

The Hindu Wedding Ceremony

Marriage in the Hindu religion is the thirteenth of sixteen ceremonies in a person's life. It is one of the most important stages of life and is called the grihstha ashram, which means the setting up of a separate family unit. It is a sacrament or sanskara and as such is solemnized in accordance with the Vedas, the holy scriptures of Hinduism that date back more than three thousand, five hundred years.

The Hindu marriage ceremony is a rite enabling two individuals to start their journey in life together. In a Hindu wedding, the multiplicity of creation becomes possible when spirit or purush unites with matter or prakriti. The Hindu wedding lays emphasis on three essential values: happiness, harmony, and growth. A typical Hindu marriage ceremony includes ten rites conducted in Sanskrit by a Hindu priest.

Milni (Greeting the groom)

The bride's mother welcomes and blesses the groom by adorning his forehead with kumkum, a vermilion powder traditionally made from turmeric. The groom is then escorted to the mandap or altar by the bride's family.

Ganesh Pooja (Invoking Lord Ganesh)

Lord Ganesh is always the first deity to be propitiated at any significant event. His blessings are invoked before the preparations begin for the wedding so that no obstacles present themselves and an atmosphere of peace and harmony is created.

Madhuparka (Offering of honey and yogurt)

The bride's father adorns the groom's forehead with kumkum and offers him yogurt and honey as an expression of welcome and respect.

Kanya Aagaman (Arrival of the bride)

The bride is escorted to the mandap by her maternal uncle. Her mother then blesses her with kumkum, holy water, rice, flowers, sacred thread, and ornaments. The bride and groom exchange jai-malas or flower garlands as a gesture of acceptance of one another and a pledge to respect one another.

Kanya Daan (Giving daughter's hand in marriage)

The bride's parents place her hand in the groom's hand, requesting him to accept her as an equal partner. The ends of the groom's dupatta, or scarf, and the bride's dupatta are tied together, as a symbol of their eternal union. The priest places coins, rice and flowers in the knot. These signify prosperity, longevity and happiness.

Agni Poojan (Lighting the sacred fire)

The couple invokes Agni, the god of Fire, to witness their commitment to each other. The fire symbolizes eternal light and knowledge and dispels darkness and ignorance. Crushed sandalwood, herbs, sugar, rice, and oil are offered to the ceremonial fire.

Mangal Phera (Walking around the fire)

The bride and groom walk hand-in-hand around the fire. Each circle represents four goals in life: Dharma, religious and moral duties; Artha, prosperity; Kama, earthly pleasures; Moksha, spiritual salvation and liberation. The bride leads the Pheras first, signifying her determination to stand first beside her husband in all happiness and sorrow.

Ashmarohana (A request to be strong and steadfast)

Upon the groom's request, the bride places her foot on a grinding stone. The bride utters a sacred resolution to be strong and steadfast as the stone she treads upon.

Saptapadi (Taking seven steps together)

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

The groom places a mangalsutra or sacred necklace around the bride's neck, as a promise of lifelong protection. He also places vermilion in the part of her hair as a symbol of his love and devotion to her.

Kansar Bhakshanam (Blessing the couple)

The bride and groom feed each other sweets, signifying their first meal together as a married couple. The priest blesses their union and the parents of the bride and groom offer their blessings to the couple.