



wedding ceremony
april 29, 2017

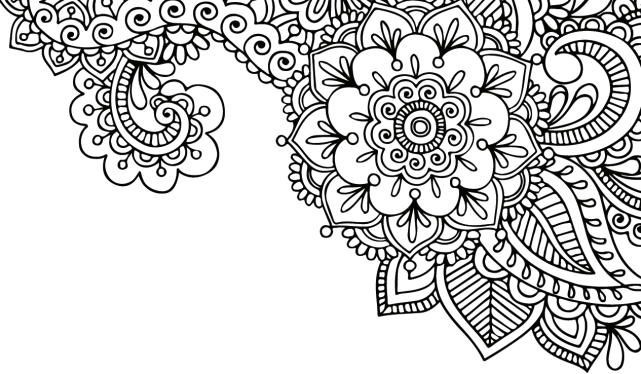
guided by
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Marriage is the sacred union of two people who seek to love unconditionally, live harmoniously and grow peacefully in a lasting partnership as they move through all stages of life. Today, in the presence of a loving community, Neeti & Alex will exchange the sacred vows of marriage to signify the harmonious merging of two souls, two faiths, and two families.

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion characterized by a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. It's roots share a deep regard for intellectual freedom and inclusive love. Similar to Jains, UU's are unified by their shared search for spiritual growth.

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion centered around non-violence and respect towards all living beings. The Jain wedding ceremony is a symbolic combination of rituals and traditions performed in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit word for marriage is *Vivaha*, meaning "what supports or carries."

This program will guide you through the different components of the ceremony, please follow along!



Navakar Mantra | Nine Prayers

The Navakar Mantra is the most significant mantra in Jainism. While reciting this Mantra, one bows down to *Arihantas* (souls who have reached the state of non-attachment towards worldly process), *Siddhas* (liberated souls), *Āchāryās* (heads of sadhus and sadhvis), *Upādhyāyas* (those who teach scriptures to sadhus and sadhvis), *Sādhus* and *Sādhvis* (monks and nuns who have voluntarily given up social, economical and family relationships). This mantra serves as a gesture of deep respect towards spiritually enlightened beings. It also acts as a reminder that a soul's ultimate goal is liberation from the tangible world, or *moksha*. This mantra will be recited many times during the ceremony and is provided with a translation here:

Namo Arihantanam: I bow down to Arihanta,

Namo Siddhanam: I bow down to Siddha,

Namo Ayariyanam: I bow down to Acharya,

Namo Uvajjhayanam: I bow down to Upadhyaya,

Namo Loe Savva-sahunam: I bow down to Sadhu and Sadhvi.

Eso Panch Namokaro: These five bowings downs,

Savva-pavappanasano: Destroy all the sins,

Manglananch Savvesim: Amongst all that is auspicious,

Padhamam Havei Mangalam: This Navkar Mantra is the foremost.

Jaan Aagman | Arrival of the Groom's Party

Alex, his family and close friends arrive at the wedding venue in a procession, received by Neeti's family. The *Navkar Mantra* is recited to mark the beginning of this auspicious occasion.

Varbedigu | Water Pitcher for Good Luck

Neeti's sister carries a pot full of water and greets the groom's party. In Hindu culture, water represents the essence of all living things and a young woman carrying water is considered good luck. Alex's mother appreciates her welcome by putting a tikka on her forehead and feeding a sweet to her. In return Alex's uncle gives a gift to Neeti's sister.



Ponkhna Ceremony | Seeking Good Thoughts



Neeti's mother performs the *Ponkhna* in which bad omens are dispelled before Alex enters the wedding area. Through her gestures, she welcomes Alex and teases him before she allows him to marry her daughter. Assuming Alex smiles in his reply, he communicates he is confident in his wishes to marry Neeti. Alex then breaks an earthen pot filled with auspicious items symbolizing the various challenges he will face during marriage. The priest asks Alex to step on the pot and crush it as a sign of the groom's determination to overcome obstacles. Alex is then led to the *Mandap* by his sister Rebecca carrying metal pots containing lentils and coins to help Alex stay focused on the wedding. The pots are covered with a green cloth signifying good luck and prosperity.

Mangalacharan | Auspicious Blessings

The wedding ceremony begins with the *Navkar Mantra* and a prayer to Shree Mahavir Swami, a Jain *Arihanta*, also known as a *tirthankara*. Blessings for Neeti, Alex and all of the guests from Mahavir Swami are requested. An *Antarpat* (a curtain) is held in front of Alex to keep him from seeing Neeti before she enters the *Mandap*.

Kanya Aagman | Arrival of the Bride

The priest calls for Neeti to enter. She is escorted by her siblings and maternal uncles to ensure she is protected as she enters.

Mangalastak | Eight-fold Prayers

The priest recites *Mangalastak* (eight-fold prayers) to invite the divine to witness the marriage and to protect the bride and groom. The couple's first meeting is marked by the exchange of garlands that symbolize their acceptance and love for each other. Neeti garlands Alex first. By doing so, she declares that she has chosen the groom of her own free will. Alex returns the compliment by offering a garland as a welcome to a new life.

Mangal Tilak | Forehead Mark

The priest places a *kanku* (sandalwood mark) on the foreheads of Neeti, Alex, Neeti's parents and on himself. A *Rakshapotli* (sacred red thread specially prepared and blessed prior to the wedding day) is tied around the wrists of Neeti, Alex, and their parents as an offering of peaceful wishes.



Abhisheka | Blessings from the Priest

The priest takes holy water in the pointed part of a betel leaf and anoints the heads of the bride and groom. This offering symbolizes peace and happiness through the calm flow of water. The prayer offered binds Neeti and Alex together in an eternal bond.

Kanya Daan | Entrusting the Bride to the Groom

Neeti's parents perform the ritual of entrusting their daughter to the care of the groom through a symbolic gesture of rice flowing from their hands through Neeti's hands and into Alex's hands. Neeti's parents ask Alex to treat their daughter as a loving and equal partner. Alex promises to love and respect Neeti throughout his life. Neeti's parents wrap the *varmala* (hand woven cord) around the couple to unite them and to protect them from evil influences.

Hasta Melap | Joining of the Hands

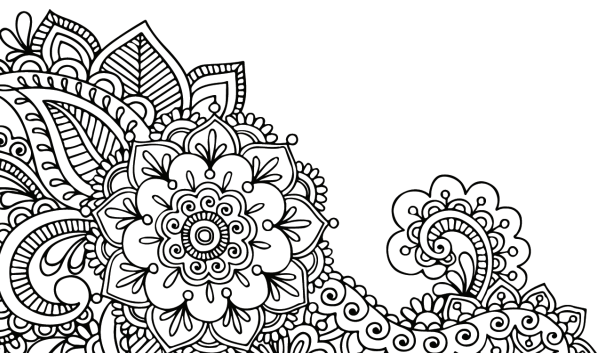
This ceremony is the union of the two palms, signifying that bride and groom are united as one and will live as one in body, mind, and spirit. Holding each other's hands, Neeti and Alex vow to walk hand in hand throughout their life. The couple is reminded to remember the divine, to be strong, and to look upon others with love, and compassion and sympathy.

Chhedabandhan | Tying of the Knot

Neeti's sister, Deepti, ties one end of the Alex's scarf to one corner of Neeti's sari to represent eternal togetherness. The cloth used is a symbol of purity and unity. While a single thread of raw cotton is easily torn, interwoven strands of cotton form a strong bond. Similarly, the abilities and virtues of the bride and groom are much stronger when combined rather than separated.

Mangalphera | Auspicious Four Rounds

Bound by the knot, Neeti and Alex will take four circles to represent the basic principles that will guide their daily activities and thought processes. Alex leads the first three rounds, signifying his contribution in helping each other attain *dharma* (trust, sincerity, honesty and discipline), *artha* (earning a livelihood by truthful and honest means), and *kaama* (happiness in family life). Neeti leads the last round signifying *moksha* (eternal bliss when one leaves all material thoughts, beliefs and attachments behind). Each circle is initiated when Neeti's brother fills the bride's palms with rice signifying the following blessings: good health, happiness, wealth, and prosperity. Neeti then offers the rice to the supreme souls.



Saptapadi | Seven Sacred Steps

It is said in Indian philosophy that if two people walk seven steps together, they will be lifelong friends. Neeti and Alex have not only decided to make seven promises to each other, but also to make public their choice to live together knowing that your presence makes them stronger. Alongside their promises, the couple acknowledges the seven guiding principles of Unitarian Universalism with their steps:

1. *The inherent worth and dignity of every person.*
2. *Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.*
3. *Acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth.*
4. *A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.*
5. *The right of all people to have a voice.*
6. *A community with peace, liberty and justice for all.*
7. *Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.*

Exchange of Rings & Mangalsutra

In addition to exchanging rings, Alex will place the *mangal sutra*, a sacred necklace made of black and gold beads, around Neeti's neck as a symbol of his love, integrity, and devotion towards her. The seven steps the couple shared are forever embedded in the pair of seven gold beads on the *mangal sutra*.



Shanti Mantra & Kshmapana | Peace Prayer & Forgiveness

As the end of the ceremony approaches, the priest recites a chant for universal peace for all beings. The priest and the couple humbly request forgiveness from the supreme souls for any omissions and imperfections. At this time, witnesses of the wedding shower rice on the couple to convey their blessings for longevity and prosperity.

"Love one another but
make not a bond of love:
let it rather be a moving
sea between the shores
of your souls."

-Kahlil Gibran