Family meets faith [1]

Dear Alice,

I have been with my partner for almost six years. We are both from different religions (I'm Muslim and he's Hindu). I would like to raise my children as Muslims. He says we should raise them with both, but I completely disagree with this as I disagree with the religion of Hinduism. I have read a lot about Hinduism and asked him to do the same about Islam for 1 year now? I even gave him the Quran, but he just can't be bothered.

I'm due to go abroad for three months in two months' time, and I think that we should break up because we can't agree on our future. My parents are completely against this marriage, and so is his family. If I marry him, I risk losing my family completely. We are great together because we hardly argue unless it's about religion. I thought, perhaps, if he started reading and asking questions about my religion, he might convert (because then we would not have a problem) or even start to see things in a new light. He is brought up only believing what his parents told him about religion? he does not actually have any proof or evidence telling him what they have been telling him is correct about Hinduism.

I am just tired of this as we are going around in a circle and cannot seem to agree. I already am taking a big step by marrying him even though he is of a different faith. Please help.

Answer

Dear Reader,

It sounds like you've invested a great deal in your relationship, and there are aspects of it that are really positive. Religion appears to be a strong value for both of you, but you have some fairly fundamental differences of opinion. Talking through your religious differences, what options you have for parenting, and determining whether you can accept these differences might be a key part of building a more stable partnership.

You're both bound to influence one another just by being in a relationship and that can certainly spur some growth and changes? like stopping a habit or picking up a new hobby. And, some people certainly have more of a tendency to change than others. But, you're not necessarily setting your relationship up for success when its future relies on the hope that your partner will change something fundamental about himself. To think through this further, it might help to ask yourself some questions, such as: If he maintains his Hindu faith, would you be able to fully respect and support him as a partner? Do you feel respected even though he doesn't want to learn about your beliefs? Reflecting on your answers might give you some
insight into whether you think you can remain in the relationship given the possibility that your partner doesn't change his beliefs.

Reader, you also mention that deciding to marry against the will of your families could lead to your family to exclude you. For some people, rejection from family members is a very high price to pay. Have you talked with your family about the issue? Initial negative reactions? even strong ones? may soften with time. Is there a family member who could be an ally and help win over others? If your family has a chance to get to know your partner, they might come around. You may be able to show your family that people of differing faiths can have loving, happy, healthy relationships. Their love for you could enable them to see past other differences or open their minds to new ideas. If you do choose to marry, and your family won't support you, maybe you can create a loving "family of choice." Seeking out close friends or mentors to fill some of the roles often played by family members can help provide mutual emotional or financial support, advice, and companionship.

If you're able to support one another's beliefs, and come to a general agreement about religion and parenting, raising a child together will undoubtedly require a tremendous amount of negotiation and compromise. When it comes to strategies you can take, there are multiple options? one of which your boyfriend already brought up. Some people choose an integrated approach where both religious beliefs and customs are melded together and celebrated. Others might choose a co-existing strategy where each person maintains their individual beliefs and tend to hold a respectful?agree to disagree? mentality. Another approach is where one person has decided to become fully integrated into their partner's religion. Parenting strategies and attitudes often differ between partners even when they don't have religious differences, so it?is not always an easy task. You might think about each of these situations and what that would look like for you and your boyfriend. Which ones make you comfortable? Which seem like deal breakers? Just viewing them as options might provide a space for you and your boyfriend to speak openly and honestly about what your values and priorities are for starting a family.

Perhaps having a neutral third party involved to discuss your differences might help you reach a resolution, or at least move forward. You might consider seeking out a mental health professional that specializes in helping couples work through conflicts. Some even have specific experience working with interfaith couples. Consider checking out How to find a therapist [2] in the Go Ask Alice! archives for more information on locating a provider that?s a good fit for you and your partner.

Lastly, when all is said and done, you might still decide that faith is a sticking point for you that you're not willing to negotiate and that's okay. Being honest with yourself and aligning with your values is a critical part of being happy in your life and relationships.

Alice!

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