

20 Questions to Ask Before an Interfaith Marriage

Dharmic–Abrahamic Relationships

By Dilip Amin, PhD

If you are in a Dharmic–Abrahamic relationship, for example, Hindu, Jain, Buddhist or Sikh with someone who is Jewish, Christian or Muslim, these are important questions to discuss before marriage, rather than after.

Love is important, but marriage also involves religion, family expectations, children, traditions and daily life. Before making a commitment, ask your partner to discuss these questions with their parents and, where appropriate, their religious or community leaders. This is important because an individual's answer may change when family or religious expectations become involved.

Marriage and Conversion

1 Conversion

Is there any expectation that either partner will convert for the marriage? Could there be pressure or coercion to convert after marriage?

2 Marriage ceremony

What marriage rituals will we follow? Will we have one religious ceremony, two religious ceremonies, or a secular ceremony?

3 Religious agreements

Will either family or religious institution expect a written religious agreement, such as a Shahadah, Ketubah, church agreement or other document, that could influence our married life?

Religious Life at Home

4 Practicing our faiths

Will both partners be free to practice their respective religions at home? Will either religion place restrictions on the other?

5

Religious symbols and practices

Can we display religious items such as a murti, cross, menorah, a photo of kaaba or other symbols? Will daily puja, aarti, prayer or namaz be welcomed in our home?

6

Religious holidays

Which religious holidays will we celebrate, and how will we decide which traditions to follow?

7

Holidays with families

How will we divide time between our families during Thanksgiving, Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Hanukkah and other important holidays?

8

Role of parents and extended family

What role will each set of parents have in our married life? How often will we (they) visit them (us)? Will they bring their religious practices or expectations into our home?

9

Food and dietary practices

What dietary practices will we follow? Will our home be vegetarian, kosher or halal? Will we keep beef, eggs or alcohol in the house?

10

Clothing and appearance

Will either partner have expectations about wearing, or not wearing, a sari, bindi, hijab, turban or other religious or cultural clothing?

Religion of Children

11

Circumcision

Considering there is no compelling scientific merit to circumcision, will our sons be circumcised for religious reasons?

12

Children's names

What names will we give our children? Will their names reflect one religion, both traditions, or neither?

13

Religious ceremonies

Will our children have ceremonies such as christening, baptism, bris, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Shahadah, Sunat, Namakarana or other religious rites?

14

Religious education

Will we teach our children about both religions? Which religious tradition, if any, will be considered their primary faith? Will one parent's religion be treated as less important?

15

Raising children in two religions

Can our children be raised with meaningful exposure to both faiths? If not, why not?

16 Time devoted to religion

How much time will our children spend each week in religious education, worship, classes or community activities?

Religious Institutions and Community

17 Religious participation

Will either partner be expected to attend a religious institution on a regular schedule? If so, how will we balance participation in both communities?

18 Financial contributions

Will we make regular financial contributions to religious institutions? In some cases it could be 3-12% of our gross income. If so, what amount is expected, and how will we decide whether contributions should be made to one or both communities?

19 Equality in marriage

Will there be genuine **50-50 equality between the two faith traditions** in our married life? Will either partner eventually be expected to give up, minimize or subordinate their religious identity?

End-of-Life Rituals

20 Death and funeral practices

If one of us or our child dies, will the person be cremated or buried? Which religious funeral and end-of-life rituals will be followed?

One final thought

These questions are not intended to discourage interfaith marriage. They are intended to encourage couples to have difficult conversations before marriage, when there is still time to understand differences, negotiate expectations and make informed choices together.

The goal is not to eliminate every difference. The goal is to know what those differences are, and to agree on how you will handle them before they become sources of conflict.

Working through them with Dilip Amin, PhD. A private video session on the questions that are hardest for the two of you, or for your families: globalspiritualcare.org/services/interfaith-marriage/. You can also answer these questions online, together, and bring the result to the session: globalspiritualcare.org/20-questions/. An initiative of the Hindu Spiritual Care Institute.