

A GUIDE TO THE HINDU WEDDING CEREMONY

The Hindu wedding is a mix of cultural tradition and religious practice, an amalgamation of customs that have built up over thousands of years.

The main ceremony is a collection of rituals that come from the Vedas, the four sacred texts that make up the foundation of Hinduism. Each part of the ceremony is meant to unite the couple so firmly that, after marriage, they become a single unified spirit even though they still retain two separate bodies.

Over centuries, this core religious event has evolved into a multi-day celebration of the joining of two families, equal parts joyful showmanship and sacred commitment that have given Hindu weddings their world-famous reputation. Everything is fundamentally community oriented. Which is, of course, where all of you come in! Each of you has contributed to both of us being where we are today, and we're honored to have you here celebrating with us as part of our extended community. Below we've compiled a beat-by-beat guide to explain the rest of the day in more detail.



Baraat (lit. Groom's Procession)

Traditionally, the wedding ceremonies take place in the bride's hometown. The baraat is the groom's wedding procession as he leaves from his home and makes his way to the venue. Over the years, the baraat has become an elaborate display of opulence, showcasing the groom and the life he is promising his bride. The groom often rides in on a white horse, dressed in beautiful heavily embroidered clothes, while his entire family and friends dance to live music around him.

Today, in the US, the tradition lives on in a slightly shorter format. Though we won't be starting the baraat from our literal home in Basking Ridge, the procession will begin from outside the venue and make its way to the front gates to meet the bride and her family.



Var Puja (lit. Worship of the Groom)

Once the groom and his family arrive, they are greeted by the bride's parents. For the duration of the wedding, the groom and bride take on the forms of Vishnu — the God of Preservation, one third of the supreme deity, and, in many forms, the ideal groom — and Lakshmi — the Goddess of Wealth, Fortune, Beauty, and Prosperity, and Vishnu's royal consort. The mother of the bride welcomes the groom's family with a prayer for his good health and happiness. In doing so, she invites Vishnu into the venue.

After receiving the blessings of his elders, the groom is escorted by the parents of the bride to the mandap (altar), accompanied by his parents and groomsmen.

Ganesh Puja (lit. Worship of Ganesh)

This is the first ritual at the mandap. In this ceremony, a prayer is offered to Lord Ganesh. In addition to being one of the most famous of the Hindu pantheon, Ganesh is known in Hindu mythology as the Remover of Obstacles and the God of New Beginnings. His presence is ubiquitous across India, because no major life event or major ritual occurs without first seeking his blessing.

During the Ganesh Puja, garlands made of jasmine and the mangalsutra (a sacred wedding necklace, lit. "an auspicious thread") are placed at Ganesh's feet. The pandit then leads the group in asking Ganesh to ensure that the couple will be able to overcome all obstacles, and that the ceremony can continue without any disruption.



The Bride Enters

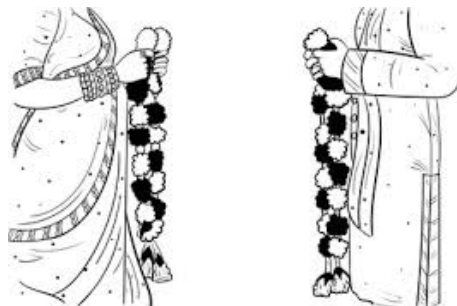
The importance of this event is the same in every culture: this is the moment the bride enters to grace everyone with her presence. The bride makes her way down the aisle towards the mandap,

where her parents and the groom are waiting. She's surrounded by flowers. She's preceded by flowergirls that cover the walkway with petals. The mandap and the hall and the aisle are all lined with floral arrangements. And she's flanked by her four closest friends, each holding one corner of a canopy made of flowers. The canopy is a symbol. The bride has grown up under the calming shade of flowers that represent the love and care of her family and friends. As she steps out from underneath the flowers to meet the groom, she transitions to a new stage in life.



Jaimala (lit. Victory Garland)

The bride and groom participate in the first ritual that binds them together by exchanging floral garlands. The exchange of garlands appears throughout Hindu mythology, including in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. In each case, the garland symbolizes the public decision to choose an individual as a life partner, an eternal pledge of respect and commitment.



Kanya Daan (lit. Gift of the Bride)

In the next ritual, the father of the bride formally blesses his daughter and the groom. He first joins the couple's hands together and declares to the gathered witnesses his intent to entrust his daughter to the groom's care. He then speaks directly to the groom, demanding an oath of enduring love, fidelity, and security for his daughter.

Once the bride's father has blessed the couple, the groom and bride turn to each other and formally commit to supporting the other in fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities: Dharma, the duty to lead a moral life; Artha, the duty to lead a joyous and fruitful life; Kama, the duty to lead a pleasant and productive life; and Moksha, the duty to attain enlightenment.

Sath Phere (lit. Seven Rounds)

After making commitments to their parents and to each other, the bride and groom seal their vows with the Gods as their witness. This is the most important ceremony of the set, and is also the only one that is, by custom, legally binding.

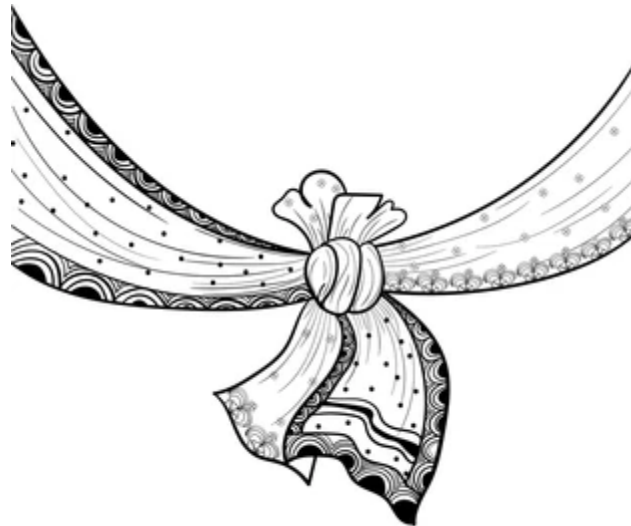
The two are physically joined together with their clothes, symbolizing their spiritual bond, while the pandit lights a fire in the center of the mandap. The fire is the material form of Agni, one of the most important deities in the Vedas. In addition to being the God of Fire, he is traditionally the messenger between humans and other deities. Through his presence, the entire Hindu pantheon witnesses the promises made by the couple.

The couple walks around the sacred fire seven times. Each round represents a specific marriage vow and a prayer to the Gods. The number seven is considered to be a lucky and particularly

auspicious number in the Hindu tradition, because it is the number of celestial bodies — the earth, sun, moon, and the four closest planets — that are visible to the naked eye.

The seven vows and prayers are:

- A vow to provide for each other, and a prayer to always have plenty.
- A vow to support each other in good and bad times, and a prayer to have the physical and mental health to do so.
- A vow to fulfill each other's spiritual obligations, and a prayer to have spiritual strength.
- A vow to work together to build a home and a family, and a prayer to have strong, heroic, and noble children.
- A vow to love and respect each other, and a prayer for continual love and respect throughout the entire family.
- A vow to build self restraint and inner peace, and a prayer for a long and peaceful life together.
- A vow to have companionship, loyalty, and friendship, and a prayer for a life of unity and peace for themselves and the rest of the universe.



Once complete, the bride and groom finalize their bond with these words, said to each other:

Having taken these steps together, I assure you that I will not swerve from the path of my love and friendship with you. Let our thoughts, decisions, and actions be one and in unison. Let us be kind, loving, considerate, good, and open-hearted to each other. Let us share our food, possessions, strengths, and advantages together.

The ceremony concludes with a hymn signifying that the union is eternal. The bride and groom are pronounced husband and wife.

Sindoor Daan (lit. Gift of Vermillion)

The groom now places a dash of vermillion powder, known as a sindoor, on the bride's forehead. The sindoor is a tradition that appears to date back to the neolithic era, and shows up throughout Hindu mythology. The sindoor is in many ways equivalent to a wedding band. It is a visual marker of marital status, a physical representation of one's vows, and a symbol of love and devotion. After applying the sindoor, the groom ties the mangalsutra around the bride's neck. Traditionally, the bride wears the mangalsutra for the remainder of the marriage.

Ashirvad (lit. Blessings)

Once the wedding rituals have been completed, the couple touches the feet of their parents and the priest and asks for their blessings.

Vidai (lit. Blessings)

In this last ceremony, the bride and groom leave together. The Vidai marks the departure of the bride from her parent's home. As she leaves, the bride throws puffed rice over her head, a symbol of prosperity and a gesture of gratitude to her parents and community. In return, the community showers the couple with flowers, symbolizing their hope that the marriage will be filled with joy, laughter, and happiness.

