

Vows: Traditional Vows from the World Religions

A wedding is an expression of individual happiness and blissful partnership, but it is also a communal affair. Each religious faith has nuptial practices -- including traditional wedding vows -- that have been passed down through generations. Exact phrases vary slightly from place to place and among different clergy; here are some popular wordings you can adopt or alter to suit your tastes.

CATHOLIC VOWS:

"I, ____, take you, ____, for my lawful wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part."

Or:

"I, ____, take you, ____, to be my husband/wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love and honor you all the days of my life."

EPISCOPAL VOWS:

"In the name of God, I, ____, take you, ____, to be my husband/wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death -- this is my solemn vow."

HINDU VOWS:

Traditional Hindu wedding ceremonies are elaborate and complex. The bride and groom recite many beautiful words to each other, often including the vow-like phrases, "Let us take the fourth step, to acquire knowledge, happiness, and harmony by mutual love and trust. Finally, let us take the seventh step and become true companions and remain lifelong partners by this wedlock."

JEWISH VOWS:

In a traditional Jewish wedding -- Orthodox and sometimes Conservative -- only the groom speaks his vows, which can be recited in both Hebrew and English. The original vow is (in English transliteration), "Haray at mekudeshet lee beh-taba'at zo keh-dat Moshe veh-Yisrael," which translates into, "Behold, you are consecrated to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel."

In Reform, some Conservative, and other contemporary Jewish ceremonies, the man and woman both recite vows, slightly altered from the traditional Hebrew version: "Haray ata mekudash lee beh-taba'at zo keh-dat Moshe veh-Israel." Another version of non-traditional vows is a phrase from the Song of Songs: "Ani leh-dodee veh-dodee lee," which means, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

MUSLIM VOWS:

According to Vafar Jamal, chair of the preaching department at the Islamic Circle of North America, most Muslim couples do not recite vows, but rather heed the words of the imam (cleric), who speaks about the meaning of marriage and the couple's responsibilities to each other and to Allah during the nikah, or ceremony. At the end of this ritual, the couple consents to become husband and wife, and they are blessed by the congregation. However, some Muslim brides and grooms do recite vows -- here is a common recitation:

Bride: "I, ____, offer you myself in marriage in accordance with the instructions of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him. I pledge, in honesty and with sincerity, to be for you an obedient and faithful wife."

Groom: "I pledge, in honesty and sincerity, to be for you a faithful and helpful husband."

PROTESTANT VOWS:

"I, ____, take thee, ____, to be my wedded husband/wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee my faith/myself to you."

QUAKER VOWS:

“In the presence of God and these our friends I take thee to be my husband/wife, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful husband/wife so long as we both shall live.”

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX VOWS:

Many branches of the Orthodox church use silent vows during the ceremony -- an introspective prayer in which the couple promises to be loyal and loving to each other. In the Russian tradition, however, vows are spoken out loud: “I, ____, take you, ____, as my wedded wife/husband and I promise you love, honor, and respect; to be faithful to you, and not to forsake you until death do us part. So help me God, one in the Holy Trinity, and all the Saints.”