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## Wedding Traditions Unveiled

### By The Iconoclast

Weddings are that special occasion where two people come together to celebrate their love for one another. Yet, was it always this way? How did marriage come to be, and what is the meaning behind some of the many strange traditions observed today?

We assume that marriage has always been a sanctimonious tradition; however marriage was not originally about "holy matrimony" or "true love." The original intent of marriage was to insure a safe environment for the bringing up of children, as well as the acquisition and transfer of property. Indeed it is the rather superficial "marriage of convenience" which can be viewed as the original meaning of marriage. Eventually marriage became more about love, and less about property. Throughout that time, though, numerous different traditions and superstitions have surfaced. Here are just a few of these.

In Ghana, Africa, location is everything. Women in Ghana are viewed as the life force of the tribe. After all, they were where all the great warriors and chiefs came from. Because of this, Zulu culture referred to women as "the great homes." Because of this status, it was considered customary for the husband to be, to move to his bride's village.

The Mande people of Africa practice clitoridectomies (female circumcision). During this time, the women are taught how to be good wives. They are also taught a special "secret" language that is only spoken by married women.

A common African tradition is "jumping over the broom." The broom has become a symbol of the sweeping out of the old, to welcome in the new. The part about jumping over is actually of North American origin. It was from the days of slavery, when slaves were not allowed to marry. By jumping over the broom, the couple was solidifying the seriousness of their marriage.

In 1076, in Europe, it was decreed that no man should give away his daughter, or other female relative, without a priestly blessing. Interestingly enough, it wasn't until the 16th century that priests were even required to perform wedding ceremonies. Another interesting medieval tradition: women at the time would pluck their hairlines in order to attain higher foreheads, which were considered more attractive at

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the time.

Conservative/Orthodox Jews have a neat tradition where the bride walks 3 to 7 times around her husband to be. This is done to signify that she is a protective wall for her husband, and that by stepping inside, their family status has changed. Ah, but what of the breaking of glass? This is done to represent the many, many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. It acts as a reminder of those bad times.

Interestingly, the Muslim faith doesn't really celebrate weddings. A marriage is strictly an officious occasion. The marriage occurs inside an office, rather than a mosque. The wedding is viewed as a private civil/religious contract. The only real tradition here is that the groom must give his bride a dower to serve as insurance for her future.

Japanese (Shinto) weddings are also small and private affairs, though they are far more elaborate.

Both bride and groom sip three times from three separate cups of sake. It is done to guarantee luck and happiness in the marriage.

Chinese brides are given chestnuts and jujubes. This was done with the wish of the bride to conceive a son as soon as possible. Brides wear red dresses to symbolize the color of love and joy. As we shall see further down, Europeans viewed the color red in a completely different light.

Speaking of Europeans, many Eastern orthodox ceremonies featured the placement of wreaths on the heads of both bride and groom. It was done to symbolize their place as king and queen of the heavenly kingdom of Earth.

With such a wide variety of traditions out there, it is interesting to note that two of them are almost universal among human culture: the wedding veil and the wedding ring.

### The Veil

Wedding veils saw their origin among the Romans. Ancient Romans believed that women were particularly susceptible to possession by demonic spirits during weddings (perhaps they had a lot of runaway brides back then). The veil was used to "confuse" these spirits. To further help the bride out, bridesmaids were dressed in clothing similar to the bride's. They were to act as decoys for these demons.

When Christianity took over, the veil was changed to represent chastity and modesty. This really took off in Britain during the 1800s. During some Eastern ceremonies, the groom is not allowed to remove his wife's veil until after the ceremony. Jewish faith took the exact opposite approach. In some Jewish ceremonies, the groom first validates that the bride is his intended, before placing the veil over her face.

### The Ring

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Wedding rings are probably the oldest wedding traditions out there. They can be traced back over four thousand years, to the Egyptians. Ancient Egyptians would make rings out of twisted pieces of plants. The ring was meant to symbolize a love with no end. Egyptians and Romans both placed the ring on the 4th finger of the female's left hand. This was done out of the belief that there was a vein on the 4th finger that connected directly to the heart. It was called the "vena amoris," or "love vein." When Christianity became the dominant religion of Europe, the vena amoris was replaced with a holy seal. Priests would take the wedding ring and touch the first three fingers of the left hand (thumb, index and middle) while reciting: "the father, the son and the holy ghost." Upon reaching the 4th finger, the ring was placed on it to seal the marriage.

For a long while the ring went from being a symbol of endless love, to that of ownership. The Romans used it like a branding. It was worn by the husband's wife, to signify his ownership over her. Two thousand years ago, in Asia, this ownership concept was taken to a new level with "puzzle rings." These were rings that were worn by brides as a sign of loyalty. If a bride were to take her puzzle ring off, it would fall to pieces. These pieces could then only be put back together by knowing the solution to the puzzle.

So what of the history of other common wedding traditions?

One interesting tradition is the presence of a flower on the buttonhole of the groom. The flower matches one of the flowers in the bride's bouquet. This was a holdover from medieval times, when a knight would wear his lady's colours in order to signify his love for her. I suppose that means that in one small way, chivalry isn't dead.

Then we have the confetti. Prior to being paper, confetti was originally a mix of rose petals, rice and grain. Before that, it consisted of various sweets which were thrown over the couples as they emerged from the church. It originated in Italy. In fact, confetti is Italian for: candy.

Finally, what "history of weddings" article would be complete, without a brief rundown of some popular wedding superstitions?

The day that a wedding took place, was considered to be vitally important. As such, a little rhyme was concocted to allow future couples to pick the appropriate days for their marriage.

Monday for wealth Tuesday for health Wednesday the best day of all Thursday for losses Friday for crosses Saturday for no luck at all

Then there was the month. Depending on what month one was married in, one's marriage could be glorious or tragic. By far the worst month of all, was May. This was due to the historic pagan belief that May was the start of summer. This was celebrated by the festival of Beltane (commonly called May Day, now). As part of the festival, couples were encouraged to have outdoor orgies to bless the crops and the Earth. Because of this, it was considered a bad month for a newly monogamous couple to marry. The best month of all, for marriage, was June. This was because June was named after the Roman goddess of love: Juno. Interestingly, June is now the second most popular month for marriages. August has recently taken over the top spot for weddings.

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Next we come to the bridal dress itself. While most brides today marry in white (which symbolizes maidenhood), the tradition is only as old as the 16th century. Prior to that, brides chose whatever colour dress they would like. There was a general rule of thumb though.

Married in White, you have chosen right, Married in Blue, your love will always be true, Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl, Married in Brown, you will live in a town, Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead, Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow, Married in Green, ashamed to be seen, Married in Pink, your spirit will sink, Married in Grey, you will go far away, Married in Black, you will wish yourself back.

Green dresses were viewed as being a sign of promiscuity. This led to the old saying that a woman "has a green gown." This was meant to signify that she was rolling around in grassy fields. Back then, only Irish women were considered "okay" in a green bridal gown.

Last, but not least, we have the classic wedding rhyme: Something old, something new. It started back in Victorian times, but what does it mean?

Something old: This represents the friends of the couple and the hopes that they will remain friends throughout the marriage. This was traditionally represented by an old garter which would be given to the bride to be, by a happily married woman. It was done in the hope that the happiness would be passed onto the new couple.

Something new: The happy and prosperous future of the newlyweds.

Something borrowed: This is something lent by the bride's family. It is often an item that is highly valued, and that the bride must return after the wedding in order to ensure good luck.

Something blue: This is an Israelite tradition. The bride would wear a blue ribbon in her hair to symbolize fidelity.

There is one more part to the rhyme that is often omitted:

And a silver sixpence in your shoe: The placement of money in the bride's shoe was done to ensure wealth and prosperity in the lives of the new couple. For some reason or another, this portion of the tradition doesn't appear as popular. Perhaps that is why so many couples run into money problems?

So, when you are consulting the "Ms. Manners" of wedding etiquette, remember, it's mostly just folk lore. Just be sure to bring the ring.

The Iconoclast is a student at the University Of New Mexico and part of the web building team at Gifteteria.com. View Wedding and Shower gifts at

<http://www.gifteteria.com/WeddingPage.html>

## **Planning Your Wedding**

**By Sharon Stajda**

### Tips to Avoid Turning It Into A One-Sided Affair

You just got the most romantic marriage proposal of your life. You said yes, of course. News of your engagement spreads among family and friends and you can't wait for the day when the two of you exchange I do's.

Planning your wedding can be exciting. Important decisions need to be made. However, don't get too caught up in your wedding plans that you forget to involve the other most important person in the event - your groom. You can avoid turning your wedding day into a one-sided affair. Here are some tips:

1. When you plan your wedding, plan it as a couple. This is a prelude to your married life - everything needs to be decided together. Discuss your thoughts and come up with a plan that makes both of you satisfied and comfortable.
2. Don't let your and your groom's differences in religious beliefs and race be an obstacle. Consider having a double-ceremony wedding wherein you receive wedding blessings from both traditions.
3. How formal do you both want your wedding? Decide if you both want a formal black-and-white affair or a semi-formal one? What about having a wedding theme? Consider both of your lifestyles and interests when deciding on this aspect of your wedding.
4. Discuss the monetary aspect of your wedding. As a couple, the two of you should agree on the expenses involved in the wedding. Decide on a wedding budget and stick to it no matter what. Remember, financial stress after the wedding is over can lead to trouble.

Planning a wedding can be a source of stress. It can even take its toll on you as a couple. However, don't let the stress rule love. Remember, the key thing is to enjoy your wedding. It is your special day that you will treasure forever.

For more information about planning a wedding, please visit the following url:

<http://www.oldsold.com/articles05/wedding-planning-1.shtml>



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