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advice

Open the Door to Your Differences

You don't have to be a clone to your spouse. Acknowledging your differences is a healthy way to bridge many gaps.

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Don't run away from your differences, walk toward them.



You've been looking for a good relationship for so long. You have just about given up, when this person comes along who is really nice, treats you well and seems to care. "Gee," you think, this could be really great, and you conveniently ignore the fact that he likes hiking, bicycling, jogging, waking up with the birds and thinks 10:00 p.m. is the middle of the night. You, in turn, prefer to read until 2:00 a.m., you've never heard a morning bird yet, and hiking is something like going to the refrigerator and back.

At the time, you think, "Oh, heck, hiking is good for me, I don't mind," and cheerfully

dump all the things you used to do that made you the person you are—all to be with the man you hope will make you happy. Lo and behold, he does, and your new love becomes your spouse.

But here you are, less than a year into the marriage, and you're depressed. You're cranky and out of sorts. Your new husband is everything you've longed for. Others look at your wedded bliss with envy, and as you smile and acknowledge how lucky you are, you wonder "What's wrong with me? Can't I ever be satisfied with anything? Why am I so depressed?"

You're suffering from a bad case of Cinderella's shoes. Do you remember in the fairy tale, before the Prince found Cinderella, how he asked all the women in the kingdom to try on the glass slipper? The two ugly stepsisters wanted to win the handsome Prince so much that they cut off pieces of their toes so their foot would fit into the slipper.

That's exactly what we do when we try to *make* ourselves fit into situations which really aren't for us. We cut off pieces of our selves, our souls, in order to fit. Does this mean that you can only be married to a clone of yourself or can't thrive in a relationship that doesn't exactly meet your specific preferences? No, of course not. What it means is, be smart. Don't blind yourself to what the relationship requires of you.

Say to your new spouse, "I think you're great. I'm so happy to be with you and I love our life together. As we grow into our relationship, I'm realizing that we have some different needs and preferences, and I'd like us to talk about those." As scary as it may seem to openly discuss such differences, it is far less scary than the prospect of cutting off pieces of yourself for the sake of the marriage. After all, what kind of a marriage do you have if you only allow a portion of yourself to function?

Before you commit yourself to a lifestyle choice, ask yourself: "Does this circumstance fit with what I know about myself? Does this way of going about things satisfy *enough* of my needs and preferences for me to be happy?"

Get creative. Be willing to work it out together—it's fun finding ways for both of you to be happy. For example, maybe

you explore easy trails for hiking together on the weekend and agree that your mountaineering spouse indulges his 2,000 feet-straight-up-the-cliff hike on those occasional "guys-only" days. Maybe Saturday mornings become your "sleep in because I read romance novels until 2:00 a.m." mornings while your true love delights in bicycling, after which the two of you share your respective experiences over brunch or while doing errands together.

You cannot lead a satisfying life by filling it with unsatisfying and unfulfilling experiences. Have the courage to stand up for what you want. You don't need to have it all your way and you don't need to—ugly-stepsister-style—cut off your toes to fit circumstances that don't suit you. Respect yourself. Trust that together you can develop a way of both being happy in your marriage. That, after all, is how you can make your fairytale come true.

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