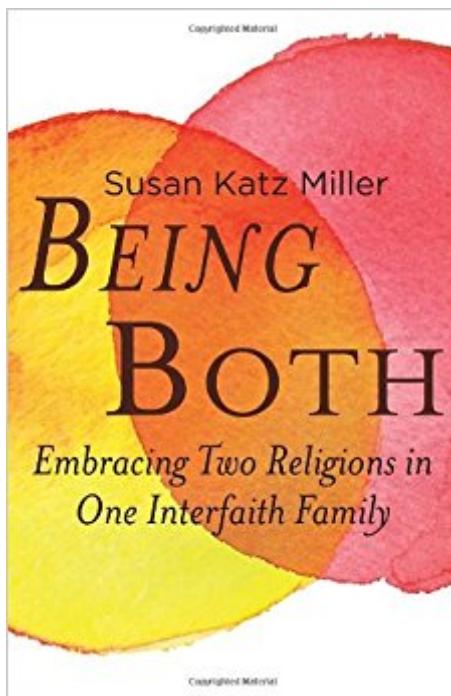


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# Being Both: Embracing Two Religions In One Interfaith Family



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Beginning with the story of her family of origin, Miller surveys the burgeoning phenomenon of families who observe two religious faiths. Her Jewish father married an Episcopalian who, though agreeing to raise the children as Jews, still informally baptized little Susan in the kitchen sink (her mother and sister each did the same, though it was years before they dared tell even one another). So began a multigenerational interfaith reality, which Susan continued as another Jew married to a Christian, this time in a ceremony that honored both religions. Four years later, the couple joined the Interfaith Families Project (IFFP) of Washington, D.C., whose mission is to raise member families' children as Jewish and Christian. From the members, clergy, and teachers of IFFP and similar organizations elsewhere, Miller gathered the stories of how these families successfully raised children who are happily interfaith and intend to raise interfaith children themselves. Miller concludes this fine resource with a look at the next wave of, this time, Christian-Muslim and Christian-Hindu interfaith families. --Ray Olson

An insightful examination of one way that religious beliefs are shaping American families. • Kirkus Reviews "Positive, hopeful." Miller's enthusiasm and exhilaration at the prospect of a new generation of interfaith Americans "healing the world" is cause for celebration. Recommended to faith practitioners of all stripes. • Library Journal "A gorgeous and inspiring testament to the power of love to not only transcend the divides of faith and tradition, but to bring faiths together and create wholly new traditions." • Reza Aslan, author of *No god but God and Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* "Hallelujah! This is the book interfaith families like mine have been waiting for!" Susan Katz Miller serves as a wise, well-informed, progressive, steady, and plainspoken guide to the challenges and benefits--yes! --of raising children with two faith traditions. Reading this book I dropped tears on the pages because I felt for the first time my family was affirmed and understood and, most importantly, not

alone. This is a singular contribution to the conversation on the future of religion in America. Every interfaith family and every religious leader who works with interfaith families should read *Being Both*.<sup>1</sup> Joanna Brooks, author of *The Book of Mormon Girl*,<sup>2</sup> “Religion is never static, and always reflects the needs and mores of those who adopt and adapt it. In *Being Both*, Susan Katz Miller brings us into the emergent world of interfaith families, families who seek to blend traditions that others find mutually exclusive. Whatever your thoughts on religion and interfaith marriage, this book will help you think more clearly. And if you are in an interfaith marriage yourself, it may help you live more courageously.”<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Rami Shapiro, author of *The Sacred Art of Lovingkindness*,<sup>4</sup> “Interfaith families are transforming the face of religion today. People are marrying others from different religions<sup>5</sup> and they are celebrating the two traditions! For anyone who cares about families or about religion<sup>6</sup> or both<sup>7</sup> Susan Katz Miller’s *Being Both* is a must read.”<sup>8</sup> Sheila C. Gordon, PhD, President, Interfaith Community<sup>9</sup> “A moving, personal story that opens new dimensions of life in general and religious life in particular that rise out of an interfaith family.” Susan Katz Miller writes with the passion of experience and with the integrity of being authentic. Its insights moved me deeply.<sup>10</sup> John Shelby Spong, author of *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic*,<sup>11</sup> “Engaging, comprehensive, nourishing: *Being Both* will serve as both guidebook and inspiration for a new generation of interfaith families.”<sup>12</sup> Mary Helene Rosenbaum, co-author, *Celebrating Our Differences: Living Two Faiths in One Marriage*,<sup>13</sup> “Beginning with the story of her family of origin, Miller surveys the burgeoning phenomenon of families who observe two religious faiths. Her Jewish father married an Episcopalian who, though agreeing to raise the children as Jews, still informally baptized little Susan in the kitchen sink (her mother and sister each did the same, though it was years before they dared tell even one another). So began a multigenerational interfaith reality, which Susan continued as another Jew married to a Christian, this time in a ceremony that honored both religions. Four years later, the couple joined the Interfaith Families Project (IFFP) of Washington, D.C., whose mission is to raise member families’ children as Jewish and Christian. From the members, clergy, and teachers of IFFP and similar organizations elsewhere, Miller gathered the stories of how these families successfully raised children who are happily interfaith and intend to raise interfaith children themselves. Miller concludes this fine resource with a look at the next wave of, this time, Christian-Muslim and Christian-Hindu interfaith families.”<sup>14</sup> Booklist

*Being Both* is an insightful, thought provoking book showing how interfaith families, after decades of

being told no you can't, are demonstrating that yes, they absolutely can raise children dual-faith and do so in a way that is not at all detrimental. Susan Katz Miller's primary research, including surveys and extensive interviews of couples, children, young adults, and clergy, as well as sharing her own personal interfaith experiences result in rich, moving story. As a spouse in an interfaith marriage raising dual-faith children, it was inspiring and comforting to read about others who are trying similar approaches and to know that obstacles can be overcome. I hope that interfaith couples and families as well as their extended families and clergy will read this beautifully written book to enrich their understanding of interfaith relationships and expand their perspectives on what is possible.

(Disclosure: my husband and I are the founders of a Philadelphia-area interfaith group modeled after D.C.'s IFFP and Susan Katz Miller has been a strong advocate and supporter of our effort.)

Engaging and informative for those families who would choose to raise their children with knowledge of more than one religion and tradition. This is a story about faith and belief and move beyond the boundaries of one particular tradition so that children and adults are aware of the sacred through two sets of eyes--and engagement. Most families are learning about Judaism and Christianity--but there are examples of other combinations as well.

This is a great book. Everyone in a mixed relationship should read it. Or better yet, everyone should read it. It is amazing how it portrays the natural course of the future of relationships not only in America, but in the world (that's me extrapolating, by the way, but it's true). In a global era we can't expect for things to be the same and to just be involved with people the same as we are. This book sheds some light over the way these relationships work and the many ways people have to make it work for them.

Not as story based as I'd hoped . More about the author & less about other faiths. Not enough stories about non Jewish families.

Thank you, Susan. This is an excellent book. Well written, well edited and best of all, not apologetic at all! I was so glad to read a book that is so clearly enthusiastic about the experience of raising children in more than one faith. I found myself saying "amen" (silently, in my head, since I was on the plane) almost every page! I really hope that this book gets widely read and distributed. I feel that the interfaith communities where children are educated and families celebrate are still really hidden, so that when people do hear about them they act as if they are part of some crazy, untested theory

rather than something that has been going on for years. I was surprised at how old some of the "where are they now?" kids were! I also want to thank you for your honesty in sharing your story. It's not easy. I totally understand the "sighs" you talk about. Good work.

As my husband and I discussed the idea of marriage 21 years ago, we read every book about interfaith relationships we could find. There weren't many available but they helped guide us get to where we are now. Susan Katz-Miller's book is so comprehensive and honest and hopeful. It has reaffirmed for us that the choices we made were the right ones for our family and that we are not alone. This book is great for everyone whose lives are touched by interfaith relationships at any stage of life...interesting, helpful and easy to read, it's a great resource for this day and age. Don't miss this one!

Miller's book is a self-serving discussion justifying multi-faith religious education of children. This book is not about pluralism, interfaith dialogue or religious tolerance. However, the book is a good read on what interfaith families have to endure. The book is well detailed and document in an attempt to justify the "embracing of two or more religions in one interfaith family". The book provides much source material for the "muddying down" of religious traditional observance by replacing it with interfaith observance by children outside the mainstream of religious observance. The parents of interfaith marriages are being portrayed as being already ambivalent about institutional religion themselves with some being raised in interfaith or religion-less families. The result being that their children are being manipulated into determining which religion or religions by being made to choose for themselves being educated in two or more religions because their parents are unwilling make that choice for their children or themselves. My major concern of the book is that institutional religions are falsely portrayed as being hostile to interfaith families and children. My wife and I in an interfaith marriage of 27 years have attended both mainstream church and synagogue regularly and have been welcomed in both settings. We also raised two children. The book's objective is to have children "cherry pick" their religion or combination of religions of choice in adulthood absolving the parents of responsibility. The book's real purpose is to portray traditional religious observance as being hostile to interfaith families already struggling to raise children in a religious environment by negating what the traditional religious education and observance has to offer.

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