

## **Wedding Traditions and Folklore**

The following wedding information was found on the web at various sites.

Many of today's popular wedding ceremony and reception traditions can be traced to ancient Egyptian and European customs. These were often based on symbolism, superstition, folklore, religion, and even the belief that evil spirits could bring disease and death to newlyweds and crops, which was very important in many farm-based early cultures. Although the exact origin and usefulness of many of these early wedding traditions are not always clear, popular acceptance has allowed them to flourish. Besides, many of these wedding traditions are fun.

According to various sources, some of the early marriages were literally carried out by the Groom and his "Bridesmen" (or "Bridesknights") who would kidnap a woman (the origin of "carrying a Bride over the threshold") from another tribe! The Groom and his fellow conspirators would then fight off the female's family of tribesmen with swords held in their right hand while the Groom would hold the captured Bride in his left hand, which some say is the origin of why a Bride stands on the left side of the Groom at a wedding – so a right handed Groom can still wield his sword.

After a successful capture, another politically correct practice was for the Groom to hide his new Bride for one month for mating purposes. It is said that the word "honeymoon" was created to describe this one month cycle of the moon when they would drink mead, which was a honey sweetened alcoholic brew that effects both sobriety and the acidity of the womb, thus increasing fertility.

Marriages in the “nobility” were often nothing more than trading chips used in bartering land, social status, political alliances, or money between families.

The word, "Wedding" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "wedd" that meant a man would marry a woman and pay the Bride's father.

### **Bouquet**

Wedding bouquets were originally made of such strong herbs as thyme and garlic, which were meant to frighten away evil spirits, and to cover the stench emitting from people who had not bathed recently or ever.

## **Bouquet Toss**

In ancient times, it was believed that a Bride was especially lucky on her wedding day. Guests would sometimes tear at her dress for a souvenir piece of good luck to take home. The Bride's tossing of her bouquet grew from her desire to offer a good luck souvenir, and prevent guests from bothering her (and her dress!) during her reception.

## **Bridesmaids**

Early Brides and Bridesmaids wore similar dresses in order to confuse evil spirits.

## **Bridal Shower**

Back in the days when weddings were arranged by family members, it is said that a poor Dutchman fell in love with a girl whose father refused her a dowry. Their friends showered her with enough gifts to help them start a household. According to another story, the first "Bridal Shower" occurred at the end of the 19th century. At a party, the Bride's friends placed small gifts inside a parasol and opened it over the Bride's head. When she opened the parasol, she was "showered" with presents!

## **Bridal Veil**

When marriages were arranged by family members, the newlyweds very rarely were allowed to see one another. Family members exchanging a dowry were afraid that if the Groom didn't like the appearance of the Bride's face, he might refuse to marry her. This is why the Father of the Bride "gave the Bride away" to the Groom at the actual wedding ceremony. Only after lifting her veil just prior to the ceremony did the Groom see the Bride's face for the first time! Early Greek and Roman Brides wore red or yellow veils to represent fire, and to ward off demons.

## **Carrying The Bride Over The Threshold**

When a Groom would steal his Bride from her tribe, he was forced to carry her kicking and screaming. This act of thievery has evolved into a more romantic gesture, welcoming the Bride into her new home.

## **Garter**

Brides originally tossed a garter, rather than a bouquet, at a wedding reception. In the 14th century, this custom changed after Brides became tired of fighting off drunken men who tried to remove the garter themselves! According to one legend, the garter toss in England evolved from an earlier tradition of "flinging the stocking." On their wedding night, guests would follow the Bride and Groom to their bedroom, wait until they undressed, steal their stockings, and then "fling" them at the couple! The first person to hit the Bride or Groom on the head would supposedly be the next person to marry.

## **Money Dance**

According to one custom, when arranged marriages were common, the Groom collected a dowry only after his marriage was consummated. The money dance insured that the couple would have some money before they left their wedding reception. According to another wedding tradition, the people of the village gave gifts of pottery, livestock, and garden plants to the newlyweds because the Bride and Groom had no money to acquire these items until they had children, after which a dowry was exchanged.

## **Penny In Shoe**

This is a European tradition to bring the Bride good luck, fortune, and protection against want. After the Wedding Day, the lucky penny can be turned into a piece of jewelry as a pendant, charm for a bracelet, or ring setting.

## **Ring Finger**

Prior to the 5th century, the ring finger was actually the index finger. The ancient Greeks believed that the third finger contained the "vein of love" that led directly to the heart.

## **Shoes On Vehicle**

Ancient Romans would transfer to the Groom his authority over his Bride when her Father gave the Groom her shoes. In later years, guests threw their own shoes at the newlyweds

to signify this transfer of authority. Today, this tradition is kept alive by simply tying old shoes to the back of the newlywed's vehicle before they leave their wedding reception celebration. Throwing shoes at a President has nothing to do with weddings.

### **Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue**

This superstition of the Bride wearing something that fits each of these four categories originated in Europe to ward off evil spirits.

**Something Old:** This tradition symbolized the sense of continuity while making the transition from a single person to that of a married couple.

**Something New:** This tradition symbolized that marriage represented a transition to adulthood.

**Something Borrowed:** This tradition symbolized the popular belief that by borrowing something from a happily married couple, good fortune would follow the newlyweds.

**Something Blue:** In ancient times, blue was the border color of the Bride's dress, symbolizing purity, constancy and fidelity.

### **Stag Parties**

This is the male equivalent of the Bridal Shower. Roman soldiers would feast with the Groom the night before his wedding to say goodbye to his irresponsible days of bachelorhood, and to renew their vows of allegiance to their friendships.

### **Tossing Rice**

By believing that newlyweds brought good luck, guests used to shower them with nuts and grains to insure a bountiful harvest, and many children to work the land. During years of a poor harvest, rice was tossed instead. This tradition continues today with rice or birdseed (where permitted), or bubbles to wish the Bride and Groom much happiness.

### **Tuxedo**

Until the 20th century, the Groom simply wore his "Sunday best" on his wedding day. It is said that President Teddy Roosevelt popularized the modern tuxedo.

### **Tying The Knot**

This comes from the days of the Roman Empire when the Bride wore a girdle that was tied in knots. The Groom untied the knots prior to the consummation of their marriage. So tying the knot started out as untying the knot.

### **Wedding Cake**

Also during the days of the Roman Empire, wedding cakes were baked of wheat or barley. At the reception, they were traditionally broken over the head of the new Bride by the Groom as a symbol of her fertility. Guests would then scramble for pieces of the cake, and take them home for good luck. It later became a tradition to place many small cakes on top of each other as high as possible. The newlyweds would then try to exchange a kiss over the top of the tower of cakes without knocking them down. During the reign of King Charles II of England, the baker added icing, and the modern style of wedding cake was born. It is unclear when the tradition of the newlyweds smashing wedding cake into each other's face first began.

### **Wedding Ring**

According to some historians, the first recorded marriage rings date back to the days when early man tied plaited circlets around the Bride's wrists and ankles to keep her spirit from running away. In approximately 3,000 BC, Egyptians originated the phrase "without beginning, without end" in describing the significance of the wedding ring. These rings were made of woven hemp which constantly wore out and needed replacement.

Although Romans originally used iron, gold is now used as a symbol of all that is pure. Diamonds were first used by Italians, who believed that it was created from the flames of love. In some European cultures, the wedding ring is worn on the right hand. In other cultures, an engagement ring is worn on the left hand, and the wedding ring is worn on the right hand.

### **Wedding Toast**

It is said that this tradition first began in France, where bread would be placed in the bottom of two drinking glasses for the newlyweds. They would then drink as fast as they could to be the first person to get to the toast. According to legend, the winner would rule their household!

### **White Wedding Dress**

This was made popular in the 1840's by Queen Victoria, who chose this instead of the traditional royal "silver" wedding dress. Prior to this, Brides simply wore their best dress on their wedding day.

### **Popular Ethnic and Religious Wedding Traditions**

Various wedding customs have their roots and popularity based on ethnic origin. The following information comes from websites and actual weddings.

#### **African-American**

At some African-American wedding ceremonies, newlyweds "jump over a broom" to symbolize the beginning of a new life. The ritual was created during slavery, when African-Americans could not legally marry. Some people trace this wedding tradition to an African tribal marriage ritual of placing sticks on the ground representing the couple's new home. Today, the jumping of the broom is a symbol of sweeping away of the old, and welcoming the new. Broom Jumping can be performed either at the wedding ceremony, after the Officiant pronounces the newlyweds husband and wife, or at the wedding reception just after the Bridal Party enters the reception area. A fully decorated broom can be purchased on the Internet. Other couples may prefer to use a regular household broom decorated with bows, flowers, and/or other trinkets in the wedding colors. At some receptions, guests may participate in the ceremony by tying ribbons around the broom before the Broom Jumping begins.

#### **Belgian**

As the Bride walks up the aisle at her Wedding Ceremony, the Bride stops and hands her mother a flower from her bouquet and they embrace. After the Wedding Ceremony is finished, the new couple walk to the Groom's side of the church and the Bride gives her mother-in-law a second flower from her bouquet and they also embrace.

## **Chinese**

The Bride may wear a red wedding dress, symbolizing love and joy. At the wedding reception, a nine-course meal (lasting up to three hours) is very popular. A family member may act as the official "Master of Ceremonies" orchestrating family introductions, toasts, comedy sketches, and a reenactment of the newlywed's courtship.

## **Eastern Orthodox Church**

The rings are blessed by the Priest, who takes them in hand, and makes the sign of the cross over the Bride and Groom's head. The "Koumbaros" (Best Man) then exchanges the rings three times, taking the Bride's ring and placing it on the Groom's finger, and vice-versa. This exchange signifies that in married life, the weaknesses of the one partner will be compensated for by the strength of the other, and the imperfections of one by the perfection's of the other.

Candles are held throughout the Wedding Service, which begins immediately after the Betrothal Service. The candles are like the lamps of the five wise maidens of the Bible who, because they had enough oil in them, were able to receive Christ when He came in the darkness of the night. The candles symbolize the spiritual willingness of the couple to receive Christ, Who will bless them through this sacrament. The Office of the Crowning which follows is the climax of the Wedding Service. The crowns are signs of the glory and honor that God crowns them during the sacrament. The Bride and Groom are crowned as the King and Queen of their own little "kingdom", their home, which they will (hopefully) rule with wisdom, justice, and integrity.

## **Egyptian**

After the Bride has walked down the aisle, she removes her shoes. The Groom then helps her slip on a new pair. This is an Egyptian wedding tradition symbolizing that the Bride is beginning a new life with her Groom.

## **French**

One early French wedding custom signifies the new alliance created by uniting two families through marriage. During the Wedding Reception, the new couple raise a glass of wine from two different vineyards. They then pour their wine into a third glass and each drinks from it.

## **German**

During the wedding ceremony, the Groom may kneel on the hem of the Bride's dress to symbolize his control over her. Not to be outdone, the Bride may step on the Groom's foot when she rises to symbolize her power over him!

## **Greek**

Some newlyweds wear a crown of flowers during the wedding ceremony. The couple may walk around the altar three times representing the Holy Trinity. At the reception, Greek folk dances are popular, with guests lining up in a single file line.

## **Hindu**

The Groom and Bride move under the mandap. This is a covering and it can be found for sale on many websites.

### **1. Potho Bhostro**

Groom is offered new clothes by the Bride's Father as a sign of accepting Groom into his family. A prayer is offered to the gods and ancestors before the ceremony starts.

### **2. Shaaat Paak** (Completion of seven circles)

The Bride completes seven circles around the Groom escorted by a brother figure. The belief is that seven circular orbits symbolize the eternal universe, and the completion of seven circles signifies that the attraction between the Bride and Groom will be eternal.

**3. Maala Bodol** (Exchange of garlands)

The Bridesmaids will hand garlands of fragrant flowers to the Bride and Groom. They will place the garlands on each other and then exchange the garlands three times. This symbolizes the first step in which they accept each other for life.

**4. Shubho Drishti** (First Look)

Now that they have placed garlands on one another, the Bride and Groom will look at each other in front of the guests. This exchange of a loving glance is to initiate them to be together officially in the eyes of society.

**5. Shampradhan** (Giving Away the Daughter)

The Bride and Groom take their places under the mandap where Bride's Father will hand her to Groom. The couple's hands are bound by a sacred thread amidst a recital of Vedic chants and placed on a manghal ghot.

**6. Yaagnaa** (Prayer in Front of Fire)

The Bride and Groom sit in front of the sacred fire and chant mantras after the (Hindu Priest's name). Agni, the fire god will be made the divine witness to the marriage.

**7. Shaaat Paaak** (Completion of Seven Circles)

This time the seven circular rounds will be taken together by the couple around the fire thereby solemnizing this occasion. Bride's sari will be tied to Groom to symbolize their commitment and connection to one another.

**8. Anjali (Offering to the Fire)**

An offering to the fire will be made. Puffed rice will be placed in Bride's hands and Groom, standing close to her, will hold her hands from the back and extend their arms forward. They then will pour the offering into the fire together.

**9. Shap-ta padhi gha-man** (Seven Steps)

Bride completes seven steps with Groom's help. This ritual symbolizes the journey of life, which they both should travel together hand in hand. They should be with each other through thick and thin. According to Hindu belief if two people walk seven steps together then they will remain together for life. Each of the seven steps translate into the following blessings:

**First** - May this couple be blessed with an abundance of resources and comforts, and be helpful to one another in all ways.

**Second** - May this couple be strong and complement one another.

**Third** - May this couple be blessed with prosperity and riches on all levels.

**Fourth** - May this couple be eternally happy.

**Fifth** - May this couple be blessed with a happy family life.

**Sixth** - May this couple live in perfect harmony... true to their personal values and their joint promises.

**Seventh** - May this couple always be the best of friends.

**10. Shidoor Dhaan** (Giving Shidoor)

The Groom applies shidoor (vermillion, a red powder) in the Bride's hair parting. This symbolizes the married status of women in West Bengal.

**11. Ashirbhaad** (Blessing by Parents)

The Parents of the Bride and Groom come to the front and bless the couple to have a long, happy, and prosperous marriage. The Groom's Mother places a bangle on Bride, a sign of welcoming Bride and accepting the marriage of the couple.

**Hispanic – Mexican - Spanish**

The Groom sometimes gives his Bride thirteen coins in memory of Christ and the twelve apostles. The Bride carries them in a small bag during the Wedding Ceremony as a symbol that the Groom promises to support and care for her.

During the wedding ceremony, thirteen gold coins (representing the Groom's dowry to his Bride) are often blessed by the priest, and passed between the hands of the newlyweds several times before ending with the Bride. A large rosary or white rope ("lazo") is sometimes wound around the couple's shoulders in a figure-8 symbol of "infinity" during the wedding ceremony to symbolize their union as one.

Red beads are sometimes tossed at Newlyweds to bring them good luck.

## **Irish**

In the early 1900's, an Irish couple would walk to church together on their Wedding Day. If the people of their parish approved their union they would throw rice, pots, pans, brushes and other household items at the couple as they approached their church. Today, "hen parties" (Bridal Showers) have replaced this practice.

Some Irish people wear a "claddagh" ring for a wedding ring. This ring was created by a master goldsmith, Richard Joyce, 400 years ago in a fishing village called Claddagh, which overlooks Galway Bay. The claddagh symbolizes love, loyalty, and friendship. On the right hand, with the heart facing inward, it means the wearer's heart is unoccupied. Facing outwards reveals love is being considered. When worn on the left hand facing outward, it signifies that the wearer is seriously committed or married.

At some Irish wedding receptions, the Groom is lifted in a chair ("jaunting car") to celebrate that he is a married man.

For good luck, the newlyweds are given a horseshoe to display in their home in the upward position.

A traditional Irish wedding cake is a fruitcake. Traditional Irish toasts, in addition to remarks from the Best Man, are very popular.

### **An Irish Marriage Blessing**

May God be with you and bless you;  
 May you see your children's children.  
 May you be poor in misfortune,  
 Rich in blessings,  
 May you know nothing but happiness.  
 From this day forward.

### **Italian**

Some Brides may choose to carry a white silk or satin purse ("busta") to store gifts of money that are welcomed. "Tarantella" folk dances are popular at the wedding reception. Another Italian custom is to present five sugar-coated almonds to the guests which represent health, wealth, long life, fertility, and happiness.

### **Japanese**

The Bride and her Parents might visit the Groom's house on wedding day. At the wedding ceremony, the Bride's wedding gown is often a traditional wedding kimono. She usually changes into something else at the wedding reception. The first of nine sips of sake drunk by the Bride and Groom at their wedding ceremony symbolizes the official union of marriage.

### **Jewish**

It is a Jewish tradition for a Bride to present her Groom with a tallit to wear for his Aufruf, the reading of the Torah prior to their ceremony. The Groom's family often give candlesticks to the Bride that can be used during the actual wedding ceremony. It is also a custom for Jewish men to cover their heads at all times, especially during prayers, with a kippot (yarmulkes), as a form of reverence, respect, and acknowledgement that God is present everywhere. In some congregations, women also cover their heads to pray.

Some Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform wedding ceremonies take place under a chuppah (wedding canopy). The chuppah is a rectangular piece of cloth large enough for the Bride, Groom, Rabbi, and sometimes other members of the wedding party to stand under. The chuppah signifies the new home about to be shared by the newlyweds. Before the procession to the chuppah, the tana'im are signed, and the Groom is asked if he is ready to take on the responsibilities outlined in the ketubah. He signifies his willingness by accepting a handkerchief or other object offered to him by the Rabbi. The two witnesses to this sign the ketubah. While the actual text of the ketubah is never meant to vary, the border decorations on this document have over the centuries been the subject of remarkable artistic creations.

At the beginning of the wedding ceremony, the Bride might observe the Biblical custom of "Circling the Groom" seven times. This practice is seen as a powerful act of definition, where the Bride will symbolically create the space that they will share as husband and wife. In Judaism, the number seven is mystical and represents completion and fulfillment. Just as the creation of the world was finished in seven days, the seven circles complete the couple's search for each other.

The bedeken, or veiling, is a small ceremony in which the Groom lowers the veil over the Bride's face, and by this act acknowledges that he is marrying the correct woman. This custom originated in the story of Jacob who didn't see the face of his Bride prior to his wedding and was tricked into marrying Leah instead of his intended, Rachel.

The Jewish marriage ceremony consists of two parts: Erusin (pre-engagement) and Nissuin (marriage). These ceremonies were historically performed up to one year apart, but more recently the two have been combined into one ceremony. The Erusin ceremony begins with Kiddush, the blessing over the wine. Kiddush is part of virtually all Jewish observances as a prayer of sanctification. The exchange of rings completes the Erusin ceremony.

In Jewish law, a verbal declaration of marriage is not legally binding unless an act of Kinyan, a formal physical acquisition is completed. This is reached when two witnesses see the Bride accept a ring from the Groom, and he recites the words of marriage. After the ketubah has been read at the ceremony, wine is often poured into a new glass, and the Sheva Berakhot (Seven Benedictions) are recited over it. The Bride and Groom then drink from the glass of wine. With the ceremony complete, tradition calls for the Groom to break the wrapped glass by stomping on

it. This final action symbolizes the destruction of the Holy Temple in Israel, and reminds guests that love is fragile. The audience may shout Mazel Tov, and the Bride and Groom kiss.

Immediately after the wedding ceremony, the couple may spend a few private moments together, or Yichud as a symbolic consummation of their marriage. Later, the Mitzvah, or obligation, of rejoicing at a wedding reception is incumbent on the Bride, Groom, and guests.

### **Polish**

The Mother of the Bride may choose to place the veil on the Bride before the wedding ceremony to symbolize her last task that a Mother does on behalf of her girl before she becomes a married woman. A traditional folk song ("Twelve Angels") is sometimes played at the reception, allowing the Bride to transfer her veil, and good luck to be married, to her Maid of Honor, Bridesmaids, and Flower Girl.

A morning wedding ceremony is sometimes followed with a brief afternoon luncheon, several hours of downtime when guests return home, and then a long evening wedding reception. Polka dances and other audience participation events are very popular.

### **Scottish**

The Groom and his Groomsmen often wear Scottish kilts (and traditionally no undergarments!). The Groom may present the Bride with an engraved silver teaspoon on their wedding day to symbolize that they will never go hungry. A traditional sword dance is sometimes performed at their wedding reception.