

WEDDING TRADITIONS AND OTHER SPECIAL TOUCHES

1) The Unity Candle

Lighting the Unity Candle symbolizes the joining together or blending of separate lives. It is the coming together of two families and the merging of two individuals into one married couple, a love that burns jointly. The Unity Candle is an arrangement of three candles (the middle candle sometimes being larger than the other two). The two side candles are lit before the wedding ceremony begins. These are usually, but not always, lit by the Bride's parents and the Groom's parents on their respective sides of the altar. Lighting the Unity Candle normally takes place after the Bride and Groom exchange vows and rings. The officiant will share a few thoughts about the unity that exists between a husband and wife when they enter into marriage, after which the couple will take their respective candles and light the middle candle. The couple then extinguishes their respective candles by gently blowing out the flame, symbolizing that they are now "one." Sometimes the couple chooses not to blow out their candles to symbolize that, even though they are now one, they continue to retain their individuality. (See words used in *Lighting of the Unity Candle* in *Traditional, Contemporary, Civil, Short and Sweet, Second Time Around* and *All in the Family* ceremonies.)



2) The Marriage Vessel and the Rose™

First Version

This ceremony may be used as an alternative to the Unity Candle, especially at outdoor weddings. The Officiant explains that the Bride and Groom have chosen to share two gifts, A Marriage Vessel and a Rose, to symbolize their ever-growing lifelong commitment to each other. He then explains the significance of this ceremony.

(The Officiant says):

The spiritual roots of *The Marriage Vessel and The Rose* grow out of an understanding of God as the Potter or Creator, and the Gardener or Sustainer of Life. The vessel of clay, lovingly shaped by the Potter, is a symbol of love's strength and endurance. The miracle of the vessel is that it not only protects, but is enriched by that which it holds, the rose. Likewise, the rose, born of the tiniest seeds, symbolizes the beauty and potential of growing in love throughout life together. Both the vessel and the rose are individually unique, yet, when combined, they create an object of even greater beauty.

(The Groom presents the rose to the Bride and says):

(Bride) _____, this rose represents the beauty I see in you. / I thank you for the person you are / and the person I am becoming / because of your love for me.

(The Bride presents the vessel to the Groom and says):

(Groom) _____, this vessel represents the strength I see in you. / I thank you for the love you have given me / and for all we will share together.

(The Bride then places the rose in the vessel; they hold it together and the Bride and Groom say):

As our gifts bring beauty and purpose to each other, / may our lives continue to enrich and strengthen one another.

(The Officiant says):

(Groom) _____ and (Bride) _____, as you share each passing day and as your days become years, remember this tradition you have created. On each wedding anniversary, place an additional rose in the Marriage Vessel to symbolize your ever-growing love for one another. May *The Marriage Vessel and the Rose* always be a symbol of the beauty and strength you bring to each other's lives.

Second Version

(The Groom hands his Bride a long-stemmed rose and says):

(Bride) _____, take this rose as a symbol of my love. / It began as a tiny bud and blossomed, / just as my love has grown for you.

(The Bride places the rose into a vessel or vase filled with water and says):

(Groom) _____, I take this rose, / a symbol of your love, / and I place it into water, / a symbol of life. / For just as this rose cannot survive without water, / I cannot live without you.

(The Groom responds by saying):

In remembrance of this day, / I will give you a rose each year on our anniversary / as a reaffirmation of my love / and the vows we have spoken here today.

(The Bride responds by saying):

And I will refill this vessel with water each year, / ready to receive your gift / in reaffirmation of the new life you have given me / and the vows we have spoken here today.

(The Bride and Groom join hands around the rose-filled vessel and say together):

Just as this rose and vessel of water give beauty and life to each other, / so may our love blossom and grow / throughout our life together.

You may obtain a complete copy of *The Marriage Vessel and The Rose™ Ceremony* as well as the *Marriage Vessel* by contacting Clergy Services, whose address and phone number appear on page 96.

3) The Unity Cup

Two separate goblets are filled with wine. Before the couple is pronounced “husband and wife,” the Bride and Groom each pour half of the wine into a separate cup, the Unity Cup, from which each sips. The half-filled goblets are a reminder of their individuality; the single cup marks their new life together.

(The Officiant says):

As you share the wine from a single cup, so may you, under God’s guidance, share contentment, peace, and fulfillment from the Cup of Life. May you find life’s joys heightened, its bitterness sweetened, and each of its moments hallowed by true companionship and love. *(From the Rabbi’s Manual)*



4) The Wedding Ring Ceremony

The *Wedding Ring Ceremony* is a tradition that evolved from a custom dating back to ancient times. A husband would wrap circles of braided grass around his bride’s wrists and ankles, believing it would keep her spirit from leaving her body. The bands evolved into leather, carved stone, metal—and eventually silver and gold. Today the bands have a more romantic meaning. Because of the ring’s circular shape, it symbolizes eternal love—a love without beginning or end.

The Best Man or Ring Bearer usually carries both rings and gives them to the Officiant during the ceremony. The Officiant explains the significance of the wedding rings or describes the custom behind the giving of rings and then passes them to the Bride and Groom. (See *Explanation of the Rings in Traditional, Contemporary, Civil, Short and Sweet, Second Time Around* and *All in the Family* ceremonies.) The Groom places the ring on the Bride’s left hand, third finger as he says his vows. The Bride then places the Groom’s ring on his left hand, third finger, also repeating her vows. The third finger was chosen because it was believed the vein in that finger led directly to the heart. (See also *Ring Exchange Vows*.)



5) The Ceremony of The Rose *(The First Gift)*

First Version

The Ceremony of the Rose symbolizes the merging of the Bride’s and Groom’s families. When the Bride enters, she has in her possession two roses (usually red). When she approaches the altar, she will stop and give a rose to her mother or significant mother figure along with a kiss. In doing this, she is expressing her gratitude for preparing her for this moment and for receiving the man she is about to marry into her family. When the wedding ceremony has ended and she and the Groom exit, the Bride will stop and give a rose to the Groom’s mother or significant mother figure along with a kiss. In doing this, she is expressing her gratitude for preparing her new husband for this moment and for receiving her into the Groom’s family. A variation can be to present both roses either upon their entrance or upon their exit.

Second Version

(The Officiant says):

(Groom) _____ and (Bride) _____ have chosen to give each other a rose which is their first gift as husband and wife. *(The Officiant at this time will give both the Bride and the Groom a rose, and they in turn will present their rose to each other.)* This rose was born of the tiniest of seeds and has blossomed into the beautiful flower that it is today...and so it is with your relationship. It began as a small feeling and blossomed and grew into something beautiful. And now you stand before us today to make a commitment to each other as husband and wife. Since you know that love must be shared, it is your desire to share these first gifts with two very special people, two people who helped to prepare you for this moment and molded you into the individuals that you are today. *(The Bride and Groom turn and present their roses to their mothers or significant mother figures and offer a hug or a kiss.)*



6) **The Family Medallion**™ *(For ceremonies involving children)*

This ceremony, created by Rev. Roger Coleman, was designed to significantly include the children of those being married in the wedding celebration. *The Family Medallion* provides a symbol for recognizing family relationships by adding a third circle to the two "marriage circles." During this part of the ceremony, the children shall come forward and form a circle with the Bride and Groom who welcome the children into the family and verbally make a commitment to them.

(The Officiant says):

Just as (Groom) _____ and (Bride) _____ gave each other rings as symbols of their love and commitment to one another, so too, they would like to present each of you with a gift as a symbol of their love and commitment to you. This medallion is made up of three intertwining circles, two of which symbolize the union of this man and woman in marriage. The third circle represents the joining of children to this union, making it complete as we celebrate the new family created here today.

You may obtain a complete copy of the *Family Medallion Ceremony*, as well as *Family Medallion*™ jewelry, by contacting Clergy Services, whose address and phone number appear on page 96. Also, for a more extended presentation of the *Family Medallion Ceremony*, please refer to the *All in the Family* ceremony on page 34.

Creative Alternatives *(Add that special touch to your wedding.)*

- 7) Have the Groom's parents escort the Groom down the aisle and the Bride's parents escort the Bride down the aisle, which is common in Jewish weddings.



- 8) Have the Officiant change positions with the couple so that the Bride and Groom face the audience and the Officiant has his back to the audience.



- 9) Have the Bride and Groom memorize or read their vows (printed on a 3x5 card) rather than repeat them after the Officiant.



- 10) During the ceremony, have friends or relatives participate by sharing a poem, a reading, a quote, some Scripture, a prayer, or special thoughts about the Bride and Groom.



- 11) Have the guests participate by joining the soloist in a hymn, a favorite chorus or special song during the ceremony. The words could be printed in the program or projected onto a screen.



- 12) Show a brief slide-tape presentation on the lives of the Bride and Groom.