



Rev. Ann Fuller

I always ask a prospective couple if there are any religious, ethnic or family traditions they would like to honor during their wedding. This is an example of a wedding that includes elements honoring an African heritage.

One of the most popular traditions within African American weddings is the *Jumping of the Broom*. Many people erroneously assume this ritual was invented by North American slaves when their masters refused to allow them to be married. It is in fact a tradition dating back to a time before the first Europeans arrived in West Africa.

Jumping the broom, a piece of cord or an imaginary line is a marriage ritual still practiced in some parts of West Africa. Of course it is only natural that enslaved Africans would affirm their cultural heritage by retaining this tradition in North America. The ritual is a lovely visual metaphor of taking a leap into a new life as husband and wife. It should always be performed in the presence of friends and family.

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Pouring of Libation

In many African cultures, ancestral spirits and respect for the wisdom of the elders are integral parts of life. The ritual pouring of a libation calls on the ancestors to join the assembled guests in witnessing this sacred occasion. Within this ritual, elders in the gathered families are honored for having passed on the lessons of their experience to the younger generation.

Minister: I invite our gathered guests to call out the names of ancestors who are dear to them, members of their families who have recently passed on. I also charge you as witnesses to remember that you are responsible for the two people coming together on this day to be married. By your very presence you have promised to bless, support and maintain this relationship.



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I now invite the two eldest members of (bride) and (groom's) families to be seated nearest the couple to remind them that their elders' wisdom is always close at hand.

<Eldest member of (bride) and (groom's) families are escorted to the aisle seats in the front row.>

We bring the living and the dead, the young and the old, together to witness and bless the joining of this man and this woman in holy matrimony.

<Minister pours libation as the following words are spoken.>

I pour a libation in the four directions
-- north, south, east and west --
the four gates that the spirits guard,
to open the way for our ancestors to attend
All praise to God
Praise to our ancestors and roots
Divinity gives its power for the roots of
the trees to spread its branches wide.
If man does not know his roots, then he does
not know the divine.
Let the spirit of divinity and our ancestors
bring us closer in unity.

Processional

Presentation of the Bride

Who brings this woman to her wedding this day? ~ Honored Escort(s): *On behalf of her family, I/we do.*

Opening Words

Dearly beloved, we come together this day to witness the joining of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. (Bride) and (Groom) have invited you here to witness their public pledge of eternal devotion because of their trust in your blessings and support. Our presence today is an affirmation of not only our love and regard for them as individuals, but our faith that their union is ordained by God and sustained by mankind.



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Reading

TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

By Maya Angelou

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

Affirmation of Marriage

(Bride) and (Groom), you have made the decision to proclaim your ultimate regard for one another publicly. Your love has grown to the point where it cannot be contained within two hearts, but must generate a larger circle of love in the holy estate of matrimony. Your decision is not taken lightly, but reverently. You have shared with me your desire to embrace both the joys and the trials that constitute a healthy marriage.

You have acknowledged that marriage consists of not only of a spoken pledge on this day, but a life-long commitment to companionship and utmost regard. Each of you now gazes upon the face of the person each holds most dear in this life. Hold the vision of this moment in your memory and trust that the face you look upon now will grow more beautiful with time, experience, wisdom and love.



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Marriage is a blessed gift we must believe we deserve. At times we may consider ourselves unworthy recipients or our spouse a grudging donor. This is natural given the ebb and flow of our energies and our sentiments. I urge you to periodically renew in private the vows you publicly exchange today. Allow these words to buttress your home against the storms of time and circumstance. Trust one another and trust yourselves as you continuously renew the consecration of your marriage. Your marriage is an exalted union that conveys a responsibility made joyous because of the love in your hearts. A sacred love that allows you to embrace as one while you continue to celebrate the unique individuals you are this day.

Exchange of Vows

In Turn: (Bride / Groom – in turn) please look into (Bride's / Groom's) eyes as you repeat after me.

*I, (Bride / Groom) pledge to you,
my undying love and dedication.
I have found in you the woman/man
I wish to spend the rest of my life with.
You are the one person who, with your love,
your laughter, caring, and thoughtfulness,
attention, positive outlook, and devotion to me,
has bestowed the hope of a future
filled with happiness and sharing
You have given me the gift of certainty
that with you by my side
life will be full of love,
caring, purpose, and joy.
I take you _____ as my wife/husband
and give to you all that is within my heart,
my body, and my soul, to give
as long as I shall live.*

Exchange of Rings

May I have the rings please?

We call for blessings upon these rings, both as symbols of love and union between (bride) and (groom), and as tokens of their hopes and dreams fulfilled in their commitment to each other this day and every day for the remainder of their lives. We ask that these rings hold and carry these dreams, remind them of the endless circle of their union to each other, and be a beautiful reflection of their sacred vows to each other, now and always.



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In Turn: (Bride / Groom) please look into _____'s eyes repeating after me as you place the ring upon his/her left hand.

*I give you this ring
as a symbol of my love.
As it encircles your finger,
may it remind you always
that you are surrounded by my enduring love.*

Sharing of the Cup

This ritual utilizes the same cup and beverage that was used at the beginning of the ceremony to call the ancestors.

(Bride) and (Groom), this goblet of wine (or other beverage) symbolizes the cup of life. As you each drink from the same cup we are reminded that you have committed to share all that your future may hold. Your union multiplies the sweetness life brings you and any bitterness in life is made less bitter because your sharing divides it.

<Bride and groom each drink from the goblet.>

Marriage Blessing

May the love of God be above you to overshadow you, beneath you to uphold you, before you to guide you, behind you to protect you, close beside you and within you to make you able for all things, and to reward your faithfulness with the joy and peace which the world cannot give -- neither can it take away. Be your union a source of pride for your ancestors and a source of inspiration for your descendants. Amen

Declaration of Marriage

(Bride) and (Groom), you have publicly expressed your intent to live together in the holy estate of matrimony. You have committed your lives to one another symbolized by the giving and exchanging of rings. With great joy as a duly ordained minister in the state of Florida, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride.



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Jumping the Broom

The broom can be a simple utility broom purchased at a local discount store or an elaborately decorated prop purchased from a bridal shop or on-line wedding retailer. I appreciate the creativity exhibited when a bride and groom decorate a broom themselves utilizing supplies from a local craft shop or items from their childhood and current homes.

I now ask _____ and _____ 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 that a successful marriage entails hard work as well as effortless passion. As a broom sweeps away that which is unwanted in our homes, may you endeavor to sweep away any strife that threatens your union. This broom will represent the strength, love, togetherness, loyalty and respect essential for a successful marriage.

(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 ancestors and their legacy.

_____ and _____, please place the broom upon the ground.

(Bride and Groom), you may now leap into your new life as husband and wife!

<Bride and Groom jump the broom.>

Introduction of the Couple

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honor to present to you for the first time, Mr. & Mrs.

_____.