

Couples and Core Beliefs

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Core beliefs are our deeply held beliefs about life, about what's right and wrong, and what is important to us. Unconsciously or consciously, they guide our behavior and our decision-making. These beliefs can stem from a religious, spiritual or cultural framework, but no matter where they come from, our core beliefs can and do have a profound impact on our marriages. For most of us in the Unification movement, our core values are intertwined with our spiritual values and our world view is shaped by our faith perspective.

It's important, therefore, for couples to talk about their core values and spiritual perspectives with each other often and work toward creating and maintaining a shared faith or a common spiritual perspective. This ultimately becomes the foundation for their family values and family culture.

Research has shown that when couples share common core beliefs, it generally leads to the enhancement of their relationship. Sharing the same faith or the same values fortifies a sense of respect and security in a couple, increases their resilience to stress, and boosts their personal health and happiness. Involvement in a faith community can also provide much-needed community and support.

For these reasons, most people want their spiritual or faith perspectives to be a significant part of their connection with their partners. But even though spiritual closeness is a deeply desired goal for many couples, it is also a very common challenge. In fact, many couples struggle to find a shared way to relate to God or to nurture their spirituality together.

This is because faith and spirituality are always very personal, and couples often discover that they have different and sometimes conflicting faith styles. This happens even when we share a common faith, because we naturally express our personal faith and spirituality in our own unique ways.

And when the differences emerge, it can be very tempting to criticize each other, not because we're

judgmental, but because unconsciously we all believe that our way is the best way -- even while we are trying to make spirituality the center of our relationships!

On the deepest level, we are all interfaith couples, and this has the potential to create many kinds of challenges, especially when we forget to be careful and kind to each other. To counteract this, we need to remember that there are many paths to spiritual growth and many types of spiritual practice, and all of them are valid. Some people, for example, feel God in nature, and some through the intellect or when studying scripture. Others are inspired while in prayer or meditation; still others God while caring for others or by participating in spiritual traditions, rituals and celebrations.

It's natural that different spiritual styles would work for different types of people, and it's highly likely that our partners will experience God in very different ways than we do. And guess what? Even if our differences are minimal now, we can expect that one or both of us will change our beliefs or the way we express them, at some point in the future.

This is why it is essential for us to learn how to honor the ways in which our partners experience and worship God, and how they express their spirituality. Rather than running the risk of crushing each other's spirits with misunderstanding and criticism, we want to make every effort to shift our energy and focus on the areas that we share in common.

If we can't find common ground, at least we can take turns participating in our partner's favorite way of worshipping, or just practice being proud of them when they are motivated and growing in their individual lives of faith. Whatever we do, let's aim to do it in ways that honor and foster respect for each other.

If you haven't done so recently, take some time to share about when you each felt close to God or were moved in a spiritual way. Your partner's story will give you clues as to how they are nurtured spiritually, and your story will help you to understand your own personal style a little better. And then, talk about how you can support and honor each other's individual growth, and what you can do to strengthen and express your spiritual values together as a couple.

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This article is adapted from Debby's book, *Small Steps to Bigger Love*, which is available through HSA Publications and on Amazon. It includes a study guide for small group use. Debby is also available for couple coaching and can be contacted at coachgullery@gmail.com or at debbygullery.com.