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CEREMONIES WITHIN YOUR CEREMONY

Unity Candle

Candles will always be popular and, especially because of one idea we'll discuss with you, we think a Unity Candle is worth considering as you plan your wedding. Candles may not work well in outdoor venues but, even then, we can suggest ways of including them.

The Unity Candle symbolizes lives being united in marriage. It is a large candle lit by the Bride and Groom, sometimes by the bridal couple along with their children, indicating that all are now an inseparable part of one another. It also says to in-laws and friends that they, too, have been brought into this joyous whole.

Sometimes the smaller tapers used to light the larger Unity Candle are blown out afterwards, sometimes they remain lit because individuality remains even within unity.

Your officiant will describe to your guests the meaning of this ceremony and sometimes pronounce a blessing upon the newly formed family. The Bride and Groom typically are not expected to say anything (though they may whisper sentiments to one another). Sometimes mothers or other loved ones are given an opportunity to speak. Sometimes a soloist will sing, or music will be played, or a reading will take place. Sometimes candle sponsors (often Godparents) will stand with the bridal couple. Sometimes spiritual or religious connotations are involved. We will tailor the Unity Candle ceremony to fit what you want to remember.

Many treasured thoughts may be symbolized in the lighting of the individual tapers and the Unity Candle. Your choices will determine who lights these candles and how this may be used to honor loved ones or give pledges to your children. One variation involves every guest being given a candle, passing the flame to the wedding couple or each guest holding a lit candle as the Bride and Groom complete the ceremony.

Because the Unity Candle originated in churches, local religious Book Stores sell simple and elaborate supplies. You may be able to purchase a Unity Candle personalized with your names and the date of your wedding. You may find additional options on the Internet. If you want to involve your guests, you might consider battery operated candles for them to use and then take home as mementoes.

We usually include the Unity Candle ceremony, when it is requested, after the Vows and before the Pronouncement of Marriage.



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Sand Ceremony

Sand Ceremonies are outdoor versions of the Unity Candle. The grains of sand represent individuals being united in family, plus all the talents and love they bring to the family. Vials of colored sand, one color for each participant, are poured into a large artistic glass container. Some couples choose shadow boxes, vases, or bottles that can be kept as keepsakes. Some couples use sand collected from a birthplace or from where they became engaged.

When the sand represents several children, or an extended family, each person may lay down a layer of solid color to display the heritage upon which this family is built. Once that is complete, a top layer of blended colors is poured as everyone participates simultaneously.

Wine Ceremony and Water Ceremony

Similar to the Unity Candle and Sand Ceremony, the wedding couple is represented as two bottles of liquid (often, two vintages of wine). These are poured into a single container and often the Bride and Groom sip from this. Brides and Grooms may also choose to pour the liquid into separate glasses and intertwine their arms to symbolize their unity and yet their continued independence, as each still drinks from his or her own glass.

If wine is objectionable, two bottles of colored water can create a new color when combined.

As with all unity ceremonies, many treasured thoughts may be symbolized in the representation of unity, therefore we tailor the words to fit your intentions.

We usually perform a Wine Ceremony, when it is requested, immediately prior to the couple's vows. Here is a Russian/Lithuanian example:

(Saying Groom's name) and *(Saying Bride's name)*, just as you have received life, with all its bread, salt, and honey, from your parents, you're being crowned with the care you'll receive from one another. Never will you hunger or thirst for love to be revealed, for everything good will be manifest in your life as husband and wife.

Wine is a universal symbol of the richness of life and sweetness of love. So it is appropriate that, on this joyous occasion, you toast life with this ancient pleasure.

I ask you, *(Saying Groom's name)* and *(Saying Bride's name)*, to lift your individual glasses of wine and pour them unselfishly into the center cup. By pouring from your own into one, now together, you are signifying that your once



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solitary treasures are being blended into endless companionship. From this moment forth, you will share every harvest, and produce fine wine, together, throughout life.

I now invite you to each drink joyfully from your wedding cup.

(Saying Groom's name) and *(Saying Bride's name)*, lift the cup, one to another, and drink.

As you have shared wine from a single glass, so may you share contentment, peace, and fulfillment from the cup of life. By sharing this wedding cup, you have shown your desire to blend your families together beautifully. May you always find life's joy heightened and its bitterness sweetened. As you have accepted this cup, you have accepted all the fragrance and flavors you may encounter together.

May your days all be pressed into unique, fine wine – honoring the robust energy and rich love of your marriage. May the banquet of your years delight and fulfill you.

Now, *(Saying Groom's name)* and *(Saying Bride's name)*, will you vow to one another here, in presence of us all, the breadth and depth of your covenant with one another?

Breaking the Glass

This ceremony is associated with Jewish weddings but may also be included with the Wine Ceremony. There are nearly as many interpretations of the meaning of the breaking of the glass as there are Rabbis. At the conclusion of the wedding, the officiant will ask the best man to place a wine glass *(it is safer and acceptable to use a fragile light bulb in place of a sturdy glass – wine glasses may roll, resist breakage, and result in dangerous shards)* wrapped in a white cloth or in a special bag the couple provides, under the Groom's right foot. Some couples use a delicate crystal wineglass so that the shattered pieces may be kept as a keepsake in a velvet pouch.

After the Groom breaks the glass, in Jewish weddings the guests shout "Mazel Tov" ("Congratulations!"), clap their hands, and may embrace and sing as the couple departs.

If you are using this breakage to conclude your Wine Ceremony, the individual glasses from which the wedding cup was filled may be wrapped in cloth or a special bag and now broken, symbolizing that the old has gone and only the new remains.

We prefer to interpret Breaking the Glass thus: "This marriage will last as long as this glass remains broken and will contain as many years of blessing as there are shards of glass."



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Wine Box Ceremony / Love Letter Ceremony

The Box Ceremony (*Wine Box or Letter Chest*) is designed to carry your wedding into future celebrations. Accessories for these ceremonies can be found on wedding supply websites.

On a particularly romantic day or evening before your wedding, use a private moment to write a letter to your partner. Write how wonderful he or she is, why you want to wed, and your hopes and dreams for the marriage you will share. Seal it. Then keep it with your wedding planning materials. Do not read what your partner has written. As part of your wedding ceremony you will each present your letter. There these will be placed alongside your vows in a box intended to remain sealed – opened only on your every fifth anniversary.

You can also include recordings of your favorite music, favorite pictures of you two together, and other mementos – making this box your own private love capsule. You can set aside future letters and memories, maintaining a collection just waiting for the next opportunity to be placed in your Love Box.

Keep the box and collection in a place of honor as a constant visual reminder of your love and commitment to each other. The box can be a life preserver if you hit a bumpy spot in your relationship – though our hope is that there will never be a reason to open the box except on each fifth anniversary!

In the years to come, each rare and special time your box is opened, take out the letter(s) you have written to your partner. In times of celebration, read your letter(s) to your partner aloud. In times of distress, go to separate rooms and quietly read the letter(s) to yourself. Remember all the reasons you choose your partner, and the vows you made. Share pictures and memories of all that has shaped the life you are creating together. Never take the blessings of your marriage for granted.

We usually include the Wine Box ceremony, when it is requested, after the Vows and before the Pronouncement of Marriage. It also presents another opportunity for a reading such as this:

Wedding Vows – (*Saying Bride's name*), your companionship is the part that makes me whole. I cherish the time, laughter, and silliness that we share together. I pledge as your soul mate to be there for you, to love you unconditionally, and to create beautiful memories together. You are the best thing that ever happened to me. I love you (*Saying Bride's name*).

(*Saying Groom's name*), today I call you husband, but the word means more than that. You will always be my partner and soul mate, my strength and my support,



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my touchstone and my one true love. Today I promise to you: my encouragement and inspiration, my laughter and my tears, and my unending love and affection. Today I swear to you my love will never falter. Through good times and bad, through triumph and failure, I will be by your side. All these things I give to you, my husband, today, tomorrow and all the days of our wonderfully weird life together.

from Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke (read by Bride's sister):

“It is ... good to love: because love is difficult. For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation. ... Loving does not at first mean merging, surrendering, and uniting with another person ... it is a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world, to become world in himself for the sake of another person; it is a great, demanding claim on him, something that chooses him and calls him to vast distances.”

[continuation of thought, spoken by the officiant] (Groom's name), (Bride's name) tells us that she wants to give you space to continue to nurture your friendships and to make new ones, which will in turn enrich the life you two will share together. *(Bride's name), (Groom's name)* tells us that he wants to encourage you to grow as a person, start new hobbies, pursue new businesses and be there for him when he feels that things are not going well. Both of you have said that you want to continue to write one another little notes whenever either of you goes on a trip, and to give one another letters on anniversaries that describe all the little things you've done together that previous year, so that your joys are never forgotten.

[addressing guests] (Saying Groom's name) and (Saying Bride's name) have chosen as a couple to perform a Love Letter & Wine Box ceremony.

This box contains a bottle of wine, two glasses, and a love letter from each to the other. The letters describe the good qualities they find in one another, the reasons they fell in love, and their reasons for choosing to marry. The letters are sealed in individual envelopes and they have not seen what the other has written. *(Saying Groom's name)* and *(Saying Bride's name)*, you have created your very own romantic time capsule to be opened on your 5th wedding anniversary.

I recommend that you keep the box in a place of honor prominently displayed in your home as a constant reminder of your commitment to each other.

(Saying Groom's name) and *(Saying Bride's name)*, you may now lock the box.



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Coins/Cord/Veil — Arras/Lazzo/Velo Ceremony

Las arras are coins used in Spanish, Latin American, Philippine, and similar wedding ceremonies [The Spanish colonization period in the Philippines (1521-1898) brought these traditions to the islands]. Las arras are thirteen precious coins in an ornate container.

Arras [ah-rahhs] is a Spanish word meaning “earnest money” or dowry, though most often today the thirteen coins are seen to represent Jesus and his 12 apostles. They are given to the Bride with the Groom’s promise to care for and support his wife, and the Bride’s trust in his ability to do so. They are often seen as symbolizing the prosperity that will be shared by the newlyweds.

Filipino weddings typically include an “arrhae-bearer” or “coin-bearer” who functions similarly to the ringbearer. Unlike the ringbearer, he carries the actual *Arrhae* [ar-rah-heh] in a ceremonial chest or pouch, on a pillow.

Las arras, the coins, are usually dropped into the Groom’s waiting hands, who in turn drops them into his Bride’s hands. The Bride then puts her hand above the Groom’s and drops the coins into his hands again. The Groom then places the coins back into the chest (in a church service he would allow them to drop through his hands into a plate held by an acolyte).

The metal tinkling of the coins being passed from one pair of hands to the other is a distinctive reminder of the Groom’s promise to take care of his wife materially. The Bride, by giving back the coins to his hands, conveys that her earnings as well as his now belong to their marriage. The trickling sound also anticipates that there will be abundance and success in the couple’s joint efforts.

Arras, today, represent the couple’s trust, hard work and good administration of their income rather than a dowry. Similarly, las arras are less tied today to the Lazzo and Candle. We suggest that the Coin Ceremony be immediately after the exchange of wedding rings.

A frequent, though not essential, ceremony accompanying “the coins” is “the *lazzo*”, the lasso or cord. A lazzo is a large rosary, a ribbon or a decorative rope that is symbolically draped around the necks or shoulders of the Bride and the Groom, to bless and protect their unity. It is first placed around the Groom’s neck or shoulders. It can otherwise be placed around the couple’s wrists. It affirms their union and their commitment to always be together side-by-side. The couple may wear the lazzo through the remainder of the wedding until, at the end, it is removed and given to the Bride as a keepsake.

Filipino Weddings reflect strong traditions of family and extended family. Filipino



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weddings will often include mention of loved ones who are unable to be present, and those who are deceased. On this special day, each is represented in the Bride's and Groom's heart and are truly missed. This is particularly evident if the couple intended to have these loved ones as sponsors.

Sponsors, family members and close friends whom the Bride and Groom admire, may facilitate key parts of the wedding. In the Philippines, they are official witnesses of the state and they sign the marriage license. Worldwide, their participation is symbolic of the wisdom and support they offer to the new couple. The number of sponsors can vary from a single individual to many couples. Principal Sponsors are part of the bridal procession. At the nuptial blessing, they may also be invited to extend their right hands and, together with the officiant, offer a prayer of blessing. In doing so, they are fulfilling their roles as sponsors.

Filipino weddings often have a Veil Ceremony between the coins and cord. Wedding rituals are very important to Filipino culture, and visual symbolism is an important part of the traditional Filipino wedding. Sponsors drape and pin the veil (a long white tulle) on the Groom's shoulder and over the Bride's head. This symbolizes the union of two people 'clothed' as one. Further symbolizing the couple's eternal bond, the Cord and Unity Candle ceremonies follow the Veil Ceremony. Filipino weddings are a bit longer than others, and involve a few more participants, but certainly make for a memorable testimony of love!

It is up to the bride and groom to request a coin, cord, veil, and/or candle ceremony as part of their wedding, and to inform us of the responsibilities of sponsors they may have for these.

We will gladly discuss all this with you, providing simple explanations and offering suggestions. We prefer to include the coins, cord, veil, and associated candle ceremonies immediately after the exchange of rings. One example (mildly religious) is:

Blessing Exchange of the Coins (Arras)

[Officiant]: "The Blessing of the coins is a symbol of the husband's dedication and responsibility to his wife and their future children. The husband presents the coins (arras) to his Bride who accepts the coins to represent her support and commitment in their union."

[Officiant]: "Hold these coins in your hands as a sign that your blessings will no longer be held separately, but together. Remember that the gifts you have in this life are not truly yours but God's. As guardians of God's gifts, use them well."



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(Groom, Saying Bride's name), accept this symbol of all my possessions as a pledge of my dedication and concern for your wellbeing. These I offer to you, of all that I am, and with all that I have.

(Bride, Saying Groom's name), I accept them with joy and gratitude; And I also offer you these coins in return as a sign of my effort and concern for our family's wellbeing.

Veil Ceremony- (Velo) means "watch over"

[Officiant]: "The veil is laid on the Bride and Groom to emphasize their union for life under one roof. The laying of the veil symbolizes the purity and honesty of marriage and invokes God's protection in their lives. The veil covers the Bride's head, its edge is placed over the shoulder of the Groom, covering his back."

[Officiant]: "Dear God, with the purest threads which these sponsors now hold, you have spun a fine veil of love over *(Saying Groom's name)* and *(Saying Bride's name)*. Keep this precious mantle whole and immaculate; mend the tears of trials and hardship with fibers of strength, and wash away the stains of anger and distrust with the waters of forgiveness and faith."

Cord Ceremony- (Lazzo) means "tie, knot or loop"

[Officiant]: "The cord is placed in the form of an eight (symbol of infinity) around the couple to represent their spiritually boundless commitment in marriage. One strand is placed over the Bride's shoulders and the other the Groom's, with the knot in between them."

[Officiant]: "Dear God, as these sponsors offer the cord of unity, we ask You to continue to bind *(Saying Groom's name)* and *(Saying Bride's name)* in courage. You have entwined their lives and fortified their bond with your Spirit. With you they are a three-fold cord that cannot be broken: one strength, one life, one love."

Prayers of the Faithful

Rose Ceremony – for Mothers, Family, Friends

One form of Rose Ceremony has the Bride and Groom each giving their mothers (or parents or grandparents, etc.) a single rose to symbolize gratitude for all that these people have done for them; or symbolizing the giving of gifts to welcome the new family members. Many times, this ceremony is not discussed by anyone except the Bride and Groom (and necessary vendors). Unexpected gestures don't appear staged. Rose Ceremonies are especially sweet and memorable when they surprise the Moms.



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You may choose to write your sentiments, rolled up like scrolls, and attach these to the roses with a ribbon. In such letters you can tell your mothers much more than the officiant can reasonably announce. The Rose Ceremony can be adapted for children and other family situations as well. For a very small wedding, the Bride might give a rose to each of her guests.

We generally do the Rose Ceremony in an extemporaneous fashion, but it's helpful to have some idea from each of you regarding particular emphases. Consider the following:

Often it's best to do this right after welcoming your guests to the wedding [it also can be done right after a unity candle ceremony]. Then the officiant says something similar to:

What is occurring today cannot be separated from the blessings that have preceded it. (*Saying Groom's name*) and (*Saying Bride's name*) have been loved by, and have learned from, their mothers. In large part, that love lit the paths that brought them here today. Now as they begin a new journey, walking together, relying upon one another, they gratefully remember their past. We therefore open this ceremony giving honor to the women who prepared (*Saying Groom's name*) and (*Saying Bride's name*) to become Bride and Groom.

There are many other ways to introduce the Rose Ceremony, taking into account varied family situations including remembrance of the deceased. We will discuss these with you and follow your direction. We are practiced at making this a joyful moment even though you may fear that it might be difficult or sad.

You may choose to give a rose to your mother. In that case we encourage you to whisper words of gratitude into her ear. Or you may choose to give a rose to your partner's mother and thank her for raising the child who now and forever will be your spouse.

After you've had opportunity to present the flowers and embrace your mothers, you can walk quickly back to your wedding positions or, while still standing beside your mothers (who may be standing at their chair or seated in it, whichever happens naturally), we can read a tribute of your choice, such as a portion of Proverbs 31 or:

Thank you for your love throughout the years.
How else could we become what we've become?
All your plans and hopes and even your tears;
Our going is brightened by where we are from.



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Know that we are grateful for your love.
Your hard work is mirrored now in ours.
On you our marriage will shine.
Underneath our unity,
We remember your strength.

Rose Ceremony – for the Wedding Couple

We always recommend that your wedding ceremony include our officiants' "Remarks Concerning Love and Marriage". We find that these help your guests "enter into" your wedding, as though reliving or imagining their own. Our "Remarks" vary according to what we think we know of you, but are deliberately broad enough to encourage your guests to lovingly know themselves.

In a 'Rose Ceremony for the Wedding Couple' the Bride and Groom each give the other a Rose. This form of Rose Ceremony is placed at the end of the wedding just before the couple is pronounced: husband and wife! It is based on their first wedded gift to one another – a single rose (or a flower lei).

[Officiant]: "Please exchange your first gift as husband and wife.

"In some ways it seems like nothing has changed – you have received what you've given and given what you've received. But you gave unconditionally. And what you received was not a reward. Marriage is like that. Sometimes your partner will be tired, overworked, over-stressed, ill, or simply unpleasant, and not very giving. But *you* can give – unrequested, unconditionally. That's love. Sometimes you will be reluctant, worried, unwilling, unreasonable, and not very receptive. But *your partner* can give – unrequested, unconditionally. That's love.

"You see, an excellent marriage does not depend on *having* the best partner you can imagine, but *being* the best partner you can be. Unconditional giving *makes* love. It is not love that will sustain your marriage – but marriage that will sustain your love.

"If ever you want to relive today – with all its newness and splendor – give your partner another small rose. A single rose that says: "I marrying you again! I vow to love you in every circumstance of life, and always will. Thank you for marrying me!"

Handfasting Ceremony – Tying the Knot

The Handfasting Ceremony dates back to the time of the ancient Celts. It was used to acknowledge the beginning of a trial period of one year and a day during which time a



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a couple were literally bound together to demonstrate their compatibility. Whether Irish, Scottish, English, North-West European, or other – there is great joy in “tying the knot”.

Although there are countless variations of the Handfasting Ceremony, the symbolic act typically involves fastening a couple’s hands together with four to six feet of any color of cording, ribbon, twine or silk sash while prayers are recited and vows are exchanged. Couples can use a single string or braid strands together to represent the intertwining of their individual lives (with possibly a third strand signifying God’s participation) into one. Numerous online wedding vendors sell ready-made and custom versions.

Handfasting Ceremonies continue to thrive in cultures throughout the world and among modern couples who want to incorporate a visual symbol of their lifelong bond. A sample ceremony has the officiant saying:

Please face each other and take each other’s hands, so that you may see the gift that they are to you. These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and full of love for you, that are holding yours on your wedding day as you promise to love each other today, tomorrow and forever. These are the hands that will work alongside yours as together you build your future.

These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, and with the slightest touch will comfort you like no other. These are the hands that will hold you when fear or grief temporarily comes to you. These are the hands that will countless times wipe tears from your eyes, tears of sorrow and tears of joy.

These are the hands that will tenderly hold your children, the hands that will join your family as one. These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it, support and encouragement to pursue your dreams, and comfort through difficult times.

And as you are united for life, these are the hands that even when wrinkled and aged will still be reaching for yours, still giving you inexpressible joy with just a touch.

With this cord, I bind (*Saying Groom’s name*) and (*Saying Bride’s name*) to the vows they make to each other:

(*Saying Groom’s name*) and (*Saying Bride’s name*), will you honor and respect one another? [*We will*] ... the cord is then draped over the couples’ hands.]



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Will you support and assist each other at all times: times of joy and pain, of triumph and testing? And through such times, will you make every effort to continually strengthen your marriage? [(We will) ... the cord is then knotted, tying the couples' hands.]

Will you share one another's laughter and joy, and look for brightness and fun in life, and the positive in each other, so that your marriage always retains the celebration of this day? [(We will) ... the cord may then or soon be removed from the couples' hands.]

Marriage is not held together by perfection, for we are imperfect people, but it is knotted by the courage and commitment to remember these promises. Always be willing to take a step towards one another with an open heart.

Love Lock Ceremony

A relatively uncommon ceremony (although it has caught on with several celebrities) involves two Locks and two Keys. These can be purchased from Internet sites. The Love Lock Ceremony is of Chinese origin but no one knows how or when this ancient custom began. It symbolizes opening your hearts, your lives to one another. Your partner is the key that has made this love possible. Now, in your wedding, you fasten this love in absolute, eternal unity.

In a Love Lock Ceremony, the Bride and Groom lock their individual heart padlocks together as one. They may then assure that the keys that first opened their hearts can never be used to separate what has been joined in their wedding. Sometimes the keys are tossed into a place from which they can never be retrieved. Sometimes the keys are tied to helium balloons and released; sometimes they are buried in a meaningful location or melted in a fire. Sometimes they are kept and displayed as a reminder of the love that brought them together. Love Lock Ceremonies follow your vows and exchange of rings. Then your officiant may say:

You all have just witnessed (*Saying Groom's name*) and (*Saying Bride's name*) pledge their lives, and exchange rings symbolizing the endless nature of their love. They wish to further symbolize the strength of their commitment with a Love Lock Ceremony.

A lock and key can symbolize so much. For (*Saying Bride's name*) and (*Saying Groom's name*) it symbolizes the opening of their hearts to one another and the locking of the commitment that now binds them together.

It's important to understand that the key to love is the ability to comprehend not only the spoken word, but those unspoken gestures, the little things that say so



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much by themselves. It is giving, without thought of return, but with the hope of just a simple smile; and giving in but never giving up. The key to love is forgiveness, to accept one another's faults and pardon mistakes, it is sharing and facing your good fortunes as well as the bad, together; conquering problems and forever searching for ways to intensify your mutual happiness.

A soul mate is someone who has locks that fit your keys and keys to fit your locks. When you feel safe enough to open the locks, your truest selves step out and you can be completely and honestly who you are. No matter what goes on around you, with that one person you are safe in your mutual paradise.

Your soul mate is someone who shares your deepest longings, your sense of direction. When you're upholding one another, and moving upwards together, chances are you've found the right person.

(Saying Bride's name) and *(Saying Groom's name)*, your hearts, bodies, and minds are joined together in a bond that constitutes the sanctity of marriage. These locks illustrate that you are forever joined together in a lifelong partnership and an abiding friendship, a promise between two people that you will forever be one, and that your oneness will complement and complete the two of you.

These locks represent your recognition of the dedication and courage necessary for securing a strong and healthy marriage. And now as you join your separate lives into one, I invite you to lock your locks together as a symbol of your commitment to each other.

As you do it, I remind you of the reason you are marrying one another: to be committed to each other as a couple forever, to keep each other safe in good times and in bad. Let these locks remind you that today you are joining your hearts and souls together for a lifetime.

Remember – your locks will be joined permanently because you have chosen to let these balloons take the keys to where they can never be found by anyone. This symbolizes your commitment to each other for an eternity. As these locks will be locked together forever, so will your love and commitment to each other. The keys will no longer be of use because there is no need to undo the bond of your commitment made today. What your love has brought together cannot be broken, and if there is ever a time of struggle just remember this day and the promises you have made to each other.

[The Bride and Groom then move to table where two locks, keys, and the balloons are positioned. They each take a key, unlock the locks, and then fasten them



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together. After connecting the locks, the newlyweds tie their keys to strings attached to a bouquet of helium balloons and release the balloons along with the keys into the sky. They then return to their position in front of the officiant.]

Ring Warming

Another uncommon ritual, especially valued at small and in-suite weddings, is the Ring Warming Ceremony. If you want to include your guests in an intimate way, or if you request their prayers and blessings, you might consider this tradition.

The concept is simple: near the beginning of your ceremony, have your officiant let everyone know that your rings will be making their way through the assembled guests, with an invitation for each guest to briefly hold the rings and silently “warm” them with his or her blessing, prayers and wishes, and then pass them to the next guest. We recommend tying them to a pillow or placing them in a small mesh drawstring bag for the passing. Family and friends “warm” the rings in the background while the wedding proceeds without pause.

If the rings have not yet made their way through everyone before it’s time for the Groom and Bride to present them to one another, the officiant will adjust and instruct the guests how their hopes for the bridal couple may still be added. There are many ways this sort of ritual can be designed to suit your needs and any unanticipated circumstance of your wedding.

Jumping the Broom Ceremony

Some marrying couples will end their ceremony by jumping over a broomstick, either together or separately. Jumping the broom is a custom widespread among African Americans, popularized in the 1970s by the novel and miniseries *Roots*. It was used in mid-19th century America among West Africans who were enslaved in the antebellum South and not allowed to marry (because marriage gave a couple moral if not legal rights over one another which conflicted with the slave-owners’ claims).

Typically a loving couple would place a broom on the ground and then jump over it as sort of an “I do”, signifying a committed union. Jumping the broom was always done before witnesses. Sadly, the ceremony of jumping the broom was as close as these slaves were allowed get to the formality of a wedding ceremony.

The immoral, now illegal, conditions that necessitated this custom no longer exist. Now Jumping the Broom can be seen as a joyful passage over the threshold that separates single from married life. The Bride and Groom accept all the responsibilities and receive all the blessings that accompany this leap. We include Jumping the



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Broom whenever it is requested. It's usually performed without the officiant speaking.

Chuppah

A chuppah (also spelled chuppa or huppah) literally means a canopy or covering. You'll find beautiful illustrations on the Internet – showing ways to create and personalize a chuppah. Jewish weddings may use the Groom's tallit (prayer shawl). Chuppahs, however, are not only for Jewish weddings. These canopies are symbolic of the home that the couple will build as husband and wife.

Just as with decorated arches, we hope you'll construct your chuppah tall and wide enough for the wedding couple to stand comfortably underneath it. Chuppahs can be used with or without ceremonial words denoting their significance.

Ketubah

A ketubah is a special type of Jewish prenuptial agreement. It is not a ceremonial document, scripture, prayer, legal or state contract – so it is not typically presented as a part of the wedding ceremony – though it is considered an integral part of a traditional Jewish marriage.

It is not an affirmation of perpetual love. It is the Groom's acknowledgement of the fundamental responsibilities imposed by the Torah upon him in relation to his Bride, therefore providing the framework of love. The ketubah is a unilateral commitment by the Groom, guaranteeing to his Bride that he will meet certain minimum human and financial conditions which are inseparable from marriage.

A ketubah is not a mutual agreement; the Bride agrees only to willingly accept the husband's proposal of marriage. The ketubah is an ethical statement designed for the woman's protection; every nuance was developed so that her husband shall not regard lightly anything that might result in him being unworthy of her trust.

The modern ketubah is, more often than not, also a beautiful work of art intended for display in the couple's home. Ketubahs can be purchased on the Internet, or created, for couples from all religions and cultures, including interfaith and multicultural marriages.

Butterfly Ceremony

Including a butterfly release, usually Monarch butterflies, is a beautiful though occasionally disastrous idea.

You can purchase farm raised butterflies in advance; they'll be delivered overnight to arrive the day before your wedding. You may want two dozen or more, usually enough



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for the wedding party and family, or for the front row(s) of your guests, to release individually – or you may prefer the Bride and Groom having baskets from which several dozen butterflies are released simultaneously.

USDA approved butterflies are fed, chilled (with thermal protection to keep them inactive) and surrounded by soft padding before being shipped. The cool temperature combined with minimal light keeps the butterflies calm and naturally asleep during shipping. Complete instructions on how to care for and release your butterflies will accompany your order.

When they arrive you'll open the top of the package for ventilation and store the butterflies in a cool, dark place away from direct light until being transported to your wedding. They must remain cool and darkened at all times. When the butterfly boxes are exposed to light and become warm (this takes as little as 5 minutes on a cool day or less if it is summer and sunny) the butterflies are stimulated and they will become active again. The ambient temperature should be 65 degrees or more, and there must be at least 30 minutes of daylight left when you release them, so they can find a safe place to roost.

You'll have someone distribute individual butterfly boxes at the appropriate moment. We will provide a text which will explain and cue the release beautifully. The butterflies are released by simply unfolding the boxes to open them. As soon as the box opens wide enough for the butterfly to flap a wing, the butterfly should take flight.

Please arrange for this ceremony through experienced professionals. We've observed two risks you should be aware of when considering a butterfly release. The first, if your day is unexpectedly cold, is that the butterflies might not fully "wake up" before being released. We've seen butterflies cling to guests for warmth, walking on them like drunken sailors. The second risk is worse. When the day is unexpectedly warm, butterflies may struggle to escape their box before it is opened. A sad moment happened in one ceremony involving at least ten-dozen monarch butterflies that the Bride had placed in a hope chest, to be opened by her three-year-old flower girl. I imagine that she took every precaution, but unfortunately almost all the butterflies were dead before the lid was lifted. The little girl burst into wailing and our officiant had to do some quick, creative work to restore order. Ultimately, the ceremony was successful and pleasure was restored. But the butterfly failure created a sad moment that will never be forgotten.

[Incidentally, we've had bad experiences with a rose-petal canon too. Some things seem creative when first imagined but aren't easy, practical, or inexpensive to implement.]



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White Dove Ceremony

A Dove Release Ceremony can make a special occasion even more wonderful, and it's easier than you might imagine. The doves arrive with an experienced handler. They are not fed until they've returned home, so they won't embarrass themselves or your wedding guests. They can be released from your hands, by their handler, or using remote control cages. When the doves are released, they circle several times overhead, allowing everyone to "ooh!" and "aah!" They are naturally equipped to find their way despite great distances, but are never taken to weddings that might impair their successful flight home. The release is always scheduled early enough to allow them to dependably return, be fed, and settle contentedly on their perches before sunset.

Please arrange for this ceremony through trained Las Vegas professionals. As with all the ceremonies here, we can offer a text which will draw your guests into the experience, and cue it beautifully, but we do not sell or recommend the necessary supplies. Please remember, dove releases not performed by knowledgeable staff can bring undesired results, including harm to the birds.

Breaking the Dish

In many countries a local wedding must be performed by an authorized magistrate or at the appropriate registrar's office in order for it to be legal. Church weddings may not convey the same legal status. Nevertheless, marriages entered into legally in Clark County (Las Vegas) and the State of Nevada are generally recognized as valid world-wide.

Germany is one of the countries where a couple often has *two* weddings – their civil at the registrar's ("Standesamt") office and their religious ceremony in a church. So it's not unusual for their celebration to take place over three days. After the necessary civil ceremony, family and friends may gather the following night for a "Polterabend", or wedding-eve party. This is where everyone smashes old china in front of the bride and groom to grant them good fortune. The couple sweeps up and saves the pieces as a symbol that nothing will be broken in their home again. An informal party follows.

Log-sawing is another of many German wedding customs that we've never been requested to include, and that we don't expect to use in the future. It is, however, your wedding. You may request almost anything.

An interesting aspect of German weddings (because the couple's civil wedding usually precedes their more formal celebration) is that in Germany the couple usually arrives together and walks down the aisle together.



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Bagpiper

According to Scottish tradition, bagpipers can assure you of a long and successful marriage. Certainly they will be memorable for your guests. You don't need to be Scottish or Irish to enjoy the uniqueness of a piper at your wedding. If your family doesn't contain Scotts, however, be prepared for kilt and sporran jokes.

Celtic Oathing Stone

Ancient Celts had a tradition that came to be known as "oathing the stone". It was believed to connect the couple and their wedding with the wisdom of their ancestors; and more – that the best in nature of all time, places, and people would bless their future as they began new life together.

As Celts adopted Christianity they looked less to their ancestors and Mother Nature for marital blessing. But "Oathing the Stone" remained an ethnic tradition.

Modern couples are rediscovering this ancient way of setting their marriage "in stone". Many avoid its spiritualist, now New Age, view of ancestry, so provide their own meaning, but value it as "something old, something new, something borrowed." They are fitting it to their own beliefs and developing it into a new tradition. Rituals that stand the test of time do so because they touch the heart, mind, or soul of those who experience them.

We can tailor this ceremony to your situation. After the Bride and Groom have laid their hands on the stone and said their vows, we hope you'll place it at the entrance to your home or in your garden as a daily reminder of the solidity of your love

Food, Spices, Colored Fabric, and other Symbols used in Celebration

Many traditions involve symbols and sharing. These can be wonderfully expressive or strangely confusing. Always imagine what will be most meaningful to you. Then consider how it might appear to your family and friends. We will work with you to explain and use traditions in a way that will have people talking enthusiastically, and remembering for years to come how your traditions inspired their deeper understanding of marriage.

Or maybe you want to start a new tradition. Ultimately, marriage lives in the present and the future. Your gift to future couples may be to begin a new and meaningful wedding tradition. It may take years to fully catch on – but you'll be together throughout that time demonstrating its significance and worth.



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Bride and Groom's Signing Ceremony

In Canada, Puerto Rico, parts of Europe, and some other places the Declaration of Marriage (Wedding Certificate) is consented and signed (by the spouses, two witnesses and the officiant) *during* the wedding ceremony. That does not customarily happen in the United States of America. But it can.

In Clark County (Las Vegas) and Nevada there is no designated space for the wedding couple to sign their marriage certificate – either the commemorative document or the document that will be filed with the County Recorder of Deeds.

However, we have performed many versions of a Signing Ceremony and have, occasionally, prepared a keepsake certificate specifically for a Signing Ceremony. These keepsakes have no legal precedent but are important for photographs and memories.

Government documents, issued with the marriage license and later filed with the Recorder of Deeds, have clear statutory requirements including being signed by one or two witnesses and the officiant. These are not flexible.

Honoring and Recognizing Children During The Wedding Service

Please refer to the main menu of our planning page. We include a separate document that suggests ways to include children in your wedding and vows.

Parents' Ceremonies

As part of "Giving" or Presenting the Bride into marriage we can construct a "Ceremony Within Your Ceremony" for her father, mother, or other loved ones (including children). Similarly, we can suggest Blessings to be read at the beginning of the wedding, or after the exchange of rings, or as part of the reintroduction ("I present you Mr. and Mrs. ____). There are no limits to how these can be done.

Parents' Blessing (instead of 'who gives this woman, etc.')

[Officiant]: "This occasion is a special celebration for you parents who have brought these children into the world, and nurtured them into adulthood. Today you are witnessing another stage in the lives of your son and daughter. Your continuing confidence and encouragement will be needed as (*Saying Bride's name*) and (*Saying Groom's name*) unite in marriage. Mr and Mrs (*Bride's last name*) and Mr and Mrs (*Groom's last name*), will you, with all the love and wisdom within you, do everything you can to encourage and uphold the



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commitment that (*Saying Bride's name*) and (*Saying Groom's name*), are making to one another today?"

The father, (or father and mother) of the Bride, and of the Groom, answer: I am (or: we are)

Covenant Wording (instead of 'who gives this woman, etc.')

[**Officiant**]: I now invite the father of the Bride to release his daughter in marriage to this man.

The father says (addressing the Groom): Her mother and I have raised our daughter with love and tenderness to her maturity. We now release her into your hands with full confidence that you will meet her needs in all aspects of her life — her spiritual, physical and emotional needs. Will you assure us of your intention to provide for these needs?

The groom says: I assure you.

Longer Covenant Wording (instead of 'who gives this woman, etc.')

[**Officiant**]: "What we are witnessing today cannot be separated from what has been prepared in the past. [**Father of the Bride**], by escorting (*Saying Bride's name*) down the wedding aisle, you are saying that you and your wife [**or Mother of the Bride**] are endorsing this man as the very best choice as a husband for your daughter and are bringing her to him.

"At the same time you are accepting (*Saying Groom's name*) as your son; and you are telling him that you are presenting him a most treasured gift – the daughter whom you raised up to become to a worthy bride – and that you are (transferring ^{if the bride lives with her parents} or entrusting ^{if the bride has been an independent adult}) to him full responsibility as her protector and provider.

"[**Father**] (and [**Mother**]), are you affirming that you are giving your blessing to the marriage of your daughter to this man and that you are welcoming him into your family, and also that you are (transferring or entrusting) full responsibility for the care and protection of your daughter to this man?

The father, (or father and mother) of the bride answer: I am (or: we are)

(*Saying Bride's name*) and (*Saying Groom's name*), on this day of your wedding, do you acknowledge and honor [**Father (and Mother) of the Bride**] as [optional: **God's**], instrument(s) in preparing for your marriage and presenting you each as a gift, to the other, for a lifetime of care and protection.

The Groom and the Bride shall say: We do.



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An example of a mother's blessing:

(Saying Bride's name), from the moment I first held you, you held me. You held my heart that day and I'm grateful that your grip has only strengthen through all these years.

Wanting the best for you I tried to be my best for you. Sometimes I reached that goal and other times I fell short. But I never wavered in wanting the best for you. On this day of your wedding, I believe the best is now. Furthermore, I believe that because you are choosing to marry (Saying Groom's name), better times are yet to come.

I have always admired you. Yes, there were moments that were difficult for you as well as for me, life is like that, but I watched you grow and sort things out and stick to what was good. I knew you were courageous and strong. I knew you were adventurous yet wise enough to play safely, loyal enough to share your opportunities, and humble enough to recognize the contributions of others to your success.

It's time now for you to want to and be the best for your husband. I know your marriage will succeed. The commitment of love you are making today comes from deep within you. I have seen it and so has (Saying Groom's name). Of course day-after-day relationships call for more than human beings can sometimes deliver. So I presume that you will discover occasional shortcomings in you as well as in (Saying Groom's name). I am confident that these won't deter you. You are greater than all life's difficulties. Your marriage will overcome every obstacle.

I'm not losing you now but rejoice that you are lifting another above me – that you are giving first place to that unique *Oneness* that every wife and husband is intended to fulfill. I rejoice knowing that you will be most loyal to that part of (Saying Groom's name) and part of you that shall always be united. This pleases me. It's what I've always hoped and worked and prayed for – and consider to be the greatest gift you've ever given me.

Go, now, with my blessing and applause. I am proud of you. You will be the wife that I always dreamed you would be.

Last Words – Your Photographer

Photographers may not be familiar with some of these ceremonies – and therefore may not capture the moment you want for memories. It is up to you to explain the significance of the “Ceremonies Within Your Ceremony” and how you picture these in your mind. If you care about having certain images preserved in your wedding pictures or video, make sure that your professional camera person knows the



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sequence and cues they'll need to watch for. If you make yourself clear, you can expect excellent results.

Similarly, if you or a loved one has prepared hand-crafted supplies for your wedding, or romantic purchases, please be sure to point these out to your camera person. It may sound silly to have to mention these things – things so obvious to you – but you'll thank yourself later. Remember that there's no way to make up for anything that is inadvertently missed.