

## Spring, Time for Choices and Family

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Source: Jewish Outreach Institute

It is not surprising that more North American Jews celebrate Passover than any other holiday, including Hanukkah. The spectrum of Passover holiday observance is rather wide and even the most traditional observers welcome a healthy measure of creativity to its celebration. Adding to its appeal is that Passover is primarily home-based (not synagogue-centered) and family-oriented (welcoming of children). Outreach to guests is affirmed as well. And of course, it includes a major-league meal!

Passover, more than any other one rite or ritual, is a *summary* of Judaism. It includes the core Jewish story of redemption from Egyptian slavery; the formative journey through the Sinai desert on the way to the land of Israel; and various encounters with God, culminating in the revelation of Torah. Perhaps the most important contribution of the Passover story is the infusion of the Jewish people with unyielding hope in the face of adversity. Plus, for those who live in northern climes, it reminds us of the coming spring which we have anticipated all winter long. And it does all this in the course of an evening meal (ok, a long evening meal) in an exquisitely subtle way.

Likewise, Easter is a defining holiday of Christianity. The Easter story tells how the martyred Jesus becomes Christ, the Messiah for those who believe. Similarities to Passover include the anticipation of springtime. And some will even suggest that Jesus' Last Supper was none other than a Passover Seder. Such connections can form a bridge for greater understanding among interfaith families.

For those who consider Passover and Easter to be primarily about families getting together and enjoying special moments, there should be no real conflict. For those, however, who search for a deeper religious meaning in their respective faith celebrations, there are a number of options interfaith couples can choose from to reduce tension around these holidays.

Passover and Easter are unrelated as holidays. They are not *in conflict* with one another but rather are simply "a disconnect," stressing different outlooks on the spiritual and the religious. Couples that go their separate religious ways (even in the midst of their marital union) may avoid conflict, but at the price of perhaps losing a shared sacred time together.

Another possible option is for families to "universalize" both holidays and try to tease out the humanist values that are contained in them (and leave the particularism behind), or try to meld the symbolic and ritual elements in them to form one whole. At the Jewish Outreach Institute, we are concerned that following this option runs the risk of robbing *each* holiday of its own character, leaving families with ritual practices lacking in a deeper spiritual meaning.

Of course, we affirm the personal autonomy of individuals to make informed choices. The method behind our mission at JOI is one of speaking honestly and fully about all the issues surrounding interfaith marriage. (And that's also something we appreciate about [InterfaithFamily.com](#).) By sharing what we've learned about the potential for conflict, we try to help interfaith families work through it, to strengthen their relationships. It is a *mitzvah* (sacred obligation) to help promote *shalom bayit* (literally, "peace in the home"), and that's why we try to listen, learn, and share, to help reduce tension as much as possible.

So what do we recommend? Take the time to look at Easter and Passover. Study the holidays together. Get a real sense of their inherent and explicit values and teachings. Discuss your feelings. While both traditions may contribute to your own sacred stories, is there one that you want to offer your children? On which spiritual and religious path do you want them to continue their own journey forward? Address the issues

head-on and take control of them, rather than letting the issues overrun you and your family.

To some this may seem obvious, but to others who may be avoiding the issue, or who are just beginning their journey, we hope it will help you focus on what's most important to you and your family. And we're here to answer any questions you may have along the way! All of us at JOI wish you the best for this holiday season.