

A Secular Wedding Ceremony (With A Buddhist Reading)

At the front of the ceremony space is a small cloth-covered table. On it are two glasses, a bottle of beer in an ice bucket, and a cloth. Also on the table are ceremony Reading Cards.

The Groom and his Groomsmen come from the side and meet Beth at the front of the space. This signals the start of the processional of the Bride's party.

The Processional

[The Bride's attendants walk in to the tune of "Sea of Love."]

The Bridesmaids
The Flower Girl

[The Bride enters to "Trumpet Voluntary" played by a bagpiper attired in full Scots regalia.]

The Bride, escorted by her father.

A Reading from The Buddha's Sermon at Rajagaha, Verses 19-22

[Beth signals the Reader to come to the microphone.]

READER:

Do not deceive,
do not despise each other anywhere.
Do not be angry
nor bear secret resentments;
for as a mother will risk her life
and watches over her child,
so boundless be your love to all,
so tender, kind and mild.

Cherish good will right and left,
early and late,
and without hindrance,
without stint,
be free of hate and envy,
while standing and walking and sitting down,
what ever you have in mind,
the rule of life that is always best
is to be loving-kind.

[Beth thanks the Reader, who takes her seat.]

Welcome and Gathering Words

Officiant:

Good afternoon and welcome to the ceremony that will unite Bride and Groom in marriage. I am Beth Palubinsky, a Life-Cycle Celebrant® and interfaith minister, and I've had the privilege and great fun of working with Bride and Groom to create their ceremony.

Before we begin, may I ask you to silence your cell phones and devices? Thank you.

Bride's aunt just read for us from a sermon the Buddha gave at the sacred city of Rajagaha, in the Indian state of Bihar, sometime late in the 6th century BC. Be honest, open, tender, kind and loving, he says -- wise counsel for a bride and groom. But Bride and Groom chose the reading also because they believe this is a good lesson for all of us: whether we're standing, sitting, walking, whatever we have in mind, we should be "loving-kind." And they hope we'll all hold those words close to our hearts, not just today but always.

Honoring Bride's Parents and Groom's Aunt and Uncle

Officiant:

Before we do anything, Bride and Groom want to acknowledge her parents, and her stepmother and his aunt and uncle.

Mother, Father, Stepmother, Aunt and Uncle, Groom and Bride feel profound gratitude for all the love and care you showed in raising them. The unconditional gifts of love and support that you have unstintingly given have inspired them to become who they are today, and they thank you, from the bottom of their hearts, for guiding them to this celebration of love. Without you, this day would not be possible.

The Love Story of Bride and Groom

Officiant:

You may have read about Bride and Groom's marriage proposal on their very cool wedding website. I'll remind you of a bit of it but first, let's share some of the love story behind that magical night on a Caribbean beach.

They met at an Ethiopian restaurant in the city. They'd gone there to hear a blues band, but they connected so quickly and talked so easily for so many hours that the music seemed to take a back stage. Successive days and evenings together were like that first date – music, good food, and lots and lots of talking.

I asked them when they fell in love and how they knew they were in love. Bride wrote to me, "Groom's answer will certainly be different from mine," but in fact it wasn't very different at all. No "Eureka!" moment, no explosion of fireworks, no earthquake. Instead, each came to know that, somewhere along the way, they had not exactly *fallen* in love but had *become* in love. Their timelines might have been different but not their feelings.

And there's a lot each loves about the other. For Groom, it's Bride's exuberant personality and her willingness to try new things – even things that scare her. He admires the way she makes friends and how generously she gives them her time and care. Though I myself have only known Bride to be the very picture of restraint and decorum, Groom swore to me that she has a huge sense of humor and that, when she's on a roll, she's something to watch.

For Bride, it's Groom's kindness and steadfastness; from the beginning he has been gentle and thoughtful. She loves how he goes all in when he's interested in something: very little sits on his back burner. And he makes her laugh. He'll dance with her anywhere – in the produce aisle or on the sidewalk. She wrote to me, "Groom does not operate at the level of silliness that I do at all times, so when he is in a silly mood, the laughs don't stop."

Or the love. They write notes to each other. They start and end each day with a deep embrace and kiss – not an obligatory peck but a real kiss that comes, as she expressed it, "from a place of genuine joy and appreciation that we can continue to co-exist."

Now, back to the proposal. They took a trip to the Caribbean and Groom planned to propose there, asking this most important question of his life early in the trip so they could spend the rest of the week celebrating. But things kept getting in the way – an excursion to a secret waterfall with Bride's cousins along for the fun; Bride's sudden decision that they head to the town's only American bar to watch an NFL game on TV; and someone's unexpected allergic reaction to sunblock. Groom carried the antique ring in his pocket for three full days waiting for just the right time and place.

Then finally, at the end of a lovely day, alone as they watched the sun set over the sea, Groom said, "I have something for you" and took the ring from his pocket. And Bride, ever so eloquent, said, "Seriously, dude?"

Seriously, indeed! And now, here we all are to help them step off onto the next phase of their journey. They're already a team, their lives increasingly intertwined. And wherever the road takes them, they'll have a grand time getting there.

The Declaration of Intent

Officiant:

Bride and Groom, someone once said that deciding to marry is like following a magnificent hunch. This person is someone you love, and after years together you know a lot about each other, but you'll come to know more in the time ahead. The companionship you'll share from this night on is the hallmark of marriage, its natural state, and its richest and most valuable gift. The contract of marriage that underpins that companionship is captured, in its essence, in the vows you'll exchange in a minute.

That contract is most solemn and must be entered into thoughtfully and seriously, with a deep awareness of its obligations and responsibilities. So, before you say your vows, I'll ask you to declare your intent to be bound by them.

Groom, do you take Bride to be your wife, to live with her in marriage, to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, as long as you both shall live?

Groom:

I do.

Officiant:

Bride, do you take Groom to be your husband, to live with him in marriage, to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, for as long as you both shall live?

Bride:

I do.

The Exchange of Vows

Officiant:

Then, mindful of the declarations you've made, and knowing that you'll be held to account for them, now you'll say the marriage vows you've written.

[Bride hands her flowers to Maid of Honor.]

[Beth explains that the vows have two parts – the words Bride and Groom wrote to say to each other and a reading they will do called “A Blessing for the Journey,” written by a Buddhist teacher, Sensei Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Beth steps back, gently guides Bride and Groom to face each other at the microphone, hands Vows reading cards to them.]

Bride:

Groom, over the past several years,
I have become increasingly aware of the fragility of life
and the impermanence of our existence.
This realization has inspired a deep appreciation for every moment
and a drive to find ways to make my own time on this little planet
just a little more enjoyable.

I've spent just over 20% of my life sharing moments with you.
It is you who has filled each and every day
with an increasing level of joy and peace.
It is you who has inspired me to be the best version of myself
that I could possibly be.
It is with you that I find silver lining in any unfortunate or boring situation.
It is you whom I wish to kiss goodbye every morning
and hug hello every night.

You have enriched my life in so many ways
and for that I will always show gratitude.

Groom:

Bride, there are days that change everything.
Such days will come along,
and all the ones after
are suddenly different than all the ones before.
Often such a day isn't noticed until well after it's over.

Way back at the beginning of the year we met, I had a really good day,
spent with a girl I had just met who seemed pretty awesome.
It's only now that I look back on it,
that I realize that it was much more than just a really good day.
The sky has looked brighter ever since, the grass greener.
Only now do I see that day for what it was.

Today is another such day.
The only difference is that now,
I can see it for what it is while it is here.
I can see how we will grow together,
how we will become more connected,
how our love will reach new heights.
And it makes me very happy,
and I'm glad that we get to celebrate this wonderful day.
I can't wait to find out how tomorrow will be different from yesterday,
because I get to find out with you.

[Beth hands the "Blessing" reading cards to them.]

Bride:

Let us vow to bear witness to the wholeness of life,
realizing the completeness of each and every thing.

Groom:

Embracing our differences,
I shall know myself as you,
and you as myself.

Bride and Groom Together:

May we serve each other
for all our days,
here, there, and everywhere.

Groom:

Let us vow to open ourselves to the abundance of life.

Bride:

Freely giving and receiving, I shall care for you,
for the trees and stars,
as treasures of my very own.

Bride and Groom Together:

May we be grateful
for all our days,
here, there, and everywhere.

Bride:

Let us vow to forgive all hurt,
caused by ourselves and others,
and to never condone hurtful ways.

Groom:

Being responsible for my actions,
I shall free myself and you.

Bride and Groom Together:

May we be kind
for all our days,
here, there, and everywhere.

Groom:

Let us vow to remember that all that appears will disappear.
In the midst of uncertainty,
I shall sow love.

Bride:

Here, now, I call to you:
Let us together live
The Great Peace that we are.

Bride and Groom Together:

May we give no fear
for all our days,

here, there, and everywhere.

The Exchange of Wedding Rings

Officiant:

[Officiant explains that Bride and Groom will first exchange rings and then exchange ring vows. She asks the Best Man for Bride's ring and gives it to Groom, who places it on her finger. Then she asks Best Man for Groom's ring and give it to Bride, who places it on Groom's finger. She hands the Vows reading cards to Bride and Groom and steps back as they face each other at the microphone.]

Groom:

Bride, these rings are just bits of gold.
They are polished, they are pretty, but those things aren't important.
They will spend some time on our fingers,
and they will spend some time off.
One day we might lose them and it won't matter.

Bride:

Groom, it won't matter
because these rings are not the important thing
that we give each other today.
What we give each other that is important
is our undying love,
our utter devotion,
our absolute trust
and total commitment.

These things cannot be taken off, and they cannot be lost.
They will be with us always.

Groom:

These things cannot be taken off, and they cannot be lost.
They will be with us always.

The Beer Ritual

Officiant:

[The beer has been opened before the ceremony.]

It's no secret that Groom is a beer aficionado, and that Bride has become one, too. So it's fitting that we use beer in a ritual in their wedding, and what a special beer they chose!

Near Brussels, in a small city named Beersel, is the Drei Fontainen – Three Fountains – brewery, known for its outstanding *gueuze* lambics. Lambics are beers fermented by wild yeast that lives

in the air of some old breweries and that give a lambic its distinctive flavor – sour, dry, cidery.

We have a bottle of gueuze here, bottled by Drei Fonteynen in the year that Bride and Groom met and began their courtship. It's also called a *doesjel*, which means “sleeper” in Flemish, but that's not an insult to the beer in the bottle. Because, though a gueuze is a very tart, sour beer, especially when it is young, its funky flavor is oddly addictive. And as time passes, like a good marriage it will get better and better, becoming smooth and complex at the same time, and satisfying no matter what comes.

[Officiant turns to the Bride and Groom.]

You're going to share sips of this special beer, with help from your Best Man and Maid of Honor.

[Officiant asks the Maid of Honor and Best Man to pour the beer into the glasses and hand them to Bride and Groom, who take sips, linking their arms.]

As you've shared the beer, so you should share your lives, all its joys and happinesses, every sorrow and sadness. And always be ready to raise a beer in toast and celebration.

A Final Reading

Officiant:

Bride and Groom, I'll close with some words for you, borrowed from Robert Fulghum.

“You have known each other
from the first glance of acquaintance
to this point of commitment.
At some point, you decided to marry.
From that moment of yes,
to this moment of yes, indeed,
you have been making commitments in an informal way.

“All of those conversations that were held in a car,
or over a meal,
or during long walks –
all those conversations that began with,
'When we're married',
and continued with 'I will'
and 'you will'
and 'we will' –
all those late night talks
that included 'someday'
and 'somehow' and 'maybe' –
and all those promises that are unspoken matters of the heart.

'All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding.

‘The symbolic vows that you have made
are a way of saying to one another,
‘You know all those things that we’ve promised,
and hoped, and dreamed –
well, I meant it all, every word.’

‘Look at one another and remember this moment in time.
Before this moment you have been many things to one another –
acquaintance, friend, companion,
lover, dancing partner, even teacher,
for you have learned much from one another these past few years.
Now you’re stepping across a threshold of life,
and things between you will never quite be the same.

‘For after today you shall say to the world –
This is my husband. This is my wife.’

The Pronouncement of Marriage

Officiant:

And so with the authority vested in me by the State, and with great joy, I pronounce that you are
Husband and Wife. Groom, you may kiss the bride.

The Kiss (well, actually, the Dip-and Kiss)!

[The Wedding Party recesses to the tune “Highland Laddie,” played by the bagpiper.]

The Recessional

Bride and Groom
The Attendants in pairs
The Parents and Aunt and Uncle
Beth

Here the ceremony ends and the celebration begins!

By Beth Z. Palubinsky, Life-Cycle Celebrant®, Officiant