



Rev. Ann Fuller

Rituals of Conclusion

I'm teasing a bit when I tell couples if they want to jump something, break something, throw something or release something they should do it at the end. There is some truth to it though. These rituals are best done at the end of a wedding ceremony and some of them specifically bring the ceremony to a close in the way they are written. They are a great way to transition from the solemnity of the vows to the celebratory atmosphere of a reception.

- Jumping the Broom
- Breaking of the Glass
- Wish Upon A Shell
- Butterfly Release
- Dove (White Bird) Release

Jumping the Broom

This ritual is found in many different cultures, but is particularly associated with European and African heritages. The debate as to where jumping the broom originated rages on and will likely never come to an end. The Romani Gypsies in Wales and England are often cited as the source of the custom as is West Africa, although there isn't any documented evidence of its use in West and Central African weddings. Many Americans assume the custom is popular among African Americans because of its connection to traditions during the era of slavery, but this isn't necessarily the case. It fell out of favor because of its association with the horrors of slavery and then made a comeback in the 1970s following the publication of Alex Haley's novel, Roots.

Some couples conclude their ceremony with this ritual while others do it at the reception. The custom is a symbolic jumping over the threshold of a doorway from a carefree single life into the responsibilities of domestic life and not necessarily a leap of faith into the future. There is no right way or wrong way to do this ritual and the officiant and couple are certainly free to word the ceremony to capture the symbolism they find most meaningful.

Here is a version I wrote for a couple as a concluding ritual in their wedding ceremony. After they kissed, I had the maid of honor hand the bouquet back to the bride, the couple linked arms and turned to face their guests.

Officiant: *(Bride and Groom) have just pledged themselves to one another recognizing their union comes with responsibilities to be diligent and responsible householders. They understand a marriage is not just a uniting of two hearts and souls as one, but the creation of a new family with obligations and responsibilities to one another, their families and the community.*



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At this time I would like to invite (Name) and (Name) to come forward to represent (Bride and Groom's) families. Will you each please hold one end of this broom as a gesture of support for your children's marriage? By serving as anchors, these two families provide ((Bride and Groom) with the security of unconditional love and a source of tradition, heritage and history.

The broom is an instrument of labor reminding us a successful marriage entails hard work as well as effortless passion. As a broom sweeps away all that is unwanted in our homes, may you endeavor to sweep away any strife threatening your union. This broom represents the strength, love, togetherness, loyalty and respect essential for a successful marriage.

<Family representatives place the broom on the ground in front of the couple.>

(Bride) and (Groom) may this broom always remind you of your new life and commitment to each other. Display it proudly in your home. Whenever you see it, may it be a joyous reminder of the way you felt today, your wedding day. May it inspire a sense of honor and respect for your family and a legacy you now share and create anew today. You may now leap into your new life as husband and wife.

<Bride and Groom jump the broom.>

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a joy and an honor to present to you for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. (Names)!

A decorative broom used for the occasion makes a lovely keepsake the couple can display in their home. Its presence will bring back memories of their wedding and how they felt that day.

Breaking of the Glass

This ritual is usually associated with Jewish weddings, but is also an Italian tradition. In some regions of Italy, the bride and groom shatter a vase or large glass together and the number of pieces are said to represent the number of happy years they will spend together. This is clearly a ritual to conclude a wedding ceremony.

A silk bag and a light bulb is a great way to achieve spectacular shatter with minimal clean up. The wording of this ritual varies depending upon the traditions and symbolism the bridal couple wish to convey.

Couples with a sense of humor have also included the line, “this is also the last time (Groom) gets to put his foot down” right before the groom breaks the glass.



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Wish Upon A Shell

This ritual is designed for beach weddings, but something similar can be done in other venues using site appropriate items. I adapted the ritual for a wedding in a botanical garden where the guests distributed pebbles and stones through the park as they exited the grounds.

At this time I invite you to hold close to your hearts the shells inscribed with ____ and ____'s names and wedding date. As you listen to the recessional music consider the gifts ____ and ____ bring to one another and the shared potential of their life together.

Make a wish, say a prayer, think a special thought or simply feel the love we celebrate this day. In a moment, ____ and ____ will lead us to the shoreline where I invite you to toss your shell into the ocean. All of our hopes and dreams will become one with all of creation which shall bring together the well wishes of all who have gathered here this day for such sharing magnifies a joy which knows no bounds.

Butterfly Release

I once had a couple release ladybugs instead of caterpillars, but the effect is just not the same and adapting the wording was a bit of a challenge to say the least. This ritual requires a little planning and preparation. It is not a do-it-yourself project. You will need to order the butterflies online and follow the instructions of the company providing them. Simply do a web search for butterfly release and weddings and you'll end up with tons of sites. It does have the potential for lovely photo opportunities, but considering they are living creatures this comes with no guarantee.

I have seen this ritual work beautifully and fail miserably. It can be written for the guests to release butterflies or for just the bride and groom to do so.

According to an old legend, for a wish to come true, you must first capture a butterfly and whisper to it your sincere and heartfelt wish. The butterfly symbolizes new beginnings, freedom and happiness. Take a moment to consider the gifts (Bride and Groom) bring to one another and the shared potential of their life together. Make a wish, say a prayer, think a special thought or simply feel the love we celebrate this day.

I invite you to now release your butterfly. As they escape to the light, may the promise of (Bride and Groom)'s tomorrows always be bright. Let them carry your hopes for what the future may bring and your love uplifted on these butterfly wings. May (Bride and Groom)'s marriage last as long as the offspring of these butterflies which shall endure in grace, beauty and liberty.



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Dove (White Bird) Release

I have had one couple do this at their wedding. It is very romantic and makes for a splendid photo opportunity. It is not available in all areas though. Dove release companies usually have a limited geographical range as the birds are not taken more than approximately 100-125 miles from their homes. Do a web search for white dove release and the name of the state within which you will be getting married to find a suitable company within range.

Doves have long symbolized what we consider today to be essential elements of a strong and healthy marriage. Love, devotion, and fidelity. Doves woo their mates and then mate for life. We witness them kiss and touch their partners gently. Partnership is demonstrated by the male selecting a site for the nest and bringing the building materials while the female approves the location and arranges the nest. The appearance of the white dove symbolizes purity and hope. A long-standing superstition says that if doves are seen on your wedding day, the bride and groom is assured of a home filled with happiness, love, fidelity and prosperity. As a gesture to seal their vows, _____ and _____ will now release these two pure white birds.

<couple releases birds>

They fly upwards and circle above us, then will fly home together as a pair. They symbolize _____ and _____ beginning their journey in life together. _____ and _____ our prayers, hopes and dreams go with you as you being a life together, may your union be long, rich, harmonious and rewarding. May your marriage capture all the wonderful qualities of the white dove.