

Mixed (Inter faith) marriages...
by Narottam Das, Sri Nanda Nandana Das and Dr **Dr. Dilip Amin**



There is no such mention in our Hindu sastras about a Hindu marrying a Christian or Muslim because these are still baby religions as compared to Hinduism whose name is actually Sanathan Dharma. When our Puranas was compiled by Srila Vyasadevji which was over 5000 years ago these religions didn't even exist...

I am not against inter-marriage but when two people marry from different religions it opens up a can of worms and generally its not nice worms I must say. I have done many marriage counseling sessions from a spiritual point of view and I found that the love when it disappears and reality checks in then the couple realize, man what a mess I got myself in... Also what do you name the baby who do you go see a pastor or a mulana or a Pundit. It just gets more and more complicated...

Anyway thats my point of view being a Hindu priest...

I still do believe that a Hindu marry a Hindu but thats me due to experience with couples... but again if you fall in love with a person from another religion thats love and when one in in love then whoa its whole different ball game... you can't talk to a person in love they seem to be in a trance or not in their senses...

Introduction by Sri Nanda Nandana Das. I want to thank Dr. Dilip Amin for putting this thoughtful information together. Interfaith marriages are becoming an increasingly important topic among Dharmic parents. Personally, when it comes to interfaith marriages, I have seen only a few of them really work out. When a Hindu marries someone of another religion, often the spouse who is Muslim or Christian expects the Hindu to immediately or eventually convert. This may be due to a number of factors that are not always obvious at the beginning of the marriage, such a family pressure, or the birth of children, etc. This is especially the case when a Hindu girl

marries an Abrahamic spouse. Even if the spouse does not expect conversion, then at least the children are expected to be raised to become Christians or Muslims. Rarely is this otherwise. Even if the children are exposed to both religions and left to make their own decisions about which religion to follow, it is generally found that within one, two, or at most three generations, that family is no longer connected to the Vedic tradition.

However, I have seen marriages work out nicely when, for example, a converted western Hindu male or Dharmist marries an Indian Hindu female, or vice versa, and plan to raise their children in the Vedic tradition. Or even when two converted Hindus marry each other. But when a Dharmic follower marries a person of the Abrahamic faith, the future can be turbulent with unexpected consequences and problems, especially when children are born. Therefore, I do not advise anyone who wants to make sure their family continues in the Dharmic tradition to enter into an interfaith marriage. You simply cannot be sure of what is going to happen, and much heartbreak and turmoil can result. The following two articles below by Dr. Dilip Amin will make this clearer.

Summary: Now more and more young people are making friends and engaging in interfaith relationships leading to marriage, many times without realizing the complexities associated with their decision. This message will help Dharmic (Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist) young adults to help them make more informed decisions before committing to marry a person of the Abrahamic faiths (Christian, Jew, and Muslim).

As the former president of a Balvihar, I only regret one point of our collective inaction: though we had taught our kids about our religion, we failed to teach them the practical aspects of interacting with young people from other faiths. In the Western world, it is quite common that young adults date those from other faiths during their college years, therefore it should come as no surprise that about a third of our young generation of Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists (Dharmic) marry a person from outside of these Dharmic faith traditions.

In almost all cases where a non-Dharmic life partner is selected, the decision is made by our young adults without pre-emptive advice, guidance, or consultation with their parents. As cited in this article, religious differences could bring complexities in their married life, starting with an unintended religious conversion of Dharmic and their progeny to the faith of their intended spouse. Further, divorce rates in interfaith marriages are double compared to within the same faith marriages (http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifm_divo.htm). For these reasons, it is increasingly important for our young adults to understand potential complications before entering into a serious relationship, ideally during the years in which they still reside under their parents' roof.

While interfaith relationships should develop based on a mutual respect for religious diversity, sometimes major differences in fundamental beliefs pose difficulties in

finding a common ground.

Dharmics carry this tolerant attitude that all faiths help you attain God, and everyone should respect not only their own religion, but other religions as well. But this tolerant attitude is not universal. Many families belonging to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Abrahamic) believe in the supremacy of their 'monotheistic' dogma. Their holy books reject what they consider 'polytheistic' beliefs of Dharma. For example, Hindus believe that although the Ultimate Reality can be worshiped in many forms, but this recognition and practice is forbidden in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and poses a serious issue when it comes to puja or worship (which is considered very bad -'idol' worship by Abrahamics).

According to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..."

Another example, Islam forbids marriage with a non-believer (in Allah). Non-believers are expected to convert to Islam by taking the Sahadah oath, the declaration that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad as **his** apostle. A similar practice also exists in some Christian sects where there is often intense pressure from family members and the clergy to perform a religious conversion of a Dharmist by Baptism before the church wedding. An uninformed Dharmist will only discover the often times unmentioned expectation of religious conversion after years of being in a romantic relationship. At this point, reluctantly accepting the religious conversion may be the only way of averting a marital grid-lock.

Religious conversion may be a matter of just a brief ceremony, but do not underestimate this ritual as a trivial matter. Taking this oath will set a tone for your life and your children's lives. You will soon find out that the conversion was not just a matter of satisfying the sentimental obsession of the parents-in-law, but a binding commitment guarded by every member of the new community. As per the Sahadah oath, you will be forbidden to display an image of Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, or Lord Ganesh, or any other deity in your own home since associating partners with Allah is the greatest of all sins. Offering prayers or supplications to anyone, living or dead, is an unpardonable sin. Furthermore, attempting to later reclaim yourself as a Dharmist, even after talaak (divorce), could be seriously punishable by death or life imprisonment by some Middle Eastern countries' laws. Therefore, one should be prepared to accept conversion to a new religion as a serious and irreversible process.

Most conflicts in inter-religious marriages will surface after you have children. For Abrahamics, it is vital that children from their marriage follow only the rules of their individual holy book. A Muslim spouse and the community may demand your kids have sunat (religious circumcision) and bear only an Arabic name. A Jewish person may not ask for a religious conversion for the spouse but may want Bris circumcision

to declare the Jewish faith for the child. A Christian spouse may require Baptism of children and require them (and you too) to attend Church every Sunday, while you may wish to take your child to the Mandir.

Another major consideration is about the expectation for family planning. I know of a case where an Ahmedabadi young Patel already has five kids because her Catholic husband did not believe in birth control. Did she know and realize the consequences of her interfaith relationship while dating in college?

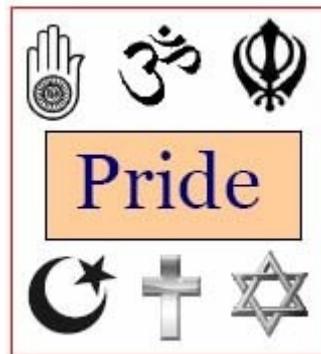
In the truest sense, marriage is a secular act and not a religious one. Unfortunately, some religious leaders and communities would like to use the wedding as a tool for their ambition of religious expansion. I learned of a case in Boston where without the Sahadah and Islamic wedding (nikaah), the wedding was denounced by a local Imam and most Muslim relatives did not attend the wedding reception party. In almost all cases of a Hindu-Muslim marriage in which both Muslim and Hindu ceremonies are performed, the religious conversion to Islam (Sahadah) is performed first. Then it is followed by the Muslim wedding ceremony (nikaah) and after that by the Hindu ceremony (Vivah). Similarly, in many church weddings declaration of faith to Christianity is a mandatory requirement. Therefore, technically speaking, after conversion to Islam or Christian faith has been performed, the Hindu ceremony is a totally superfluous oxymoron – because it is a ‘Muslim to Muslim’ or ‘Christian to Christian’ wedding performed by a Hindu priest! In such a wedding, do celebrating Hindus really know what why they are celebrating?

While investigating the possibility of a relationship with those from other religions, be sure to find out if there is going to be any pressure to convert for you and your future kids from not just your future life partner, but also from his or her family members and religious community. Not all Abrahamics impose their religious beliefs and practices on their spouse, but it is very important to find out the facts sooner than later. It is also important to note that despite all the potential marital pitfalls, a successful and fulfilling inter-religious marriage is possible, ideally, by not imposing one’s respective religious beliefs on the other partner. A similar message has been given in Jodhaa Akbar, Gadar, and Namaste London movies. Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan and Suzanne Khan kept the religions out and got married by a civil wedding, and it is an admirable act. If someone you are dating cannot show you this same respect and expects you to forsake your own religion for marriage, even just in name sake, you must ask yourself if you are prepared to tolerate the intolerance being practiced against you.

Before entering into a relationship, one should have an open **dialog** about religious expectations (especially the conversion business) and recognize the far reaching consequences. Though dealing with this issue early on will obviously be important for the well being of the couple, it is also a significant issue for their children, not to mention the couple’s extended families who take pride in preserving their religious and cultural traditions that have been passed down for generations and generations.

Well-informed and well-thought out decisions for selecting a life mate will certainly bring long lasting happiness in a married life, even if it is an interfaith marriage. But most importantly **is that** we want to make sure we will have the freedom to follow our traditions and raise our children to do the same without threats to this liberty created by our spouse and his or her relatives.

Questions About Interfaith Marriages



As the world is getting smaller, people with diverse backgrounds are coming closer. Consequently, more and more young people are making friends and engaging in interfaith relationships leading to marriage, many times without realizing the complexities associated with their decision.

These questions and answers are prepared with the objective of educating young people of ALL faiths to help them make more informed decisions before committing to marriage.

What is the main message here?

Interfaith relationships should be based on mutual respect for both faiths, and marriage should be solemnized without imposing religious conversion on a spouse. After marriage, both spouse's faiths should get equal respect and consideration in home life and raising children.

Is religious conversion for marriage wrong?

Not if it is discussed early on in the relationship and agreed to by both parties, without coercion. Some conservative Islamic and Christian families still believe in the superiority of their faiths, thus forcing the spouse of any other faith to convert to their faith before an Islamic Nikaah or a church wedding can take place. Such expectations should be discussed upfront before getting deep into a relationship. To ask an intended spouse to give up his or her religion just before the wedding IS UNETHICAL. In such cases, the coerced spouse feels cheated at a time when they expected to experience some of the sweetest memories of their life. It harbors a doubt in their heart if a

spouse deceptively practiced proselytism under the guise of love.

What is wrong if one converts to a new faith just for marriage, as far as allowed to practice his/her own faith after the marriage?

Be careful – Religious conversion is not a hollow ritual devoid of any meaning or consequences. Let's take a Christian-Muslim marriage as an example. As per the Sahadah oath to convert to Islam for Nikaah, you accept and declare that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his apostle. Further, you acknowledge that associating others (like Jesus) with Allah is the greatest of all sins. Similarly, baptism before a church wedding means conversion to Christianity and a commitment to repudiate former practices (of Islam) and to live with Christ forever. You must ask yourself what is your intention?

Do my children have to convert too?

This should be the MOST CRITICAL question in interfaith relationships, even if there was no conversion required for the marriage ceremony. Ask if your intended spouse expects your sons and daughters to have baptism, bris (for Jews) or sunat to declare their faith for life.

How a decision to select a faith is usually made?

In most cases, the decision for selection of the faith for the spouse and children is made to please the more rigid and intolerant spouse, or the more stubborn parents / community.

Are the above questions relevant to Hindus?

The 'Dharmic' religions (Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists) are not normally accepted or tolerated by the Abrahamic "People of the Book" in a marriage. Hindus believe in one Supreme God, but they are free to worship the same God in many forms. However, this practice is forbidden in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and poses a serious issue when it comes to 'Puja' or the worship of various Dharmic/Hindu forms of God. According to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods (e.g. Ganesh) before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God ... punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me."

Can we teach our children both religions?

It is difficult. Young kids get confused with mixed and often conflicting messages. For example, when you take them to a Hindu or Jain temple, you ask them to believe in, respect, and bow to several forms of God. But when you take them to a mosque or

church, they hear just the opposite, exclusive, and intolerant messages. When confronted with such duplicity, children lose faith in any God or religion.

My spouse is open-minded and we could get around these religious expectations.

Remember, a marriage is not just the union of two individuals but, believe it not, a union of two families and two communities. It is ethical to be upfront and honest about your intentions with your new family rather than building life-long relationships on deception and lies.

I'm not so religious; I don't mind religious conversion for marriage to please my spouse.

Life is full of changes. In general, people tend to return to their roots as they age, especially when they have children. How will you feel if you find yourself irreversibly locked into unintended practices?

Conversion is only a formality, why not do it just to please my spouse and his/her family?

The religious conversion is not a one time deal; you are setting a new tone for your life. If you feed a shark, it will come back again for more food. Similarly, religious conversion for marriage will be followed by the expectation of a declaration of faith for your children via baptism, bris or sunat. Later, you may be forbidden to practice your own religion so children would not learn and follow it. Also, your spouse or his/her family may not like to be part of a religious activity while at your parent's home. When your fantasy love period ends and it transforms into a routine married life, then these issues may become sore points in your life.

My spouse didn't know before but is asking now for conversion to please his/her parents.

Do not be convinced by the old trick of playing innocent. Every one uses that. If after living with the same parents and community for most of their life, he or she should have known of their parents and community's expectations. If he/she had not, then you have the right to question his or her intelligence.

What is the true test that my intended spouse is not a religious fanatic?

Simple! Just ask for two promises, the second one being the more important:

- 1) No religious conversion for marriage; and
- 2) No baptism, bris or sunat for your children. And have it in writing...

But what if he or she does not agree?

If someone you are dating lacks tolerance for what you believe in and expects you to forsake your own religion for marriage, even just in name sake, you must ask yourself if you are prepared to tolerate the intolerance that is being practiced against you.

Why do so many marriages end in divorce?

Some of the major reasons are miscalculated expectations and the resulting complaints that my “spouse changed” after the marriage. Before entering into an interfaith relationship, find out sooner than later, if he or she has true tolerance for what you are.

Is a fulfilling relationship possible in an interfaith marriage?

Yes, if the interfaith relationship is based on true mutual tolerance for religious diversity.

[This article available at: www.stephen-knapp.com]

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