



INTERFAITH MARRIAGE SOME PASTORAL GUIDELINES



VICTORIAN

multicultural
commission



VICTORIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
COMMISSION ON LIVING FAITHS,
DIALOGUE AND COMMUNITY

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Preface

The Victorian Council of Churches is pleased to be able to make this publication available to those who have contact with couples from different faith backgrounds who are planning to marry. While much of the material is descriptive, we believe it will assist people to understand the meaning which different faiths place on marriage.

We have tried to gather contributions from as many faith traditions as possible and have allowed each faith to be represented in the words of its own believers. Where no contributor was available from a faith community, we have gathered information from published material from that faith. We trust that we have done so sensitively and accurately.

The publication of this booklet has been made possible by a grant from the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Council expresses its thanks.

November 2010

Mr Theo Mackaay, General Secretary



Cover photo of Megan Gixti by Jo Trevelyan, 2006. Used with permission.

Epilogue

The preceding pages contain material prepared by representatives of Christian Churches affiliated with the Victorian Council of Churches and we thank them for their thoughtful and helpful contributions.

We are also grateful for the information made available by friends and spokespeople from other faith groups in our community, particularly the Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish people.

But we are aware that this booklet is not comprehensive.

There are a number of Christian Churches not represented in the Victorian Council of Churches, such as the Presbyterians, some Baptists, Evangelical Assemblies and organisations such as the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are also gaps in the non-Christian Faith groups.

Readers of our little handbook who find themselves in dialogue with people with these affiliations are advised to make direct contact with their spokespeople. We hope the information in the handbook will prove a useful resource in furthering the effectiveness of the dialogue in which you will need to engage.

That dialogue should start with you listening and asking questions, with honesty and goodwill. If you are like us, you will find out much about yourselves, as well as about those whose help you need.

Early in our exploration of this topic a wise and experienced colleagueⁱ advised the Commission that solving the problems of creating a successful wedding ceremony was only a beginning. The real measure of success would be how successful the marriage would be, for the couple, for their children and for their families. Some very engaging work has been done to explore interfaith marriages 'down the road'. Please see recommendations for online references below.

The Editor of the handbook, Gemma Creegan, has found the task associated with compiling and writing the information stimulating and enlightening. We hope you too find it helpful.

Prof. Richard Snedden

ⁱ The 'wise and experienced colleague' is the Rev. Gary Bouma

References and Recommendations for Further Reading

The ABC program COMPASS screened a series on ABC1 on 28th June 2009 called 'Faithfully Yours', which follows the interfaith marriages of three couples. You can find it on the web at www.abc.net.au/compass. You can watch the program on your computer, download it or just read the transcript. The Editor is Ms. Kim Akhurst, who can be contacted at akhurst.kim@abc.net.au

Introduction

Interfaith marriage is becoming more common in Australia as people from all over the world find their home here. In response to questions about the nature and conduct of Interfaith marriages that have come to the Victorian Council of Churches (VCC), the VCC Executive have authorised the Commission on Living Faiths to develop a resource about interfaith marriage practices that will inform clergy who are assisting in, or planning, marriage ceremonies for couples from different faith communities.

The purpose of this resource is to better equip clergy to assist and advise couples and those families concerned. The intention is to provide information about and understanding of the issues and questions that couples from different faith origins, contemplating marriage, need to consider.

A marriage is between two people, but each partner brings experiences and aspirations that come from their family upbringing. This can include some significant differences in lifestyle expectations and worship. It may also involve commitments by couples to new practices and/or traditions.

This information has been gathered from leaders within different faith communities and reliable web sources. It contains what Commission members believe to be useful information, based on what is common practice of the different faith traditions. As such, the information is descriptive rather than prescriptive. To this end Commission members would suggest that clergy involved in the planning of, advice about and implementation of interfaith marriages listen carefully to couples contemplating such marriages and respond to their needs and wishes as they feel able to do so.

“We are today in a new situation. Inter-religious marriages are likely to be on the increase, not because people are less committed to their faith traditions, but because there is a new human reality in which old barriers are breaking down. All religious traditions should revisit their attitude and approach to people who have found each other across the fences.”ⁱ

Mr Gavin Faichney

ⁱ Ariaraja S Wesley, *Not Without My Neighbour: Issues in Interreligious Relations*, Geneva, World Council of Churches (WCC) Consul Oecumenique, 1999, 130pp.

References and Recommendations for Further Reading

Ekklesia, (www.ekklesia.co.uk) Data showing historical statistical changes to marriage patterns in the UK e.g., growing numbers of civil ceremonies and cross-cultural marriages.

ⁱ A search of the website of Uniting Church's Assembly Working Group on Interfaith

ⁱⁱ Particularly Mr David Schütz's essay for the Roman Catholic Church.

ⁱⁱⁱ Uniting in Worship-2, The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sydney, 2005. The section Marriage and Related services begins on page 349.

^{iv} Ibid., p.358, note 19.

^v Ibid., p.358, note 19.

^{vi} Ibid., p.359, note 20. The numbers in the text refer to the sections of the service named. (14) The Proclamation of the Marriage has this 'Trinitarian formula': 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I therefore proclaim that they are now husband and wife.'

^{vii} This way of expressing the doctrine of God is commented on critically in note 8, p.140, of The Service of the Lord's Day, and any alternative to the explicit Trinitarian formula is ruled out in Baptism (see Note 15, p.65, The Sacrament of Baptism and the reaffirmation of Baptism called Confirmation'.

^{viii} See, for instance, the Uniting Church statement 'So you want to worship together...' on the website <http://assembly.usa.org.au/rof/religious-gatherings/20-so-you-want-to-worship-together>. This includes recommendations of care as to location, clarity of purpose, and content of inter-faith gatherings.

References & Recommendations for Further Reading

The space to watch is the Assembly's website which is continually updated: <http://assembly.uca.org.au/>

Preamble

Marriage in Australia

Australia is a civil society, which, under its Constitution, allows individual citizens to embrace faiths and religions of their choice.ⁱ The Commonwealth Constitution dates from 1901ⁱⁱ and the Founding Fathers of Australia regarded it as a predominantly Christian community, albeit with many versions of that faith. The wording of the Constitution and the proceedings of its new Parliament reflect this view, with many references to God, opening each day in Parliament with prayer and the swearing of oaths on the Bible.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Section 51. (xxi) Marriage, and Section 51. (xxii) Divorce and matrimonial causes; and in relation thereto, parental rights, and the custody and guardianship of infants.”

These are the references in the Constitution, which gave, and still give, the Commonwealth power in these matters. However, the laws relating to marriage, birth and death, the status and naming of children, parental rights and responsibilities, schooling, place of residence, work – in essence, all family matters which occur as a result of marriage, were already being managed by the States, which had the legislation and the administrative resources to deal with them in place.

The Commonwealth decided to leave things as they were, despite well-known discrepancies and significant differences in the law from state to state.^{iv} By the 1950's the Commonwealth decided it would have to intervene and in 1959 passed the first uniform act dealing with Matrimonial Causes, though the first Commonwealth Marriage Act dates from 1961. Since then, there have been extensions to those acts, which are now known together as the Family Law Act, first consolidated in 1975. This legislation is still developing – the most recent being the changes in 2004 to preclude recognition of same sex partnerships as marriages.^v

Any discussion of interfaith marriages in Australia must be aware of this constitutional and legal framework. The consequence in Australia is that no marriage is legal unless it satisfies the requirements of the Commonwealth legislation.

The Commonwealth Family Law Act defines who has the status to enter a valid marriage and what the minimum incidents of such a marriage shall be. It authorises all wedding celebrants, who may be “ministers of religion” or clergy but do not have to be.^v

Marriage by Civil Celebrants

People may become civil wedding celebrants, with the authority to conduct wedding ceremonies according to a format chosen in conjunction with the couple being married, so long as the minimum requirements of Commonwealth legislation are met.^{vi} In Australia, civil celebrants must be authorised by the Attorney-General's Department of the Commonwealth. Most are currently members of one of the two large representative organisations of practising civil celebrants.^{vii} These organisations offer training, accreditation and support in the resolution of disputes involving their members. Other civil celebrants operate quite independently. Civil celebrants often widely advertise their services.

sensitivity while being faithful to the Church's understanding of God. The Trinitarian formulae in the Proclamation of the Marriage (14), the Blessing of the Marriage (15) and the Blessing of the Congregation (19) should not be modified.”^{vi}

In short, the service is one of Christian worship, with pastoral sensitivity to others involved, but no compromise of Christian faith, or ‘syncretism’, is permitted. A non-believer would not be asked to use the phrase ‘in the presence of God’ in the vows, for instance, though most persons of faith could say those words with integrity.

The Uniting Church has also set out the essential parts of the Marriage Service, as distinct from parts, which may be omitted according to circumstance. Amongst the essentials are, ‘Scripture readings, proclamation of the Word, prayers and the marriage rite’. The latter includes the parts with the Trinitarian formula mentioned above. It adds, ‘It is acceptable to use alternative wording with the same meaning and intention, but the essential elements are marked...’, which suggests that, with the exception of the three sections named earlier, these can be modified with care. There are alternative wordings within the service e.g. at (15) The Blessing of the Marriage. In ‘B’, the reference to God reads, ‘May almighty God, who creates you, redeems you and guides you, bless you now and always’. The meaning (however inadequate^{vii}) is still that of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

It is also true that the service of Reaffirmation of a Marriage (usually undertaken at a later date, e.g. a significant anniversary) or the Blessing of a Civil Marriage, are a case in terms of the Christian faith. They do not have the same status as the Marriage Service itself, tied as it is to an agreement with the laws of the Commonwealth, so it should be possible to adapt them to particular circumstances, including respectful acknowledgement of other religious faiths. In both cases, they assume that a legal marriage has already taken place. They contain statements of the Christian understanding of the purpose of marriage, prayers ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord’, and Trinitarian formulae of blessing but it may be possible for the representative of another religion to offer additional prayers and blessings. In this, the normal rules of interfaith worship apply^{viii}: that is, there should be no suggestion that the faith expressed is some sort of ‘mixture’; the religious acts (readings, prayers, and blessing) should occur separately, so that they may have their own integrity. Where such an occasion is held will be of significance: the Uniting Church notes that the Service of Blessing of a Civil Marriage might occur either within a normal Sunday service (which in this context would be unacceptable) or ‘privately’ e.g. in a home (which would resolve the difficulty of dedicated buildings).

The Uniting Church is committed to creating good relationships with people of other living faiths. Though the conclusion of our examination is that a seriously minded couple of differing religious backgrounds would be best served in their marriage service by a sensitive civil celebrant, followed by a private gathering in which the two faiths might suitably express their ritual affirmations, there is no doubt that the Uniting Church is likely to respond to this relatively recent trend in Australian society and make appropriate recommendations.

Rev. Prof. Emeritus Robert Gribben



10 Uniting Church of Australia

We note at the outset that interfaith and inter-religious marriage is not a matter on which the Uniting Church in Australia (inaugurated in 1977) has made direct legislative provisionⁱ. Therefore what follows is an individual perspective, based on long pastoral experience, involvement in inter-religious dialogue, and in the development of the liturgies of the Uniting Church. Some of the points are made on the analogy of intra-Christian marriage, where, for example, a Uniting Church person marries a Roman Catholic or member of another Christian church.

As is said elsewhere in this bookⁱⁱ, each couple comes with their own background, their own personal commitment and their hopes for the future. One partner, or both, may share a deep commitment to their religion. They may have come to a respectful understanding of their partner's religious views. In every case, where the Uniting Church is involved, adequate enquiry and counsel must be sought before the church's rites are involved. In most cases, as we shall see, the most honest way forward may be to request the services of a civil celebrant and seek involvement of religious leaders as can be agreed, in the service or at a later time.

A Uniting Church Minister of the Word or Deacon is authorised to conduct marriages on the basis that the Commonwealth Government understands that the authorised liturgies of the church will be the form the service takes. In the case of the Uniting Church, though a full liturgy is authorised in its worship book, there is some freedom in the words and rites used. The services in *Uniting in Worship-2* (2005)ⁱⁱⁱ are these:

Blessings of an engaged couple
The Marriage Service
A reaffirmation of marriage
A service of blessing of a civil marriage.

The book states, 'the Christian celebration of marriage is an act of worship, an expression of the Church's offering of the whole of life to God. It is a pastoral occasion in which the community of faith shares in the joy of bridegroom and bride; it is an evangelical occasion in which all those who have come to witness the marriage may be challenged by the implications of the Christian faith.'^{iv}

The liturgy is designed to express this understanding. If the service is conducted by a minister of the Uniting Church, they will be the person who leads the service, administers the vows, and authorises the legal documents. There are provisions for the involvement in the role of assistant – of pastors from another Christian denomination.^v This note, however, is made regarding non-Christians:

Where one person is a Christian and the other is an active member of a non-Christian religion or an unbeliever, the minister should exercise pastoral

The availability of civil celebrants can be important for a number of people seeking interfaith marriages because a couple may prefer to seek a civil celebration to avoid the difficulties of arranging a multi-faith ceremony, which satisfies the requirements of particular faith celebrants, as well as the participants and their families. Sometimes, a couple may seek a simple civil ceremony conducted by a government official to be sure of meeting legal requirements for a valid marriage, with additional religious ceremonies held later to reflect the faiths of participants, and friends and families resident or widely dispersed in countries of family origin.

Marriage by a civil celebrant is also attractive to some couples because the ceremony can be relatively inexpensive and can, by arrangement, reflect at least some of the cherished customs of their traditional ethnic and faith backgrounds.

In a number of instances civil celebrants have worked with clergy to conduct marriage ceremonies, which allow particular clergy, important to the families, to play significant roles short of a full faith service.

Prof. Richard Snedden

ⁱ Section 116 of the Commonwealth Constitution states: -

“The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.”

It has long been held that the Christian religion is not recognised as part of the underpinning social value system of the Common Law (*Cowan v Milbourn* [1867] L.R.2 Ex. 234). Today the claim would be expressed that the Christian religion forms a basis of the general social order of Australian society.

ⁱⁱ The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act comprises Acts 63 and 64 of the Imperial Parliament of the United Kingdom, was assented to by Queen Victoria on the 9th July 1900 and came into effect on the 1st January 1901.

ⁱⁱⁱ Section 42 “an oath or affirmation of allegiance in the form set forth in the Schedule to this Constitution.”

In practice the Commonwealth operates three forms of oaths. One is an adjuration by invocation of the Deity, with uplifted hand, commonly called the Scotch oath. Second is the ‘ordinary’ oath on the Bible, ending with the words, “So help me God”. The third is an affirmation or solemn assertion or denial, omitting any invocation of the Deity.

^{iv} “There is a good deal of diversity in the divorce law of the states and, it is quite possible, so long as the states remain separate law districts, that parties may be married persons in the view of one state and single persons according to the law of another.” (Harrison, *The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 2nd edition, 1910)

^v Prior to 2004, marriage was not defined in the Act. The Marriage Legislation Amendment Act 2004 inserted a definition into Section. 5 (i) of the act, as follows: “Marriage means the union of man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.”

The 2004 amendment addressed the issue of gay marriage in Australia. Prior to the enactment of the 2004 amendment there was uncertainty as to whether the Marriage Act 1961 allowed gay marriage. There was also uncertainty about whether the 1961 Act ‘covered the field’ so as to preclude gay

marriage. If the 1961 Act did not cover the field then the states could 'fill the gap' to legalise gay marriage in that state. If the Commonwealth Act covers only heterosexual unions it is still arguable that states may have residual powers in relation to gay unions.

^{vi} There are three categories of persons in Australia who can be authorised to celebrate a marriage.

- (i) Ministers of Religion recognised by the Governor-General for the purposes of the Marriage Act and registered in the Register of Ministers of Religion in the state or territory where they normally reside. They may celebrate a marriage at any place in Australia (S.32) but may refuse to conduct a marriage if, for example, the proposed marriage offends the tenets of their faiths. However, if such a marriage proceeds and meets the other requirements for a valid marriage, it is valid whatever the religious law of a faith determines (Meyer v Meyer (1964) 6 FLR 36).
- (ii) State or Territory appointed Registrars or Deputy Registrars of Marriage (S.39) (2).
- (iii) Other suitable persons appointed by the Australian Attorney-General (S.39). Today they are known as Civil Marriage Celebrants.

^{vii} The Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961 (as amended) sets out the required forms and specifications of a valid marriage. For example, since 1961 the minimum age for marriage is 18 years for both boys and girls, with court approved exceptions for special circumstances. Marriages will be legally void if the parties are already married; the parties are in a prohibited relationship, the marriage is not solemnised by an authorised celebrant; there is no consent by both parties (due to duress, fraud, mistake as to identity, mental incapacity, etc, as set out in Part II of the Act). Marriage celebrants are expected to satisfy themselves that these 'forms' are correct and observe the times and sequence for the preparation and presentation to authorities of required evidence to substantiate the marriage is valid.

The Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants of Victoria Incorporated.

www.marriagecelebrants-victoria.org.au

The Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants.

www.civilcelebrants.com.au

humanity and seek unity with Almighty Lord. To attain unity with Almighty Lord is the theme, mission and objective of a Sikh marriage.

*"They are not to be called husband and wife who sit together;
rather they are husband and wife who have one spirit in two bodies."*
~ Sri Guru Granth Sahib ~

Ms Ranjit Kaur

References & Recommendations for Further Reading

Kaur-Singh, Kanwaljit, Sikhism for today, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Sikh Wedding, <http://www.sikhs.org/wedding/>

Gupta, Hari Ram, History of the Sikhs, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984

where once each individual alone had made a commitment to that path, now two individuals, together in their lives, are committing to that path.

The *Anand Karaj* ceremony begins with an *Ardaas* – a prayer seeking God’s blessing for the proposed marriage. This is followed by the reading and singing of a certain selection of *shabads* (hymns) written by the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ramdas. In these *shabads*, which are called the *Laavaa* (nuptial rounds), there are four stanzas. The four stanzas depict the four stages of human consciousness seeking God realisation. After reading each stanza, the stanza is sung and the bride and groom circumambulate the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the centre of their spiritual lives as Sikhs. In doing so, they will reaffirm their commitment to the spiritual path. The circling signifies a passage into higher and higher circles of existence. This is repeated four times, once for each stanza in the *Laavaa*. With the conclusion of the fourth *Laav*, the reaffirmation of the commitment these two individuals are making is complete, and the essence of the *Anand Karaj* ceremony is also complete. After this, a few more *Shabads* are sung, and finally, the entire congregation offers a prayer. This is prescribed in the *Sikh Rehat Maryada* – Sikh Code of Conduct.

The Four Laavaa

The fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas, in the *Laavaa*, describes the four stages of the spiritual journey toward *Waheguru* (God). In the Sikh faith, marriage is both literal (union of two people) as well as metaphorical (the union of an individual with God).

First Laav: Emphasises the performance of duty to the family and community. The preparation and justification for the state of marriage is encouraged and supported as the best state of life for a Sikh.

Second Laav: Describes the first feeling of love when the bride (or soul) has left her old life behind and begins the new life of partnership. On a spiritual plane, one meets the True Guru, the guide on the spiritual path, without whom there can be no further progress. Through the Guru’s guidance, one sheds the ego, and all of the other vices within the mind begin to dissipate also. Through the Guru, one begins to realise the pervasive nature of *Waheguru*.

Third Laav: Describes the bride’s (or the soul’s) detachment from the world and outside influences through deeper devotion. One reaches the state of an intense feeling of yearning to find *Waheguru*. It is the *Sangat* (holy congregation) that carries one forward through this stage.

Fourth Laav: Describes the most perfect love and devotion when no feeling of separation is possible between the two, the final stage of harmony and union in married life during which human love blends into the love for God. This is the stage when one reaches the goal of meeting *Waheguru* within oneself. The mind reaches a state of complete harmony and peace and remains immersed within *Waheguru* at every instant from then on.

The ceremony of *Anand Karaj* gives equal status to man and woman. Both husband and wife, enjoy equality and freedom in all spheres of life. Both of them, enjoy a householder’s life, love each other, love creation, love the path of Sikh faith, serve



1 Anglican

Anglican Christians recognise marriage as a God-given institution, which has a sacred character whether or not it is contracted between Christians or in the context of a Church with accompanying ritual. However the Anglican marriage service also includes specifically Christian elements, which as part of a marriage involving one or two baptised persons, provide a special framework for understanding the marriage in those instances.

The possibility of marriage between Christians and others was known in the earliest times of the Church, and was unavoidable in a pluralistic society. Although there is in New Testament writings a warning to Christians against marriage to persons of other faith (2 Cor 6:14), such circumstances are acknowledged (1 Cor 7:12-16), and the marriage is regarded as providing a form of sanctification (7:14) for spouse and children.

Christian marriage was not always conducted under the direct auspices of the Church, but has for a much longer period been regarded as a “sacrament”, meaning that it has a particular theological significance centred on the public acceptance of each other by husband and wife. This is often seen in terms of an analogy with the love between God and God’s people, and/or between Christ and the Church.

Since the Middle Ages, the Church has expected marriage between Christians to be celebrated publicly with the involvement of the Church and its ministers. This partly reflected the situation in Medieval and early modern Europe where Christian baptism and membership of the Church were almost universal, as well as an increased significance given to the religious and not merely the social or economic dimension of family structures. In the reformed Church of England, out of which Anglicanism has sprung, this expectation continued.

Until the 1970s, Anglican rules required that both parties to a marriage celebrated in a Church be baptised, and hence members of the Anglican Church or another Christian Church. Marriages between Anglicans and members of other Christian Churches were always possible.

This requirement was changed in recent decades to require that at least one of the couple is a baptised person and an Anglican, reflecting the changed circumstances of Australian society and its increasingly multicultural and diverse character. Since no further distinction or requirement is made about the religious belief or practice of the non-Anglican party, they may be persons of a different religious tradition, or of none.

It is of course also possible that Anglicans may marry members of other faith traditions in a ceremony of that tradition, or in a civil and secular setting.

In both these cases, Anglicans would be concerned both for the integrity of the Christian partner and respect for their faith and community, and also for the conscience of the other partner and parallel issues of respect, especially where they are active members of another religious tradition.

Anglican practice and teaching does not require that a particular conclusion apply in dealing with issues where partners differ over religious practice, or in the upbringing of children. Ministers who prepare a couple for marriage will certainly discuss these issues with the couple and encourage them to reflect seriously before marriage, and to deal with unforeseen issues with clarity, openness and mutual respect. Anglican Christians will however also maintain the hope that the Anglican partner and the children of such a marriage are able to sustain and to learn Christian faith, respectively.

Assoc. Prof Andrew McGowan



9 Sikh

The Sikh Wedding Ceremony - *Anand Kaaraj* (Ceremony Of Bliss)

The *Anand Karaj*, the Sikh marriage ceremony, is often viewed purely as a social event. However, within the Sikh faith, the essence of the *Anand Karaj* is predominantly spiritual. The two individuals that participate in the *Anand Karaj* sit before the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (Sikh sacred Scriptures), the guide in their spiritual quest, and thus seated, these two individuals reaffirm their commitment to walk on the spiritual path in the presence of the holy congregation. The Holy Scriptures factually represent God for Sikhs while the congregation is considered as an assembly of saints in the worldly form.

Marriage in Sikhism is a religious obligation. It is neither a contract nor a business but a lifelong sacred and spiritual commitment. It is a union for the performance of social and religious duties to achieve the goal of human life and live for one-another. It is a spiritual union and an opportunity for serving God through service of humanity.

The *Anand Karaj* is an important step socially because it is an affirmation to the community that these two individuals are making a commitment to each other. But, for those who have chosen to find the essence of the Sikh path in their lives, the *Anand Karaj* is an even more important event spiritually, for it reaffirms a commitment that is far more enduring and important in the Sikh way of life than the social commitment that is being made.

Commitment

It is said within the Sikh faith that there are four important events in any individual's life - birth, *Amrit* (initiation or baptism), marriage, and death.

In the Sikh way of life, the *Amrit* ceremony is a commitment an individual makes to walk on the spiritual path, when one reaches a stage in life that one is ready for that commitment. However, *Amrit* marks the beginning of a journey, not an end.

Amrit is an individual's commitment to begin walking on that path, and each person who truly wishes to reach their potential through the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, must first make a commitment to walk on the Guru's path.

The *Anand Karaj* ceremony

After *Amrit*, the *Anand Karaj* is the most important event in the spiritual life of a Sikh. The *Anand Karaj* is a reaffirmation of the commitment before the Guru, that

- 1) Will one partner convert to the religion of the other?
- 2) To what extent do the partners understand and appreciate their own religion and the religion of their partner?
- 3) Will each partner continue to be committed to and practice their own individual faith and will this decision be respected by the other partner?
- 4) How will they bring up their children?
- 5) What "life-cycle" ceremonies will be observed in the life of the family?
- 6) How would each partner be accepted by the other family and religious community?
- 7) What about the type of wedding ceremony?
- 8) How, despite their differences, might the couple still form a spiritual unity?

Note also that according to the canons of the Catholic Church, there are specific issues that must be dealt with before the ceremony between a Catholic and a non-baptised person of another religion (technically referred to as marriages with "disparity of cult"), if the marriage is to be regarded as 'valid' by the Catholic Church.

These include:

- 1) **Dispensations:** In order for a Catholic to marry an unbaptised non-Catholic, a special dispensation for "disparity of cult" is required from the local ordinary (the Bishop). Dispensation is also required if a non-Catholic celebrant, rite or place of worship is to be used.
- 2) **Dissolutions:** If the non-Catholic partner has been previously married, a dissolution of the previous marriage must be obtained.
- 3) **Affirmations:** The Catholic partner must affirm that he or she is prepared to avoid the dangers of abandoning the faith and promise sincerely to do all in their power to see that the children of the marriage are baptised and educated in the Catholic Church. The non-Catholic partner must affirm respect for this desire.
- 4) **Instruction:** The Catholic Church will also generally require that the non-Catholic party undergo at least some instruction in the Catholic faith and in the Catholic teaching on the qualities and obligations of marriage.
- 5) **Particular requirements regarding the Wedding Ceremony**

Mr David Schütz

ⁱ Adapted from "Interfaith, Intercultural and Interracial Marriage" (<http://www.stayhitched.com/interfaith.htm>), which in turn was based on Joel Crohn, *Mixed Matches: How to Create Successful Interracial, Interethnic, and Interfaith Relationships*, (Ballantine Books, 1995)

References & Recommendations for Further Reading

Schütz David, *Pre-marriage Preparation for Interfaith Couples*, Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission, Archdiocese of Melbourne, Roman Catholic Church of Australia, 2007.



2 Bahá'í

The religious and liturgical practices of the Bahá'í community and its approach to marriage reflect several basic understandings.

These are; affirmation of the validity of each of the great religions which preceded the mission of its founder, Bahá'u'lláh, and the eternal truths enunciated by all the Divine Messengers including Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad; the unity of God; love of one's neighbour; the moral purpose of earthly life; humanity's unity as one single race, and that the day has come for humanity's unification in one global society.

On the basis of those understandings the Bahá'í community works strenuously for interfaith understanding and cooperation, and accepts and encourages interfaith and "interracial marriage" on the basis of love between the individuals entering marriage together. Marriages occur frequently on that basis, with a number of provisos, which follow.

The Bahá'í community is organised and governed through Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, elected annually, with members holding responsible offices but without a hierarchy or clergy. In accordance with Commonwealth Marriage Law, the National Assembly accredits marriage celebrants who assist couples and Local Spiritual Assemblies to fulfil civil requirements for marriage. The Bahá'í marriage celebrant works with the Local Assembly, who counsels the men and women contemplating marriage, their parents and others involved. At times, the Bahá'í marriage celebrant will also work with the clergy of the other faith in interfaith marriages. In Victoria there are five accredited Bahá'í marriage celebrants.

The provisos for marriage to be recognised by the Bahá'í community are:

1. A marriage **may not** be arranged by the parents but a marriage proposed by a man and a woman must have the approval of all living parents before a Bahá'í celebrant can conduct it. Once they have given their approval, the parents may not interfere.
2. A marriage may be solemnised with a Bahá'í ceremony only, or with two ceremonies conducted either jointly or separately, provided that a night does not intervene between the two ceremonies. When two ceremonies are conducted the sequence is to be decided by the couple and the first ceremony will be the valid marriage for the purpose of the Marriage Act.

3. Only the simplest ceremony is required. The most distinctive characteristic of the Bahá'í concept of marriage is the fundamental belief that marriage is based on the submission of both partners to the Will of God. Their commitment is expressed in the vow they exchange. In the presence of two witnesses appointed by the Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly of the locality in which the ceremony is to be held, the couple recites the following verse: "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." Beyond that requirement, the couple may design their own marriage celebration according to their personal interests, family resources, and cultural traditions with music, dance,

dress, food and festivity. Bahá'ís view marriage as a divinely ordained institution under God and it is the commitment of each to the other. Their purpose is to be loving companions for all time. They should be united both physically and spiritually, so that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other and enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God

4. The decision to adopt or adhere to a particular religious faith rests entirely with the children when they reach an age and competence to make such a decision and therefore no promise or consent to bring the children up in a particular faith is permitted in a marriage ceremony or contract.

5. The love, nurture, education and training of children is a pre-eminent duty of parents, divorce is therefore discouraged ("condemned" in the code) but is permitted and recognised, conditional upon certain counselling and reconciliation procedures having been followed. Marriage will therefore only be solemnised when it is apparent that it is based on mutual attachment of mind, heart and character and a commitment to a binding covenant that is intended to endure forever.

6. No marriage can be recognised except between one man and one woman, having obtained the legal (civil) marriageable age and after an engagement not exceeding 95 days (not yet applicable in Australia).

7. Women and men are recognised equally. Dowry (not yet applicable in Australia) is based on the husband's place of residence and is paid by the husband directly to the wife (approximating A\$2,000 in cities or A\$500 in rural areas). The couple must share in all domestic responsibilities and enjoy the same employment opportunities. Both parents, whether of the same faith or different, must encourage children to develop habits of prayer and meditation, and to acquire both intellectual and spiritual knowledge. However the innate differences between feminine and masculine natures (both physical and emotional) are recognized explicitly, especially a mother's influence in the early education of children when basic values and character are being formed.

Committee of Bahá'í Marriage Celebrants

References & Recommendations for Further Reading

The Bahá'í Reference library

An online information resource of the Bahá'í International Community
'Marriage and Family Life', <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-6-4-1.html>

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Author: Bahá'u'lláh Source: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992 edition

Section C. Laws of Personal Status

Marriage: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA>

Personal conversations

An officer of the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly in Victoria

Key reference:

The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the Bahá'í International Community
<http://www.bahai.org>



8 Roman Catholic

In Catholic practice, an "*interfaith*" marriage is a marriage between partners from backgrounds in distinctly *different* religions, e.g. Christian/Muslim, Jewish/Buddhist. As partners who come from different religious backgrounds prepare to live their lives together, differences of religion can become critical.

Those preparing an interfaith couple for marriage have an obligation, without any loss of sensitivity, to assist them to recognise the magnitude of the challenges they will have to face. It might well be necessary for them to reconsider their intention to marry if they realise they do not have the personal resources to face these issues honestly and to find mutually agreeable solutions.

Interfaith couples reflect such a wide variation of circumstances that no single approach can be suggested which would be suitable for all. Practically speaking, however, there are only five possible models that a couple from different religious backgrounds could choose to follow: ¹¹

- *Single Faith:* in which one partner agrees to convert to the beliefs, traditions and rituals of the other partner.
- *Predominant Faith:* in which the couple agrees to follow (and to raise the children in) one of the two religions and yet tries to honour the beliefs and traditions of the other partner in a selective but relatively less significant manner.
- *Dual Faith:* in which the couple attempts equally to observe (and to raise the children in) the beliefs, traditions and rituals from each partner's religious background.
- *Multi Faith:* in which the couple adopts beliefs, traditions and rituals from a variety of sources, including those outside the religions of their families of background. This model presumes no strong adherence to the background religions on the part of either partner but also implies that "spirituality" is valued.
- *No Faith:* in which the couple deliberately chooses to take a non-religious approach to life, which involves minimal practice of religious beliefs, rituals and traditions. This model presumes no strong adherence to religion on the part of either partner despite their religious background.

The way in which the couple will approach the following issues will largely depend upon which of these models they decide to follow.

4. **Acceptable denominational traditions** include: *Roman Catholic, Anglican Church (Church of England)*

5. Having been baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, both parties are requested to responsibly declare that any **children** born of the marriage will be baptised according to the rites of the Eastern Orthodox Church and that they shall be raised in the Orthodox Faith.

Far from wishing to interfere in the couple's discretions and freedoms, the reason for this requirement is that the Church has, painfully, seen too many marriages often confront insurmountable problems because the subject of the children and their religious upbringing was not addressed before the wedding.

6. Marriages with persons who belong to the **following groups are prohibited** by the Orthodox Faith: *Pentecostal Church, Greek Evangelicals, Salvation Army, Christian Revival Crusades, Reborn Christians, Assembly of God, Christadelphians, Seventh Day Adventist, Church of Christ, Church of Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses* and other similar religious groups.

7. Persons who are **not Christian** or who have **never been baptised**, even though their parents belonged to a Christian tradition, can only marry in the Orthodox Church upon being baptised in a denomination acceptable to the Orthodox Church. Should they wish to become Orthodox of their own free choice, directions on the procedure are provided under 'Converting to Orthodoxy'.

8. A **non-Orthodox** Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian, whilst welcome to attend Church Services with his or her spouse (and children), **does not automatically become a member of the Orthodox Church**, and is therefore not permitted to receive Holy Communion or the other Sacraments in the Orthodox Church.

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

References & Recommendations for Further Reading

Fr John Meyendorss, *Marriage; An Orthodox Perspective*, NY: Crest wood SVS Press, 1984.

Fr John Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality and the Sacrament of Marriage*, Massachusetts: Brooklyn Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998.

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Bahá'í Topics

An information Resource of the Bahá'í International Community
<http://info.bahai.org>

One Country

The Online newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community
<http://www.onecountry.org>



3 Buddhist

The Buddhist Perspective on Marriage

The Buddhist position on marriage is founded on the understanding that the union of male and female is an intrinsic characteristic common to all living beings. The institution of marriage is considered both an individual concern and social convention, which is necessary to distinguish human beings from animal life. However, marriage is not constituted in Buddhism as a religious duty, which is guided by regulations. Rather, advice is given to promote wellbeing and happiness between a man and a woman to lead a life-long relationship founded on shared responsibilities, fidelity and loyalty. The main emphasis is on the life-long bond, which is being established between a man and a woman and thus the compatibility of the partners is considered paramount. Besides these, supporting one's parents, loving one's spouse and children, being generous, having a sense of duty, helping relatives and acting blamelessly, and reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude and listening to the *Dhamma* (teachings) too are considered important in a marriage.

Buddhist monks do not marry and are celibate. They do not attend marriage ceremonies and therefore do not preside at wedding ceremonies – they may offer blessings to couples on request on an occasion other than the marriage ceremony. Buddhist do not have an official marriage liturgy or ceremony, and regional customs and practices – which are formed within the acts of paying homage to Lord Buddha, seeking refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sanga*) and reciting the Five Precepts – provide a wide range of ceremonial elements and activities.

In Buddhism there are no religious ordinances governing divorce and a couple may seek divorce in civil courts.

Marriage Ceremony

Broadly, in Buddhism marriage is not considered a spiritual or religious event. Hence, there is no standard Buddhist liturgy and the marriage is regarded as a civil contract. However, when Buddhists marry they do so in a ceremony, which is arranged around making a commitment to the Triple Gem and the Five Precepts and the singing of *jayamangala gatha* (Stanzas of Victory) at the end of the ceremony. The rest of the ceremony will consist of local cultural customs such as starting and ending the ceremony at an auspicious time, paying tribute to parents, receiving and giving gifts from parents and elders of the family and holding speeches to wish the couple prosperity. Also, the couple may choose to visit the monks at the local monastery before or after the wedding to offer food and pay respects to the monastic community, recite the Triple Gem and the Five Precepts in a formal way, receive a *Dhamma*



7 Orthodox

Marriage is a Sacrament, a Mystery of the Orthodox Church, through which the union of man and woman is sanctified by God. Married life is a special vocation, which attains its fullness through the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is this very grace that is conferred on the couple during the Wedding Service.

The Orthodox marriage ceremony, the most ancient of Christian wedding rites, is steeped in ritual and symbolism, reflecting the theology of the Church. The rite is performed by a Priest who stands before an appropriately covered ceremonial table. It is placed in the middle of the Soleas area of the church, in front of the Holy Altar. Upon the table are placed the Holy Gospel, a cup of wine, the Betrothal Rings and the Wedding Crowns.

Two candles are lit as a reminder that Christ is “the Light of the world” Who offers Himself as illumination for the couple that they “will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life”. The couple stands facing the Priest and the Royal Door of the Holy Altar; the Groom on the right; the Bride on the left.

The Ceremony comprises of two parts:

1. The Betrothal Service with the official Blessing of the Rings, and
2. The Marriage Service with the Crowning of the Bride and Groom

The Laws and Regulations pertaining to Weddings are set by the Holy Canons of the Orthodox Church and are implemented accordingly by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia. These regulations apply to every Greek Orthodox Priest across Australia who is obliged to observe them conscientiously.

Mixed Marriages

1. The Orthodox Church recognises that, in multicultural nations such as Australia, members of the Orthodox Faith might invariably elect to enter into a permanent relationship with persons who are not Orthodox.

In certain cases, despite its strict Canons and Regulations, the Church will accommodate the relationship and bless the union through the Sacrament of Marriage.

2. A marriage **cannot** take place in the Orthodox Church between an Orthodox **Christian** and a **non-Christian**.
3. The non-Orthodox partner must be a person who belongs to a Christian denomination ‘acceptable’ to the Orthodox Church.

of the glass in their ceremony. Again, most rabbis (and many Jewish guests) would feel uncomfortable with this very visible reference to the Jewish marriage ceremony.

On the positive side, I often recommend that couples actively involve members of their families or close friends in the ceremony, for example, singing to them a favourite song (as a serenade), reciting a favourite poem, reading a brief passage that is meaningful to them, or even sharing with the couple a personal blessing.

Rabbi Fred Morgan

References & Recommendations for Further Reading

www.myjewishlearning.com
www.judaism101.com
www.tbi.org.au

instruction, and to receive a blessing from the monks. Matching the horoscopes of the couple by an expert is seen as a significant exercise before matrimony is decided.

The Triple Gem

To take refuge in Buddha
To take refuge in the *Dhamma* (the teachings of Buddha)
To take refuge in the *Sangha* (the Monks)

The Five Precepts

- i) To undertake the training to avoid taking the life of beings.
- ii) To undertake the training to avoid taking things not given.
- iii) To undertake the training to avoid sensual misconduct.
- iv) To undertake the training to refrain from false speech.
- v) To undertake the training to abstain from substances which cause intoxication and heedlessness.

The Buddhist Position on Interfaith Marriage

Buddhism maintains the teaching that every human being has the freedom to follow the religion of one's choice and enter into marriage with a partner of one's choice. With the primary emphasis being on the life-long bond in marriage and the compatibility of the partners, which may facilitate such a relationship, Buddhism does not oppose a Buddhist marrying a person of another religion. Understanding, respect and mutuality – which results from the compatibility of the partners – are seen as the ingredients that would enable the Buddhist and non-Buddhist partners to render equal status to their religions and fulfil marital, social and religious duties and obligations.

Rev. Dr. Ruwan Palapathwala

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Clarke, Steve, *Buddhism: A New Approach*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2005.



4 Hindu

The Hindu Perspective on Marriage

Hinduism is the common name given to a multitude of religious sects and practices in India, which are based on six schools of philosophy, other than the common Sacred Scriptures, there is no central authority or official policy which binds all Hindus. What is central however, is the understanding that marriage is a sacred relationship between two souls and a fulfilment of four aims of human life, duty, wealth, sensuous pleasures and salvation. Traditionally but very much in symbolic terms in contemporary times, marriage is also considered the fulfilment of the second stage of the Four Stages of life (the stage of householder), which is preceded by the stage of studentship and then followed by the stages of forest dweller and renunciation. These fundamentals underline that marriage is both an obligatory duty and a sacrament. There are two other fundamental beliefs that govern the Hindu understanding of marriage. The first is that the marriage relationship extends beyond one's life across seven or more lives during which the couple help each other to progress spiritually. The second is that the bride and the bridegroom are divinities. Thus, in a traditional ceremony, which is conducted by a priest or a *Brahmin*, the bride is first married to the Gods and then placed under the bridegroom's protection as a gift from the Gods.

In Hinduism there is no concept of divorce. It is considered a modern practice which individuals are free to follow in civil courts.

The Hindu Marriage Ceremony

The major stages of the Hindu Ceremony are:

1. Ganesh Puja

All *pujas* begin by worshipping Lord Ganesh. He is the Lord that dispels the darkness of ignorance and removes obstacles. No other God will accept any offerings before Lord Ganesh has had his dues.

2. Mandap Ropan (Vedi)

The beginnings of *Mandap* (canopy) making involve four pillars (bamboos) being erected at each of the four corners and blessed. In the ancient times it was a custom to perform all-important ceremonies under a canopy, marriage being one of them.

3. Pithi

The bride and groom are anointed using a paste made out of turmeric powder, curd, sandalwood, scented water etc. This used to be massaged all over the body for a month before the wedding. Apart from improving the appearance, it helps tone the

On the other hand, some Jewish symbols are less intrinsically bound to the meaning of marriage in Judaism, and these may be used in mixed-faith ceremonies *as an expression of the Jewish heritage of the bride or groom*, without suggesting that the ceremony itself is Jewish in nature. In my opinion it is important that both the bride and the groom see themselves represented and reflected in their marriage ceremony. My advice generally to a mixed-faith couple is to create their own sort of ceremony, without pretending that it is something it isn't and indeed cannot be from a Jewish perspective.

Symbols and rituals which are part of the Jewish ceremony but are also commonly adopted in other traditions, and which therefore might appropriately be used in a mixed-faith context, are these:

- Both parties drinking from a single cup of wine (without a Hebrew blessing, or *berachah*, being recited over the wine)
- Exchanging rings and vows (without the Jewish marriage formula)
- Reciting psalms or verses from the biblical "Song of Songs"

Elements of the Jewish ceremony that would be out of place in a mixed-faith ceremony include,

- Reciting any Hebrew blessings, whether in Hebrew or in English, including the *sheva berachot* ("Seven Blessings")
- The bride circling the groom seven times, or the bride and groom circling each other three times
- Reading a document similar to or in the place of a *ketubbah*
- Wearing *kippot* (Jewish head coverings for males).

For the couple to stand under a canopy (*chuppah* in Hebrew) during the ceremony is problematic. On the one hand, the *chuppah* is so intrinsic to a Jewish understanding of marriage that it has given its name to the entire ceremony, which is popularly referred to as a *Chuppah*. The canopy is also the most visible expression of the Jewish wedding ceremony, and that is why most rabbis (and many Jewish guests) would not feel comfortable with its use in a mixed-faith ceremony. On the other hand, we understand that this is precisely why the Jewish partner in a mixed-faith ceremony might want to incorporate it into their wedding, as an expression of their Jewish heritage. Out of sympathy with this view, some rabbis would accept a canopy if it does not have any Hebrew inscriptions or Jewish symbols embroidered on it and is less obviously a canopy, for example, wisps of lace draped above the couple.

The same arguments may be applied to breaking a glass at the conclusion of the ceremony. In the traditional explanation of the ceremony, the breaking of the glass refers symbolically to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70CE; even at times of great joy we are bidden to remember the destruction of the Temple and its impact on Jewish life in the Diaspora. Other explanations are often given, however, including the folkloric explanation that the breaking of a glass chases away any evil spirits that may threaten the marriage. It is also commonly and humorously explained as the last time that the groom will put his foot down in the marriage. Drawing on alternative explanations like these, the couple may be inclined to include the breaking



6 Jewish

The model for marriage in Judaism is the relationship between God and Israel. In this respect, the Jewish marriage is a contractual or covenantal agreement between a man, called *chatan* (bridegroom), and a woman, called *kallah* (bride). The marriage document, *ketubbah*, plays the role in the wedding ceremony that Torah plays in the marriage between God and Israel, detailing the covenant or expression of promises (*brit*) that binds the two parties together.

The Jewish act of *kiddushin*, or sanctification through marriage, thus creates from two independent parties a new entity, referred to as a “Jewish home” (*bayit b’Yisrael*, literally a “household in Israel”) that hitherto had not existed. In order to fulfil the terms of this covenant, to create a new household in Israel, it is necessary that both parties are Jewish, committed to making their home into a Jewish sanctuary and raising their children within the Jewish faith.

For this reason, rabbis in Australia cannot participate professionally in mixed-faith marriage ceremonies, whether alongside a minister from some other faith community or on their own. This extends even, perhaps especially, to “giving a (Jewish) blessing” to the couple. In order to avoid embarrassment we ask that ministers of other faiths do not invite rabbis to participate in mixed-faith ceremonies, despite the fact that it may be the wish of the Jewish party in the marriage to extend such an invitation. The situation is complicated to some degree by the fact that in America it is not uncommon for rabbis of the Reform movement to participate solo or in tandem with other ministers in officiating at mixed-faith marriages. The couple may have heard of this or even know people who have undergone mixed-faith ceremonies in the States. But America is unique in this regard, as in many others, and this practice is not accepted in other countries around the world, including our own.

For Orthodox and most *Masorti* (Conservative) rabbis this is the end of the matter. In Progressive Judaism the rabbis are happy to extend their congratulations to any couple who have found in each other a loving partner for life, and we will offer to meet with the couple in order to discuss with them the style and content of the ceremony. Our aim is to help the couple relate the marriage ceremony to the rest of their life together, so we will often inquire about their plans regarding the raising of children, religious activities in the home, and much more.

We will also discuss the meaning of religious symbols associated with marriage and the need to treat symbols with respect because they may resonate deeply, and in unexpected ways, with guests at the wedding. While ministers from other faiths may believe they are showing respect to Judaism by incorporating Jewish symbols and rituals into a mixed-faith ceremony, because of the very nature of the Jewish marriage ceremony many Jewish guests may find it confronting and even upsetting to see Jewish symbols appearing in what is not in reality a Jewish wedding.

skin and muscles and clears out the pores. As a remnant of that custom, today, the bride and groom are anointed only a day or so before the wedding.

4. Welcoming the Groom's party (*Pokhana /Var Preksan /Parchhan*)

The bride’s mother welcomes the bridegroom. The mother-in-law to be also offers him advice that marriage is a weighty matter and not to be lightly entered into by showing him various symbols such as the yoke used to tie bullocks to a cart. He is garlanded (sometimes by the bride, sometimes by the mother-in-law) and showered with rice and flowers before being escorted into the *mandap* by the family of his fiancé.

5. Ceremonies in the *Mandap*

Parents of the bride wash the right foot (or just the toe) of the bridegroom with the five auspicious liquids (milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey).

The bride is ushered in by her maternal uncle at an auspicious hour.

During this ceremony, the bride and groom are worshipped as the embodiment of *Lord Vishnu* (the Preserver) and *Maha Lakshmi* (the Goddess of wealth).

Madhu Parka, a sweet mixture of yoghurt, honey and ghee, are offered to the couple. This honour is usually reserved for the Gods, Kings, saints and ones Guru.

6. Garland ceremony

The bride and groom exchange garlands and in the past, this was the first time they may have actually met face-to-face.

This, along with the offerings to the fire is central to the Hindu marriage ceremony.

7. *Kanya Daan*

The parents formally give away their daughter and consent is given for the marriage ceremony to begin.

8. *Pani-Grahan* (Proffering of the bride's hand)

The parents of the bride proffer her hand in marriage to the groom and officially request him to accept her as his bride. At one time, this might have been the first time the couple may have physically “touched” each other.

The groom usually offers clothes and jewellery to welcome her to his home.

9. *Vaivahik Homa* (invoking the sacred fire)

The sacred fire, central to all Hindu religious ceremonies, is invoked and sacred oblations of wood, grains and ghee are poured in. *Agni* is the mouth of the Gods and the Gods obtain our offering through this medium.

10. Shilaropan

The bride places her foot on a stone at the corner of the *mandap*. The bridegroom tells her to be as firm as the stone/mountain to be able to face the vagaries of their life ahead.

11. Agni Patikrama

This is the central part of the marriage ceremony. The bride and groom circumambulate the sacred fire four times. (In some communities, this is done seven times.) This signifies the marriage contract between the couple to have been witnessed by the Gods through the sacred fire.

The groom leads the first three circumambulations. The bride leads the final one.

In Hindu scriptures, we believe that as humans we have four goals to achieve in our lives, *Dharma* (duty), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (pleasure) and *Moksha* (liberation from this continuous circle of life and death).

The first three rounds represent the first three goals of life. Though these are the combined goals of the couple, according to custom, the husband leads and the wife promises to follow his lead. The final goal, that of liberation, is an individual goal and in that she states her independence by leading the last round. No one can force anyone in matters of the soul, its liberation and its religious convictions.

The brother of the bride touches her right toe to the stone mentioned before. He advises her never to cross the threshold of her new household in anger or undue haste. The honour of both families is now in her hands.

12. Laja Homa

Three oblations are offered to the sacred fire. The bride's brother places parched rice in the hands of the bride during the circumambulation. The bride and groom then offer this to the Gods via the sacred fire. They pray for a long life, health, happiness and prosperity.

The rice must be transplanted from the field of its germination to another in order for it to grow and provide an abundant harvest. The brother, in his silent manner, gives her advice that she too must now transplant her life from her own parent's family to her husband's in order to fulfil her own life's ambition and bear children for the future of the human race.

13. Saptapadi

Bride and groom take seven steps together. This can be done around the sacred fire, or next to it. With each step they take a vow to be together, to grow together, to strengthen each other and support each other. and pray to the Gods that these vows will be fulfilled.

^{ix} Qur'an 2:229

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The following may be helpful in providing some insight into marriages between Christians and Muslims as a result of a study of married couples themselves.

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Nichols Alan, *On The Path To Mutual Respect*. Victorian Council of Churches, Melbourne, 2007, Chap 5, "Personal Stories", pp 55 – 58.

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Boorstein Michelle, *Muslims Try to Balance Traditions, US Culture on Path to Marriage*, Washington Post, May 27, 2008.

actual ceremony. He may say to the bridegroom: "I marry you to Sarah," and the groom responds: "I accept Sarah as my wife." Then the marriage contract is signed by the bride, the groom and the witnesses. The marriage documents are filed with the mosque (*masjid*) and the respective government office for the civil record.

At the marriage ceremony, prayers are recited from the Qur'an and there is a sermon, and the ceremony usually concludes with the recital of the *Fatiha* by the Muslims present. The *Fatiha* is the opening chapter of the *Qur'an* and also represents the creed of Islam.

The Qur'an permits Muslim men to have four wives.^{vi} It requires equitable treatment of all wives and acknowledges the difficulty of ensuring this.^{vii} Many Muslims interpret this as a constraint on the option of polygamy.

According to Islamic law, a Christian or Jewish woman married to a Muslim has the right to practice her faith. If an interreligious couple moves to a jurisdiction governed by Islamic law, rules pertaining to divorce may be based on Qur'anic injunctions. These allow a man to unilaterally divorce his wife, with or without cause. The husband must pronounce a triple repudiation at specified intervals of time^{viii} to enable him to reconsider his decision. A woman can initiate a divorce if she returns her dowry (*mahr*) to her husband as compensation;^{ix} if the right to divorce was included in the marriage contract; or through a judicial process by the court, if the husband has failed to fulfill his conjugal duties to a significant degree or in the event of serious illness and abandonment. Divorce by mutual consent is possible.

In the case of divorce or widowhood, the non-Muslim wife of a Muslim may encounter disadvantages with respect to property, inheritance and the custody of children. In Islam, there is no right of inheritance between a Muslim and a non-Muslim spouse, but this stipulation can be altered by a will or a deed of a gift.

Dr. Helene Ijaz

ⁱ Qur'an 4:21

ⁱⁱ Quran 30: 21

ⁱⁱⁱ Hadith - Al-Tirmidhi # 3096, Narrated by Anas ibn Malik

^{iv} Qur'an 2:221; 5:5

^v Qur'an 4:4

^{vi} Qur'an 4:3

^{vii} Qur'an 4:129

^{viii} Qur'an 2:228-231; 65

14. Subhagya Chinha

The groom adds a dash of vermilion to the parting in the bride's hair and places a dot of the red powder on her forehead. At this time, he also offers her an auspicious necklace, *Mangalsutra*, to signify their marriage. Usually this is made of gold and glass beads, though it can be made of anything auspicious including cotton and silk.

The brilliant red vermilion powder represents the life giving blood that flows in us all. By anointing the bride with the vermilion, the groom is promising to cherish her and protect her as if she were his own life. He also promises to protect her with his own life, if needs be.

15. Surya Darshan

The bride and groom look at the sun, moon and stars and ask them to witness their wedding. They promise each other that their love and devotion will be as steadfast as the stars in the firmament. They also take the relationships between such great couples as *Arundhati* and *Vashistha* as role models for themselves. These two form part of the star system known as the seven sages. *Arundhati* is the only female who is allowed to sit in the council of the seven sages due entirely to her wisdom and steadfast devotion to *Vashistha*.

If the marriage is performed in the day, or at times when the respective stars are not visible, the couple are asked to witness these later that day.

16. Haridaya Sparsha

The couple touch each other's heart and promise "May my heart be thine and thy heart be mine. When I talk to thee, please listen to me with perfect attention. I promise to listen to thee with equal attention."

17. Anna-Prashan

As with all religious ceremonies, the bride and groom, would have been fasting till this moment. This is the first time they will eat together as husband and wife.

Sweets are usually offered at this point and the couple feed each other in the *mandap* in the presence of their guests.

18. Purnahuti

The marriage ceremony is completed by offering ghee in to the sacred fire. The priests bless the bride and groom and guests shower the couple with their own blessings, flowers and rice. The bride and groom then pay their respects to the assembled guests before having their meal. At an auspicious hour, the bride will leave her parents and friends to begin a new life with her husband.



The Hindu Position on Interfaith Marriage

While interfaith marriages would be strongly discouraged in orthodox Hinduism predominantly due to cultural reasons and social conventions, there is no one globally binding position on interfaith marriage. However, a broad Hindu understanding of interfaith marriage could be based on two principles, which are inherent to Hinduism. Firstly, the breadth of Hindu religion which can comfortably accommodate any religious faith and practice to its sphere of religion; and secondly, its fundamental humanism which highlights the equality of all human beings regardless of caste, colour and creed.

Based on these two principles, it can be said that in the modern practice of the faith, Hindus do not oppose to an interfaith marriage provided the life-long bond in marriage is in perspective and due consideration is given to all the practicalities of modern life which may facilitate such a relationship.

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5 Islam

Marriage is strongly recommended in Islam, and there is no room for celibacy. The Muslim conception of marriage is based on the *Qur'an* and the *hadiths*, the Muslim traditions. According to the *Qur'an*, marriage (*nikah*) is a strong covenant (*mithaqun Galithum*) between a man and a womanⁱ which provides companionship, mutual love and tranquillity.ⁱⁱ Muslims view marriage as a way of containing sexuality, a union between two families, and a source of fruitfulness and growth for the *umma*, the Muslim community. The Prophet Muhammad said: "When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion."ⁱⁱⁱ

The *Qur'an* recommends that Muslim men marry Muslim women, but they may also marry Christians and Jews.^{iv} Muslims believe that Christians and Jews, like themselves, are *People of the Book* that share revealed scriptures perfected in the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* is silent on marriages of Muslim women to Christian or Jewish men but according to Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*), a marriage between a Muslim woman and any non-Muslim man is prohibited. The argument given by most Muslim scholars is that a non-Muslim cannot have authority over a Muslim. The husband is the head of the family and thus in a position of authority over his wife and children. For this reason, he must be Muslim. Any legitimate child of a Muslim father is Muslim and must be raised as such.

If a Muslim man wishes to marry a non-Muslim woman other than a Christian or a Jew, the woman must convert to Islam. Similarly, if a Muslim woman wishes to marry a non-Muslim man, the man must first convert to Islam. According to Islamic Law, no Muslim is permitted to convert to another religion. Any such act is viewed as apostasy and is punishable, including in some Islamic jurisdictions by death.

Marriage traditions vary in different Muslim communities but for a marriage to be valid, the following requirements must be met:

1. Both parties must consent and in the case of the bride through a guardian (*wali*) who is Muslim.
2. A marriage contract (*Aqd-Nikah*) must be signed by the bride and the groom, and witnessed by two sane and respectable male Muslims or by one male and two female Muslims. The bride and the groom and their families are free to define terms and conditions they wish to include in the contract.
3. The groom must give a dowry (*mahr*) to the bride^v as a token of commitment, of which the bride can dispose as she wishes. The *mahr* can be paid in cash, property or movable objects and is payable either at the time of marriage, a later date, or a combination of both.

Any practicing Muslim can perform a marriage (*nikah*) ceremony. The bride is asked for her consent prior to the ceremony, and the guardian speaks on her behalf at the