**Growing Up
Multi-Faith**

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On all my school forms, under religion, my mum would tick Jewish, Muslim and Christian, and she never raised me to think of myself any differently. She came from a Jewish family, and was raised in a traditionally Jewish environment. She married a man who was half Turkish Muslim and half Irish Catholic, and together they had me. Within Judaism, which goes through the maternal line, I'm considered Jewish, and under Islamic law, which is paternal, I'm Muslim. If I wanted to be Christian too, it wouldn't be too difficult.

The society that I've grown up in has been one filled with different cultures and ethnicities which has led to a wide range of religions existing side by side. This notion of multiple religions co-existing within a society is known as religious pluralism, and it's not really surprising that in countries with freedom of religion we often find it in high levels. Most people, subconsciously, or unconsciously, are absorbing other religions into their own lives, alongside any other religion they actively practice or do not practice. For example, mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism; yoga from Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism and many families will sit down and have a Christmas meal regardless of their religion or background.

The intermixing of religions within society has also led to another form of religious pluralism, where people accept that there are multiple paths to truth/heaven/God. This resulted in many people picking and choosing from different religions and identifying with a variety of different belief systems. The 'Jewbu' is one of the most popular examples of this, with an increasing number of Jews identifying with the philosophy of Buddhism. Given that Buddhism doesn't have a concept of God, on the whole adopting Buddhist thinking won't conflict with Jewish belief. Similarly, the popularity of kabbalah, a mystical Jewish philosophy, has been practiced by many non-Jews, and has a wide range of celebrity followers, most notably Madonna, Elizabeth Taylor and Demi Moore. Its popularity in the mainstream world has allowed many people to adopt the philosophy without formally entering the Jewish religion.

I personally identified as Jewish, and it wasn't difficult for me to do so. My parents divorced and although my mum raised me in a very secular, irreligious, assimilated household, where she constantly emphasised my mixed religious background, it wasn't hard for Judaism to become a part of my life. I went to Hebrew school every week where I mixed with other Jewish children. I would go to Israel two or three times a year, and my grandparents taught me Jewish songs, and all the blessings I needed to know. I was educated about Jewish history, and celebrated the main festivals. As I've gotten older, I've become more in tune with my own Judaism, distinct from the Judaism given to me by my family. I like following the traditions that come along with Judaism, and the nice thing about Judaism is that you don't need to believe in God to be Jewish. I go to Friday night Shabbat dinners but I can do this and not feel a need to start professing a resilient belief in God. There are many atheist Jews who will upkeep certain Jewish traditions like keeping kosher or fasting on Yom Kippur, simple because it's culturally important.

As I've delved further into what Judaism means to me, I've also had to grapple with a lot of aspects about Judaism that make me uncomfortable. The position of women is a classic example here. Although attitudes are changing, there are still aspects of Judaism which limit the potential of women. For example, within Orthodox Judaism, women are still prohibited from leading communities as rabbis. However there are positive changes happening within the Orthodox community. A Modern Orthodox school in New York now allows female pupils to wear tefillin (phylacteries) worn by all men during morning prayer, and female Jewish learning is generally encouraged. There are also large Reform, Liberal and Progessive movements within Judaism where these problems aren't apparent (although they're not without their own problems). Even within Judaism there's a certain level of plurality, and there's definitely room within the religion to find your place and have your views respected and accommodated.

In contrast, my grandparents on my father's side both died before I was born. I'm fairly sure my dad has never defined himself as a Muslim, and he's never passed any form of Islamic identity on to me. I've never felt Muslim in any way, shape or form. I find Islam a fascinating religion, with an incredibly interesting history, and I think it's sad that more people don't know about it. I also think

it's a shame that Islamic contributions to the world and its history often get forgotten about. Just like Judaism, there are aspects of Islam that I've questioned, and tried to wrap my head around, with the position of women, and the rise of extremist Islam being the two most prominent. Yet I've never felt any sort of attachment to Islam in the same way I have with Judaism. I'm fairly confident that this is because I've grown up in a predominantly Jewish environment, but even with the constant reminders from my mum that I can be Muslim if I wanted to, it never personally appealed to me. While I haven't adopted a serious belief in the religious doctrine of Judaism, Islam or Christianity, there is the consideration that if I were to, I'd probably end up with conflicting views. Given that there's so much common ground between the three religions, adopting a unique belief in one will probably result in a contradiction with a belief from another.

In general we live in a very interesting time for religion. People are increasingly becoming satisfied with 'cherry picking' from other religions, and not feeling bound to one sole religion. There's an increasing number of inter-marriages, and therefore lots more children growing up, like myself, with a range of religious backgrounds. What this means for the future of religion will be interesting and general studies differ as to whether or not religious pluralism promotes religious vitality or weakens it. In my personal experience, growing up with a knowledge of a variety of religions in my background led to an interest in religion and inter-faith, but it didn't lead me to take on any form of religious plurality between Judaism, Islam and Christianity.