



Inter-Faith Relationship: Can it work?

Dear Couples Company:

I am Muslim and the guy I love is a Christian and a very religious one. Our love started out as friendship and then became LOVE. I know I love him more than he loves me and I am ever ready to do anything for him. We want to marry and we both can't live without each other. We have made all sorts of plans about the future and I know if I couldn't marry him I will forever stay single... the problem is: when we decided to marry, the problem of religion arose and I am unable to change mine.

He said he would 5 months ago, but yesterday he said he couldn't carry on with the guilt of the lie that he had accepted Islam. He said he lied to me just to save his love... now he says, "we can stay in our own religions and will marry". Today he changed his statement and said "living in our own religions will be too darn difficult, coz it will badly hurt our children.

"I don't know what to do. Neither of us want to change our religions and either of us want to quit...we love each other immensely.

Miss Ivan
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Miss Ivan:

Let's take a look at what you've got going for you first. Of all the religions in the world, Islam and Christianity are as close to each other as religions can get. Both recognize and revere Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Apostles as prophets. Both hold the Ten Commandments in high esteem and as God's law. Both are monolithic, and espouse servitude to God and the tolerance and charity toward all fellow men. Both place forgiveness and acceptance as reverence and demonstration of faith. In these key areas, your faiths are compatible. True, both faiths have groups that twist their meanings to their own purposes, but in the core values, the faiths are identical. This is a good thing.

Where you are going to run into problems is the execution of your faiths and in this area your fiancé has a valid concern. As you say you cannot change your faith. The same is true for him. Christianity isn't disposable to those whom both practice and adhere to the faith, the same as Islam isn't disposable to you or to other Muslims whom are devote.



When I say execution, what I mean is the manner by which you both follow your faiths: customs, traditions, holidays (or lack there of), time and method of prayer and the rules set forth by each faith that determine how you each behave and go about your business day to day. Here are a few examples. I'm assuming you follow the kosher rules of Islam. As Christians, the book Galatians absolves Christians from practicing and adhering to the customs originally founded by Israelites, and depending upon which portion of Christianity he subscribes to, adopting these practices would be similar to discounting the teachings of Jesus Christ. This why Christians can eat pork, don't require kosher foods or kosher preparations and why the traditional holidays of the Israelites are not observed by Christians like Yom Kippur and Chanukah.

Photographs & Music: This may or may not be an issue for you as Islam has as many different factions as Christianity, but in some portions of Islam it is forbidden to have photographs of people on the walls, listen to music or participate in many of the rituals customary in Christianity. Christian surround themselves with photos of loved ones and music plays a significant part of worship. Christians also celebrate birthdays and the drinking of wine and alcohol is central to some of our traditions and ceremonies, (though some factions of Christianity like the Methodists do not use or promote alcohol).

Conversion to another faith: As a Christian, if he were to convert to Islam, it is an action akin to a mortal sin. By doing so he denies Christ is the Messiah, (the cornerstone of his faith). In Christianity, once exposed to Christ and the choice is made to turn your back on Him, Christians believe they are no longer admitted to heaven and denied ever-lasting life in God's kingdom. Basically it means a Christian can no longer spend eternity with God. Depending on which portion of the Christian faith he is, this can mean he is sentenced to eternal damnation in hell or relegated to a different area of heaven. Either way, for a devote Christian, eternity is high price to pay for earthly pleasure. Just like Islam, a devote Christian believes his reward comes after he leaves this earth. His time here is a test of his worthiness and willingness to place God above all others and his purpose as a Christian is to serve God first.

Another issue you will run into is his duty to share his faith. It is the duty of every Christian to share their faith and spread the words of Jesus Christ to non-believers. Asking him not to raise the children Christian or to raise them under two faiths is the same as asking him to forsake his faith. He cannot do this and continue to be a devote Christian.

I'm not as familiar with Islam, but I have studied the Qur'ân. From what I understand the penalties according to your faith should you convert or augment it, are similar those of Christianity. What you need to ask yourself is whether it is more important to you to serve God according to your faith or to get married. If it is to serve God as your faith has taught you, marriage doesn't seem to be in your best interest given this situation. One of you will have to compromise your core values and in the end, this usually breeds resentment.

CAN AN INTER-FAITH MARRIAGE WORK?



Interfaith marriages can work, but rarely when both people are devote as you've stated you and he are. Marriages between faiths work when one or both persons are pseudo religious, meaning he or she states they may be Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Mormon or any other faith but doesn't practice it. A pseudo religious person may go to church or temple and occasionally pray, celebrate the holidays or follow some of the traditions, but these people don't live their faith.

Sometimes, especially with teens and young adults, much anger can be directed at their faith because the media tends to report the bad examples and abuses. More commonly, a person experiences the faith being abused and used toward evil ends. Christianity, Islam and Judaism all have current examples of people using these faiths as cover and conviction for evil. Seeing this and understanding it leaves many disillusioned and at times the disillusioned will seek a different faith to escape the abuse of their own or empathize with another faith believing it more just and pristine.

People in disillusionment are not pseudo-religious. They are usually quite devoted and need time to work through the anger. In time they realize it is not the faith that is the problem but the fact that humans administer it. Humans aren't perfect, nor do they always have the best interests of their fellow man in mind. A disillusioned person will reclaim their faith, much stronger the second time around due to two occurrences: children or personal challenge. It is amazing how important faith can become when children enter the picture or when a person faces a major crisis.

In the instance where one person is pseudo religious and the other is devote, the pseudo religious person always converts to the religious spouse's faith. After consulting with several people in the clergy for all three faiths, none of our sources are aware of an inter-faith relationship involving two devote persons of differing faiths that has been successful. It requires a compromise of faith and values. For devoted followers of any faith, devotion to God comes before all else. The sacrificing of the faith is too much of a burden for those whom are devote to live with.

Understanding this, ask yourself if it would be fair to either of you to ask the other to abandon a principle part of what makes each of you who you are? If you love each other, your answer has to be no.

One statement you made, "I'll do anything" concerns me. Be very careful about changing who you are to please a potential husband and likewise asking him to change for you. In the end it never works out and you'll become bitter and resentful toward each other.

What is important is that you stay true to yourself and true to the core values and beliefs that make you who you are. No man is worth the price of abandoning these, no matter how much you love him. Likewise for him, no woman is worth abandoning his relationship with God nor would it be right for him to ask you to forsake your own relationship with God.

ONE FINAL COMMENT ON SOME OF YOUR FEARS

I understand you're worried that at twenty-three you will never have a chance to marry again. I also understand that in Pakistan women marry young and at twenty three you're probably feeling quite old. If you'll permit me to get personal, I remember feeling the same way when I became engaged at your age. Fortunately I broke that off when I realized he and I were morally incompatible. In our case it wasn't religion but our ideas of what parents should be. It took two years before I started dating again and it seemed like I'd never meet the right man.

Then, still single, I turned thirty.

Believe me, I know the fear of never meeting a husband. I was a basket case (American slang for going crazy with worry and anxiety) by age thirty-three. Finally I turned my marital status issues over to God. I decided I was tired of trying and I'd just let him show me what to do. If it is his will I marry, he'd make it happen. If not, he had another purpose for me and I just needed to wait to find out what it was. Six months later I met my future husband. The lesson? I tried writing the script for my life and it turns out God had a better one. When I stopped fighting His will, He came through. The truth is, 90% of all people get married at one point in their lives. Your chances are very good that if this relationship doesn't work out, God will provide you with a life mate later on. He has plans for you. All you need to do is ask, listen and follow His guidance and your faith. He will show you the way.

Good luck!

