



Everything Except Choosing Your Groom

Recent Innovations & Cultural Traditions

Looking to include a unity candle ceremony or similar tradition in your wedding? Gaining in popularity, some of these are recent innovations, while others are cultural traditions that go back hundreds and hundreds of years.

The Unity Candle: one of the most common ceremonies. The bride and groom each take a lit candle and simultaneously light a third larger "unity candle." They may blow out their individual lights, or leave them lit, symbolizing that they have not lost their individuality in their unity. Stores are now selling elaborate unity candle setups, including a candleabra that holds the central unity candle higher than the others. You may also have your unity candle personalized with your names and the date, allowing it to be a keepsake from your wedding.

Variations: All guests are given a candle, and the first guest's is lit. Guests pass the flame until all are lit, and then the bride and groom together light their unity candle. This variation typically includes a proclamation that this ceremony represents the unity of friends and family supporting the couple in their marriage.

Rose Ceremony: A simple unity ceremony where the bride and groom exchange roses. Other variations: the families exchange roses, the bride and groom exchange roses with their families, the bride and groom exchange roses, then present their mothers with the roses.

Wine Ceremony: The bride and groom each take a carafe of wine and pour it into a single glass, which they both drink from.

Water Ceremony: The couple each pour a different colored water into a single glass, creating a third color.

Sand Ceremony: similar to the water ceremony, the bride and groom both pour different colored sand into a glass.

Salt Ceremony: Indian weddings often include a salt ceremony, where the bride passes a handful of salt to her groom without spilling any. He then passes it back to her and the exchange is repeated three times. She then performs the salt exchange with all the members of the groom's family, symbolizing her blending in with her new family.

Breaking Bread Ceremony: The bride and groom tear off pieces of bread, and then each eat a piece. Sometimes the bread is also shared with family and friends. It symbolizes their future as a family together.

Concierge to the Bride

368 St Kilda Road Melbourne Victoria 3004

www.conciergetothebride.com.au

(03) 9696 7835

ABN 26 856 224 428

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Garland Ceremony or Lei Ceremony: The bride and groom exchange garlands of flowers. This is a common part of Indian weddings, where the ceremony is called varmala or jaimala, and represents a proposal by the bride and acceptance by the groom. It also represents their new unity, blessed by nature. In Hawaiian weddings, the bride and groom typically exchange leis. The families may also exchange leis with the couple. Leis represent the love and respect you have for the person you are giving it to, and the unity of the new family.

Circling: In Eastern European ceremonies, the bride and groom circle the altar three times, which are their first steps together as husband and wife. In Hindu ceremonies, couples circle the fire seven times, sealing their bond. The unbroken circle represents the unbroken commitment to each other.

Broom Jumping: An African-American tradition that has its roots in slavery times when slaves couldn't marry. Typically the family places the broom on the ground, and the bride and groom jump over it together. The broom can then decorate a place of honor in their home.

Lasso Ceremony: Lasso or rope is placed around the bride and groom's shoulders, usually by the officiant. Sometimes rosary beads, or orange flowers are used instead of rope. It can also be placed around the couple's necks, or wrists.

Update: Reader Molly Scannell wrote in to tell us about two Unity ceremonies that she is using in her upcoming wedding. While these aren't "Unity Ceremonies" in the sense of combining two families, they do emphasize the unity of the couple.

The first is a **Celtic Oathing Stone**. Molly writes "The couple holds or puts their hands on a stone during their vows to "set them in stone" (I also believe this is where this phrase comes from, or so the rumor goes)."

Molly is also planning to use is a **Truce Bell**. A bell is rung on the wedding day, the happiest day of the couple's lives and then is placed in a central location in the home. If the couple starts to argue, one of them can ring the truce bell, reminding them both of that happiness and hopefully ending the disagreement quickly.

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