

Rituals and symbols

Culture and rituals play an important part in our lives. It is no different when it comes to ceremonies. Planning for your ceremony gives you the opportunity to consider what rituals and values are important to you and how you would like to convey that to your family and friends.

Whether it is your ethnic background you wish to honour, your love of music, the traditions of your family, customs of your people, or specific individuals who have been important to you throughout your lives, there are opportunities to do so in whatever way you wish.

I would be pleased to explore with you the variety of ways you can incorporate any of these things into your ceremony, including the use of particular rituals and symbols.



A number of examples of wedding symbols are listed below:

Sugared almonds

An Italian tradition, wedding guests are given five almonds—called confetti—to represent the bitter and the sweet. Each almond represents one of five symbols: health, wealth, fertility, happiness and long life.

Breaking the glass

Jewish tradition encourages the groom to stomp on a glass and break it as guests shout 'Mazel tov!' The symbolism of this gesture is debated, but a few thoughts are that it represents the fact that with happiness comes sorrow, that relationships are fragile and should be nurtured, and that the broken glass is changed forever, just as the lives of the marrying couple will be changed forever.

Flowers

Once, brides carried flowers with special meanings. Certain flowers and herbs are associated with weddings more than others.



Some of the flowers associated with weddings are listed below, but at the end of the day, the choice of flowers is yours alone:

- Orange blossoms represent everlasting life and bridal festivities
- Roses represent love
- Lavender represents devotion
- Rosemary represents remembrance
- Sage represents domestic virtue
- Tulips represent the decoration of love
- Violets represent faithfulness.

Rings

Probably the most obvious of all marriage symbols, the engagement ring and the wedding band represent commitment and the faithful love two people share. The circle, an international symbol of marriage, represents infinity or everlasting love.

Why the diamond? The goddess of love, Venus, and the diamond share a common bond. When the planet Venus shows in the night sky, it appears like a fire from within. Diamonds exhibit the same quality of sparkling from a mysterious point within. The ancients called diamonds 'Venus stones' and today the diamond has become a symbol of betrothal, romance and mystery.

And why are wedding bands worn on the left-hand ring finger? During ancient times, it was believed that the third finger on the left hand held a vein that ran directly to the heart. Putting a ring on this finger was to keep the love within, never allowing it to flow out from the finger.

Not all cultures wear a wedding ring on the left hand, but starting with King Edward VI in 1549, placing the wedding band on the left hand became a tradition among English-speaking people.



Something old . . .

The old wedding adage 'Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue - and a sixpence in her shoe' comes from England. Each item symbolises a good-luck token for the bride.

'Something old' is a wish for continuity with family. A mother's lace handkerchief, grandmother's pearl earrings, or whatever 'old' object is offered will do the trick.

'Something new' is a wish for a happy future life. Since brides wear new gowns, shoes and veils, meeting the 'something new' criterion is easy.

'Something borrowed' symbolises friends the bride can count on in the future. A good friend of the family may offer the bride something to wear to meet the 'borrowed' part of the rhyme.

'Something blue' comes from the long tradition of brides wearing blue long before white was worn. Blue garters often take care of this part of the wish for the bride.

The 'sixpence in her shoe' is often dropped from this rhyme, but it has now become a five-cent piece. It symbolises financial security for the bride and groom as the couple moves into their future.

Unity candle

The lighting of the unity candle is a relatively new marriage symbol. Believed to have begun in the 1930s, the popularity of the unity candle has grown over the last 40 years. A large pillar candle sits between two lit tapers, representing the bride and groom. At a designated point in the wedding ceremony, the couple each takes a taper and, together, they light the larger candle in the middle, blowing out their separate tapers. The symbolism behind this new tradition is that the couple leave their past behind to venture into the future together.

Where the bride and groom stand

In ancient times, brides were often kidnapped from their homes by grooms in what has been described as 'marriage by capture'. Because of this, the groom then had to ensure his sword arm (usually his right) was free to be drawn at any point during the ceremony to fend off irate members of the bride's family (or any other potential suitors). This meant the bride would be standing on the groom's left, out of harm's way.

Today the choice is more personal, and I have conducted as many ceremonies with the bride on the right of the groom as I have with her on the left.