



Wedding Traditions

ENGAGEMENT RING

The engagement ring is a promise for marriage. During the Roman era, the man had to "barter" for his future bride. The engagement ring was security for the "betrothed." As time went on, men presented diamond rings to future brides because a ring containing a diamond was considered more valuable than a plain gold band -- thus, it is a stronger promise and offers more security.

BACHELOR PARTY

This was the last chance before his new wife took over the finances for the groom to gather money by gambling for his own future use.

BRIDAL SHOWER

This custom came about when a father disapproved of his daughter's marriage and refused to provide a dowry to the couple. The shower became the alternative to the dowry. Supportive villagers would assemble and provide the bride a variety of household items for her new home.

DOWRY/HOPE CHEST AND TROUSSEAU

There was a time when marriage would include some exchange of property between the families of the bride and groom. The groom's family would pay a price to the bride's family for the bride. The bride's family in turn would provide the couple with a dowry of various household items for their new home. As a bride planned for her future marriage, she would supplement this dowry with her own items that she collected or made (i.e. embroidered linens). All items would be kept in a special Hope Chest built by the bride's father for the purpose of holding the dowry.

The trousseau included all the clothing and property which a bride brought with her to the marriage. Today, the trousseau includes all wedding and shower gifts as well as new purchases.

WEDDING BANNS

This is an announcement of an impending wedding in the Catholic Church. This announcement usually takes place for three consecutive Sundays. Its purpose was to inform the public with enough notice of the pending wedding so if anyone objected to the marriage, they could do so.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

WEDDING RING

The marriage ring represents a promise for eternal and everlasting love. It is a representation of the promises joining both the bride and groom together. The wedding ring is placed on the fourth finger of the left hand because it was traditionally believed that this finger was a direct connection to the heart -- the perfect place to place a symbol, representing eternal love and commitment.

ALTAR POSITIONING

This tradition dates back to the time when marriage might take place by capture. By having the bride stand to the groom's left, the groom would have his right hand free for his sword if he needed it for defense.

ARCH OF SWORDS FOLLOWING CEREMONY

Walking through the arc of swords following the ceremony was done to ensure the couple's safe passage into their new life together.

BREAKING OF GLASS

A Jewish tradition that represents the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Many times couple save the pieces of glass from the ceremony in a symbolic box.

BRIDAL GOWN (WHITE)

There was a time when the bride would wear her favorite dress to the ceremony. In 1840, Queen Victoria wore an elegant all white gown to her wedding. She started a fashion trend which quickly caught on and continues to this very day. White was worn because people believed it represented affluence, virginity and purity.

BRIDAL VEIL

Traditionally the bridal veil was a symbol for modesty, respect and virginity. The veil served as a reminder to all witnessing the ceremony that the physical relationship was entered into only after the vows were exchanged and the marriage became official with the seal of a kiss. The veil was removed after the vows were exchanged and the couple was pronounced "Man and Wife."

CHILD ATTENDANTS

Children were originally included in the ceremony to add innocence.

FATHER GIVING THE BRIDE AWAY

This custom originally had its roots in arranged marriages where the bride was considered property. Later, this custom persisted as a symbol with two meanings:

- *an endorsement by the father to all witnessing the ceremony that the groom is the best choice for his daughter.*
- *an offering to the groom: "I am presenting to you my daughter."*

FLOWERS AND THE TOSSING OF THE BOUQUET

Flowers were incorporated into the ceremony because they represent fertility, purity, new life and never ending love. Traditionally, bouquets were a mixture of flowers and herbs. Dill was a very popular choice as an herb because it was believed to promote lust. Following the ceremony, the dill was eaten for that purpose.

Tossing of the bridal bouquet is a custom which has its roots in England. It was believed that the bride could pass along good fortune to others. In order to obtain this fortune, spectators would try to tear away pieces of the bride's clothing and flowers. In an attempt to get away, the bride would toss her bouquet into the crowd. Tradition says that the single women who catches the bouquet is the one who receives the bride's fortune and will marry next.

THE GRAND EXIT AFTER THE RECEPTION

Traditionally, old shoes were tied to the back of the car to represent the transfer of property from the father of the bride to the groom. Horn honking, the shooting off of firecrackers and ringing of bells were a means to protect the bride by warding off evil spirits.

GROOM ENTERING CHURCH FIRST/GROOM EXCHANGING FIRST VOW

Both of these customs signify that the groom is the covenant initiator. Because he is the initiator, he is the first to state his vow for marriage. As the initiator of the covenant, the groom is to assume the greatest responsibility in the marriage.

HUPPAH

In the Jewish religion, the ceremony takes place as the couple stands under an ornamental canopy. This canopy symbolized nomadic tents of Israel and the new home that the couple would soon share.

KISS

No ceremony is complete without the kiss. In fact, there was a time when an engagement would be null and void without one. Dating back from early Roman times, the kiss represented a legal bond that sealed all contracts.

PRONOUNCED "MAN AND WIFE"

This is the point of time when the marriage becomes official. It is also at this point that the bride officially changes her name.

RECEIVING LINE

This is a chance for the guests to congratulate and greet the newly married couple and their parents.

RECEPTION, FOOD AND WINE

The reception is the official celebration of the new couple. The wedding cake represents the sharing of the bride and groom's body to become one. The drinking of wine symbolizes the sharing of the bride's and groom's life together with God.

SIGNING OF WEDDING PAPERS AND THE SIGNING OF THE GUEST BOOK

The signing of the marriage certificate documents a public record of the marriage. The guest book was a record of all people who witnessed the wedding. For that reason, the guest book is supposed to be signed following the official wedding ceremony.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING BLUE

You may have heard the saying that the bride is to wear "something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue." And, although you know that most brides perform this ritual, you're probably wondering why they do this and what it means. Each part of this saying holds some form of traditional significance. The old and new items represent the passage from the single status to the married status. The borrowed item represents the participation and approval of the wedding by family, friends and the community. Something blue is a symbol of purity, love and fidelity. In England, this saying goes on further to include "...and a lucky sixpence in your shoe" which brides will still do.

TAKING OF EACH OTHER'S RIGHT HAND

The open right hand is a symbol of strength, resource and purpose. The coming together of both right hands is a symbol that both the bride and the groom can depend on each other and the resources that each brings to the marriage. It also represents the merger of their lives together into one.

THROWING OF THE GARTER BELT

This ritual dates back to a time when woman wore hose with a garter belt. It was a chance for the single men to share in the good fortune of the groom. Today, it is believed that the man who catches the garter when it is thrown will be the next to marry.

THROWING OF RICE, FLOWERS

When thrown as the couple exited the church, throwing of rice and flowers represented the wish for the couple to have a fruitful and plentiful life together. Originally rice and wheat were thrown over the married couple to represent the hope for fertility.

When rose pedals are thrown before the bride as she walks down the aisle, it is to ward-off evil spirits below the ground and grant fertility.

UNITY CANDLE

The unity candle is a symbol of family unity. Usually a single candle (representing the newly married couple) is lit with two individual candles, each representing the bride's and groom's families.

WEDDING FAVORS

Wedding favors are mementos of the special occasion given to each wedding guest to thank them for sharing the momentous occasion with the bride and groom.

WHITE AISLE RUNNER

The white aisle runner symbolized God's holiness and walking on holy ground. It is believed that marriage is not just between two individuals but includes the presence of God who is actively involved in the marriage ceremony.

FOLLOWING THE RECEPTION

CARRYING THE BRIDE OVER THE THRESHOLD

This was done to protect the bride from any evil spirits which may be hiding beneath the threshold. The groom would carry his beautiful bride to safety and happiness so they could start their new lives together.

HONEYMOON

This was a chance for the new couple to hide from family and friends for a period of time.

WEDDING NIGHT

This custom dates back from the Middle Ages. A group of friends would gather and bang on pots and pans, shoot off guns, etc. to disturb the newlywed couple on their wedding night.

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