



WEDDING TRADITIONS EXPLAINED

THE ORIGIN OF THE RING FINGER

During 3rd century Greece, the ring finger was the index finger. In India it was the thumb. During a Christian wedding the priest arrived at the forth finger (counting the thumb) after touching the three fingers on the left hand '...in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost'. The Egyptians believed that a special vein, which they called a "vena amoris" or vein of love, ran from the third finger on the left hand, directly to the heart. By putting on a fitted ring, the affections were bound in and could never flow out the fingertips. Also, this finger although not the smallest on the hand is the weakest and most dependent on the others for help in lifting and holding. It seemed to symbolise the young wife supported by the strength of her husband.

The "ring" finger has sometimes been on the left hand, sometimes on the right, according to country and custom. Among English-speaking persons, it has been on the left since the edict of Edward VI in 1549.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WEDDING RING

Before coinage, gold rings were circulated as currency. By giving a gold ring to his bride, a man showed he trusted her with his property. Under Roman law, the ring was a sign of security, protecting the interests of the bride-to-be. In Elizabethan times, an interlocking set of three rings was used and worn during the engagement period by the bride, the groom and the witness at the wedding. The three rings would be placed on the bride's finger during the wedding ceremony. Diamond rings became popular in the 19th century.

Roman wedding rings were carved with two clasped hands. Very early rings had a carved key through which a woman was thought to be able to open her husband's heart. Jewelled rings were the next step and the diamond is mentioned specifically from about the fourth century AD, and frequently from the fifteenth century on.

Although not required to validate marriage under a civil law, rings were required in 16th century by the Council of Trent. Circular shape symbolises eternity.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ENGAGEMENT RING

The truth or promise ring is older than the wedding band. Its earliest form was probably plaited sweet grass, which came from the custom of securing the bride's wrists and ankles with rushes during the age of marriage by capture. When restraint became more symbolical than physical, a grass ring was given to her, succeeded by rings of metal as man became more accomplished in the crafts. The Romans and Egyptians, with their love of precious metal and stones, initiated the production of platinum, silver and gold rings. In early Rome a gold band came to symbolise everlasting love and commitment in marriage.

In 860 A.D., Pope Nicholas I decreed that an engagement ring become a required statement of nuptial intent. He insisted that engagement rings had to be made of gold which signified a financial sacrifice on the part of the prospective husband.

Wedding Traditions Explained

THE ORIGIN OF THE DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING

The Wedding Tradition of the diamond engagement ring comes from the 15th. century Venetians. The diamond was called the Venus stone, comparing its shining beauty with the planet Venus in the evening sky. Like this goddess, who was dedicated to love, the diamond in time became associated with sweethearts, and its mysterious inner fire was likened to the equally mysterious fires of passion. The Greeks called it "adamas"- eternal or unchanging, possibly as a declaration as to the depths of their emotions, but more probably the ancient name came from the character of the stone, the hardest substance in nature.

According to history, the diamond as an engagement ring began in 1477 with Maximilian of Austria and Mary of Burgundy. Maximilian of Austria planned to propose marriage to Mary of Burgundy. Fearing he would be rejected he sought advice. It was suggested a diamond be bought. Max took the advice and proposed, slipping a diamond ring on her third finger, left hand side. Mary said "Yes" and a wedding tradition was born and they were married on August 17 that year.

Today, when many wedding traditions are toppling, the diamond ring wedding tradition is stronger than ever. Four out of five engaged couples- for whom the individual expression of their love is still captured in that tiny, sparkling gem.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BEST MAN WEDDING TRADITION

In 200 A.D, the male Germanic Goths of northern Europe, usually married a woman from within his own community. However, when there were fewer women, the prospective bridegroom would capture his bride from a neighbouring village. The bridegroom was accompanied by his strongest friend (or best friend), who helped him capture his bride.

WHY THE BRIDE STANDS TO THE GROOMS LEFT

After the bridegroom captured his bride, he placed her on his left to protect her, thus freeing his right hand or sword hand against sudden attack.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HONEYMOON

After "kidnapping" his bride, the groom would take her and go into hiding, disappearing with her so that his family could not rescue her. The couple hid for a month (moon) and partook of a wine, made of mead and honey called metheglen, which was thought to have aphrodisiac properties. By the time the bride's family tracked them down them, the bride would probably already be pregnant! A "bride price" would then be negotiated.

By the sixteenth century, honeymoon referred less to a time period and more to a feeling. Newlyweds were in the "honey," or full phase, of their love.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM WEDDING

Although some brides were kidnapped, marriage by purchase was the preferred method of obtaining a wife. The "bride price" could be land, social status, political alliances, or cash. The Anglo-Saxon word "wedd" meant that the groom would vow to marry the woman, but it also referred to the bride price (money or barter) to be paid by the groom to the bride's father. The root of the word "wedding" literally means to gamble or wager!

THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM "TO TIE THE KNOT"

The term "tie the knot" also goes back Roman times. the bride would wear a girdle that was tied in many knots which the groom had the "duty" of untying.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BACHELOR DINNER (BUCKS NIGHT)

In Sparta, during the height of Greek civilisation, soldiers were the first to hold stag parties. The groom would invited his close friends to a supper on the eve of his wedding to celebrate and reminisce about his past. Traditionally, it was also held to raise money for the bridegroom so he would be able to continue to drink with his buddies after his wife took control of the finances . He would bid farewell to his bachelorhood and pledge his continued allegiance to his comrades.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BRIDAL PARTY

This term has many origins from different cultures. In Anglo-Saxon times, the groom had the help of "bridesmen" or "brideknights" to help him capture and/or escort his bride. Later they would make sure that the bride got to the church and to the groom's home afterwards. The women who accompanied and assisted the bride were called "bridesmaids" or "brideswomen".

THE ORIGIN OF THE TRADITIONAL WHITE WEDDING DRESS

White is the ceremonial symbol of purity and virtue and hence of maidenhood. It has been so since Biblical times. But white has not always been the fashion for wedding gowns. Prior to the 19th century, it was fashionable to wear a colourful outfit that could be adopted for later wear.

A typical early American bride wore the best she should afford and potentially re-use in the prevailing fashion of the day. It might be a white linen shift over a petticoat or two, a blue and white Calico smock or something in pink, a fashion colour, with velvet or trim. Colonial brides also wore pastel brocades and even cherry red satin, but the rites were most often performed at home than in a church.

Depending on which source you believe the following three women are credited for the popularisation of the white wedding dress.

In 1499, Ann of Brittany wore the first white wedding gown.

Nellie Custis revised the wearing of white at her marriage to George Washington's favourite nephew on the ex-president's last birthday, February 22, 1799 and white has now been the fashion for some 200 years.

About 1820 white became popular for formal occasions, although pastels were in vogue until the end of the century. When Queen Victoria wore white at her own wedding in 1840, it became the official colour for brides, because it was considered a symbol of Biblical purity. Although fashions have changed, white is still symbolic of brides and the word "white" has come to symbolise happiness and joy.

THE ORIGIN OF "SOMETHING BLUE"

In early Biblical times, blue not white symbolised purity. Both the bride and groom usually wore a band of blue material around the bottom of their wedding attire, hence the wedding tradition of "something blue.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BLUE GARTER

We all know that something blue is lucky for the bride, but why a blue garter? This seems to stem from the noble Order of the Garter, the oldest order of knighthood in Europe. Its regalia includes a collar, a star and an actual blue velvet garter. Since queens and princesses are the only women invested with the Order, and a bride is a "queen for the day", she may enjoy royal prerogatives by wearing a blue garter below her left knee.

THE ORIGIN OF THE GARTER AND BRIDAL BOUQUET TOSS

Guests invaded the bridal chamber and threw the bride and groom's stockings. The one whose throw landed on the bride or groom's nose was the next to marry. It was customary in the 14th century for the bride to toss her garter to the men. Sometimes the men would get drunk, become impatient, and try to remove the garter ahead of time. Therefore, the custom evolved for the groom to remove and toss the garter. By the end of the 14th century, the groom was throwing the bride's garter to prevent their being rushed at the altar. With that change the bride started to toss the bridal bouquet to the unwed girls of marriageable age.

WHY IT BECAME BAD LUCK FOR THE GROOM TO SEE BRIDE BEFORE THE CEREMONY

Until relatively recently, brides were considered the property of their father. Their futures and husbands were arranged without their consent. The marriage of an unattractive woman was often arranged with a prospective groom from another town without either of them having ever seen their prospective spouse. In more than one instance, when the groom saw his future wife, usually dressed in white, for the first time on the day of the wedding, he changed his mind and left the bride at the altar. To prevent this from happening, it became "bad luck" for the groom to see the bride on the day of the wedding prior to the ceremony.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WEDDING VEIL

To prevent the groom from seeing the brides' face till after the ceremony was over, brides began to wear opaque yellow veils. Not only could the groom not see in, the bride could not see out. Therefore, the father of the bride had to escort her down the aisle and literally give the bride to the groom.

We think of the veil as being oriental because the Eastern bridegroom often did not see his bride's face until after the ceremony. Actually, the veil is older than the harem and rises from the mists of mythology. Ishtar, ancient Goddess of Love, came from the depths to her betrothed, the vapours of the earth and sea covering her "like a veil."

Today, prior to a Jewish wedding ceremony, it is the groom who ritually "veils the bride". This reason for this wedding tradition goes back to the marriage of Jacob to Leah (the older sister) when he thought he was marrying Rachel (the younger sister) whom he loved.

The invention of the wide loom and silk tulle in the 19th century gave women a sheer covering that enhanced their beauty.

The wedding veil symbolises modesty, privacy, youth, and virginity. That way of thinking still has a foothold on bridal etiquette, as only a first-time bride wears a veil.

WHY SHOULD YOU BE ENGAGED ONLY ONCE?

At one time it was thought that to be engaged more than once meant certain damnation. The groom-to-be often avoided making the proposal himself, but instead sent friends to represent his interests to his intended bride or her family. On their way to make this visit, these representatives would observe certain things that they would interpret as omens for the future couple. A monk, a blind man, or pregnant women were among the bad omens, signalling that the representatives should give up their mission. Nanny goats, a pigeon, or a wolf were among those bringing good fortune. One warning for brides-to-be was to avoid suitors whose surnames began with the same letter as their own.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROPOSAL

In the 19th century, declaration of love was tantamount to proposal; arranged marriages did not include proposals nor did marriage by capture. Asking the bride's father for her comes from the era of arranged marriages.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ENGAGEMENT

The engagement is a means to an end - marriage. Indeed, the full term is "engaged to be married." At one time, however, the engagement was as important as the wedding itself. Anglo-Saxons were used to stealing away their brides-to-be. Romance, wooing and engagements were not in the picture. But the families of the women insisted on being reimbursed for what was, after all, a working member of the family. The engagement itself signified the intended transfer of ownership from father to husband and also provided a period during which the "bride's price" could be agreed.

Several centuries later the situation was in reverse and fathers were paying future sons-in-law, or their families, a "dowry" to marry off their daughters. The engagement was again a time for agreeing on the payment, or dowry, and also a time for collecting an extravagant trousseau, at least for rich brides.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ENGAGEMENT PARTY

Once marked by a party called a "flouncing", the couple met with their future in-laws to make the engagement official. Neither of the couple could be seen talking to another man or woman after this point and should the engagement be broken, the one breaking it forfeited half of his or her worldly goods.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BRIDAL SHOWER, TROUSSEAU (KITCHEN TEA)

This wedding tradition evolved from Holland when a father disapproved of his daughter's choice and the villagers gathered to "shower" her with the dowry her father refused.

Once upon a time, the bride's family began preparing for her marriage when she was born. They collected embroidered and crafted items to store in a striking piece of furniture known as a "marriage" or "hope" chest.

A century ago in Italy the bride's belongings were carried in a street procession to her marriage and everyone saw the contents. Today, the bride's family might purchase the hope chest.

In some communities today, a "trousseau tea" is held before the wedding. This "ladies only" social gathering is a way to show off all the bride's new things not just gifts, but lingerie, clothing items, personal items everything but the wedding costume.

Bridal showers were meant to strengthen the ties between the bride and her friends, provide her moral support, and help her prepare for her marriage. Gift giving dates from the 1890's.

In the old days of marriage by capture, a maiden was guarded by her family to prevent seizure, and in later centuries this little drama was enacted as a sort of game at country weddings. The bridegroom, gaily attired, coming for his bride, was confronted by a bevy of maidens all dressed exactly alike. His part of the play was to detect his true love, "forsaking all others," and bear her away to the church. As recently as Victorian times, brides' maidens often wore white dresses and even short bridal veils, looking like brides themselves. The best friend was designated first bridesmaid. Maid of honour and matron of honour are modern designations in line with our smaller wedding parties of today. It was once required that 10 witnesses be present at a marriage ceremony to outsmart the jealous demons. Bridesmaids dressed similarly to the bride, and ushers' attire resembled the groom's. This was an attempt to confuse the spirits who wanted to harm the couple. If the spirits could not tell the bride and groom apart from attendants, they would not be able to carry out their plans.

THE ORIGIN OF THE RING BEARER

This small attendant, usually a relative of the bride, is typically American and unknown in Europe, although he is the successor of the English page boy who still carries the bride's train in formal weddings at Westminster. Children, especially youths, have always been considered propitious in the wedding party, and in France they carried lighted tapers at the bride's side. Charles Frederick Worth, who dressed most of the queens of Europe from his house in Paris, is said to have originated the court train, suspended from the shoulders, for the wedding gown. This gave the little train bearer a definite job to do.

But alas, court trains went out of fashion as skirts grew shorter, so the bride's little nephew was given the wedding ring to carry.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOUQUET

Symbolises life, growth, and fertility. Herbs ward off evil spirits. Flowers with different meanings are assembled into a bouquet. [Flower Meanings](#)

- Acacia = Elegance
- Carnations = Fidelity
- Honeysuckle = Generosity
- Hyacinth = Playfulness
- Irises = Wisdom
- Orchids = Fertility
- Roses = Love

Why Orange Blossoms?

There are cycles of favour for bridal flowers just as with other bridal fashions. We had the era of rosemary, then myrtle, and more recently the orange blossom has enjoyed a full century of popularity. Carried from Spain to France many years ago, and then to America, the orange blossom wedding tradition became so strong that brides wore the flowerets moulded in wax when they couldn't get fresh blossoms.

The meaning is significant: the orange tree is one of the very few in all nature that bears its flowers and its fruit at the same time-- a symbol of the young and fruitful spouse. Because the tree from which orange blossoms come is an evergreen, they are also thought to symbolise the everlasting nature of the newlywed's love for each other.

THE ORIGIN OF "SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW"

Something Old: Continuity

Something New: Optimism and Hope

Something Borrowed: Happiness shared from happily married couple

Something Blue: Fidelity, Love, and Purity

A Lucky Sixpence In The Shoe: Ensure a life of fortune. The sixpence first became known as a lucky coin when introduced by Edward VI of England in 1551 and later became part of bridal wedding tradition in the Victorian era.

Other traditions include carrying small bags with a bit of bread and cloth and wood and coin to protect against shortages of food, clothing, shelter, and money. A lump of sugar to bring sweetness all the married life may also be included.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WEDDING KISS

No ceremony is complete without the kiss. In fact, there was a time when an engagement would be null and void without one. Dating back from early Roman times, the kiss represented a legal bond that sealed all contracts. If one of the engaged pair died before the wedding, the other could keep the gifts only if they had already kissed. The wedding kiss is no longer a required part of the wedding ceremony.

Adrian Downey CMC.JP – NSW Celebrant

The wedding kiss is a symbol of the newlywed's faith and love, respect and obedience to mutual benefits. It grew out of the feudal practice of kissing the lord's ring.

Another story goes, the priest first kissed the groom after the ceremony. Then the groom kissed the bride, the priest kissed his assistants, and his assistants kissed the guests. No longer is the tradition carried this far.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BRIDE'S HANDKERCHIEF

Early farmers thought a bride's wedding tears were lucky and brought them rain for their crops. Later on in history, a crying bride meant she would never shed another tear about her marriage.

THE ORIGIN OF THE REHEARSAL DINNER

Parties were held on the wedding eve to chase away the evil spirits. The more noise the better.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WEDDING RECEPTION

The fact is that marriage feasts have been in existence nearly as long as marriage ceremonies. The early Greeks held a splendid wedding feast for every couple. And it was a very special occasion indeed because although women were not usually included in other Greek banquets, they were invited to wedding feasts.

THE ORIGIN OF SERVING GOOSE AT A WEDDING FEAST

According to folklore, goose was served at weddings because the gander, always faithful to his original mate, became the symbol of marriage and fidelity. By serving goose, it was believed that the main dish would symbolise things hoped for and dreamed for in the marriage.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WEDDING TOAST

What about the origin of "toasting"? As drink goes, wine has always been central to the wedding, even mentioned in the Bible. The first recorded toast was given at a Saxony feast in 450A.D. by a woman who became a bride herself before the end of the evening.

British King Vortigern was so moved by the sentiment: a simple "Lord King, be of health," offered by Rowena, daughter of the Saxony leader Hengist, that he proceeded to make passionate love to her. Intoxicated by the drink, possibly love, and definitely greed, he then bargained with Hengist for her hand. A deal was arranged whereby Hengist received the province of Kent in exchange for her hand. Vortigern and Rowena were married that same evening. From that time forth, "to life, to health, to love," has been a part of the toasting tradition, as glass touches glass and a chorus of clinks heralds a festive time for all.

Once it literally involved scorched bread. In the days when wine was regularly decanted, it left much more sediment than our modern bottles do. So the French cleverly placed a piece of toast in the bottom of the cup to absorb the dregs.

A competent toaster drank everything to get to the toast at the bottom because decorum dictated that one drain the glass.

So good wishes were often accompanied with the dictum, "Bottoms up!" Today the good wishes remain but happily the actual soggy toast has disappeared. And, clinking of glasses after a toast scares away the devil who is repelled by the noise.

THE ORIGIN OF SUGARED ALMONDS

In many cultures, almonds symbolise wishes for a happy and fertile marriage. The candy-covered nuts were often in elaborately decorated small boxes and containers, looking for all the world like little gems. Wedding Favours are given, to share joy of day with guests, dating back to Elizabethan times

THE ORIGIN OF DANCING AND GAMES

Ancient wedding dances were communal and symbolic of life giving and beginnings. The first dance of the bride and groom leading to their dancing with the guests was to give them strength from the community before they retired to the bedchamber.

THE ORIGIN OF DECORATING THE CAR

Traditionally, the guests escorted the couple to the bedchamber and tucked them into bed reminding them of their responsibility to the community to create a family.

Old Shoes: In India, when a couple were honeymooning in a house, the bride's red slippers were thrown across the peaked roof as a discreet reminder that visitors were not especially welcome. Our custom of throwing old shoes after the departing newlyweds stems from this ancient sign language. Old shoes tied to the honeymooner's car were once considered symbols of authority and possession. The bride's father would contribute one of the bride's shoes to the groom, thus symbolising the transference of authority over to the husband.

Tin Cans: To protect the couple from evil spirits while they travelled.

THE ORIGIN OF THROWING RICE

It is thought to have come from the Orient, where rice is a household symbol that signifies a full pantry. Thus, wedding guests through the ages have thrown rice to demonstrate their wishes for the prosperity of the new bride and groom.

It was also believed that to shower the couple with grain was to wish upon them a 'fruitful' union. It was believed that the fertility of the seeds would be transferred to the couple on whom they fell. While nearly all cultures have showered the wedding couple with symbolic food to ensure fertility, for many years it was rice that was used in America. Today, however, this sport is considered dangerous as someone could slip and fall when walking on the grains. Environmentalists say that rice can harm birds, being hard for them to digest. However, there is also biodegradable rice now on the market, making it possible to again use rice.

As an alternative you use birdseed, potpourri, confetti, or bubbles. Tie the birdseed into the rounds of net. Coordinate the ribbon used to tie the packets with your colour scheme. Or, packages of confetti can be passed out. For a different effect, non-staining bubble soap is available and the small bottles can be personalised with the couple's names. What a pretty sight it is to walk beneath a canopy of bubbles on camera a beautiful sight.

THE ORIGIN OF CARRYING THE BRIDE ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

The Romans believed that the threshold was the sacred place of their goddess Vesta and that if the new husband did not carry his bride feet-first into their new home, and the bride stumbled when entering the newlywed's home for the first time, it would bring bad luck and harm to their marriage and the couple would risk Vesta's displeasure, so carrying the bride across the threshold would prevent this from happening. And even today in some parts of India, the fear of evil spirits is so great that the groom himself is carried over the threshold before he turns and lifts his bride across after him!

THE ORIGIN OF THE WEDDING CAKE

The tradition of the wedding cake has ancient roots. The Roman wedding ceremony included a simple cake made from salt, water, and wheat flour. The cake culture may also be connected to the fertility rituals of many cultures. One custom, similar to that of throwing confetti, involved showering the bride with many small cakes after the wedding. Sometimes the cakes were even broken over the bride's head.

In Shakespeare's time, sheaves of wheat were carried in the wedding procession and sometimes the bride wore weathers in her veil because this graceful grain is a symbol of fertility. In a later era, the wheat was ground to flour and little hearth-baked cakes were broken and eaten by the bride and groom. Gradually these loaves became more elaborate. The bridesmaids carried them to the church to be blessed, which led to the belief that the very crumbs under one's pillow would induce dreams of romance.

At Elizabethan weddings, the bride and groom would kiss over a stack of small sweet buns. A 17th century French chef frosted the little cakes with white sugar to hold them together. White wedding cakes appeared in the United States around the civil war, replacing the British dark fruitcake.

Elaborately decorated wedding cakes date from Victorian times. One customs in England involved throwing a plate holding a piece of cake out the window as the bride entered her father's home after the wedding. If the plate remained unbroken on landing, the bride was destined to be unhappy or wretched. If the plate broke and it usually did she was sure to be happy. England also has the tradition of placing a ring in the wedding cake. The guests were invited to cut themselves slices of cake. The one who found the ring was said to be ensured happiness for a year.

The bride and groom feed each other a taste of cake to symbolise the sharing of life's bounty. A small bit of icing on his face foretells a "rich and sweet life"; his face smeared with icing, "trouble"; and if a child under five snitches frosting, their first born will be the same sex as the child.

BREAKING THE CAKE OVER THE BRIDE'S HEAD

An old tradition that isn't practiced today, breaking the cake over the bride's head has its origins in the roman empire. The groom would eat part of a loaf of barley bread baked for the occasion and break the rest over the head of the bride. It is believed that this symbolised the breaking of the hymen and the dominance of the groom over the bride. As time wore on and wedding cakes evolved into a more modern form of a cake, it became impossible, much to the relief of many brides, to properly "break" the cake over the bride's head. There have been reports of breaking an oatcake or other breakable cakes over the bride in Scotland in the 19th century.

In North Scotland, friends of the bride would place a napkin over her head and a basket of bread is poured over her head. There is no easy explanation for the evolution of this tradition, as the principal symbols of the tradition, the groom and the actual process of breaking, have been done away with.

COLOUR

When asked about the colour of a wedding cake, most people would answer white. The white colour of the icing on a wedding cake has come to symbolise purity and virginal attributes. This notion was first put forward in Victorian times. Before then, though most wedding cakes were white because of a more practical reason. At the time, ingredients for the wedding cake were much harder to acquire, especially for the icing. White icing meant that only the finest refined sugar was used, and so the whiter the cake, the more affluent the families involved were perceived!

Another reason that the whiteness of the cake was considered pure was the association of the cake with the bride. Originally, wedding cakes were called bride cakes. This not only emphasised the bride as the main focal point of the wedding, but also created a link between the bride and the cake. In fact, even today, the link is being reinforced. Many couples have requested wedding cakes be made to match their colour with the wedding dress!

CUTTING THE CAKE

Perhaps the most well-known tradition associated with wedding cakes is the joint task of cutting the cake. Here the first piece is cut by the bride with feigned assistance from the groom. It has come to symbolise the first task in the couple's life together and is a key image for the wedding photographer to capture. Originally, it was the sole duty of the bride to cut the cake for sharing by the guests. As cakes became grander, the task became quite formidable, particularly in the early multi-tiered cakes where the icing had to be strong and rigid enough to support the upper tiers. It became a joint task more out of necessity than symbolism.

Immediately after the cutting, the bride and groom feed each other the first slice. This action symbolises the commitment to provide for each other that the bride and groom have undertaken. However, in most American weddings, this task has the appearance of a traditional slapstick pie-fight.

GIVING PIECES OF CAKE AS GIFTS

The idea of presenting pieces of cake as gifts for guests was started as far back as the roman empire, but it is still carried on today. After the tradition of breaking the bread over the bride's head, the guest would grab for the crumbs that fell to the ground as catalysts for fertility. The idea of sleeping with a piece of cake underneath your pillow was chronicled as early as the 17th century and is the main reason behind giving cake as a gift today. It is said that you will dream of your future husband if you sleep with a piece of wedding cake underneath your pillow. A twist on this tradition in the late 18th century has the bride handing out tiny crumbs of cake that were passed through her ring for people to place underneath their pillows. This was stopped after ceremonial rules frowned on the bride removing her ring after the service.

THE ORIGIN OF TAKING EACH OTHER'S RIGHT HAND

The open right hand is a symbol of strength, resource and purpose. The coming together of both right hands is a symbol that both the bride and the groom can depend on each other and the resources that each brings to the marriage. It also represents the merger of their lives together into one.

GROOMCAKE

Another tradition that was more prevalent in early American ceremonies is the groomcake. Usually a dark cake to contrast the wedding cake, it was a second cake that was present at the reception as well. The reason for this second cake is not commonly known. There are claims that the groomcake was to be served to the bridesmaids by the groom with a glass of wine. Another claim states that the groomcake is to be saved and shared with friends after the honeymoon. This tradition is not widely recognised in most ceremonies, but there are still some observances of this in the southern half of the United States.

SAVING THE TOP TIER

With multi-tier cakes, most couples decide that they would like to save the top tier for a later time. The process involves freezing the cake for consumption as much as a year after the ceremony. This tradition has its roots in the late 19th century when grand cakes were baked for the occasion of the christening of a child. It was expected that the a christening would occur soon after the wedding ceremony, so the two ceremonies were often linked, as were the cakes. With the increasing complexity of the wedding cake, however, the christening cake soon became a paltry partner for the wedding cake. When three tier cakes became popular, the top tier was often left over after the reception. A christening provided a good reason for disposing them. People could then rationalise the need for three tiers, the bottom tier for the reception, the middle tier for distributing and the top for the christening. As time wore on, the wedding became less and less associated with procreation. So the reason for saving the top tier has expanded. Whatever the reason, when the top tier is finally consumed, it serves as a reminder of the happy occasion for the couple.

SEPARATING THE TIERS

The first wedding cakes were very simple compared to today's multi-tiered creations. The first multi-tiered cakes were made for royal weddings in England, with the first one not even having "true" upper tiers (they were made of spun sugar rather than actual cake). As these upper tiers evolved into real cakes, the problem of preventing the upper layers from sinking into the lower layers was prevalent. The idea of using pillars to decorate a cake was present before the multi-tiered cakes appeared, so it was natural for bakers to regard this as a way to support the upper tiers. To prevent the pillars from sinking into the bottom tier, icing was hardened to support the pillars.

THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILIES SITTING ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE CHURCH

Fathers would sometimes offer their daughters as peace offerings to warring tribes. Because of the hostility, the families were placed on opposite sides of the church so the ceremony could go on without bloodshed. The ceremony united the two warring factions into on family, and danger of war was resolved.

