

Celtic Handfasting 2009

Bride comes down the aisle, preceded by her attendants. Bridegroom is waiting at the altar with his attendants beside him.

Officiant (O): ``According to the ancient code of the Celts, and to our own laws of the land, neither man nor woman is property to bought, given or taken. And yet, the act of marriage is a contractual one, proposed and consummated by those who want to share a life together.

O: Have you both come here of your own free will, without coercion or false pretence?``

(Bride and Groom answer yes)

O: ``Do your families support you in your decision to marry?``

(Families stand and say yes)

O: ``If there is anyone here gathered who would have cause to disrupt this ceremony, speak now or forever hold your peace.``

O: ``Then we can proceed.``

``Marriage is a joining of two separate lives- lives that are the culmination of a lifetime of love and caring, beginning at birth. So to start, I will ask you both to offer these roses to the each other`s mother, as a means of honouring the life that was given, and thanks for bringing in to the world the person you are about to marry.``

(Bride and Bridegroom present mothers-in-law with roses)

O: ``Marriage in the Celtic tradition is the union of equals, for none should have power over the other in order for peace to prevail in the home.``

``Who stands for the Bride?``

(Attendants step forward)

``What does (bride) bring to this union?``

(Attendants speak words of praise)

Officiant to Groom`s party: ``Does this satisfy you that (bride) will make a fitting partner for (groom)?``

Groom`s Attendants: ``No. We would test her first with three questions.``

(Attendant steps in front of groom, so bride cannot see him)

A: ``

A: ``

A: `` (Questions are asked and answered one by one.)

Officiant to Groom: ``Are you satisfied with this woman`s answers?``

(Hopefully, groom says yes)

``And who stands for the Bridegroom?``

(Attendants step forward)

``What does (groom) bring to this union, to make him a match for (bride)?``

(Attendants speak words of praise)

Officiant to Bridal party: ``Does this satisfy you that (groom) will make a fitting partner for Stacey?``

Bride Attendants: ``No. We would test him first with three questions.``

(Attendant steps in front of (bride), so (groom) cannot see her)

A: ``

A: ``

A: ``

(Questions are asked and answered one by one.)

Officiant to Bride: ``Are you satisfied with this man`s answers?``

(Hopefully, (bride) says yes)

O: ``Then the union is balanced, and the match is a good one.``

“We gather today not only to witness the coming together of these two people’s lives, but also to give them the blessings and support they will need on their new journey as a couple. During this ceremony, a total of nine blessings are given, in the style of our Celtic ancestors. For the Celtic people, nine was a holy number, three sets of threes. It was a number that expressed wholeness, completeness, the end as well as the beginning of something. In joining yourselves to each other, you each become more whole, complemented by the strengths of your partner. In uniting yourselves today, you both finish one life, and begin another, hand in hand. As you start today on your new life together, you must know that it will not always be easy. The path of true love is fraught with surprises and challenges, and requires courage as well as faith in yourselves and each other. Yet, it is also a wonderful journey, and we will today ensure that you are taking your first steps on this new path with all the strength and blessings needed.”

“We will start first with the blessings of this world, a world full of richness and wonder. Even so, in this world, love such as this one is rare, and must be cherished and supported. Before such love, let the world bend and give of itself, like a gardener tending to a precious bloom.”

(First friend comes forward with bread and salt)

Friend: “So that you may never know hunger.”

(Second friend comes forward with a coin)

Friend: “So that you may never know want.”

(Third friend comes over with two acorns)

Friend: “So that you may always grow together in love and spirit, slow and strong as the oak.”

O: “Next, you will receive the blessing of family and tribe, who are gathered here for you today.

(The family will stand, and one sibling from each family will step forward to give the blessing)

Family member: ``Know that when you are joined together today, you bring together two families as well. There will be no division, no difference in the amount of love or support conferred to you, for the ties that bind you, bind us as well, as strong as bonds of blood. Whatever makes you happy, we will support. What you love, we will love. ``

(Optional: if there are children/step-children)

O: ``If I could ask (bride/groom`s) children to join their parent at the altar.``

(Children come to altar)

O: ``In marrying, (Bride and Groom), you become a family of your own.(Child/children), in the marriage of your parent and bride/groom, you gain a new extended family, a new set of grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as cousins. They will treat you as their own, and love you as though you are of their blood. ``

``Likewise, (Bride and Groom and child/ren), as a family you have the support of an entire tribe of people, your close friends and allies, who are assembled here today. Do not hesitate to turn to them for help, or to lean on them in times of trouble, for that is how they can show you their love. In marrying, you become so much richer, with the wealth of family and clan.``

(O holds up the quaig, filled with whiskey) ``This is the cup of kinship, filled with the blessings of peace. Let it be shared between the two families, to symbolize their coming together.``

(Bride and Groom) will bring quaig to both sets of parents and siblings.)

Now we will call upon the primal powers of fire and water, from which all the universe is created. By imbuing your rings with these powers, your oaths are made sacred.

Could I have the rings, please?

(Attendants bring rings)

Officiant holds the rings over a candle:

O: ``At the center of love there is a fire. Burn brightly, o fire, and bring warmth and life to the hearts and hearth of (Bride and Groom). Burn strong, o fire, and bring passion and delight to their union. Burn constantly, o fire, and bring longevity to their marriage and hope in times of darkness.``

Officiant holds the rings over the water:

O: ``At the center of love, there is a well of deep waters. Waters of life, flow within their marriage and renew their love for each other, over and over. Waters of love, flow within their marriage, and fill them with compassion and caring for each other, over and over. Waters of power, flow within their marriage and strengthen their faith in love and in each other, over and over.``

``Before you exchange rings and make your vows before the people gathered here, I would ask that you give me your hands, so that you may receive the blessing of the Sacred Tree.``

``Amongst the ancient Celts, the tree was the most sacred symbol. Like love, which stretches and connects two people together, the great tree stretches up to the sky, and grows down into the earth, connecting above and below, and all the parts of the universe can be found contained within it. For this reason, at the feet of great trees, the Celts would make their most important oaths, like the ones we will witness today.``

``Like the sprouting seed, may your love forever push through the darkness into the light.

Like the deep roots, may your love grow a foundation from which to draw continuous strength.

Like the branches stretching to the sky, may your love never find its limit.

Like the fruit that is brought forth each year, may your love forever be renewed.``

``Now, at the foot of the Sacred Tree, it is time to make your vows before all those here gathered, and exchange rings as a sign of your commitment to each other.``

``Groom, only you have the power to marry this woman, your best friend and partner, who stands beside you today. Do you wish to have (Bride) as your wife, knowing her as you do?``

Groom: ``I do.``

O: ``Then take your ring and place it on (Bride)`s finger, stating your oath to her.``

(Daniel makes his vow and places ring on Stacey`s finger)

O: ``Bride, only you have the power to marry this man, your best friend and partner, who stands beside you today. Do you wish to have (Groom) as your husband, knowing him as you do?``

Bride: ``I do.``

O: ``Then take your ring and place it on (groom)`s finger, stating your oath to him.``

(Bride makes her vow and places ring on groom`s finger)

O: ``Let your vows be sealed by a traditional blessing from Brigid, Goddess of the Hearth:

(In Gaelic)

Brigid, Shining One,

Bless their hearth

Bless their hearts

Protect and sustain them

Through all of their days.``

O: ``For the most ancient of bonds, it is only right that we perform the most ancient of traditions, handfasting. (Bride and Groom offer their hands, which are lightly bound by a green cord).

``In binding your hands, you come to understand what marriage truly means. When one moves, the other feels it. When one pulls, the other must push. While you both may continue to lead your own lives, each decision you make from this point on has a consequence on the other. This is the dance of marriage, giving when your partner needs to take, and taking when your partner needs to give. Always conscious of the impact of your actions on the other- that is the only way to remain standing together.

``Brought together by fate, and bound by love, your lives are now woven together and your souls are united. Raise your hands so all may see. What has been wrought here today, let none set asunder. So be it.``

(Bride and groom remove the cord themselves)

``It is time now for the final blessing, the ninth blessing, strongest of them all. This is the blessing of each other and of love itself, which you have carried from the moment of your meeting, and will carry until the end of your days together. ``

``Be thankful every day for the love given to you by your partner, for it is a most precious gift. Love is eternal and constant as the sea, which ebbs and flows, but is always there. When it ebbs, have faith and do not doubt its presence, even when it may seem far away. When the love flows strongly, revel in it, and let it spill over and touch the hearts of those around you. Do not be miserly with your love. Hold each other, but not too tightly. Take no notice of minor faults, but love each other completely for who you are. Trust each other, be courageous with each other, as only this kind of union allows you to be. Show compassion and caring in times of frustration, and honour your differences, for they are what make you stronger as a couple. Finally, do not live for each other, but with each other, and share the joys of life together. Grow together and all will be well, with the nine blessings to help you on your way.``

``At some point, your commitment to each other became irrevocable. This point may in fact be long past, or it may have only just occurred as you stated your vows, but it is my duty to utter it officially.``

``You are husband and wife.``

``Now seal it with a kiss.``

``As your first step in your journey as husband and wife, jump over the oak branch to symbolize the end of your old lives, and the beginning of your new life together.``

(To the congregation) ``Please stand, and offer your applause to the newlyweds!``