

Unitarian Society of Hartford  
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## **Hindu Thought and Ritual as Exemplified in the Hindu Wedding Ceremony**

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**Hindu Wedding Traditions -- Sheenu Srinivasan** - For almost 30 years Sheenu has conducted Hindu Vedic weddings with the assistance of his wife Kamla. In some weddings both bride and groom were Hindus, but many others were interfaith. Working with the families, and other clergy, he has tailored ceremonies to bring together couples from different parts of India and couples where one partner was a Christian, Jew, or Pagan. Through these weddings, he has discovered the common threads that run through many cultures and faiths. For more information see <http://www.avsrinivasan.com/index.html>

- My wife Kamla and I are very happy to be with you today at this Meeting House as it brings back warm memories of the Indian community's long association with this House since the early 1970s when Rev. Nathaniel Lauriat was the minister in office. We assembled here downstairs and conducted worship services and you will be pleased to know those simple initial steps lead to the construction and sanctification of a magnificent Hindu Temple in Middletown.
- Also, it was the Unitarian Society which played such a large role in welcoming and hosting Swami Vivekananda when he came to America to attend the World Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition of 1893.\*
- Permit me to begin by giving you a brief background for the faith that serves as a foundation for wedding customs in a typical Hindu wedding:

(1) In general Hinduism has no hierarchy: no person who is the equivalent of a pope even though there are gurus/swamis with a few to a few hundred thousand disciples. There are holy sites with specific leadership attached, such as the Jagadgurus established at four ancient shrines, but no single leader among mainstream Hindus.

(2) We have no single book. The Four Vedas, their large body of commentary and succeeding laws, the two Puranas or hero stories of the gods, and the two major epics provide lessons and examples. The Bhagavad Gita (Song of God) episode in one epic is the single current source for much Hindu doctrine – one episode in one book!

(3) No concept of original sin – only of karma: a bank of good deeds and bad deeds with consequences that follow an individual from one life cycle to the next until a pure life allows one to escape rebirth.

(4) Modern Hinduism or Vedanta puts stress on being and not believing; “No struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but realizing – not believing, but in being and becoming.” (Vivekananda, Chicago, 1893)

(5) Through 5,000 years and more, absorbing every ritual and idea that has arisen or arrived on Indian soil, Hinduism has held onto a core belief: Ekam Sat Vipra: Bahudaa Vadanti (Truth is One, the wise express it in many ways);

(6) This tolerant view leads not just to recognition of the validity of different faiths but other choices. It recognizes different forms of representation of the ONE. This includes, in India, and for Hindus, the inclusion of not only gods but goddesses too. In polytheism, families worship a deity, a God or Goddess, according to their family tradition, their community allegiance, while respecting all other forms of godhead representation. Each home has a small room or area set aside for daily worship. The Hindu religious calendar has a major festival nearly every month of the year. At the crowning moment of a Hindu wedding a bride and groom are seen as representative of the divine couple, Vishnu and Lakshmi.

(7) Nature plays an important role in Hindu worship. The Vedic gods represent forces of nature. Agni, the fire god is invoked as the chief object of worship in a wedding ceremony since a new domestic hearth is being built. He is also invoked as the chief officiant as he conveys the offerings the couple makes to the other gods. Fire and water, flowers, grains, butter, herbs, incense are all included in the fire ritual at the center of the wedding ceremony.

(8) Before the wedding begins, astrology often plays a part. Horoscopes are still exchanged in most arranged marriages – and most marriages are still arranged by parents. Ancient Hindus followed the movements of the stars, and felt that a person’s path in life was influenced by the position of planets and other heavenly bodies at the time of birth. Many pujas or ceremonies begin with a puja to the Nine Planets, the Navagrahas. In a wedding, the father of the bride performs a Sankalpam in which he places himself, his wife-in-dharma, his daughter and prospective son-in-law within a sacred and specific boundary of time and place according to the manvantara, yuga, pada, location in space, samvatsara, maasa, phase of moon ..... (See my book VEDIC WEDDING: Origins, Tradition and Practice, 2007. Also visit [www.indianweddings.us.com](http://www.indianweddings.us.com)). This is performed as the ceremony begins in earnest and the father is about to invoke another Hindu injunction by charging the young man to abide by dharma: It is only upon acceptance by the groom (naati charaami) the ceremony can proceed.

(9) Chaturvidha phalapurusharthha :Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha: the set of principles by which the material (Artha) and emotional (Kama) aspects of life are balanced and controlled by Dharma (Right Conduct) in order to achieve Moksha (Salvation from the cycles of rebirth). See my paper Dharmo Rakshati Rakhitaha ([www.avsrinivasan.com](http://www.avsrinivasan.com)). This is the recognized life goal of a Hindu.

• Artha & Kama in conflict? How can it be reconciled? When one's wife is in harmony .... (See my book Yaksha Prashna, 1984, p60)

• Friendship concept: Bharyaamitram grhesataha (See my book Yaksha Prashna, 1984, p18)

• Saptapadi; Indian Civil Code (see my book Vedic Wedding) During *Saptapadi*, the bride and the groom hold hands and take seven steps together as husband and wife as they walk around Agni, the God of fire, (the kindled fire symbolic of their new hearth) and pledge to each other their eternal friendship. What they say after they have taken those seven steps is unquestionably the foundation for a successful marriage.

Together they chant:

sakhaa sapta padl bhava sakhyaM tE gamEyaM  
sakhyaM tE mAyOshaH sakhyaM tE mAyOshTaH

With these seven steps you have become my friend.

“May I deserve your friendship.  
May my friendship make me one with you.  
May your friendship make you one with me.”

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• Summary: Principal steps:

- families gather/barat/
  - varapuja/
  - declarations/
  - bride's arrival/
  - kanayadan/
  - homas/
  - saptapadi/
  - blessings/prostrations
  - Principal guide is family tradition
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\* After the sermons we discovered in the lobby of the Sanctuary a display that showed the Unity Church in Hartford. This is precisely the church where Swami Vivekananda spoke on Friday, March 8, 1895 on "[God and the soul \(Soul, God and religion\)](#)", at Unity Hall, Hartford, CT . Also see Newspaper Report: "[The Social World](#)"