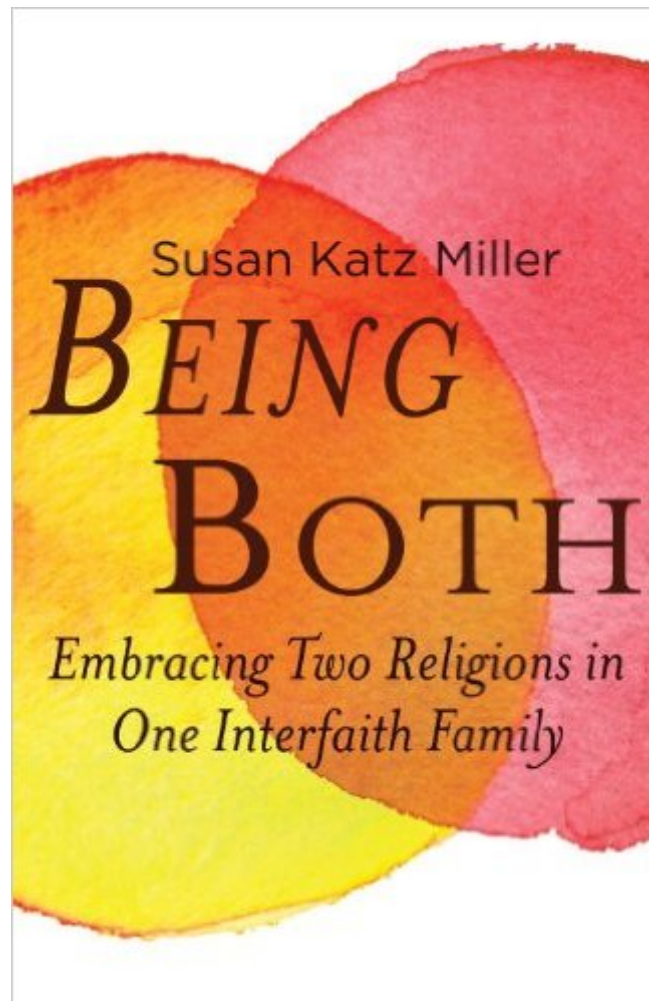


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# Being Both: Embracing Two Religions In One Interfaith Family



## Synopsis

A book on the growing number of interfaith families raising children in two religions Susan Katz Miller grew up with a Jewish father and Christian mother, and was raised Jewish. Now in an interfaith marriage herself, she is one of the growing number of Americans who are boldly electing to raise children with both faiths, rather than in one religion or the other (or without religion). In *Being Both*, Miller draws on original surveys and interviews with parents, students, teachers, and clergy, as well as on her own journey, to chronicle this controversial grassroots movement. Almost a third of all married Americans have a spouse from another religion, and there are now more children in Christian-Jewish interfaith families than in families with two Jewish parents. Across the country, many of these families are challenging the traditional idea that they must choose one religion. In some cities, more interfaith couples are raising children with both than Jewish-only. What does this mean for these families, for these children, and for religious institutions? Miller argues that there are distinct benefits for families who reject the false choice of either/or and instead embrace the synergy of being both. Reporting on hundreds of parents and children who celebrate two religions, she documents why couples make this choice, and how children appreciate dual-faith education. But often families who choose both have trouble finding supportive clergy and community. To that end, Miller includes advice and resources for interfaith families planning baby-welcoming and coming-of-age ceremonies, and seeking to find or form interfaith education programs. She also addresses the difficulties that interfaith families can encounter, wrestling with spiritual questions (Will our children believe in God?) and challenges (How do we talk about Jesus?). And finally, looking beyond Judaism and Christianity, *Being Both* provides the first glimpse of the next interfaith wave: intermarried Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist couples raising children in two religions. *Being Both* is at once a rousing declaration of the benefits of celebrating two religions, and a blueprint for interfaith families who are seeking guidance and community support. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press (October 21, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807061166

ISBN-13: 978-0807061169

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (38 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #435,652 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Movements > Reform](#) #63 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Ecumenism](#) #682 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Marriage & Family](#)

## Customer Reviews

This is one book where the temptation to wax poetic is extremely strong, perhaps calling it "the jewel in the heart of the lotus" or otherwise indicating that it is indeed priceless. Although Buddhism is only briefly discussed, the main focus being on the interfaith pairings of Christians and Jews, there is something deeply meditative and profoundly spiritual about Susan Katz Miller's narrative.

Simultaneously, however, it is completely practical and extraordinarily down-to-earth as the author describes the experiences of her own family and over 250 others in raising children with "two faiths". Again, before I proceed, I feel compelled by honesty to insert a personal note. Years ago, I was part of a "mixed marriage" of the more common Catholic/Protestant variety, and I DID sign the "promises" at that time required of the non-Catholic spouse, including "raising my children in the Catholic faith and not attempting to convert my spouse". Katz Miller notes in her discussion that these promises are only asked of the Catholic partner, and are modified with the understanding that they are not to be coercive. However, at the time, I was keenly aware that unless I converted (which I did, shortly after the birth of our first child), I would be excluded from the full practice of the rituals of the religion in which my husband and our children were immersed, while simultaneously being required to totally support them. It is obvious that far too much of the destructive violence and strife in our world has been produced by the doctrinaire attitudes of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three have left far behind the insights of their founders concerning the unitive quality of Divine Love, and have focused instead on exclusionary legalism.

To be fair to the author, she says at the outset this book will concentrate mainly on Jewish-Christian interfaith families, both because that's what she's most familiar with and because they constituted the first major wave of such marriages. (I have a feeling there are more of these as far as sheer numbers go, as well). And this book is about faith and religion (though some of the people that are written about are agnostic or atheist, and many don't literally believe in God). Of course, for someone like me, an agnostic raised without religion by a Jewish father and a Confucian mother

(we celebrated Hanukkah and Korean New Year as far as cultural/religious holidays went, and that was it), the stories told here are heartening but don't quite apply. This book's primary audience, other than those interested in interfaith as a phenomenon, really is going to be Christians and Jews who are married to each other, are interested in raising their children with some sort of religious tradition, but feel uncomfortable choosing one or the other, don't want to go to a Unitarian Universalist or similar congregation (though, incidentally, the UU's Beacon Press is the publisher of this book), and would like to be around others in similar situations. I'm very glad to see it and I'd love to see something similar someday for people in my situation. Judaism, after all, isn't just a religion, nor is it (obviously) just an ethnicity... it's an ethnoreligious group, so even though I don't consider myself a Jew in terms of what religion I practice (since I practice none) I do in terms of ethnicity, and I still have a greater affinity for Jewish ritual and scripture than Muslim or Christian, say.

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