



**Below are several options for each piece of the ceremony.
You can also choose selections of your own, write your own,
or edit the verbiage in the suggestions below!**

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WELCOME/OPENING WORDS

(A short address by the minister to those gathered together.)

1. We'd like to welcome you -- friends and family -- to this celebration of the marriage of _____ and _____. We welcome you, _____ and _____ to this moment in your lives and to the place you have come to in each other's hearts. We join with you on this day, as you commit before God and those gathered here that from this point forward you will live in a union of partnership—that you remain separate individuals with separate wants and desires while forming this vital, growing partnership between two equal people for the purpose of your spiritual growth.

2. Let your presence be welcome, let your hearts be glad. For everything there is a season, and a time and purpose for every matter under heaven. This is the time and the place to celebrate the wedding of _____ and _____. We have come to do all things, old and new, that are right for such an occasion. To say words, to confirm this union, to recognize this event in the place of family, friends and the human community. We have come to laugh and to cry, to sing and feast and dance. Above all, we have come to rejoice in love and its possibilities.

3. We have gathered together to celebrate with _____ and _____ the marriage in which they are now to be united. Marriage is a relationship recognized by humankind from time immemorial, solemnized by the observances of religion and consecrated by the men and women in all ages who have brought its beauty to flower. It is not therefore to be entered upon inadvisedly or lightly, but with deliberation and reverence.

The celebration in which we join today is the outward symbol of this inward relationship, recognized by human society but made real and living only within the lives of those who share it. Into this sacred union these two persons desire to enter.

4. In marriage, two persons turn to each other in search of a greater fulfillment than either can achieve alone. Marriage is a going forth, a bold step into the future; it is risking what we are for the sake of what we yet can be. Only in giving oneself and sharing with another can the mysterious process of growth take place. Only in loyalty and devotion bestowed upon another can that which is eternal in life emerge and be known. Together we celebrate _____ and _____ who come now, in our presence, to declare their love and to be united in marriage. Love is a living thing, waiting within each one of us for an awakening touch. In this ceremony, we will celebrate love come to life. May this love grow sure and strong. We rejoice in its presence among us.

5. Welcome friends and family to this celebration of the marriage of _____ and _____. George Eliot wrote this about marriage: "What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined together to strengthen each other in all labor, to minister to each other in all sorrow, to share with each other in all gladness, to be one with each other in the silent unspoken memories?"

Today _____ and _____ will declare their love and commitment to each other. They have waited for this moment, planned for this moment and grown toward this moment. Now I ask that we all simply be in this moment. Let us take a moment to focus our thoughts not on yesterday or tomorrow, not even on the delicious dinner and dessert we will share later today, but on this very moment. In the silence that follows, I ask each of you, in your own way to confer a silent prayer, blessing, wish or hope upon this moment and this marriage. (*moment of silence*)

Additional Statements

a) Explanation of Religious Aspects

There are so many names for God—When we speak of God in this ceremony, we invite you to call on whatever name you call your Higher Power. We invite you to participate fully with your thoughts and prayers, asking for a blessing of this couple and their married life. You are here because this couple feels close to you and asks that you join with them in this dedication of sacred purpose. You represent symbolically all the people in the world who will be touched in any way by the life of this couple. You represent their friends and family, now and forever. They have chosen this act of marriage and this public, holy ceremony in which to proclaim it. Together, let us all give thanks and to hold the vision of universal love.

b) Remembering Loved Ones Who Have Died

I would like to take this moment to mention that there are those close to _____ and _____ who could not travel to be here today, but whose thoughts and blessings are with them; and there are loved ones who are no longer here in body, but who are here in spirit. Let us remember them now in a moment of silence.

c) Acknowledging the Couple's Traditions

Out of two different and distinct traditions, they have come together to learn the best of what each has to offer, appreciating their differences, and confirming that being together is far better than being apart from each other. As we bless this marriage under a chuppah (wedding canopy), the Jewish symbol of the new home being consummated here, we will later light the unity candle, a Christian symbol of two people becoming one in marriage.

OPENING PRAYER/BLESSING

Options to begin the prayer/blessing: Let us pray/Dear God/ Eternal Spirit/ Creative Source of Life/Blessed and Holy One/

Options to close the prayer/blessing: Amen. Blessed Be. May it be so.

1. In the midst of which we live and move and have our being: in the name of love are we met together, to witness and to bless the union of these two lives. May it be in their hearts and in their powers, faithfully to consummate and to keep the pledges of this day. May they be a blessing and comfort, each to the other, sharers of each other's sorrows, helpers of each other in all the chances and changes of the world. May they grow in understanding and love, and may faithfulness to the good of each become the unflinching virtue of them both.
2. Blessed are you, O God, for giving life, sustaining us and bringing us to this joyous time. Blessed be you who have come here in dedication to all that is loving, good and sacred. May the Source of life sustain you in life. May all that is noble and true in the universe inspire your lives together and bring peace to all humankind.
3. God in heaven above,
Please protect the ones we love.

We honor all that you created
As _____ and _____ pledge their hearts and lives together.
We honor Mother Earth --
And ask for their marriage to be abundant, And to grow stronger through the seasons
We honor fire --
And ask that their union be warm and glowing with love in their hearts.
We honor wind --
And ask that we sail through life safely and calm as in our father's arms.
We honor water --
To clean and soothe their relationship that it may never thirst for love.
With all the forces of the universe you created, We pray for harmony and true happiness
As they forever grow young together. Blessed be, Amen.

4. Please join me in a time of reflection for all that we have to be thankful for, based on the words of the Wedding Prayer By Robert Louis Stevenson

Let us be thankful for friends and family here assembled.
for this place in which we gather,
for the love that unites us,
for the peace accorded us this day,
for the hope with which we expect the morrow,
for the health, the work, the food, and the bright skies,
that make our lives delightful;
and for our friends in all parts of the earth.
Let thankfulness fill our hearts.

READINGS

1. *Walt Whitman*

Listen! I will be honest with you. I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes. These are the days that must happen to you. You shall not heap up what is called riches, you shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve. However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this dwelling, we cannot remain here. However shelter'd this port and however calm these waters, we must not anchor here. However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us, we are permitted to receive it but a little while. Come, I give you my hand! I give you my love more precious than money. I give you myself before preaching or law. Will you give me yourself? Will you come travel with me? Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

2. *Anne Morrow Lindberg*

When you love someone, you do not love them all the time, in exactly the same way, from moment to moment. It is an impossibility, it is even a lie to pretend to. And yet this is exactly what most of us demand. We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible in life, as in love, is in growth, in fluidity, in freedom, in the sense that the dancers are free, barely touching as they pass, but partners in the same pattern.

The only real security is not in owning or possessing, not in demanding or expecting, not in hoping even. Security in a relationship lies neither in looking back to what it was in nostalgia, nor forward to what it might be in dread or anticipation, but living in the present relationship and accepting it as it is now. For relationships too must be like islands. One must accept them for what they are here and now, within their limits. Islands, surrounded and interrupted by the sea, and continually visited and abandoned by the tides. One must accept the security of the winged life, of the ebb and flow, of intermittency.

3. *Thomas Kempis (from Imitatio Christi, 15th century)*

Love is a mighty power, a great and complete good. Love alone lightens every burden, and makes the rough places smooth. It bears every hardship as though it were nothing, and renders all bitterness sweet and acceptable. Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth; for love is born of God.

Love flies, runs, and leaps for joy. It is free and unrestrained. Love knows no limits, but ardently transcends all bounds. Love feels no burden, takes no account of toil, attempts things beyond its strength; love sees nothing as impossible, for it feels able to achieve all things. Love therefore does great things; it is strange and effective; while those who lack love faint and fail.

Love is not fickle and sentimental, nor is it intent on vanities. Like a living flame and a burning torch, it surges upward and surely surmounts every obstacle.

4. *Pablo Neruda, from Sonnet 17*

I love you without knowing how, or when or where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride.
So I love you because I know no other way
than this: where I does not exist, nor you,
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand.
So close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.

5. *Victor Hugo*

When two souls, which have sought each other for however long in the throng have finally found each other, when they have seen that they are matched, are in sympathy and compatible, in a word, that they are alike, there is then established forever between them a union. Fiery and pure as they themselves are. A union which begins on earth and continues forever in heaven. This union is love, true love, such as in truth few can conceive of, that love which is a religion, which (glorifies) the loved one, whose life comes from devotion and passion and for which the greatest sacrifices are the sweetest delights.

6. *1 Corinthians*

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels
And have not love, I am but a sounding gong, a clanging cymbal.
And though I have the gift of prophecy,
And understand all mysteries and all knowledge;
And though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains,
Yet have not love, I am nothing.
And though I share all my goods among the poor,
And though I give my body to be burnt,
But have not love, it profits me nothing.
Love is patient and kind; Love is not envious, boastful, nor vain;
She does not behave herself unseemly, Seeks not her own good,
Is not easily provoked, Keeps no account of her wrongs,
Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
Always charitable, always trustful,
Always hopeful, always steadfast.
Faith, hope and love: These three abide,
And the greatest of these is love.

7. *Sara Teasdale*

Peace flows into me, as the tide to the pool by the shore;
It is mine forever more,
It will not ebb like the sea.

I am the pool of blue
That worships the vivid sky;
My hopes were heaven-high,
They are all fulfilled in you.

I am the pool of gold
When sunset burns and dies -
You are my deepening skies;
Give me your stars to hold.

8. *This Marriage by Rumi*

May these vows and this marriage be blessed.
May it be sweet milk,
this marriage, like wine and halvah.
May this marriage offer fruit and shade
like the date palm.
May this marriage be full of laughter,
our every day a day in paradise.
May this marriage be a sign of compassion,
a seal of happiness here and hereafter.
May this marriage have a fair face and a good name,
an omen as welcome
as the moon in a clear blue sky.
I am out of words to describe
how spirit mingles in this marriage.

9. *Robert Frost, The Master Speed*

No speed of wind or water rushing by
But you have speed far greater. You can climb
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,
And back through history up the stream of time.
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste
Not chiefly that you may go where you will,
But in the rush of everything to waste,
That you may have the power of standing still--
Off any still or moving thing you say.
Two such as you with such a master speed
Cannot be parted nor be swept away
From one another once you are agreed
That life is only life forevermore
Together wing to wing and oar to oar.

10. *Kahlil Gibran from The Prophet—*

“Love one another, but make not a bond of love; Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other’s cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other’s keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other’s shadow.”

11. *Song of Solomon 2:10-13*

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

12. Song of Solomon 8:6-7

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned."

13. John 15:9-12

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

14. Colossians 3:12-17

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

15. I John 4:7-16

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

16. Matthew 5:1-10

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

17. From *"The Strength to Love"*, by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The meaning of love is not to be confused with some sentimental outpouring. Love is something much more than emotional bosh. An overflowing love which seeks nothing in return, is the love of God operating in the human heart. Love is the most durable power in the world . . . the most potent instrument available in mankind's quest for peace and security. The great military leaders of the past have gone, and their empires have crumbled and burned to ashes. But the empire of Jesus, built solidly and majestically on the foundation of love, is still growing."

18. *"On Love" and "On Marriage"*, excerpts from *"The Prophet"*,
by Kahlil Gibran

"On Love"

"Then said the student Almitra, Speak to us of love. And he raised his head and looked upon the people, and there fell a stillness upon them. And with a great voice he said: When love beckons to you, follow him, though his ways are hard and steep. And when his wings enfold you yield to him, though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you. And when he speaks to you believe in him, though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the garden. For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning. Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun, so shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth."

"On Marriage"

"Then Almitra spoke again and said, and what of Marriage master? And he answered saying: You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore. You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days. Ay, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God. But let there be spaces in your togetherness, and let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another, but make not a bond of love: let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone."

19. *"You Were Born Together"* by Kahlil Gibran

"You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore. You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days. Aye, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God. But let there be spaces in your togetherness. And let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another but make not a bond of love. Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each of you be alone, even as the strings of the lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the land of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together, for the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow."

20. *Hosea 2:19*

I shall betroth thee unto me forever,
Yea, I shall betroth thee unto me in righteousness,
And in loving kindness and in compassion;
And I shall betroth thee unto me in faithfulness.

21. *To Love is Not to Possess* by James Kavanaugh

To love is not to possess,
To own or imprison,
Nor to lose one's self in another.
Love is to join and separate,
To walk alone and together,
To find a laughing freedom
That lonely isolation does not permit.
It is finally to be able
To be who we really are
No longer clinging in childish dependency
Nor docilely living separate lives in silence,
It is to be perfectly one's self
And perfectly joined in permanent commitment
To another—and to one's inner self.
Love only endures when it moves like waves,
Receding and returning gently or passionately,
Or moving lovingly like the tide
In the moon's own predictable harmony,
Because finally, despite a child's scars
Or an adult's deepest wounds,
They are openly free to be
Who they really are—and always secretly were,
In the very core of their being
Where true and lasting love can alone abide.

22. *William Shakespeare: Sonnet 116*

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! It is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark;
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

23. *From the Book of Ruth*

Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to stay from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

24. *e.e. cummings, love is a place*

love is a place
and through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
and in this world of
yes live
(skillfully curled)
all worlds

25. *"Blessing of the Hands"*

These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and full of love for you, that are holding yours on your wedding day, as you promise to love each other today, tomorrow, and forever. These are the hands that will work alongside yours, as together you build your future. These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, and with the slightest touch, will comfort you like no other. These are the hands that will hold you when fear or grief fills your mind. These are the hands that will countless times wipe the tears from your eyes; tears of sorrow, and tears of joy. These are the hands that will tenderly hold your children. These are the hands that will help you to hold your family as one. These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it. And lastly, these are the hands that even when wrinkled and aged, will still be reaching for yours, still giving you the same unspoken tenderness with just a touch.

26. *An Apache Marriage Blessing*

Treat yourselves and each other with respect, and remind yourselves often of what brought you together. Give the highest priority to the tenderness, gentleness and kindness that your connection deserves. When frustration, difficulty and fear assail your relationship - as they threaten all relationships at one time or another - remember to focus on what is right between you, not only the part which seems wrong. In this way, you can ride out the storms when clouds hide the face of the sun in your lives - remembering that even if you lose sight of it for a moment, the sun is still there. And if each of you takes responsibility for the quality of your life together, it will be marked by abundance and delight.

27. *Oath of Friendship - China 1st Century B.C.*

I want to be your friend
For ever and ever without break or decay.
When the hills are all flat
And the rivers are all dry,
When it lightens and thunders in winter,
When it rains and snows in summer,
When Heaven and Earth mingle
Not 'til then will I part from you.

28. Autumn by Garrison Keillor

Here on an autumn night in the sweet orchard smell,
Sitting in a pile of leaves under the starry sky,
Oh what stories we could tell
With this starlight to tell them by.

October night, and you, and paradise,
So lovely and so full of grace,
Above your head, the universe has hung its lights,
And I reach out my hand to touch your face.

I believe in impulse, in all that is green,
Believe in the foolish vision that comes true,
Believe that all that is essential is unseen,
And for this lifetime I believe in you.

All of the lovers and the love they made:
Nothing that was between them was a mistake.
All that we did for love's sake,
Is not wasted and will never fade.

All who have loved shall be forever young
And walk in grandeur on a cool fall night
Along the avenue,
They live in every song that is ever sung,
In every painting of pure light,
In every pas de deux.

Oh love that shines in every star
And love reflected in the silver moon.
It is not here, but it's not far.
Not yet, but it will be here soon.

29. SHALL I COMPARE THEE? WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And Summer's lease hath all too short a date: Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimm'd; And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd:

But thy eternal Summer shall not fade Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st; Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st: So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

THE PRESENTATION/ BLESSINGS FROM PARENTS/FAMILY/FRIENDS

1. Minister: Who stands with this couple to express the good wishes of their families and friends?
(*Alternative: Who pledges the good will of the families of this couple?*)

Response (of parents/wedding party/etc): I/ We do.

2. Minister: As our children find partners and found the homes of the next generation, each family is enlarged. Do you, who have nurtured these two, give your blessing to their union and their home?

Response: I/ We do.

3. Minister: From time immemorial, weddings such as this one have been public occasions where family and friends gather to express the joy and approval that they feel for the new union. Let me therefore ask you parents this:

Do you _____, and you _____,
who know and care for _____ give them your blessings now as they enter into this new relationship, and do you aspire in the days and years ahead to give them your deepest love, understanding, and support during both good times and bad? If so, say "We do."

Response: I/ We do.

And let me ask the rest of you gathered here today: Do you who know and care for _____ give them your blessings now as they enter into this new relationship, and do you aspire in the days and years ahead to give them your deepest love, understanding and support during both good times and bad? Is so, say "We do."

Response: I/ We do.

4. Minister (To the congregation) : As our children find partners and found the homes of the next generation, each family is enlarged. Do you, all here today, who have nurtured these two, give your blessings to their union and their home?

If so, please respond "I do".

PREFACE TO THE VOWS

1. The vows through which you accept each other as /husband and wife/spouses/married partners have no hidden power in themselves. Only to the extent that they express in words your continuing intention and commitment do they have meaning. In a world where the pressures pushing people apart may often seem stronger than those drawing people together, your commitment to each other will need to be re-expressed in many different ways in the coming days and years. The expression in today's vows is simply a visible milestone in your journey together.

I invite you now to clasp hands as you repeat your vows. The hand offered by each of you is an extension of self, just as is your mutual love. Cherish the touch, for you touch not only your own, but another life. Be ever sensitive to its pulse. Seek always to understand and respect its rhythm.

2. _____ and _____, it is a great joy and pleasure for me to be standing here with you on this momentous day, and witnessing to the life-long commitment you are making to one another.

I must remind you that the vows you are about to say to one another belong entirely to you. The words I speak have no special powers, and nothing that I can say or do on this day can ultimately make your partnership endure with beauty, fidelity, and joy. Only you, by the integrity and diligence of your love, can make these vows last.

So will you now please join a hand each to each, and repeat your vows after me?

(Couple joins hands.)

3. The love which now binds you together makes your lives broader and fuller than they could be alone. The strength of this love now is that it is vibrant and new, but its triumph will be in its endurance over many years. As a 19th Century Unitarian minister, Theodore Parker, once wrote, "It takes years to marry completely two hearts, even of the most loving and well assorted. A happy wedlock is a long falling in love."

In the years to come, may your life together be a long falling in love. Preserve the joy which now unites you. Add to it with your dreams. Strengthen it with determination, faith in one another and forgiveness. And you will be a blessing to each other, to all of us, and to the wider world.

4. For Groom(s): _____ is God's gift to you, but he is not a gift for you alone. Although this man does not complete you, may your love help him to find within himself a greater sense of who he is meant to be and know that he is a beautiful soul. You are asked to see the good in this man, to accept him for who he is and who he shall be, that he might be healed and made strong.

For Brides(s): _____ is God's gift to you, she is not a gift intended for you alone. Although this woman does not complete you, may your love help her see herself as God created her, so beautiful and strong that the entire world might be blessed by the presence of her light. You are also asked to see the good in her and to accept her for who she is and who she shall be, that she might be healed and made strong.

Our prayer for both of you is that you experience the vastness of what love, connection and union is all about. Through the union with one person, may you see the interconnectedness with all people.

THE EXCHANGE OF VOWS

Decide which of you will repeat the vows first. Most people like to repeat their vows in short phrases after the minister but you may wish to read them to one another. The vows below may be altered, or you may write your own. Please tell the minister which term you prefer to use – husband, wife, spouse, partner of my life, etc.

1. I, _____ now take you, _____
to be my wife/husband/spouse/the partner of my life.

2. In reaffirming the relationship we have been building together,
I _____ take you _____
to be no other than yourself.
Loving what I know of you,
trusting what I don't yet know,
with respect for your integrity
and faith in your abiding love for me,
through all our years,
and in all that life shall bring us,
I accept you as my wife/husband/spouse, the partner of my life.

3. I take you _____ to be my wife/husband/spouse/the partner of my life.
loving you now and always.
I will love you when we are together
And when we are apart,
When life is peaceful and when it is in disorder,
When I am proud of you
And when I am disappointed in you.
I will honor your goals and dreams
And help you to fulfill them.
From my heart I will seek to be open and honest with you.
I say these things believing that God is in the midst of them all.

4. In the presence of these witnesses,
I, _____, now take you, _____
to be my wife/husband/spouse/the partner of my life.
to have and to hold
from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness or in health,
in sorrow or in joy,
to love and to cherish
as long as we both shall live.

5. _____, I take you to be my wife/husband/spouse/the partner of my life,
And the companion of my days.
We shall bear together
whatever sorrow and adversity
life may lay upon us.
We shall share together
whatever of joy and fulfillment
life may hold in store.

6. In the sight of God
and in the presence of this company here assembled,
I, _____ do take thee, _____
to be my wife/husband/spouse/the partner of my life.
to have and to hold from this day forward
till death us do part.

7. I _____ now take you, _____
to be the wife/husband/spouse/partner of my days,
the companion of my house,
the friend of my life.
We shall bear together
whatever trouble or sorrow
life may lay upon us.
And we shall share together
whatever good and joyful things,
life may bring us.
With these words
and all the words of my heart
I marry you
and bind my life to yours.

10. Startled awake
At this late and unexpectedly beautiful hour
Long after sorrow
Long after love
Long after hope
I receive you into the breath of my soul
To make my light with you
To fill with joy my glad heart
And to love you far more and dearly
Than you could have ever imagined.
I _____ now take you, _____ To be my wife/husband/spouse/the partner of my life.
.

11. Write your own!

PREFACE TO RING CEREMONY

Minister: "What symbols do you have of these vows that you take?"
(*The rings are handed to the minister.*)

1. You have had these rings crafted as special symbols of what you intend that your love and your marriage will mean to you. As you wear them, may your commitment to that ideal be fulfilled abundantly.
2. May your rings be always the symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end. Love freely given has no separate giver and receiver. You are each the giver and each the receiver. May your rings always call to mind the freedom and the power of this love.
5. "Circles have no beginning and has no end, and so in the long and sacred tradition of marriage rings have come to symbolize eternal love and endless union of body, of mind, and of the spirit.
6. These rings in their unbroken wholeness are tokens of the continuity of your love. May their shining substance be a symbol of the enduring trust and affection that you bring to one another.

EXCHANGE OF RINGS

Minister: _____, as you place this ring on _____'s finger, please repeat after me:

1. I give you this ring
to wear upon your hand
as a symbol of our unity.
2. I give you this ring
in token of the commitment
we celebrate today.
3. I give you this ring
to wear upon your hand
as a symbol of our commitment and love.
4. With this ring
I join my life with yours.
5. With the giving of this ring, I thee wed.
6. _____, I place this ring on your finger,
as a seal on the bond I have made with you.

OPTIONAL RITUALS AND CEREMONIES

WINE CUP CEREMONY (JEWISH/CHRISTIAN)

(The use of the wine cup at a wedding is an ancient Jewish tradition, and is particularly appropriate at a union where the background of one or both parties is in that tradition. The couple is asked to provide the wine, the glass, and a napkin if the glass is to be broken.)

1. This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share the cup of wine, you undertake to share all that the future may bring. All the sweetness life's cup may hold for you will be the sweeter because you drink it together. Whatever drops of bitterness it may contain will be less bitter because you share them. *(The partners drink from the cup.)*

2. The years of our lives are a cup of wine poured out for us to drink. The grapes when they are pressed give forth their good juices for the wine. Under the wine press of time our lives give forth their labour and honor and love. Many days you will sit at the same table and eat and drink together. Drink now, and may the cup of your lives be sweet and full to running over. *(The partners drink from the cup.)*

3. Friends, the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine are the symbols in many religions of our belonging to one another and of our union with God.

In that spirit _____ and _____ have asked that they share a glass of wine in this ceremony, symbolizing their union with each other, with each of us and with life itself, struggling for better ways of being. I do now offer them this wine. *(The partners drink from the cup.)*

The years of our lives are life a cup of wine that is poured out for the sake of labor and honor and love. Many days you will sit at the same table and eat and drink together.

May you now, in this sacred moment of beginning and of celebration, as in all of the days of renewal and of growth that are yet to come, drink from the cup of life with consecration and with joy.

4. Two thoughts are suggested by this cup of wine. The first is that wine is a symbol of the sweetness we wish for your life. There will be times when you drink from other cups, from bitter ones; but life offers opportunity to savor the sweetness. The awareness of the possibility of a life filled with true meaning is what we toast: the good that is life. The second is that wine is a symbol of sharing. You have shared many years together, and out of this time has grown the love which brought you to this day. As you continue to share in each other's life, you will, as a symbol of this enduring cooperation, share this cup of wine. Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

5. A wedding is a ritual that signifies the transition from a single life into married life. Like most rituals, a wedding involves many symbolic elements, each bearing a significant meaning in the formation of the new marriage and the new family that the marriage creates. _____ and _____ have chosen several different ways to symbolize the sacred union they desire to enter. The first is a wine cup ceremony.

In Judaism, the sharing of the wine is known as the Kiddush, a ritual that is accompanied with the Hebrew blessing: Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheynu Melech Ha-olam Bo'rei P'ri Hagefen; Blessed are you, LORD our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

_____ and _____, drinking from a wine cup together is a reminder that from this moment on, you will share everything, doubling your joys and dividing your sorrows. It also symbolizes the many days that you will sit at the same table and eat and drink together as each other's family.

As you share this glass of wine, so may you share all that the future may bring. May all of your joys be sweeter because you drink together. May whatever drops of bitterness life may contain be less bitter because you share them.

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY (JEWISH/CHRISTIAN)

1. It has been said that "From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. And when souls that are destined to be together find each other, their streams of light flow together and a single, brighter light goes forth from their united being."

----- and -----, at the beginning of this ceremony, each of your mothers (or other family members or friends) lit a single candle to symbolize the families you have come from. I now invite you to light a candle that symbolizes your shared life together and the love that binds you together. May you keep this love that you share warm and bright with mutual concern. Replenish the source of its light with daily care, with gentleness and respect. Care for it, rejoice in it. May the light of your love be a source of blessing in your lives and in the larger life of which all of us are a part. And may this candle, which you will light on your wedding anniversary and on other special days, remind you of the sacred vows you have taken here today. . (Couple lights a single candle from two tapers.)

2. In the wedding liturgy, candlelight symbolizes the commitment of love these two people are declaring today.

Before you, you see three special candles. The two smaller candles symbolize the lives of the couple. Until today, both have let their light shine as individuals in their respective communities. Now they have come to publicly proclaim their love in the new union of marriage.

They do not lose their individuality. Yet, in marriage, they are united in so close a bond that they become one. Now, following the profession of their marriage vows, they will light the large center candle from the smaller candles to symbolize this new reality. In this way they are saying that henceforth their light must shine together for each other, for their families, and for the community.

3. From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. And when two souls are destined to find one another, their two streams of light flow together and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being. [Written by the Baal Shem Tov, a famous rabbi who lived centuries ago]

4. Another symbolic ritual that _____ and _____ have chosen is the lighting of a unity candle. During the processional at the beginning of the ceremony, _____ mother, _____, and _____ mother, _____, each lit a taper next to the Unity Candle. These two individual flames, one representing each family, will be used to light the Unity Candle, symbolizing how out of these two families, a new family will be created.

_____ and _____, together as you light this candle of unity, you symbolize the flame of your own individual selves joining to ignite the partnership of marriage.

May the brightness of this light shine through your lives, giving you courage and reassurance in the darkness. May its warmth give you shelter from the cold, and may its energy fill your spirits with strength and joy.

CEREMONY OF WINE AND BREAD (CHRISTIAN)

(The couple may wish to choose special bread and/or that reflects their ethnic heritage or have special meaning for them, e.g. a favorite bread that a grandparent used to make, or the type of wine used at family celebrations.)

_____ have brought a symbolic meal to this occasion. Will each of you take a small piece of bread and feed one another that you may be reminded of your responsibility to nurture one another daily.

Bread is then passed to the congregation) We ask that all of you, as members of _____'s community, pass the bread so as to share in this symbolic meal, knowing that your friendship and care will help nurture this relationship.

_____ drink to each other. As long as you live, may you never be too busy to celebrate whatever great occasions come into our lives. May you have many reasons to drink from the cup of gladness together. (couple drink)

SEVEN BLESSINGS – SHEVA BRACHOT (JEWISH)

Seven blessings are said at Jewish weddings because the number seven echoes the seven days of creation. The number of creation is important for weddings because ---- and ---- are creating a home and a life together: The seven blessings are seven statements of gratitude to God, the Holy One known by many different names, and they speak of the beauty of the world and the joy and delight of creation, including the union that is being created today.

1. Blessed are you, God, who brings forth fruit from the vine.
2. Blessed are you, God who shapes the universe. All things created speak of your glory.
3. Blessed are you, Holy One, who fashions each person.
4. We bless you, God, for forming each person in your image. You have planted within us a vision of you and given us the means that we may flourish through time. Blessed are you, Creator of humanity.
5. May Israel, once lonely for her children, now delight as they gather together in joy. Blessed are you, God, who lets Zion rejoice with her children.
6. Let these two best friends taste of the bliss you gave to the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden in the days of old. Blessed are you, the Presence who dwells with bride and groom in delight.
7. Blessed are You, who lights the world with happiness and contentment, love and companionship, peace and friendship, bridegroom and bride. Let the mountains of dance! Let the gates of Jerusalem ring with the sounds of joy, song, and delight — the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride and the laughter of their friends and companions. We bless you, God, who brings this bride and groom together to rejoice in each other.

(New translation by Gilah Langner, adapted by E. Kemler)

(Couple may wish to include the Seven Blessings tradition but have seven friends or family members write/bring/speak blessings instead of the traditional ones.)

SAPTAPARDI (SEVEN STEPS TOGETHER) – HINDU

The bride and groom walk seven steps together to signify the beginning of their journey through life together. Each step represents a marital vow:

First step: To respect and honor each other

Second step: To share each other's joy and sorrow

Third step: To trust and be loyal to each other

Fourth step: To cultivate appreciation for knowledge, values, sacrifice and service

Fifth step: To reconfirm their vow of purity, love family duties and spiritual growth

Sixth step: To follow principles of Dharma (righteousness)

Seventh step: To nurture an eternal bond of friendship and love

HAND FASTING (CELTIC WEDDING TRADITION)

The ancient tradition of a symbolic hand-fasting ceremony is often performed at a Celtic wedding. To include this beautiful ceremony, a rope or length of fabric to wrap around the hands of the couple being joined by marriage will be needed. The “wrap” should be chosen as something that has meaning to both of you. It could be color-coordinated to compliment the colors of your wedding, it can be made up of remnants of your baby blankets, sentimental heirlooms, or a cherished scarf that your grandmother wore.

Some Irish families pass down a wrap from generation to generation. Whatever you choose your wrap to be, it should be significant to you because it will represent the two of you becoming united as one. This symbolic tradition is modernly referred to as “tying the knot”. In the ceremony, the bride and groom face each other, join right hand to right hand, left hand to left hand, and the fabric will be wrapped around your interlocking hands by either the person performing your ceremony or a family member.

Reading: Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

“Two are better off than one, because together, they can work effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up... Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break.”

Officiant: The three cords I hold in my hand are a symbol of the love that will join _____ and _____ for the rest of their lives. The first cord represents _____, the second is for _____, and the third, of course, is a symbol of the presence of God in their lives.

_____ and _____, please hold the hands of your beloved. (The Officiant loosely ties their hands together, and holds them.)

“As your hands are bound together now,
so your lives and spirits are joined in a union of love and trust.

Above you are the stars and below you is the earth.
Like the stars your love should be a constant source of light,
and like the earth, a firm foundation from which to grow.
May your union always be made stronger by the presence of our Lord."
The Officiant slowly unties the cords.

WATER PURIFICATION (NATIVE AMERICAN)

Water is used as a symbol of purification and cleansing. The bride and groom have a ceremonial washing of hands to wash away past wrongdoings and memories of past loves.

SAND CEREMONY (SECULAR)

The Sand Ceremony represents the joining of two lives into a new dimension of unity. It is similar to the Unity Candle ceremony. Instead of each partner having their own candle, each partner has a vial of sand which represents their childhood and life before marriage. During the ceremony, each partner pours his or her sand into a larger vial to represent their new status as a married couple. Some couples use two different colors of sand, which make a third color when joined. Partners may wish to use sand from a lake or ocean close to where they grew up, or where they spent meaningful vacations together. One interfaith couple, the bride from the east coast, and the groom from the west, brought together sands from the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, representing not only their union, but the union of two families, two histories and two traditions.

_____ & _____ will now perform their sand ceremony.
_____, _____ & _____, today you join your separate lives together. The two separate bottles of sand symbolize your separate lives, separate families, and separate set of friends. They are all you are and all you will ever be as an individual. They also represent your lives before today. As these two containers of sand are poured into the third container, the individual containers of sand will no longer exist, but will be joined together as one. Just as these grains of sand can never be separated and joined again into individual containers, so will your marriage be. You each will remain individual, with your own uniqueness, but far more importantly, is the reality that you are no longer two but one.

BREAKING OF THE GLASS (Jewish)

In a moment, _____ and _____ will end their wedding ceremony with the Jewish tradition of smashing a glass. Explanations for this practice abound. Some say we break the glass in order that this marriage be as difficult to sunder as these shards of glass would be to make whole again. Some say it's to remind us that even in our moments of greatest joy, somewhere in the world there is

brokenness and sorrow. Some say it's to scare away evil spirits, or to start off the marriage with a bang! Regardless of the meaning, the appropriate response to the breaking glass is *mazal tov*, which means congratulations and good luck.

JUMPING THE BROOM (WICCAN)

In a moment, _____ and _____ will end their wedding ceremony with the Wiccan tradition of "Jumping the Broom". As _____ and _____ tie their cords to the Broom, know that each part of the Broom is significant. The straws of the broom represent friends, family, our ancestors, those who have passed, and the joining of two families. The handle of the broom represents God, the source which unites us all, especially these two in marriage. And the cords represent the tie that binds _____ and _____ together.

THE PRONOUNCEMENT

Again, please make clear to the minister what terms you would like to use if you plan to be pronounced. (A kiss is often part of the ceremony. It usually will follow immediately after the Pronouncement)

1. Since _____ and _____ have joined themselves, each to the other, in marriage, and have signified their commitment to each other in the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of a ring, they are now and hence forward married/husband and wife/husband and husband/wife and wife/spouses/partners for life.
2. _____ and _____, you have told me, and all of your friends and family members who have gathered here to share this moment of joy with you, that you deeply love one another, and wish to live together now seeking an ever-richer, ever-deeper relationship. You have formed your own union- in friendship, in respect for one another, and in love- and it is therefore now my joyful task to acknowledge you as married/husband and wife/husband and husband/wife and wife/spouses/partners for life.
3. Whom love (or God) hath joined together let no one break asunder. For as much as you two have consented to live together in marriage and have pledged yourselves to each other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving rings and by joining hands, I, therefore, in the name of high religion, do pronounce you married/husband and wife/husband and husband/wife and wife/spouses/partners for life.

Think not that you have finished anything here today. This service is but the mark of a beginning. Today before all the world you have formally lighted the lamp of love. Keep it warm and bright with mutual concern. Replenish the source of its light with daily care, with gentleness and respect. Take it with you into all the highways and byways of life. Try it. But let it not burn dry with your indifference or flicker and grow dim through your carelessness. Care for it. Rejoice in it. Make it a light truly creative in your lives and in the larger life of which all of us are a part.

4. Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have thus pledged themselves each to the other in the presence of this company, I do now, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Church and by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, pronounce that they (or you) are married/husband and wife/husband and husband/wife and wife/spouses/partners for life.

5. Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have thus pledged themselves each to the other in the presence of this company, I do now, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Church and by the State of Wisconsin, pronounce that you are husband and wife.

You may now seal this marriage with a kiss.

BENEDICTION/ CLOSING WORDS

1. And now, may that glory which rests on all who love, rest upon you, and bless you and keep you, and fill you with happiness and a gracious spirit. And, despite all changes of time and fortune, may all that is noble and lovely and true abound in your hearts, and abide with you, and give you strength in all your days together.

2. _____ and _____,
believe in what is yours, believe in who you are, believe in the richness and the power of what lies in the depths you share. And go now in great happiness assured that all our hearts go with you.

3. And now, as you go out from this place together, and in love, may the blessings of those around you (optional: and the benediction of the Most High/ God) attend you and keep you- together always, in understanding, tenderness, and love. Amen.

4. Go now to walk the ways of the world together,
and may your days be good;
and long upon the earth.

5. May all that is good, beautiful and true abide with you forever. Amen.

6. May God bless and keep you,
May the sun of many days shine upon you.
May the love you have for one another grow and hold you close.
May you continually discover each other.
May the good true light within you guide your way together.
May your dreams come true and when they don't may new dreams arise.
Go now and walk the ways of the world together,
and may your days be good, and long upon the earth. Amen.

7. Cherokee Blessing

God in heaven above,
Please protect the ones we love.
We honor all that you created
As we pledge our hearts and lives together.
We honor Mother Earth --
And ask for our marriage to be abundant,
And to grow stronger through the seasons
We honor fire --
And ask that our union be warm and glowing with love in our hearts.
We honor wind --
And ask that we sail through life safely and calm as in our father's arms.
We honor water --
To clean and soothe our relationship that it may never thirst for love.
With all the forces of the universe you created,
We pray for harmony and true happiness
As we forever grow young together.

8. Blessing by James Dillet Freeman

May you always need one another - not so much to fill your emptiness as to help you to know your fullness. A mountain needs a valley to be complete; the valley does not make the mountain less, but more; and the valley is more a valley because it has a mountain towering over it. So let it be with you and you.
May you need one another, but not out of weakness.
May you want one another, but not out of lack.
May you entice one another, but not compel one another.
May you embrace one another, but not out encircle one another.
May you succeed in all important ways with one another, and not fail in the little graces.
May you look for things to praise, often say, "I love you!" and take no notice of small faults.
May both of you hope to have good sense enough to take the first step back in a quarrel.
May you enter into the mystery which is the awareness of one another's presence - no more physical than spiritual, warm and near when you are side by side, and warm and near when you are in separate rooms or even distant cities.
May you have happiness, and may you find it making one another happy.
May you have love, and may you find it loving one another.

9. Benediction of the Apaches"

"Now you will feel no rain,
For each of you will be shelter to the other.
Now you will feel no cold,
For each of you will be warmth to the other.
Now there is no more loneliness for you.
For each of you will be companion to the other.
Now you are two bodies,
But there is only one Life before you.

Go now to your dwelling place,
To enter into the days of your togetherness.
And may your days be good and long upon the earth"

10. *Native American Blessing*

Above you are the stars, below you are the stones.

As time does pass, remember:

Like a star should your love be constant.

Like a stone should your love be firm.

Be close, yet not too close.

Possess one another, yet be understanding.

Have patience with the other; for storms will come, but they will go quickly.

Be free in giving of affection and warmth.

Make love often, and be sensuous to one another.

Have no fear, and let not the ways of words of the unenlightened give you unease.

For the Great Spirit is with you, now and always.

11. _____ and _____, believe in what is yours, believe in who you are, believe in the richness and the power of what lies in the depths you share. And go now in great happiness assured that all our hearts go with you.

12. We pray that the holy spirit of love may deepen and enrich the lives of those who here became partners: that each may be enabled to see life from the other's point of view, that they may be tolerant and large-minded, sympathetic and kind, considerate of weakness and forgiving of faults. May the relationship which today has been given public expression continue to develop richly in the days to come; and whatever changes time may bring, let what has been said and done here remain as a treasured memory and a guide to life. Amen.

13. In this hour, rich with meaning and hope and promise, we pray that the spirit of trust, understanding and love may be with _____ and _____ through all the years that lie ahead.

May their trust bring them strength and confidence, whatever trial and adversities they may meet; may their understanding support an acceptance of each other amid all life's uncertainties; may their love be an avenue of insight into the deepest realities of our being.

In the days which _____ and _____ will enter together may they find far more in life than either would have found alone. May they find reverence for the beauties and respect for the truths they will encounter as they go forward together. Amen.

14. We cannot know what the future may bring into the lives of _____ and _____ but we pray that together they may be equal to the demands of all their days. May their union always be a shared adventure, rich with moments of serenity as well as excitement, vital with problems that test as well as achievements that lift, marked by a sense of personal freedom as well as mutual responsibility.

May they find in each other companionship as well as love, understanding as well as compassion, challenge as well as agreement. May their friends and family, those present today and those unable to be present, continue to rejoice in the love that has united them.

May the home they build together shed its peace on them and on all who find shelter within its walls.

From their life together may they draw patience in time of strain, strength in time of weakness, courage in time of discouragement, vision in time of doubt, and above all, a growing love which radiates into the world around them. Amen.

15. May the love which has brought you together continue to grow and enrich your lives, bringing peace and inspiration to each of you and to those who know you. May you meet with courage the problems which arise to challenge you; may you meet with strength the troubles that beset you. May your marriage be one of ever-growing depth and meaning, because of the sympathy, understanding and love which you give to one another in the life you share. Amen.

16. *Traditional Wedding Prayer of the Great Plains Indian*

Morning Star! When you look down upon us, give us peace and refreshing sleep.

Great Spirit! Bless our children, friends, and visitors through a happy life.

May our trails lie straight and level before us.

Let us live to be old.

We are all your children and ask these things with good hearts.