happen to be of a different religion.

Our children are named for two great women of blessed memory. A Jewish woman who always had a smile and a kind word for strangers and family alike. A Christian woman who would sacrifice anything that was hers to help another person. We hope a piece of each of them will live on in our children. ❧

Pathways Program

by Joan C. Hawxhurst

For more information on the Pathways program, either in New Jersey or in other parts of the country, call Lynne Wolfe at (201) 884-4800, ext. 192.

Interfaith families considering Judaism as the family faith will find lots of resources to help them. One of the best is a program called Pathways, run by the United Jewish Federation of MetroWest New Jersey. Pathways is designed for families who think they might want to affiliate with a Jewish congregation, but who need additional information and education about Judaism before making the decision.

Pathways is modeled after the "Stepping Stones . . . to a Jewish Me" program developed in Denver (see profile in issue 1:1 of *Dovetail*). Its literature describes the Pathways program's goal: "To provide knowledge of the basic elements of Jewish life, traditions and history while remaining completely compatible with contemporary secular society. Participating children, and their parents, will experience a non-pressured view into Judaism's vast cultural heritage."

The program, which began in January of 1991, is open to children between the ages of 5 and 18 whose parents desire to give them an opportunity to learn more about their Jewish heritage. There is no tuition fee, and a family can participate in the program for a maximum of two years. Parents "who recognize the need for positive Jewish identification for their children" are asked to share in the social, educational and cultural aspects of the Pathways program. Program literature assures parents that the program teachers "are particularly aware of the special needs of young people whose parents come from different religious and cultural backgrounds."

Over a one-year period, Pathways classes provide an introduction to the various elements of basic Judaism such as holidays, history, life cycle events, Jewish culture, religious symbols and practice lived through the literature, art and language of Jewish people. The curriculum includes an emphasis on understanding and respect for other religions "according to the needs, interests and sensitivity of the students and their families."

As part of the curriculum, children and parents participate in separate educational classes. Families come together for such joint events as a model Seder, model Shabbat celebrations, decoration of a *sukkah* (outdoor booth built for the harvest holiday Sukkot), and *tzedakah* (charity) programs. Families who choose to re-enroll for a second year of the program go through the same general curriculum, but with different activities and specific lessons based on the same cycle of holidays. "This second year serves to reinforce what families learned in the first year," reports Lynne Wolfe, the program's director.

The Pathways program does not try to hide its ultimate goal—"the transition of these families into synagogue membership, the children into religious school, and the opting for Judaism as the family's religion." The teachers and administrators of the program work toward this goal with refreshing sensitivity and open-mindedness. Wolfe is enthusiastic about what Pathways is achieving. "We are reawakening the Jewish partners' faith, sparking their interest in learning, teaching the children and providing them with knowledge and

a sense of belonging. All this in a non-threatening, comfortable atmosphere!"

Families who have graduated from the Pathways program seem unabashedly excited about their experience. "Prior to coming to the Pathways program I was estranged from my Jewish roots," writes one parent. "The program provided us with a safe and inviting atmosphere for both my husband and myself to explore our thoughts and feelings about religion and relationships. While I was busy working on my own identity, my daughter's identity began to emerge. The program has helped me to gather the strength to challenge my fears and beliefs and allow Judaism to be part of our lives."

Another graduating parent writes, "I can't say that Pathways has provided all the answers to what is a complicated and difficult situation, but it has helped to add to our family life a religious aspect and spirituality that I believe we needed." One parent stressed the communal aspect of the program: "Pathways has given our two children an opportunity to be with other children from interfaith families. It has allowed them to feel a part of a group instead of somehow different from their peers."

According to Ms. Wolfe, the program serves between twelve and 28 families each year. She finds that about half of the families who graduate from the Pathways program go on to join synagogues. Ms. Wolfe is a strong advocate on behalf of these families, often calling the rabbi of a local temple to smooth the way before a family's first visit. When asked,



Children and parents alike enjoy a model Shabbat dinner at a Pathways program, in the process learning how to prepare such a meal at their own homes.

she accompanies families to family services or special programs at the temple they are considering, "to help ease the transition." Ms. Wolfe also makes a point of calling every family who has graduated from the Pathways program at least once a year, to check on their status, offer encouragement, and provide additional information. In this way, even if a family has not made the decision to affiliate with a local synagogue, they still have a connection to the local Jewish community.

Wolfe likes to describe the first meeting of a Pathways group. The newly enrolled families meet in the worship space of a local temple, where a local rabbi gives them an introduction to temple life. The smaller children are seated in the front row, close to the ark, and their little legs stick straight out over the

edge of the pew. Children and adults alike watch with growing amazement as the rabbi removes the Torah scroll from the ark, unwraps it, and opens it wide. The Jewish adults in the crowd, mindful of the distance they've always felt from sacred Jewish objects, gasp audibly when the rabbi lays the open Torah scroll across the legs of the children, so that they can see the fine script and touch the sacred parchment. In the Pathways program, adults and children alike learn to touch and feel for themselves the beauty and meaning of Jewish life. ■

continued from page 9

Sarah developed a sturdy Jewish identity, largely through her involvement in communal Jewish education. As he watched Sarah grow, Renee's husband agreed that she should identify as a Jew, as long as the family "did it all." They joined a Reform temple with a large percentage of interfaith families. The family now worships and celebrates together. Renee feels strongly that "institutions that are supportive and accepting have made a big difference for us. These institutions have increased my husband's tolerance for organized religion in general. If our temple was farther away or less accepting of us, I'm not sure that we would have been able to create a Jewish home." She advises other interfaith couples to "seek out the most liberal, accepting place you can find, then try it and see how it feels."

As she watched her daughter's Jewish identity emerge, Renee began to search for her own. She became friends with a Christian who helped her understand the meaning of faith. Renee "began to realize how important faith can be for a person, and how each of us needs as many resources as we can find for dealing with this world. I wanted Sarah to have faith as a tool for life. And I got it, too, somewhere along the way. If you had told me ten years ago that my daughter would have a bat mitzvah, I would have said no way."

Last year the family faced a challenge when they didn't go to Denver, as had been their tradition, to celebrate Christmas with the Christian side of the family. So Renee agreed that they would celebrate Christmas in their Jewish home. Sarah was able to

differentiate, calling Christmas "Daddy's holiday" and being able to share it with him. For Renee, though, "It was weird and hard. We chopped down a tree and everything—I did it for him."

Despite the discomfort and occasional marital discord, Renee speaks glowingly of her family's progress. "You have to do whatever you decide as a partnership," she advises. "Try hard to be open about religion. It may be quite helpful for you and your partner to seek an independent counselor to help work through the tough issues.

"You can follow your child's lead, too. My daughter just loved being part of a group. She really needed it. I never would have admitted that kids actually need religion." 

Food Fights

The unwary interfaith couple can get into a stew over food. But even after you've fallen into the soup, you may not recognize what has your stomach churning. Any marriage involves some adjusting of its childhood ideas of, for instance, what makes a meal special. Compound that with nostalgia for an idealized ethnic cuisine and season it with the emotions surrounding religious practice, and you have an excellent recipe for spiritual indigestion.

In this column, I will draw on thirty-three years as the primary cook in an interfaith marriage to help you sort out the ingredients of your own marital mixture. I'll also give you fodder—recipes and menu suggestions—to suit both your tastes.

For openers, this elegant but simple treatment for roast fowl can help you through the barrage of upcoming holidays and special Shabbats. The recipe serves eight or ten people, but can be scaled down to a roasting chicken for four or up to a tom turkey for twenty. The bird is also fine without the stuffing.

Italian-style Roast Fowl

12 lb. hen turkey or capon
2 pkg. frozen chopped spinach,
thawed and squeezed dry
1/2 c. bread crumbs
1 lb. ground turkey
1 medium onion
3 large cloves garlic
1 T olive oil
lemon juice, kosher salt, coarse-
ground pepper, rosemary
bay leaf
1 T cornstarch

Chop onion and one clove garlic; sauté in oil till soft and slightly

brown. Add ground turkey; cook through. Combine with bread crumbs and spinach; cool.

Remove giblets and neck from bird; simmer them with bay leaf in water. Rinse and dry the bird; put it in a large oiled roasting pan. Rub bird inside and out with lemon juice, seasonings and the other two cloves of garlic, minced. Stuff and roast at 375° 20 minutes to half an hour per pound, basting occasionally.

Remove from oven and set on platter in warm place 15 minutes before serving. Combine pan juices with cornstarch, stir in giblet broth, and cook until slightly thickened. Add lemon juice and pepper to taste.

Serve with baked squash or glazed carrots, green salad, and potatoes chunked, tossed with olive oil and seasonings, and roasted.

Holiday Cookies

Made with oil, these are appropriate for Chanukah. But they can be cut into shapes, and stay good for days, so they're also perfect Christmas tree cookies.

1 c. poppy seeds
4 eggs, slightly beaten
1 c. cooking oil
1 c. sugar
2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
4-5 c. unbleached white flour
colored, spiced granulated sugar

Combine ingredients in order; chill. Roll out on heavily floured board, cut into shapes, sprinkle with spiced colored sugar. Bake on oiled cookie sheet at 350° until golden (about 12 minutes). Pierce with threaded needle to hang; will last two weeks on tree. ▀

**Food
and
Family**
by Mary Heléne Rosenbaum

Kids' Page
by Patty Kovacs

Enter our first Kids's Page contest! Make the contemporary seder plate described in this column, then send it (either the actual plate or a photograph or drawing of it) to **Dovetail**. *Dovetail* staff will choose several of the entries to include in our April/May 1997 issue. Chosen artists will receive a special prize and their parents will receive an extra issue of **Dovetail** added to the end of their subscription. Send your contest entry to:

Dovetail Publishing
ATTN: Kids' Seder Plate Contest
P.O. Box 19945
Kalamazoo, MI 49019

We **can** return your entry—simply include a note with your plate asking that it be returned to a specific name and address. We look forward to sharing the contest results with you in April.

Begin the New Year a New Way

Welcome to a new column in the New Year of **Dovetail**. January First is, of course, the secular celebration of a new Roman calendar. The wild celebrations stem from freedom from Father Time's past, mixed with hope for the new year being born. In our Jewish and Christian traditions, spiritual rebirth is celebrated with the Earth's natural rebirth in the spring during the holidays of Passover and Easter.

Old and New? Passover and Easter? Freedom from the past and hope for tomorrow? How about incorporating these ideas into a family project? Then how about sharing your project in a contest for **Dovetail** readers!

Step One: Table Talk—Spend some time around the family table talking about symbols. What are they? Why are they important? These concrete, tangible reminders spark and rekindle both memories and feelings. Talk about how we have secular and religious symbols all around us every day. Birthday candles, wedding rings, mezuzah, Star of David, cross. . . . What are some of the treasured symbols of your family? Go on a family *Symbol Hunt* in your home. Keep a *Symbol Explorer's Log* of your child's findings.

Step Two: Scripture Search—Read Exodus 12 and Luke 22 to your child.

Step Three: Learn About the Holidays' Symbols—Talk about the secular and religious symbols of each holiday. Ask your child what these symbols mean to him/her now in addition to what the traditional teachings are. Individual interpretations of symbol are often more evocative than traditional meanings:

Easter: lilies, paschal candles, eggs, baskets, bunnies, lambs.

Passover: Matzoh, Elijah's cup, four cups of wine, salt water, *afikomen* ("after meal" matzoh), the Seder plate and its ritual objects.

Step Four: Break the Plate!—Apart, that is! Spend an extra session talking in detail about each of the symbols on the Seder plate and its meaning.

Step Five: Keep the Old, But Add the New—Make a Seder plate for the 20th century. Since these are some symbols that were important to Jews 3,000 years ago, what words and symbols of today would your child choose to put on the family's 20th-century Seder plate? Spend some time exploring what contemporary symbols could be used to convey the same meaning as the ancient ones.

Step Six: Design and Make the Seder Plate—Buy a plastic plate or platter. Have fun, be creative, use a variety of media. If you are not the arts-and-crafts type, draw your plate on paper or make a collage. To enter this issue's contest, when your seder plate is finished, either take a photo of the finished product or send your child's art to **Dovetail**. Include a note on why your child chose the symbols that he/she did and what they mean to your family.

Step Seven: Begin Again—Set your child's Seder plate at the side of your traditional one. Perhaps a new family tradition will be born with this New Year's project. 

Need some help or ideas? Contact me at askkovx@aol.com!

Handling the December Holidays

One December we went to a Jewish community affair and were surprised to see there a Jewish friend who ordinarily disdains such activities. His explanation: "I wanted to be someplace where there wouldn't be any [expletive deleted] Christmas stuff."

Most Jews in an interfaith marriage won't, it's to be hoped, be so cranky on the subject. But the Christian partner should be aware that what for many is the favorite time of the year, to be relished on every level from goodies at the office to Santa motifs in the bathroom, can feel overwhelming and intrusive to the non-Christian.

On the other hand, it can be a relief for the Christian to have an excuse not to spend every spare moment for weeks in a frantic effort to produce magazine-cover decor, gourmet-quality cuisine, and thoughtfully chosen, exquisitely wrapped gifts for everyone from Aunt Sally to the mail carrier.

Finding What's Important

Try to keep in mind what's important to the actual meaning of Christmas, and what's not.

The tree, for instance, is a symbol with pagan origins that's only become prevalent in the English-speaking world in the past century. If your partner objects to it, consider skipping it, or at least scaling it down in size, prominence and opulence of decoration.

If you have children, try defusing the gift lust before Christmas Day with an Advent good-deeds grab bag: a daily or weekly drawing of slips of paper with directions such as "Buy

a toy for a needy child with your own allowance" and "Visit a lonely senior at the nursing home." (Intersperse a few surprise rewards, like "Take the day off from chores.")

Peace on Earth . . . and Peace in the House

My Jewish husband and I, a practicing Catholic, actually find it easier to avoid interfaith friction when we emphasize the religious nature of the holiday, rather than swamping it in an avalanche of secular trappings. We have a small *crèche* (manger scene) in the living room and a wreath on the front door, but I don't festoon the outside of the house with lights and plastic reindeer. When the children were small, we sang "Happy Birthday" to Jesus when we lit the last Advent candle, but I didn't play endless marathons of carols. As a result, my Jewish partner doesn't feel any more put out by going to church to help me celebrate this event in my spiritual life than I do by going with him to hours of services over the High Holy Days.

As for Chanukah, our advice is to enjoy it as the charming minor holiday it's meant to be. For the mixed-faith family, it can become a little islet of calm in the frothing sea of Yuletide. Put the Chanukah menorah in the window, and while it's lit play dreidel and eat *Chanukah gelt* (chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil) and tell the children stories about Jewish courage and the desperate need of the world for peace.

In that regard, at least, the message of the two holidays is ringingly in tune. ♠

**Holidays
and
Happenings**
by Mary Helène Rosenbaum

Letters to the Editor

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Thank you for your order.

Thank you for supporting Unitarian Universalism in response to a letter to the editor from Rabbi Steve Mason from our town of West Hartford, Connecticut, in your October/November 1996 issue.

We have been subscribing to Dovetail through our religious education administrator, Sally Oxman. We have found your publication helpful in addressing the many issues of our dual-heritage families, of which we have many.

These couples come to us to find a spiritual home where they can practice both religions in a meaningful way without having to feel restricted by dogma. Here they can call upon their Jewish/Christian roots knowing that each has something good to teach and that one is not better than the other. Through courses, such as "Building Your Own Theology," they can explore different ideas about God, death, good and evil and affirm that there is not just one "right" way.

Perhaps Rabbi Mason should take the course to learn that although we have no creed, we do have a set of principles by which we live. "To accept one another" is one of these principles. In today's pluralistic society it is our hope that we can know our differences and respect them and seek understanding with one another.

*Rev. Jean Cook Brown
The Universalist Church of
West Hartford, CT*

Rabbi Mason's comments in the October/November issue really cut to the quick. His attitude is unfortunately one that is shared by many people. One needs to look at the roots of Unitarianism and Universalism, which

grew out of a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, and of traditional Calvinist rigidity, to understand how this attitude came about. Because Unitarians and Universalists broke with tradition, they may seem to bend over backwards to accept others of non-traditional faiths, like neo-pagans. Another reason that they appear to "fall for just about everything and believe in practically nothing," to quote Rabbi Mason, is that during the 1960s a movement to reject traditional Christianity gained momentum. Opening words in church services were more likely to be taken from Lao Tze, the Buddha or Confucius than from the New Testament. Sunday School classes studied other faiths, or even, with high schoolers, bypassed religion to look at political issues. Jokes about Unitarian-Universalist children knowing nothing about their Judeo-Christian heritage probably came into being during these years. I think that the fact that Eastern religions were growing in popularity in the 1960s also may have influenced this turning away from traditional Christianity.

Though Unitarian-Universalists may seem to be lacking in spirituality and mysticism, their faith is deep. Jewish martyrs are innumerable, but there are Unitarian martyrs that we can look to as well. Michael Servetus was burned at the stake by John Calvin for speaking out against the Trinity; in this century, the Rev. James Reeb was murdered as he marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. Many of our nation's greatest thinkers were Unitarians—Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau. With a heritage like this, how can Unitarian-Universalists "believe in nothing"?

*Susannah C. West
Ripley, Ohio*

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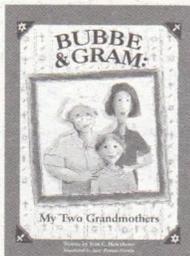
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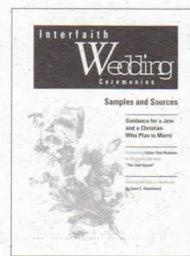


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