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## **Finding Your Soulmate—Part 3: Learning Your Requirements**

**By Kenneth A. Sprang**

*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

--Eleanor Roosevelt

Last month I reflected on finding your soulmate. I suggested that the first task is to look inward and begin to identify your needs, wants, and requirements with regard to a life partner.

Many clients find the most difficult part of this task is identifying their requirements—the attributes wanted in a partner that are non-negotiable—and distinguishing the true requirements from wants and needs. *Wants*, as you may recall, are things that would be nice but are not necessary, while *needs* are attributes that are negotiable.

A few months ago, a woman wrote to a forum to which I contribute from time to time saying that she was in her mid-forties and had begun to have doubts whether she would find her life partner. Then she met a wonderful man who met all of her requirements except one. She was a Christian and he a Jew. She asked whether it was necessary to hold to one's requirements to find happiness and a successful relationship, weighing whether she should compromise her "requirement" that her partner be a Christian.

The answer to her broad question of whether one must hold fast to one's requirements is an emphatic "yes." If you enter a committed partnership or marriage with requirements unfulfilled, your relationship will be compromised, for you will be sacrificing some part of your identity, some core part of what makes you who you are.

However, the equally compelling question is whether the specific criterion is *really* a requirement. Sometimes what we think is a *requirement* is really a *need* if we examine it closely. The question about religion—certainly a relevant one in a region as diverse as ours—is a good example.

As the writer described the man who had captured her heart--a gentle, soulful, loving man--it sounded like her real requirement was that her partner share her spirituality and values, and that he respect her faith tradition. Religion can provide us a marvelous resource for asking the hard questions about life and its mysteries, and it can provide valuable guidance in making decisions in our lives. At the end of the day, those of us who practice within a religious tradition, whether Jew or Christian, Hindu or Moslem, or a plethora of other traditions, are doing the same thing--seeking to live our lives in response to the grace of a loving Creator and to be the best human beings we can be.

When my wife met me I was a divorced non-Italian Protestant and she a cradle Italian Catholic. Her family was a bit distressed at first. But Carol saw in me a common spirituality and great respect for her faith and practice. She reconsidered her requirement that her partner be Catholic, and concluded that the real requirement was that he share her sense of faith and spirituality. Ultimately I converted to Catholicism, but not at her urging. The conversion decision was mine--part of my own life journey.

The challenge then is to examine carefully and constantly test our requirements. For some people, for example, having a partner who shares their particular faith tradition may, in fact, be a requirement, while for others, like the writer, it may be a negotiable need.

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How do you test requirements? In the case of the religion question, I invited the writer to go to services with her partner, learn about his faith as much as possible and invite him to learn about hers. Then assess whether it was imperative for her to have him share her Christian tradition, or merely to have him honor it and encourage her in it while he followed his Jewish tradition.

In another example, a woman declared that dancing was a requirement. She was right. I have met several women whose partners did not like to dance, but the women were content to pursue their dancing interest alone. But for this woman, dancing was part of her being, and it was imperative to her that her partner share in that experience. Thus, for her, dancing truly was a requirement.

What are your requirements? Write and let me know what you discover.

*Ken and Carol Sprang, direct Bethesda-Chevy Chase Counseling & Consulting in Bethesda, offering Imago Relationship Therapy, relationship and executive coaching, individual and couples counseling, and business consulting services. (301) 907-3377. [ken@singlestosoulmates.com](mailto:ken@singlestosoulmates.com). [www.singlestosoulmates.com](http://www.singlestosoulmates.com) or [www.bcccounseling.com](http://www.bcccounseling.com)*