



Couple finds perfect formula for happy marriage

PETALING JAYA: Love can transcend boundaries, including ethnic lines, and can lead to a successful marriage.

This holds true for Barhath Ali S.A. Majeth, 64, and his wife Intan Pawanteh, 55, who have been married for 39 years and have three daughters.

Barhath Ali told theSun that being in a cross-cultural marriage comes with perks.

“We are exposed to a blend of both cultures,” he said at his home in Penang.

Being of Chinese-Ceylonese descent, he said he was able to speak Hokkien thanks to his mother, who encouraged him to explore Taoist beliefs as a child.

“We would go to Indian and Chinese temples to pray,” he said, adding that he would join festivities such as the yearly Hungry Ghost Festival.

Barhath Ali said he and Intan did not face any issues being in a mixed marriage, attributing their success to Malaysia’s multi-faceted culture.

The only time he faced criticism was when he overheard a neighbour calling him arrogant as his daughters mainly spoke English at home.

“I didn’t respond to her remark. I am proud of the fact that we speak Malay and English at home. I wanted my children to have the best of both worlds,” he said.

On cuisine, he said his wife had learned to cook his favourite meals, including a Ceylonese-style chicken curry.

“She took great pains to learn it as she knew that I enjoyed the fare,” he said, adding that transitioning into the Muslim community was a seamless move.

“My friends are mostly Chinese and (although) they knew (of my marriage), they still welcome me into their homes for festivities or a chat. But of course, they served me halal meals.

“I am an easy-going person too, so embracing Islam was a non-issue for me. It was my wife’s parents (whom I was afraid of). They didn’t like the idea of having a long relationship. I courted her for three months and we got married in the fourth month.”

Touching on unity, he said speaking English was the key to long-lasting friendships.

“Though each of us came from different backgrounds, we would speak English to each other. I believe this is because of our history.

“Incidentally, I realised there is a divide among the younger generation, where each race would stick to their own. It is rather puzzling,” he said.

In addition to English, he has exposed his children to a third language – Mandarin – in university as part of their studies.

“They speak it fluently now,” he said, adding that it was important to inculcate different aspects of culture in one’s life.

The number of interracial marriages in Malaysia has risen over the years, albeit marginally.

According to the Marriage and Divorce Statistics Report released by the **Statistics Department** in November 2019, a total of 18,509, or 9%, of the 206,253 marriages registered in 2018 were interracial unions.

In 2017, inter-racial marriages accounted for 8%, or 16,238, of the 203,741 registered.

In line with our 65th Merdeka Day on Aug 31, Barhath Ali called on Malaysians not to be afraid of mingling with or making friends with those of other races or religions.

“This was the way it was when Intan and I were growing up. This is the way we have brought up our daughters. It is important to explore the beliefs of our fellow Malaysians of other races and religions as it fosters tolerance and understanding in a multicultural, multiracial and multireligious Malaysia.”

<https://www.thesundaily.my/home/couple-finds-perfect-formula-for-happy-marriage-MH9768538>