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# WEDDING TRADITIONS EXPLAINED

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## PRIOR TO WEDDING

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### Meaning of "Wedding"

"Wedding" literally meant the purchase of a bride for breeding purposes. The word wedding comes from the root meaning to "gamble" or "wager". The Anglo-Saxon word "wedd" meant that the groom would vow to marry the woman, but it also meant the money or barter that the groom paid the bride's father. This is believed why it is still customary for the father-of-the-bride to "give away" his daughter.

### Meaning of "Bridal"

Term "Bridal" came from the "brew". The bride and groom would drink, and was referred to as "bryd ealu" or "bride's ale," which evolved into "bridal".

### Meaning of "White" Color in Bride's Dress

- Color "White" was denoted as purity and virginity, which was thought to ward off evil spirits, for centuries. But in Ancient Rome, yellow was the socially accepted color for a bride's wedding attire, and a veil of flame-hued yellow. The veil or "flammeum" covered the face. There are two women noted to have made the white wedding gown popular; Anne of Brittany in 1499 and Queen Victoria, who broke the tradition of royals by marrying in silver. By the late eighteenth century, white had become the standard wedding color. Before the introduction of the white wedding gown a woman just wore her best dress.
- The white wedding dress has a two-fold significance. It is a symbol of the wife's purity in heart and life, and in reverence to God. It's also a picture of the righteousness of Christ described in Revelation 19:7-8. Christ clothes his bride, the church, in his own righteousness as a garment of "fine linen, bright and clean."

## Something old, new, borrowed & blue

### Something Blue

In Biblical days – blue represented purity. Thus the bride and groom would wear a blue band around the bottom of their wedding attire, hence something blue.

Before the 19th century, blue was the wedding dress color of choice (love that!)...eventually white became symbolic of purity and that's what bride started to wear, so the something blue is a respect for former marital traditions!

### Something Old:

This comes from the idea of the past moving into the future. Typically, brides would have something sentimental or meaningful from their past with them on their wedding day, like a family heirloom or childhood memento.

### Something New:

The "something new" represents and symbolizes the future life and optimism the bride will share with her new groom. This could be literally anything new the bride will carry into her new life, from a pack of gum, a new car, or a new outfit for her honeymoon. It represents a fresh and new start!

### Something Borrowed

Perhaps my favorite part of the tradition, the "borrowed" item represents borrowed happiness. This item traditionally was borrowed from a happily married couple, or someone who represents happiness to the

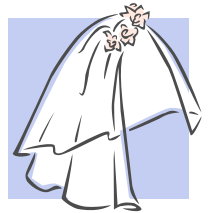
bride and groom. The borrowed item is returned after the wedding day with a special note of thanks to the person who lent out their happiness for the wedding!

### Meaning of "Bridal Flowers"

- Carrying flowers by the bride has its roots in ancient times. Strong smelling herbs and spices were thought to ward off and drive away evil spirits, bad luck and ill health. Garlic and chives were popular for the same reason.
- During Roman times, this tradition was extended, with the bride and groom wearing floral garlands signifying new life and hope for fertility.
- The bouquet symbolized a woman in bloom. During Victorian times, flowers took an additional significance, as lovers would send messages to each other using different flowers, with each flower having its own meaning. These associations were soon adopted for the bride's bouquets and are still used today by many brides.
- The groom is supposed to wear a flower that appears in the Bridal Bouquet in his buttonhole. This stems from the medieval tradition of a Knight wearing his lady's colors, as a declaration of his love.

### The Bridal Veil

- The veiling of the bride has origins in the idea that she's vulnerable to enchantment, so she must be hidden from evil spirits. The Romans veiled brides in flame-colored veils to actually scare off those spirits.
- Perhaps the most evil of spirits, in an arranged marriage, is the threat that the groom, who is perhaps seeing the bride for the first time, won't like what he sees. The veil saves everyone some embarrassment in the short term.
- Also, in many religions, the veil is a sign of humility and respect before God during a religious ceremony.
- The Victorians turned that reverence into a status symbol. During Victorian times, when archaic customs were formally incorporated into proper weddings, the weight, length and quality of the veil was a sign of the bride's status. Royal brides had the longest veils and the longest trains.
- In modern times, generally we have some assurance that the groom has seen his bride and won't be disappointed, and that the only evil spirits will be the ones behind the bar at the reception. The tradition has become more of a finishing touch in wedding fashion. It's the icing on the cake, so to speak, that pulls together the hair and the dress
- Related to the days when the groom would throw a blanket over the head of the woman of choice when he captured and carted her off.
- Veil is also related to the arranged marriages when the bride's face was covered until the groom was committed to the bride at the ceremony, so it would be too late for him to escape if he did not like the looks of his bride. It is also related to protect the bride from evil spirits that would be floating around on her wedding day.
- A woman's face covered by a veil meant that she was spoken for.
- Among Greeks and Romans by the 4th century BC, sheer translucent veils were the vogue at weddings.
- Along with these kidnappings and bartering, there were also arranged marriages. In these, the groom's family informed him that he was to marry...but they very rarely let him see the bride. After all, if the groom didn't like the bride's looks, he might not agree to the marriage.



### The Bridal Party

- The first marriages were by capture. The best man would help the groom fight off other men who wanted the chosen woman, and prevent her family from finding them. The "best warrior" would stand for the groom, thus the "best man".
- When the groom was about to abduct his bride, he needed the help of many friends, the "brides-men" or "bride-knights." The "gentlemen" would make sure the bride got to the ceremony on time and to the groom's house afterwards. The bride also had women to help her. These were known as the "bridesmaids" or "brides-women."

- The tradition of bridesmaids evolved from the custom of surrounding the Bride with other richly dressed women, in order to confuse the evil spirits.

### **Best Man**

As marriages were historically accomplished by capture (the groom would kidnap the woman), a warrior friend was often employed. This best man would help the groom fight off other men who wanted the captured woman, and would also help in preventing the woman's family from finding the couple.

### **Stag Parties/ Bachelor Parties**

Ancient Spartan soldiers were the first to hold stag parties. The groom would feast with his male friends on the night before his wedding. In this event he would say good-bye to the carefree days of bachelorhood and swear continued allegiance to his comrades.

### **Bridesmaids**

Started with the Greeks when brides were still young ---group of older more experienced women to help. In early Europe, role was to symbolically defend the bride against evil spirits—so they all dressed alike.

### **Bridesmaids' Dresses**

- The earliest tradition in bridesmaid fashion involved dressing the bridesmaids exactly the same as the bride. As with many older traditions, the idea was that by setting up lookalikes, any troublesome spirits in the area could not fixate on the bride.
- That custom gave way in Victorian times to dressing bridesmaids in white dresses but short veils, to contrast with the bride's voluminous veiling and train system. When society's fears of evil spirits subsided and commercial dyes became more available, those first hideous dresses made their appearance. In colors like lime green, harvest gold, tangerine and fuchsia, those dresses all ensured that the bride would be the best-looking girl in the church.

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## **CEREMONY**

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### **Seating of the Family on Opposite Sides of the Church**

Family and friends of the bride and groom are seated on opposite sides of the church to symbolize the cutting of the blood covenant. These witnesses—the family, friends, and invited guests—are all participants in the wedding covenant, and many of them have made sacrifices to help prepare the couple for marriage and to support them in their holy union.

### **Center Aisle and White Runner**

The center aisle represents the meeting ground, or the pathway between the animal pieces where the blood covenant is established. The white runner symbolizes holy ground where two lives are joined as one by God. (Exodus 3:5, Matthew 19:6)

### **Seating of the Parents**

In Bible times, the parents of the bride and groom were ultimately responsible for discerning God's will concerning the choice of a spouse for their children. The wedding tradition of seating the parents in a place of prominence is meant to recognize their responsibility for the couple's union.

### **Groom Enters First**

Ephesians 5:23-32 reveals that earthly marriages are a picture of the church's union with Christ. God initiated the relationship through Christ, who called and came for his bride, the church. Christ is the Groom, who established the blood covenant first initiated by God. For this reason, the groom enters the church auditorium first.

## Father Escorts and Gives Away the Bride

- All of our society's gender issues stem from the fact that fathers once used their daughters as currency to a) pay off a debt to a wealthier land owner, b) symbolize a sacrificial, monetary peace offering to an opposing tribe or c) buy their way into a higher social strata. So next time you tear up watching a beaming father walk his little girl down the aisle, remember that it's just a tiny, barbaric little hold over from the days when daughters were nothing but dollar signs to daddy dearest.
- In Jewish tradition, it was the father's duty to present his daughter in marriage as a pure virgin bride. As parents, the father and his wife also took responsibility for endorsing their daughter's choice in a husband. By escorting her down the aisle, a father says, "I have done my very best to present you, my daughter, as a pure bride. I approve of this man as your choice for a husband, and now I bring you to him." When the ministers asks, "Who gives this woman?," the father responds, "Her mother and I." This giving away of the bride, demonstrates the parent's blessing on the union and the transfer of care and responsibility to the husband.

## Meaning of "Bride on the Left"

The origin of the bride standing on the left goes back to the days when the groom would capture his bride by kidnapping her. If the groom had to fight off other suitors, the groom would hold his bride-to-be with his left hand allowing his right hand to be free to use his sword.

## Meaning of "Kissing the Bride"

Yes, this is what the big wedding kiss symbolizes--the swapping of souls between the bride and groom. Even earlier than this Christian belief, the Romans used a kiss to seal a contract. The kiss was considered legally binding. I don't know about you, but I'm glad that a handshake suffices today.

What's more, a bride marrying in the Church of England had to kiss the minister before she smooched the groom. I would really love to go to a wedding where the minister said, "Now, I may kiss the bride."



## Wedding and Engagement Rings

- A wedding band is a symbol of marriage. This potent symbol of unity sends an unmistakable message about our marital status.
- The oldest recorded exchange of wedding rings comes from ancient Egypt, about 4800 years ago. In early Egypt, the ring was linked with the supernatural, a never-ending band linked with eternal love.
- For the Romans later, the ring's acceptance by a young lady was a binding, legal agreement and the girl was no longer free.
- Today we accept the ring as part of a religious ceremony when we marry in church.
- As time passes traditions change and, today, it is not only the brides who wear rings as a symbol of their lasting affection, but the majority of men also choose to wear this badge of fidelity and commitment.

Most people wear the wedding band in the third finger of the left hand. The ancient Romans, Greeks and Egyptians believed that a vein - called the vena amoris in Latin - ran directly from that finger to the heart.

- If you've ever groaned at having to buy both an engagement ring and a wedding ring, you can blame Pope Innocent III, who instituted a waiting period between engagement and marriage in the 13th century and also insisted that a ring be used in the wedding ceremony. Before that, rings were used to seal an engagement only (as well as other important agreements).
- A ring was used as a seal of authority. When pressed into hot wax, the impression of the ring left an official seal on legal documents. Therefore, when the couple wears a wedding ring, they demonstrate their submission to God's authority over their marriage. The couple recognizes that God brought them together and that he is intricately involved in every part of their covenant relationship.



- A ring also represents resources. When the couple exchanges wedding rings, it symbolizes the giving of all their resources—their wealth, possessions, talents, and emotions—to the other in marriage. Thus, the exchanging of the rings is another sign of their covenant relationship.
- There's no dispute that DeBeers singlehandedly created the market for the diamond engagement ring with a simple sentiment in a 20th-century ad campaign: A Diamond is Forever.
- As it turned out, the slogan might outlast the product, as socially conscious brides steer away from the products of the war-torn diamond industry.

### **Pronouncement of Husband and Wife**

The pronouncement officially declares that the bride and groom are now husband and wife. This moment establishes the exact beginning of their covenant. The two are now one in the eyes of God.

### **Presentation of the Couple**

When the minister introduces the couple to the wedding guests, he is drawing attention to their new identity and the name change brought about through the marriage. Similarly, in the blood covenant, the two parties would exchange some part of their names. In Genesis 15, God gave Abram a new name, Abraham, by adding letters from his own name, Yahweh.

### **Jumping the Broom**

- Is custom relating to wedding ceremonies practiced in Wales and African Americans. The Welsh had a centuries-old custom called "broom-stick wedding" alluded to in Dundes' work. Local variations of the custom were developed in different parts of England and Wales. Instead of placing the broom on the ground, and jumping together, the broom was placed in an angle by the doorway. The groom jumped first, followed by the bride. In some African-American communities, marrying couples will end their ceremony by jumping over a broomstick, either together or separately. This practice dates back at least to the 19th century and has enjoyed a 20th century revival largely due to the miniseries *Roots*
- While trendy African-American couples sometimes incorporate this ritual into modern ceremonies, their great-great-grandparents might not have approved.
- The practice of jumping the broom started in slave times, when it was actually illegal for slaves to marry. Nonetheless, the people on the plantations sought to form bonds that were acknowledged by the community, so they jumped the broom together in lieu of a legal wedding.
- Historians note that freed slaves taught their children to disdain the practice, because to them, it was a symbol of bondage. However, the poignant scene in Alex Haley's "Roots," in which Kunta Kinte jumped the broom on the plantation with his bride, led to a revival of the custom. In that scene, the captive from Africa is not accepting his captivity, but he is acknowledging a powerful bond with another person despite being trapped in a life he didn't choose.
- Despite their ancestors' distaste for the practice, some modern couples incorporate jumping the broom into their ceremonies as a connection to a painful but significant part of their heritage.

### **The Breaking of the Glass**

- The conclusion of a Jewish wedding, with its layers of symbolic practices, often ends with the groom crushing a wine glass under his heel.
- The chief connotation is that the breaking of the glass serves as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the most holy place in all of Jewish history. Another connotation is that it reminds the couple of the fragility of the relationship and the need to preserve it.
- In some cases, modern couples may find the practice a somewhat oppressive burden in its reminder of thousands of years of history. But then, isn't that what tradition is for?

### Throwing Rice/Flowers At Couple

- The bride and groom first ate rice together to be married, and then rice was sprinkled over them. In some cases, rice was used at weddings not to bring the bride and groom together, but to protect them from evil spirits. It was believed that these spirits always appeared at a marriage, and by throwing rice after the married couple, these evil spirits were fed and kept from doing harm to the newlyweds. But for most ancient peoples, rice was a symbol of fruitfulness.
- The rice throwing tradition at weddings originated with the throwing of seed. It was meant to remind couples of one of the primary purposes in marriage—to create a family that will serve and honor the Lord. Therefore, guests symbolically throw rice as a gesture of blessing for the spiritual and physical fruitfulness of the marriage.

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## THE RECEPTION

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A ceremonial meal was often a part of the blood covenant. At a wedding reception, guests are invited to share with the couple in the blessings of the covenant. The reception also illustrates the wedding supper of the Lamb described in Revelation 19.

### Where's the Toast?

We call it a "toast" when we drink to someone because of an old French custom in which a piece of bread was put in the bottom of the wine cup--for flavor.

### Yuck!

Partygoers would drink and pass the cup; when it reached the person being toasted, he would drain it--crouton and all. It sounds pretty unhygienic. But think of how much more excitement a crunchy beverage would bring to the traditional wedding toast. I'd drink to that.

### Cake

In Rome, the first wedding cakes were loaves of wheat bread. During the ceremony, bread was broken over the bride's head as a blessing for long life and many children.

In medieval England, wedding guests brought small cakes to the ceremony as a gift for the newlyweds. The cakes were stacked in a pile, as high as possible

### Cutting and Feeding of the Cake

The cutting of the cake is another picture of the cutting of the covenant. When the bride and groom take pieces of the cake and feed it to each other, once again, they are showing how they have given their all to one another, and will care for the other as one flesh. At a Christian wedding, the cutting and feeding of the cake can be done joyfully, but should also be done lovingly and reverently, in a way that honors the covenant relationship.

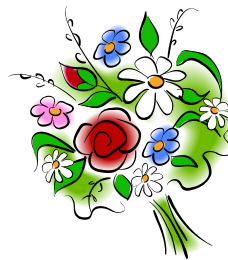


### Meaning of "Bouquet" & Throwing It Away

Anything worn by the bride was and is considered good luck. The bouquet was considered a sign of happiness. Another reason to throw the bouquet into the crowd by bride is to distract the crowd so that she could escape.

### Tossing of the garter

Apparently, in the good old days, before wedding dresses cost as much as small cars, people used to rip off chunks of the dress for good luck. The garter was something that could be shucked off in self-defense.



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## AFTER THE WEDDING

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### Meaning of "Carrying The Bride Over The Threshold"

- To protect the bride from evil spirits that were thought to be lying in wait under the threshold.
- During Roman times it was believed that if the bride stumbled when entering the newlywed's home for the first time, it would bring bad luck and harm to their marriage. Carrying the bride across the threshold was thought to prevent this from happening. Tradition dictates the new wife must enter her home by the main door and, to avoid bad luck, she must never trip or fall--hence the custom that a bride should be carried over the threshold.
- One belief of carrying the bride over the threshold stems from the same belief that aroused the idea of the runway carpet and strewing the aisle with flowers and petals. It was an ancient belief that the newly married couple was very susceptible to evil spirits. A protective layer between the bride and the ground were provided by carrying her, and thus protecting her from the "ground monster".

### Reason For Having "Honeymoon"

- After the successful "capture" of the bride, was "the hiding" (Honeymoon), and by the time the bride's family would find them, the bride would already be pregnant.
- The word honey is from "meala" in Irish. The word for honeymoon is "mi na meala", the "month of honey" and refers to how the bride and groom would spend that period of time. Irish monks first produced the fermented honey brew called mead for medicinal purposes; then found it could make well people feel even better. Following the wedding a sufficient amount of mead was given to the bride and groom, along with special goblets, so they could share the unique brew for one full moon after the wedding--and thus the term honeymoon was coined. It was believed that this delicate yet potent drink was the best way to ensure a good beginning for a new marriage and it was also believe to endow powers of virility and fertility.
- If you want to really extrapolate links to tradition, the honeymoon is a carryover from the days when grooms abducted their brides from the neighbors. ("Will you take this woman?" Well, for a lot of human history, that's exactly what the groom did.)
- Through time, those abductions became fun-filled, ritualized enactments of capturing brides. Those escapades, in Norse tradition, led to a tradition in which the bride and groom went into hiding for 30 days. During each of those days, a friend or family member would bring them a cup of honey wine, so that 30 days of consumption equaled a "honeymoon."

### Tying Tin Cans to the Bumper of the Car

- OK, so you've thrown a wedding and invited the whole neighborhood, and you're tired. An hour or so after you go to sleep, all your friends turn out and bang pots and pans under your windowsill, and you're expected to reappear in full wedding attire and feed the rowdies so they'll go away. Sound like fun? Probably not. But this was the shivaree, which was practiced on the American frontier into the early 20th century.
- The American version originated in France, where communities would conduct a charivari for widowers or grooms from out of town. These grooms, outsiders who had effectively snatched a local girl out of the clutches of the local boys, were to pay a toll to the offended locals by offering a midnight meal.
- Early French settlers brought the practice to the Mississippi Valley in the 1600s, and other settlers caught on. The midnight parties became an event that grooms worked to deflect; historians cite cases where prosperous ranchers would throw enormous barbecues for the community just to avoid getting "shivaree'd."
- Tying the tin cans on the bumper may serve as a poor substitution for an all-night party, but it's interesting to note that the decorating of the car is generally done by the groom's male friends -- men who effectively have lost their chances with the bride who's being whisked away.