

DOVETAIL

volume one, number two

October/November 1992

The Two Cultures of Christianity and Judaism: Collision or Collaboration?

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An interfaith couple swirling in the American melting pot has to confront substantial cultural differences. Historically, Christianity has tried to separate itself from culture, to focus instead on a direct, transcendent relationship with God. Judaism, on the other hand, depends heavily on culture and melds it with religion into a resilient way of life.

Thus, when making decisions about their joint lifestyle, Jewish-Christian couples must grapple with two very particular cultural attitudes. Sometimes it's difficult to see how two with such different backgrounds can approach a shared decision. Whether the decision is about what to name a baby, how to celebrate a holiday, or where to bury a parent, Jewish and Christian traditions can seem to be steaming toward each other down a potential collision course.

DOVETAIL, down to its very name, is about the ways these two rich heritages can come together without colliding. One of DOVETAIL's basic tenets is that collaboration is possible, that Jewish and Christian partners can work together to create a harmonious home, in many different ways, and with many different results. A family might decide to celebrate one parent's faith while respecting the other's faith, or it might incorporate both faiths into the family's routine—either way, both partners' cultural ties can be respected and appreciated.

In some ways, being part of an interfaith family is like living in a foreign culture. Your partner may do things in ways you've never even considered. Strange and disturbing cultural differences can even lead to culture shock. In a handy little paperback called *Survival Kit for Overseas Living* (Intercultural Press, 1984), L. Robert Kohls offers lessons that can apply as much to interfaith couples as to people planning to

work or study overseas.

Culture shock, says Kohls, comes "from the experience of encountering ways of doing, organizing, perceiving or valuing things which are different from yours and which threaten your basic, unconscious belief that your enculturated customs, assumptions, values and behaviors are "right". . . . It builds up slowly, from a series of small events which are difficult to identify." Sound familiar?

Kohls sees that cultural differences become more apparent and disturbing after an initial "honeymoon" period. Initial euphoria is followed by irritation and hostility, then by gradual adjustment. Finally, one learns to adapt, becoming "bicultural." These stages are remarkably similar to Egon Mayer's observations of interfaith couples, as noted by Lee Gruzen on page 3 of this issue.

In this issue's FORUM, three experts look at the challenges faced by interfaith families trying to collaborate on religious and cultural questions. Roy Rosenberg describes traditional religious teachings that must be reevaluated by partners in an interfaith relationship. Jay Rock reflects on the critical need for increased attention to interfaith families by the Christian community. Lee Gruzen shares insights from a conscious attempt to fit both Judaism and Christianity into her household.

As these experts realize, Jewish-Christian families can create tools to help them deal with cultural differences. Perhaps the most important skills to help in coping with culture shock are a sense of humor, realistic goal-setting, and an ability to tolerate and learn from failure. Development of these three traits will go far in ensuring an interfaith family's successful adventure in this country's cultural melting pot. ▼

Can It Be Done? Challenges in Fitting Together Judaism and Christianity



RABBI ROY A. ROSENBERG is Rabbi at the Temple of Universal Judaism in New York and co-author of *Happily Intermarried: Authoritative Advice for a Joyous Jewish-Christian Marriage*.

Christians and Jews are marrying each other in epidemic numbers. In many instances, they succeed in enriching their households with practices and ideals drawn from both faith traditions. We must admit, however, that the classical theologies of both traditions disapprove of interfaith marriage. Only people who are able to disengage themselves from some of these classical teachings can be truly "happily intermarried."

On the Christian side, the name or identity of the Messiah possesses tremendous importance. During most of Christian history it was taught that anyone who refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah sent by God was

I do not envision, nor do I advocate, a "syncretism," a combination of the two religions, but I do see a time when a loving acceptance of Jews by Christians, and of Christians by Jews, will take place, for both communities constitute "God's people."

not eligible for the fullness of salvation that God had prepared for the righteous. Plainly, a Christian who subscribes to this ancient conviction should not marry a Jew (unless that Jew embraces Christianity). To be "happily intermarried," a Christian must be able to accept Jesus as his or her Messiah but allow the Jewish partner to retain his or her beliefs about this complex theological issue.

The Jewish side has held an ancient

conviction that it is an absolute obligation of the Jewish people to remain separate and distinct from all other peoples on the face of the earth. This of course excludes interfaith or inter-ethnic marriage, unless the non-Jew should convert to Judaism. Plainly, a Jew who holds to this view should not marry a Christian. A Jew who wishes to marry a Christian will have to reject this teaching completely or modify it to apply only to the pagan peoples of ancient times.

The majority of Jews and Christians who today marry each other are "happily intermarried" because they neither think it sinful to marry each other, nor do they debate the identity and name of the Messiah. Instead, their lives together are based on mutual respect, out of which love develops and grows. They share aspects of both Judaism and Christianity with their children, and never present one faith as "better" or "truer" than the other. Children in interfaith families need to know that they share in both religious traditions, and they are not strangers in either context.

I do not envision, nor do I advocate, a "syncretism," a combination of the two religions, but I do see a time when a loving acceptance of Jews by Christians, and of Christians by Jews, will take place, for both communities constitute "God's people." This process, though it might occur without intermarriage, will be hastened by the large number of interreligious families. If a husband, wife and children can live together in mutual respect and love, so, too, can the religious communities. This is a lesson that interreligious marriage will be able to teach. ▼

DOVETAIL:

A Great Holiday Gift Idea!

Need a gift idea for interfaith families and friends? Give them a subscription to **DOVETAIL**! They'll enjoy the articles and opinions, and, by increasing circulation, you'll enable **DOVETAIL** to provide more practical, non-judgmental information to all its readers. Use the gift subscription form on page 7.

Each issue of **DOVETAIL** will include opinion pieces on a selected topic by clergy and lay professionals. In our next issue we'll look at the special meanings of the December holidays for interfaith families.



JAY T. ROCK is Co-Director of Interfaith Relations for the National Council of Churches, and is himself the child of an interfaith marriage.

Is it possible to hold Judaism and Christianity together in the life of a relationship? I think this is the wrong question. The pivotal issues are not those of compatibility of religious traditions, but those raised by the sensitivities and conduct of the people involved. A better question would be, Can a Jew and a Christian together fashion a relationship that gives spiritual life to themselves, their children and their communities? Many Christians and Jews, such as most readers of **DOVETAIL**, are engaged day-to-day in living out a variety of answers to this question.

For the sake of these couples and our communities, we cannot afford to avoid or prejudice the problems and possibilities presented by the increasing number of interfaith marriages. We need an approach that helps us all to **engage** the issues creatively, to see and discover without prejudice. Real human beings with specific needs, facing difficult challenges and bringing valuable gifts, deserve response from the Christian and the Jewish communities.

It is my judgment, however, that interfaith relationships are an invisible issue in the Christian community. Often such relationships are not noticed, or if noticed, not considered a problem. Most Christians are simply not aware of the struggles and issues involved in interfaith relationships.

In general, any child of an intermarriage raised as a Christian has been considered a Christian. Today, a Jewish partner in an interfaith relationship, or a child of intermarriage, may hear an occasional anti-Semitic joke about the Jewish banker in the church social hall. But in a time of dwindling Jewish-

Christian antagonism in the United States, those in interfaith relationships often can find themselves comfortably and creatively engaged in a Christian community.

But they will most likely find an absence of concern for their special problems, partly because of an assumption that anyone entering the Christian community leaves behind his or her former cultural identity. Christian universalism is too readily understood as a levelling already fully accomplished at the baptismal font, rather than a goal to be sought by encountering and embracing diversity.

Too few are aware that those in such relationships and their relatives might be uncomfortable in a Christian environment. Those familiar with life in a church often forget that its symbols, rituals, and mores are problematic or not readily accessible to Jews. Another

DOVETAIL's mission is to provide a channel of communication for interfaith couples, their parents and 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** will strive to be open to all ideas and opinions. Editorial content will attempt 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. **DOVETAIL** will accept a thoughtful and constructive discussion of all related issues in the Letters to the Editor section, and reserves the right to reply.

DOVETAIL (ISSN 1062-7359) is published bimonthly (6 times per year) by: Dovetail Publishing, 3014A Folsom St., Boulder, CO 80304; (303) 444-8713.

DOVETAIL welcomes your comments, letters, and suggestions. Please send them to Joan C. Hawxhurst, Editor.

A one-year subscription is available now at the special introductory price of \$19.99 from the above address (Colorado residents please add sales tax). International subscriptions \$35.00. Single issues available for \$3.50 each.

DOVETAIL welcomes article submissions and letters to the Editor. Send query or completed manuscript to Joan C. Hawxhurst, Editor, at the above address. We look forward to hearing from you.

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common assumption is that somehow the non-Christian partner is as comfortable as the Christian partner is assumed to be. Any discomfort of the Jewish partner is lost in the "shadow" of the partner's Christianity, or in the assumption that all who come to church are the same.

God is present in interfaith relationships, and in the families in which they occur, as in all other relationships. What is the good thing God is creating across these lines of our making? What might be the special role of those who are living bonds of dialogue between our two traditions?

My experience also suggests that many Christians secretly or openly regard Jews as not-yet-Christians and think that it is just great if a Jew becomes part of the Christian community. There is a kind of ingrained comfort with absorbing Jews and those of other faiths into the church.

Finally, Christians have little awareness of the Jewish community's concerns about intermarriage. The Jewish concern for survival, its worry that it may finally disappear through assimilation, is surprisingly little known.

Symptomatic of our generally unreflective Christian approach to these issues is the fact that most denominations are only just beginning to offer their clergy guidance in this area. And it remains the rare congregation that offers concrete responses such as multi-faith counseling or support groups to those in interfaith relationships.

God is present in interfaith relationships, and in the families in which they occur, as in all other relationships. What is the good thing God is creating across these lines of our making? What might be the special role of those who are living bonds of dialogue between our two traditions? We are called to see the strength and hope, and the power of love, in these struggles, and to celebrate it. ▼



LEE F. GRUZEN is author of *Raising Your Jewish/Christian Child: How Interfaith Parents Can Give Children the Best of Both Their Heritages*, from which this column is excerpted.

In our interfaith family's search to integrate two powerful and rich traditions into our lives, there are always important questions to ask and new ground to explore. My husband Jordan and I both value our own backgrounds and treasure what we learn about each other's religious and ethnic heritage. We honor our Jewish and Christian roots—each culture is important, and we are unwilling to forfeit either of them.

Nothing is more of a fixture within interfaith marriage than the fact of Jewish/Christian differences. They're more subtle than they were. And they're set against a background of increasing equality within marriage. But these carryovers from 2,000 years of Jewish and Christian experience exist and act as a dynamic presence.

Contrary to myth, the differences aren't cause for divorce, but as in all marriages, they're reason for thoughtful discussion, argument, negotiation, and growth. In his book, *Love and Tradition* (Schocken Books, 1985), Egon Mayer noticed how often the couples he interviewed reported surprise and shock when their differences began appearing for the first time. During their courtships the lovers had reveled in their commonality and the great shared areas of their lives. But suddenly the smallest detail took on enormous emotional significance, and a gulf appeared between them that had never existed before. And couples never become so accustomed to each other that the differences stop surfacing. Every life cycle reveals a new foundation of ethnic conditioning, and it's a life's work to understand what differences can mean and how to deal with them. Fortunately, the task becomes easier with practice.

With time and experience, a couple
continued on page 8

Philip and Elise Okrend

MixedBlessing Cards: Interfaith Greetings for the Holidays

Five years ago, Philip and Elise Okrend had no idea that today an idea that started out as a whim would bring them a mix of high praises and angry criticisms. In 1988, the Scarsdale, New York, couple started MixedBlessing, Inc., a greeting card company with a line of holiday cards combining Jewish and Christian symbols.

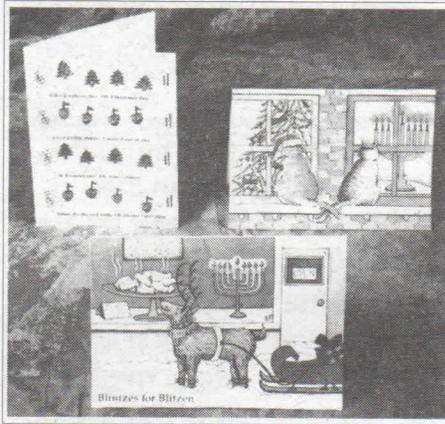
Philip and Elise are both Jewish, but so many of their friends are interfaith couples that it seemed natural for Elise to design a special card for them one December. The card, which became the first in a series of 30 designs, showed a Christmas tree transforming into a Star of David. People responded so positively to the design that Philip started thinking. An attorney in New York City at the time, he was bored with his job and looking for something that would "reach people and make an impact." So MixedBlessing was born.

Philip and Elise started out with six designs. The couple decided to produce a high-quality, tasteful product, rather than the "shocking humor" of some other holiday cards. The cards are "meant to be symbolic and to bring people together," says Philip.

In 1989 Philip went out on his own in the city, selling the cards door-to-door to stores. By 1991, MixedBlessing had 300 retail accounts, and the company now has sales representatives across the country. They've added gift tags to their line, and they plan to market wrapping paper and shopping bags.

Card designs, rendered in watercolors and ink, include a menorah hung with Christmas lights, a dreidel adorning a Christmas tree, Santa and his sleigh flying through a night sky full of Stars of David, and Santa making "Fa La La La Latkes," among many others. Most of the cards are imprinted inside with the words, "Happy Holidays."

"We're a very small company in the greeting card industry, but we've obviously had an impact. We're offering a unique service to interfaith families by providing holiday greeting



A sampling of MixedBlessing cards

cards that express symbols of both faiths in an uplifting and harmonious manner," says Philip.

"Elise and I are Jewish and observe Hanukkah. But you cannot escape Christmas in our culture. Like it or not, it's everywhere. We don't put religious Christmas symbols on our cards, but everybody knows Santa. Seeing him playing with a dreidel makes Jewish people feel like, 'hey, somebody remembered me.'"

Philip and Elise have received many letters expressing appreciation for the holiday cards. People write that the cards "make them more comfortable at the holidays," says Philip.

The cards have also brought much criticism by Jewish and Christian leaders, who suggest that the cards condone syncretism, the mixing of different religious symbols or practices. Soon after the cards went on the market in 1989, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the American Jewish Committee released a statement in opposition to the cards. "To combine the religious and cultural symbols of Hanukkah and Christmas in greeting card art is to diminish the sacred symbols of each faith and is an affront to Judaism, to Christianity and to serious interfaith relations," the organizations said. "Greeting cards that mingle Santa and Menorahs, angels, trees, stockings and Stars of David, are objectionable. . . . We appeal to the

publishers of such cards to refrain from future editions, and we urge the public to reject [the cards] unequivocally."

Philip disagrees. "Interfaith marriages can be a bit awkward at times. Our cards are trying to promote some unity in a world that's very disunited—they preserve the joyful memories and feelings of both holidays." Elise concurs. "We try to be as inoffensive as possible. The cards are meant to signify that both holidays are respected."

MixedBlessing's cards have been featured in several national newspaper articles and on CNN News. "It is interesting to me that a greeting card business can evoke such a strong response," muses Philip. "It's symptomatic of the emotional charge of the underlying issues."

"I never expected this kind of controversy," continues Philip. "I thought the cards were simply a clever solution to a seasonal problem that a lot of us face."

Philip, 31, now works full-time for MixedBlessing. Elise does the design and illustrations in the evenings, after her day job at an advertising agency in New York City. One of the couple's favorite parts of the work is coming up with new card designs. "We think about what makes you feel good at the holidays. We take a topic like food or toys or pets and see what we can come up with." The "Blintzes for Blitzen" card was born when the Okrends decided to create a card around the universal symbol of food. "We thought about food, then about a deli, then about blintzes."

Philip is quick to ask for help. "We are always looking for new ideas and ways to expand. Maybe DOVETAIL's readers have ideas about what they'd like to see. We certainly invite them to contact us." ▼

To contact the Okrends or to order MixedBlessing cards, write to MixedBlessing, Inc., 352 Central Park Avenue, D-5, Scarsdale, NY 10583, or call (914) 723-3414.

The Interfaith Chavurah for Liberal Judaism

In the summer of 1990, a group of interfaith couples met at the West Hartford, Connecticut, home of Rabbi Steven J. Mason, who had performed the wedding ceremonies of a number of the couples. Many of them had kept in touch with Rabbi Mason, often calling him in search of an accepting temple. The couples came together to discuss how they might create a new community, where couples could celebrate a comfortable kind of Judaism while affirming the Christian partner's religious and ethnic identities.

The group didn't want to be a support group, after experiences with groups which were clearly slanted toward one religion. They didn't want to be a "gateway group" whose families left when their children reached school age. By January 1991, the group had formed a steering committee, had named itself the Interfaith Chavurah for Liberal Judaism (ICLJ), and had chosen officers, including Jews and Christians.

The ICLJ congregation meets twice a month in the United Methodist Church of Hartford, once for Sabbath services, and again for discussion of contemporary issues. The ICLJ holds High Holiday services and Hanukkah and Passover celebrations, as well as potluck meals and other social events.

The congregation finds creative ways of making interfaith families comfortable. At High Holiday services, when a Jew is called to the Torah, the entire family accompanies her or him to the pulpit. For Passover, the congregation joins its host church to sponsor an ecumenical seder, led by Mason and the church's minister.

"In determining the nature of our Shabbat and holiday celebrations, we always aim to achieve some balance on two principal issues," says Mason. "The first is how much Hebrew, if any, we use, since none of the [Christians] in our group know Hebrew and many of our Jewish members have forgotten much of what they learned in religious

school. The second is how traditionally Jewish our rituals will be, versus how far we accommodate our non-Jewish members."

The group has expanded to include Jewish singles and couples wishing to affiliate with a progressive congregation. Members of the ICLJ live throughout Hartford County as well as in other parts of Connecticut. There are about 100 families on the congregation's mailing list, and an average of 40 people regularly attend functions.

The ICLJ is moving toward operating a religious school. A pilot project, with

explore Judaism and Christianity. They can sort it out for themselves and make choices."

An Episcopal member, Carole Kleinfeld, says: "When it was time to make the decision to affiliate with a synagogue, I really didn't feel comfortable or accepted by any of the local Reform temples. And even though we had decided to raise our child as a Jew, I wanted to be involved in whatever religious education we offered her. I really wanted to be accepted and welcomed, and I just didn't feel that."

Agrees Jewish member Ann

O'Connell: "We were members of the temple near where we lived, and our daughter was in Hebrew school there. While the temple claimed to be accepting of interfaith couples, its members were not too receptive toward non-Jewish partners. They were making my daughter feel uncomfortable, because she was getting negative messages about what Daddy was doing [going to church]. My husband felt like an outcast, a duck out of water, so we decided to make the switch."

"Rather than bemoan the interfaith trend as a 'catastrophe' or an 'epidemic,' we seek creative responses to the issues interfaith families confront," says Mason. "We understand that to maintain ties with Jews who intermarry, our community must be accepting and understanding of the needs of their non-Jewish partners. By being a congregation that accepts intermarriage openly and honestly, provides equal places for Jewish and non-Jewish members and receives any child within its community, the ICLJ is a laboratory for such concepts. We are a congregation on the cutting edge of the Jewish future. To paraphrase Gene Roddenberry, the ICLJ is a congregation whose ongoing mission is to boldly go where no congregation has gone before."▼

For more information, write to ICLJ, P.O. Box 270957, West Hartford, CT 06107.



ICLJ children show off their Purim costumes.

a monthly family-style educational program, starts in January. The congregation, realizing that its children will have two religious components of their identity regardless of how they are being raised, has already determined the philosophy of the school: "the school will be open not only to children who are being raised as Jews, but also to children who are being raised as Christians. From our experience, many of those families want to expose their children to Judaism, even if it is not the primary family religion."

Rabbi Mason previously served as Jewish chaplain at the University of Hartford and has held pulpits in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Wisconsin.

"At the ICLJ, we open up boundaries," says Mason. "We set up an environment where couples with a commitment to their religions can

The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews and Christians

The *Intermarriage Handbook*, by Judy Petsonk and Jim Remsen (William Morrow/Quill Paperbacks, 1988), is by far the most comprehensive and far-reaching book written to date for interfaith families. In its 416 pages, it covers life cycle events from engagement and marriage to the birth of children and their rites of passage, from holiday celebrations to burial and mourning. The authors, both journalists, interviewed hundreds of experts (counselors, therapists, clergy, and other professionals who work with intermarried couples) as well as interfaith families themselves, to bring a variety of opinions and insights to their book. Petsonk and Remsen each have personal experience with interfaith relationships, and they find that even when a couple doesn't practice any faith, it may feel the strain of being in an interfaith relationship.

Petsonk and Remsen describe their interest in writing the *Handbook*: "Intermarriage takes place in a curious force field, with alarm on the Jewish end and near-silence from Christianity . . . We decided to step into this force field because we saw the need for an independent, nondenominational handbook to help couples make their way through the emotional and practical issues that arise."

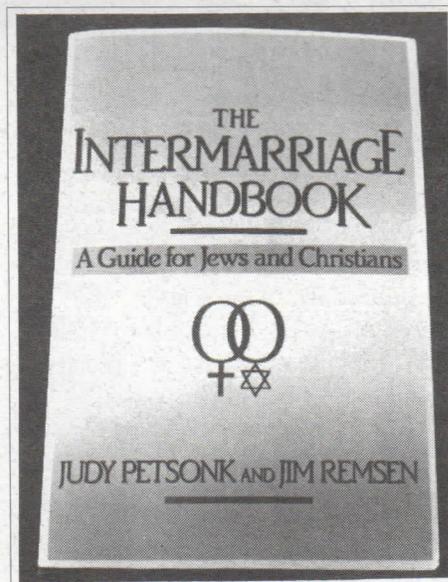
The book does a good job of laying out the issues faced by interfaith families. It contains written and verbal exercises, psychological information, case studies, and practical tips and recommendations. Flip through the notes at the back of the book, too—they're full of extra resources, facts, and information on the authors' sources.

The exercises are provocative and helpful. For example, in a chapter on holidays and home style, the reader is asked to talk about his or her memories while imagining putting ornaments on an imaginary "Christmas tree," a chair placed in the middle of the floor. "How does it make you feel about the idea of having a tree in your own home?" ask

the authors. "If you are Christian, do you feel a stab of nostalgia? If you are Jewish, is there a limit to how close you can come to the tree? Does it feel as if you're breaking a taboo if you put a decoration on it?"

Don't be discouraged by the first chapter, a painful one. It describes in vivid detail the "gloomy but central topic" of the "history of virulent Christian persecution of Jews," in order to help readers understand the reactions of Jewish relatives to announcements of intermarriage. As the authors explain, this history underlies Jewish mistrust of Christians, felt especially by older Jews. Since the 1960s, the atmosphere has changed radically, and Jews and Christians have established relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

"Remember that you are pioneers. This is the first generation in which marriage between Christians and Jews has taken place on a massive scale. As you explore what it means for people from two religions to live together in



The Intermarriage Handbook is a useful self-help book for Jewish-Christian families.

love and respect, keep in mind that you are pushing forward on a new frontier."

In the section on raising children, the authors show their most obvious bias.

"Based on . . . interviews [with adult children of intermarriage] and our talks with professionals, we have come to feel it is not satisfactory to raise a child with no group identification, no experience of belonging. . . . We have also come to the conclusion that children feel more secure if they are brought up in one religion, not two—if they have one clear religious identity." The authors' conclusions are not shared by the many families across the country currently raising dual-faith children. These families stress that the adult children interviewed to date grew up before interfaith marriages became commonplace and before parents were encouraged to discuss openly their religious decisions with their children.

Some have commented that the *Handbook* has a noticeable Jewish slant, and it does appear in Petsonk's later writings that she identifies more with the Jewish community. For example, in a December 1991 article in *Hadassah* magazine, she says, "For many intermarried couples, Judaism looks like the best choice—or compromise; as the foundation for Christianity, it has values both partners share." In a sidebar to the article she admonishes, "The Jews are a small people who have given much to the world. You and your partner can help ensure that this rich heritage survives."

Despite its subtle biases, *The Intermarriage Handbook* is chock full of resources, ideas, helpful suggestions, and powerful communication exercises. No matter what path your family is choosing, you'll find something helpful here. It is a book well worth having on your self-help bookshelf, to be pulled down each time a life cycle event raises questions from both of your religions and cultures. ▼

If you know of a book or resource that should be reviewed here (or if you'd like to write a review), send your idea to DOVETAIL.

Numbering Our Days: Statistics on the Religious Participation of Interfaith Families

by Egon Mayer, Ph.D.

Dr. Mayer, professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and a senior research fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies/North American Jewish Data Bank, hopes to generate discussion by providing statistical information on interfaith families. If you have a question about these numbers or about other interfaith statistics, send it to DOVETAIL.

The debate is an ancient one: does one's religion reside in the heart or the head . . . or, perhaps, in the stomach. No matter how that question is resolved, the practical fact remains that for most people their sense of religion is expressed in where, when, how, and how often they spend time on whatever it is they construe to be religious activity.

One of the greatest challenges that interfaith families face is not how to resolve deep spiritual or philosophical questions, but how to allocate time to their respective religious communities and religiously defined activities.

The following numbers profile the way interfaith families in which one spouse is of the Jewish heritage and the other of a different heritage allocate their time to their respective religious lives. The numbers are derived from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, completed in 1991 by the Council of Jewish Federations.

Frequency with which interfaith couples attend a synagogue:

Never	34%
Few times a year (including High Holidays)	57%
Once a month or more	9%

Frequency with which interfaith couples attend a church:

Never	49%
Few times a year	40%
Once a month or more	11%

Frequency with which interfaith couples light candles on Friday night to welcome the Sabbath:

Never	81%
Sometimes	14%
Regularly	5%

Did the Jewish spouse of an interfaith marriage personally fast last Yom Kippur?

Yes	32%
No	68%

What do interfaith couples usually do about Christmas and Hanukkah?

Celebrate neither holiday	4%
Celebrate Christmas only	9%
Celebrate Hanukkah only	14%
Celebrate both holidays	73%

This is wonderful that you are doing this newsletter! It has long been needed in our community.

*Susan Berns
Tanzana, CA*

Kudos and Kol Hakavod on an informative newsletter. I applaud your efforts to present balanced, challenging and unbiased articles.

*Lena Romanoff, Director
Jewish Converts and Interfaith Network
Penn Valley, PA*

Thank you for filling a real need. We welcome your newsletter and look forward to the next issue!

We will be relocating to the Cleveland, Ohio area from the New York City area. Perhaps there is a way of establishing a network through your publications. We would like to meet like-minded people in our new home, and will not have any family nearby.

*Betsy & Jason Port
Larchmont, NY*

Editor's note: DOVETAIL would be glad to facilitate regional communications between interfaith families. If you know of families or resources in the Cleveland area, please let us know, and we will forward your information to the Ports.

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*Colorado residents \$20.75 with tax, Boulder City residents \$21.32 with tax.

Gruzen, continued from page 3

develops enough trust in its love and likemindedness to accept infinite differences and allow them to animate and contribute to their lives. Often they agree to disagree, and in so doing, are continually reminded how much they truly have in common.

Contrary to the tradition that maintains that interfaith differences only lead to trouble and alienation, I've found that they're a compelling, vital presence, continually viewed through one's evolving knowledge and emotions. They can challenge a person's identity on the deepest, most mysterious levels. But they can also flatter and entertain, inspire and guide, and illuminate one's own power and beauty. They can draw people out of themselves and help them reach out to become their richer and wiser selves.

Interfaith couples learn about their own personal ways of responding to differences. Partners do a dance with

differences, and it takes time to trust its cycles. They reach out for differences and they push them away. They embrace a new experience, and they return to the old, familiar one. Everything and anything, from a flock of cousins to the texture of hair and skin, can be strange and threatening until they become a valued part of one's own history and circle of loved ones.

When the diversity seems like just another nuisance in the course of an exhausting day, it's useful to remember that a couple's comfortable respect for their differences and the honest and fair way they resolve them is one of their greatest gifts to their children. Children benefit by growing up in the company of two individuals who are stronger and wiser because of their marriage and the experiences that it has brought them. The way that differences are handled in the home teaches children how to treat people throughout their lives, and the spirit of compromise, patience, and sensitivity to others goes a long way toward preparing them to approach the world with the same openness and trust.

Being part of a Jewish/Christian family is a profound opportunity for everyone who's open to its challenges and unexpected rewards. Trust the way it compels you to build even stronger foundations for your understanding of life and your own experience.▼

DOVETAIL would like to recognize interfaith experiences in the Christian community. If you are an interfaith couple, a parent of someone who is intermarried, or the child of an interfaith couple, and you are or have been part of a church or a Christian support group, please contact DOVETAIL.

In the Next Issue

- ▼ Hear three opinions on, "What Do the December Holidays Mean To Interfaith Families?"
- ▼ Discover the history behind the holidays in "Hanukkah and Christmas: Where Do They Come From?"
- ▼ Review *Why Not Celebrate!*, an upbeat book on developing your own traditions and holiday celebrations.
- ▼ Meet Tom and Nancy Hennick, an interfaith couple in Connecticut who are struggling with their children's religious upbringing.
- ▼ Learn from an independent interfaith group's journey toward community in a two-part series on "How to Start and Build Your Own Interfaith Group."

Coming Up

FEBRUARY/MARCH:

**Interfaith Weddings:
Memories and Resources**

APRIL/MAY:

Parents of Interfaith Couples

JUNE/JULY:

**The Media: How Books,
Movies, and Newspapers
Depict Interfaith Families**

DOVETAIL: A Newsletter by and for Jewish-Christian Families

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IN THIS ISSUE

Forum: Fitting Together Judaism and Christianity	2
Personality Profile: Phillip and Elise Okrend, founders of MixedBlessing greeting cards	4
Program Profile: The Interfaith Chavurah for Liberal Judaism	5
Review: <i>The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews and Christians</i>	6
Statistics on Intermarriage	7

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Welcome to DOVETAIL's second issue!

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