

The following six books are just some of the many books written on the topic of intermarriage. They range from simply informative (such as *Rabbis Talk About Intermarriage*), to persuasive (such as *It All Begins With a Date*), to practical (such as *Mixed Blessings*). Each book is aimed at a different audience, and I have indicated who I think would be most interested in reading this particular text in the notes.

If one had the time and inclination, reading all of these books would give anyone a thorough education in the issue of intermarriage – concerning attitudes of both Jews and Christians, religious law, children of these marriages, potential obstacles, etc., etc. But as few people have this time, I have chosen specific books for each category of reader.

Although it is a difficult choice, I would say that the most helpful of all from a pragmatic standpoint would have to be *The Intermarriage Handbook*. For a couple considering intermarriage, this is the most comprehensive resource I have yet encountered. The provided exercises seem as though they would be helpful for any interfaith couple, and equal time is given to both Judaism and Christianity. In addition, the authors touch on gay issues, a much-neglected area of interfaith relationships.

From an intellectual standpoint, I found myself enthralled by *Jewish Intermarriage* and *Rabbis Talk About Intermarriage*. Even as a Jew, I was ignorant of many of the issues presented in these texts. I learned that many prevailing attitudes towards intermarriage are simply not supported by religious scripture. However, these volumes would not be as interesting to people who were not interested in Judaism or couples who have chosen not to affiliate themselves with Judaism. (Intellectual discussions about intermarriage are much more prevalent in Judaism than in Christianity for several reasons, not the least of which is the sheer number of Christians versus Jews in the United States, roughly 76% to 1.3%. *The Intermarriage Handbook* asserts that most Protestant ministers view intermarriage as a “nonissue” [p. 336].)

Insofar as the objectives of the Feminist Sexual Ethics Project are concerned, probably the most relevant volume would be *Between Two Worlds*. The authors do a fine job tackling problems such as abuse, divorce, and discrimination. One of my original questions about intermarriage, whether intermarried couples would have a harder time admitting marital problems, is also addressed.

Cowan, Paul, with Rachel Cowan. *Mixed Blessings: Marriage Between Jews and Christians*. New York: Doubleday, 1987.

**Summary:** Structured in three parts, this book 1) chronicles the authors' interfaith marriage; 2) provides a history of intermarriage in America from the late 1800s, and 3) provides steps to take for couples who are in interfaith relationships. The third section will probably be the most practical to people who are thinking about interdating or intermarriage. Interspersed throughout the entire volume is a wealth of case studies across a spectrum of results, from couples who could not reconcile their religious differences and decided to split, to couples who have

been married for years and were forced to deal with their children's religious decisions.

**Recommended for:** Interfaith couples who are more interested in the personal or practical aspects of intermarriage (as opposed to religious or legal aspects); people interested in the history of Jewish acceptance and persecution in America.

Eichhorn, David Max. *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction*. Satellite Beach, Florida: Satellite Books, 1974.

**Summary:** This book is a very personal undertaking of Rabbi Eichhorn, a well-educated, distinguished, and opinionated Reform rabbi who has performed over two thousand intermarriages. He challenges widely-held beliefs about *halacha* (Jewish law) and condemns rabbis who encourage non-Jewish partners of Jews to convert for the sake of marriage. By turns fascinating and enlightening, it does have some flaws: it is somewhat outdated, there is a lot of focus on the actions of the Reform ruling body, and Eichhorn's tone is, at times, downright scathing. (At one point, Eichhorn refers to rabbis who advocate pre-marriage conversion as "sanctimonious, shortsighted and stubborn mules" [p. 59].)

**Recommended for:** Interfaith couples who wish to have a deep understanding of their status in the Jewish community; Reform Jews who are interested in their sect's positions on intermarriage; Jewish-identifying children of interfaith couples, especially those with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother.

Fishman, Sylvia Barack. *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004.

**Summary:** Ms. Fishman, who interviewed hundreds of interfaith couples for this book, compiles her sociological findings into readable, understandable chapters, such as one concerning the "December Dilemma" (i.e. how to handle the holiday season), and one on the parents of the couple. Although not as in-depth as many other books in which the author surveys interfaith couples, it is useful nonetheless. The most interesting aspect of the book is Fishman's unique research into how Jewish people and interfaith couples are portrayed in the media, from *The Merchant of Venice* to *Annie Hall*.

**Recommended for:** Anyone interested in a more academic look at interfaith marriage.

Glaser, Gabrielle. *Strangers to the Tribe: Portraits of Interfaith Marriage*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

**Summary:** Ms. Glaser, who took on this project because of her own intermarriage, has written her own story and the story of eleven other interfaith couples. The stories vary wildly, from a Hawaiian couple in which the Japanese,

formerly Methodist woman converts to marry her Jewish boyfriend, to a now-split interfaith lesbian couple whose religious differences were underscored when they traveled together to Israel. Each portrait is in-depth, examining the family of both members of the relationship, and offering insight into their religious choices. The author does not shy away from chronicling the sometimes painful emotions that accompany the problems that coming from different faiths can pose for couples.

**Recommended for:** Interfaith couples in committed relationships who are interested in seeing how other couples have handled similar situations; marriage counselors who want to learn about the difficulties that interfaith couples face.

Goodman-Malamuth, Leslie and Robin Margolis. *Between Two Worlds: Choices for Grown Children of Jewish-Christian Parents*. New York: Pocket Books, 1992.

**Summary:** This book is a comprehensive guide for children of intermarriage who are struggling with "living in two worlds." Topics covered include marriage, raising children, divorce, choosing a faith tradition (whether Judaism, Christianity, or another religion entirely), and recovering from dysfunctional homes. The authors are the founders of Pareveh, a support group for adult children of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage, and statistics and quotes from the children of interfaith families are used liberally throughout the book.

**Recommended for:** Children of interfaith marriage (about 14 and up); spouses or children of children of interfaith marriage; interfaith couples who want to educate themselves on the possible repercussions of their religious choices; therapists who deal with children of intermarriage.

Petsonk, Judy and Jim Remsen. *The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews & Christians*. New York: Arbor House William Morrow, 1988.

**Summary:** This is an incredibly comprehensive, step-by-step guide for couples who are about to enter into an interfaith marriage or are already married. Every topic in the life cycle, from marriage to the birth of children to death, is covered, with exercises and case studies provided. Also included are a brief history of Jewish/Christian relations, broad ethnic and cultural categorizations and aspects of each ethnicity and culture, and appendices detailing both Jewish and Christian holidays. Much of the book is dedicated to "choosing a family style" (p. 213) and how couples can go about choosing the religion of their children.

**Recommended for:** Interfaith couples at any stage of their relationship; marriage counselors who want to learn about the special concerns of interfaith couples.

Silverstein, Alan. *It All Begins With a Date: Jewish Concerns about Intermarriage*. Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1995.

**Summary:** This is a decidedly anti-intermarriage text sponsored by The Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism. Silverstein emphasizes the “depressing process of disappearance through assimilation” (p. 11) and argues that non-Jewish spouses of Jews should not be welcomed into the Jewish community unless they convert (p. 34). Indeed, he devotes an Appendix to the topic “Judaism and Christianity Are Different” (pp. 167-77). Silverstein essentially believes that intermarriages will either cause the family to become a non-Jewish one, or that the husband and wife will split under the pressure of religious differences.

**Recommended for:** Young people who are trying to justify their decision to date only other Jews; grandparents with intermarried children who want to make their grandchildren’s lives “more Jewish.”

Tobin, Gary and Katherine Simon. *Rabbis Talk about Intermarriage*. San Francisco: The Institute for Jewish & Community Research, 1999.

**Summary:** This is a compilation of interviews of rabbis from all major denominations of Judaism. The authors do not take a pro- or anti-intermarriage stance; they present the spectrum of thoughts and feelings that rabbis have about interfaith marriage, officiating at interfaith weddings, and the “Jewishness” of such unions. Feelings of rabbis range from “anguish and hopelessness” (p. 18) to “unabashed pleasure” (p. 41). Other topics covered include conversion, Jewish education, and marriage counseling.

**Recommended for:** Anyone who is interested in learning about rabbis’ attitudes on intermarriage, whether they themselves are for it, against it, or undecided.

After reading the books I've summarized, one conclusion has stood out for me as the main message of many of these volumes. Religious choices can be extremely difficult for an interfaith couple, but they must be made, and made early in a relationship. The attitude of "we'll cross that bridge when we come to it" seems to cause a wealth of problems not only for the couple, but for the couples' families as well.

This issue comes to light especially when raising children. In an interfaith family, there are many choices in choosing a child's religion: equal exposure to both religions, exposure to only or mainly one, immersion in a third, separate religion, and no exposure to religion. Any of these choices is a valid one, and is up to the parents. However, if this choice is not made before the birth of a child, chaos can ensue. Authors have chronicled how a Christian parent may demand a baptism for the first time when the new baby is only hours old, or how a Jewish parent may begin agitating for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony when a child approaches twelve or thirteen. If a couple does not communicate regarding the religious choices of the family they are creating, they are setting themselves up for exponentially more difficult choices down the line.

My advice to interfaith couples everywhere is to inform yourselves and talk about the potential stressors that stem from religious differences. If you can, include members of your family in your discussions. Do not hesitate to seek advice from family counselors or sympathetic members of the clergy. The bottom line is this: the more aspects of your life together that you can decide upon together early on, the better your life together can be.