

Handfasting / Tying the Knot

Samples by Lou Szymkow



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THE HISTORY OF HANDFASTING

Handfasting (fastening) is an ancient marriage ritual of mixed origin including Celtic, Chinese, Indian & Hindu, Indigenous American, Islander, Maritime and even Pagan.

The Celtic ritual involves a blessing of hands and a 'tying of the knot' securing the couple together.

In Hinduism it is of religious significance and so should only be performed by a Prasad, hence for Civil Ceremonies in Australia, we tend to follow the Celtic, Chinese or the Seafarers tradition.

In Christian Churches, the act might be symbolic when the Priest or Minister drapes a stole (long narrow vestment similar to a scarf) is draped over the couples' hands during a blessing.

A handfasting ritual in a Civil Ceremony performed during a wedding ceremony, can take place instead of a ring exchange, in preparation for it, or at any time, following it such as at the end of the very end of the Ceremony.

TYPE OF CORD & COLOUR

Different colours can be used to symbolise different aspects of life, promises, history, family, heritage, hopes, blessings or desires that the couple brings to, or will uphold, in their marriage.

The Celebrant describes the symbolism of each cord to make sure everyone attending the ceremony appreciates and knows its meaning.

The cord can be a leather, rope, or ribbon.

The smaller individually coloured cords can be used to create a larger single cord of many colours symbolising unity.

CHARMS

A charm or charms such as a Celtic symbol/s can be added to the middle or ends, but couples can include any charm that has meaning to them e.g.:

- a key and/or lock symbolising freedom, fidelity and the locking of hearts
- a charm from the place where they met
- a cultural, or familial symbol, or heritage
- spirituality

HOW ARE THEY PRESENTED OR BROUGHT FORWARD?

The cords or ribbons can be worn as an adornment by the bride & groom on entry so that the two ribbons can later be joined as a symbol of unity.

The cords or ribbons can also instead, be carried or worn by others, or simply be presented by the Celebrant or others, at an appropriate time.

APPLICATION

1. If worn as a sash, the ribbons can be lowered from the shoulder of one party, and then the other and that this action in itself creates a knot. Alternatively, the sash can be removed and then draped across the joined hands.
2. The cord or ribbon can be lightly draped over and around joined hands, or
3. can be secured with a firm & binding knot.
4. knotted at one end only for easy removal.

On completion of the blessing, the cord/s or ribbon/s:-

- can be untied & removed with a reminder that the physical binding is no longer required as it is the hearts and love that will ensure the continued binding, or that fate has been fulfilled
- can be cut with flare so that the knot can be kept as a reminder of the promises made but still symbolising that the hearts and love that will ensure the continued binding, or that fate has been fulfilled. Cutting the cord enables the knot to remain intact for mounting & display in the marital home.

WHEN SHOULD IT TAKE PLACE?

A handfasting ritual performed during a wedding ceremony, can take place instead of a ring exchange, in preparation for it, or at any time, following it such as at the end of the very end of the Ceremony.

In the Celtic tradition, it might take place before the ring exchange but that presents the obvious difficulties of managing a ring exchange and signing of marriage certificates with one hand tied and so it is best undertaken after the rings, as a part of the vows, or as a blessing after the signing.

CEREMONY SAMPLES

1. HANDFASTING – 1 CORD OR RIBBON

This one can be performed over the rings. Following the vows.

<cord/ribbon of choice is presented by an appointed person/s, or Celebrant>

<the cord/ribbon is draped over the couple's joined hands>

Celebrant: As this knot is tied, so are your lives now bound.

Woven into this cord, imbued into its very fibres, are all the hopes of your friends and family, and of yourselves, for your new life together.

With the fashioning of this knot do I tie all the desires, dreams, love, and happiness wished here in this place to your lives for as long as love shall last.

<knot is tied>

In the joining of hands and the fashion of a knot, so are your lives now bound, one to another.

By this cord you are thus bound to your vow.

May this knot remain tied for as long as love shall last.

May this cord draw your hands together in love, never to be used in anger.

May the vows you have spoken never grow bitter in your mouths.

As any child discovers when they are learning to tie their own shoes, the first move is to cross the ends.

As your hands are bound by this cord, so is your partnership held by the symbol of this knot.

May it be granted that what is done before the god/s be not undone by man.

Two entwined in love, bound by commitment and fear, sadness and joy, by hardship and victory, anger and reconciliation, all of which brings strength to this union.

Hold tight to one another through both good times and bad, and watch as your strength grows.

<Cord/Ribbon can be left in place, as Pronouncement is made, or removed to show it is no longer required>

2. HANDFASTING - 1 CORD & CUT

The couple are directed to face each other and to hold hands (right hand to right hand, left hand to left hand), one across the other, forming a cross with their arms.

The cord is looped around and though the hands and brought back to the top where a secure and obvious knot is tied.

Celebrant: This couple have chosen to honour the Celtic heritage with an ancient Irish wedding tradition symbolising the act of “tying the knot.”

These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and full of love for you, that are holding yours on your wedding day, as you promise to love each other today, tomorrow and forever.

These are the hands that will work alongside yours, as together you build your future.

These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, and with the slightest touch, will comfort you like no other.

These are the hands that will hold you when fear, grief or sorrow fills your mind.

These are the hands that will wipe the tears of sorrow away from your eyes and caress the tears of joy upon your cheeks.

These are the hands that will help you to hold your family as one.

These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it.

These are the hands that, even when wrinkled and aged, will still be reaching for yours, still giving you same unspoken tenderness with just a touch.

<At an appropriate time, the cord is cut with the knot still intact and the cord is then placed into a ceremonial container or on display with the words>:

Celebrant: This cord is cut from your hands, but the knot remains just as your love and memory of your vows will continue to bind you.

3. HAND FASTING – 2 CORDS OR RIBBONS

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- Celebrant:** By your presence, you celebrate with them the love that they share.
- It is a love discovered in each other and strengthened by its sharing,
strengthened also by your support in their decision to commit to a lifelong union in marriage.
- Marriage is perhaps the greatest and most challenging adventure of human relationships.
- No ritual can create a relationship that does not already exist.
- A ritual however acts as a symbol of how far you have grown together and a further symbol of the promises that you have made to each other.
- This Ceremony today, and this next ritual affirms the choice you make to stand together and to love each other wholly.
- <Partner 1>:** I ask you now, do you take **<Partner 2>** to be your husband/wife/partner Do you promise to love, honour, cherish and protect him/her, and remain faithful to him/her now and always?
- <Partner 2>** I ask you now, do you take **<Partner 1>** to be your husband/wife? Do you promise to love, honour, cherish and protect him/her, and remain faithful to him/her now and always?
- Celebrant:** **<Partner 1>** and **<Partner 2>** have chosen the ancient Celtic tradition of handfasting which symbolises the binding of two people in love – literally tying the knot.
- The handfasting cord is made from two strands, one representing **<Partner 2>** and one representing **<Partner 1>**.
- <display cords>**
- <Partner 2>**, take **<Partner 1>**'s hands palm up, so you may see the gift that they are to you.
- The palm is vulnerable, yet in it, you see the markings of life and scars work undertaken.
- <<Partner 2>, holds <Partner 1>'s hands, palm up>**
- These are the hands of your best friend,

young and strong and full of love and holding yours on your wedding day, as s/he promises to love you all for all time.

Now <Partner 1>, please take <Partner 2>'s hands, and hold them palms up, so you may see the gift they are to you.

<<Partner 1>, holds <Partner 2>'s hands, palm up>

These are the hands of your best friend, young and gentle and full of love,

holding yours on your wedding day,

as s/he promises to love you all the days of his/her life.

<pause>

Celebrant: Now, please clasp each other's hands, forming a cross.

This cross is a symbol of the strength that is created by your union.

I ask the <selected person> to place the first cord.

This cord is <colour 1> and symbolises the love <party 1> shares today.

<chosen one stand behind couple and drapes cord N/S over hands in view of all>

This cord is <colour 2> and symbolises the love <party 2> shares today.

I ask the <2nd chosen one> to place this second cord.

<2nd chosen one stand behind couple and drapes cord over hands E/W in view of all>

Celebrant: These are the hands that will love you with passion,

cherish you with tenderness and lift you up when you fall.

These are the hands that will hold you when fear or grief would overwhelm you.

These are the hands that will wipe your tears from your eyes, whether they are tears of sorrow or joy.

These are the hands that will give you support and encourage you to chase your dreams.

These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it.

And finally, these are the hands that, even when wrinkled with age, will reach for your own still offering the same sweet tenderness as they do today.

<Celebrant take cord end and ties the secure knot.>

Treasure these hands that you see before you this day.

May they always reach out with love, gentleness, and respect.

May they build a loving relationship that last a lifetime,

may they always be held by one another.

If you follow these words and heed this sacred binding, your hands will heal, protect, shelter, and guide.

Your love, which has the foundation trust, and acceptance,

will enable a lasting and deepening relationship.

No other ties are more tender, no other vows more important than those you make today, each other.

Celebrant: <Partner 1>, please look in to the eyes of your love and say these words to him/her:

Partner 1: <Partner 2> you are my partner in life and my one true love.

I will love you today, tomorrow, and forever.

As I have given you my hand to hold

So, I give you my life to keep

Celebrant: <Partner 2>, please look in to the eyes of your love and say these words to him/her:

Partner 2: <Partner 1> you are my partner in life and my one true love.

I will love you today, tomorrow, and forever.

As I have given you my hand to hold

So, I give you my life to keep

Celebrant: I will remove the cords, by cutting it so that the love may flow freely but that knot remains to be displayed as a lasting symbol of your vows, binding and commitment.

<Cord is cut underneath so that the knot remains>.

4. HANDFASTING – 6 CORDS

Celebrant: Know now before you go further, that since your lives have crossed in this life you have formed ties between each other.

As you seek to enter this state of matrimony you should strive to make real, the ideals which give meaning to both this ceremony and the institution of marriage.

With full awareness, know that within this circle you are not only declaring your intent to be handfasted before your friends and family, but you speak that intent also to your creative higher powers.

The promises made today and the ties that are bound here greatly strengthen your union; they will cross the years and lives of each soul's growth.

Do you still seek to enter this ceremony?

Bride & Groom: Yes, We Seek to Enter.

Celebrant: In times past it was believed that the human soul shared characteristics with all things divine. It is this belief which assigned virtues to the cardinal directions; East, South, West and North. It is in this tradition that a blessing is offered in support of this ceremony.

Blessed be this union with the gifts of the East. Communication of the heart, mind, and body Fresh beginnings with the rising of each Sun. The knowledge of the growth found in the sharing of silences.

Blessed be this union with the gifts of the South. Warmth of hearth and home The heat of the heart's passion The light created by both To lighten the darkest of times.

Blessed be this union with the gifts of the West.

The deep commitments of the lake.

The swift excitement of the river.

The refreshing cleansing of the rain.

The all-encompassing passion of the sea.

Blessed be this union with the gifts of the North Firm foundation on which to build Fertility of the fields to enrich your lives A stable home to which you may always return.

Each of these blessings from the four cardinal directions emphasizes those things which will help you build a happy and successful union. Yet they are only tools. Tools which you must use together in order to create what you seek in this union.

I bid you look into each other's eyes.

Groom, Will you cause her pain?

Groom: I May.

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Groom: No.

Celebrant: Bride, Will you cause him pain?

Bride: I may.

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Bride: No.

Celebrant: Will you share each other's pain and seek to ease it?

Bride & Groom: Yes.

Celebrant: And so the first binding is made. Join your hands

<First cord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: Bride, Will you share his laughter?

Bride: Yes.

Celebrant: Groom, Will you share her laughter?

Groom: Yes.

Celebrant: Will both of you look for the brightness in life and the positive in each other?

Bride & Groom: Yes.

Celebrant: And so the second binding is made.

<Second cord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: Bride, Will you burden him?

Bride: I may.

Celebrant: Is that you intent?

Bride: No.

Celebrant: Groom, Will you burden her?

Groom: I May.

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Groom: No

Celebrant: Will you share the burdens of each so that your spirits may grow in this union?

Bride & Groom: Yes.

Celebrant: And so the third binding is made.

<Third cord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: Bride, will you share his dreams?

Bride: Yes

Celebrant: Groom, will you share her dreams?

Bride: Yes

Celebrant: **<To Both>**

Will you dream together to create new realities and hopes?

Bride & Groom: Yes

Celebrant: And so the fourth binding is made.

<Fourth cord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: Groom, will you cause her anger?

Groom: I May.

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Bride: No

Celebrant: Bride, will you cause him anger?

Bride: I may

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Bride: No

Celebrant: <To Both>

Will you take the heat of anger and use it to temper the strength of this union?

Bride & Groom: We Will.

Celebrant: And so the fifth binding is made.

<Fifth chord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: Bride, Will you honour him?

Bride: I will.

Celebrant: Groom, Will you honour her?

Groom: I will

Celebrant: Will you seek to never give cause to break that honour?

Bride & Groom: We shall never do so.

<Sixth cord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: And so the sixth binding is made.

The knots of this binding are not formed by these chords but instead by your vows. Either of you may drop the chords, for as always, you hold in your own hands the making of breaking of this union.

<The cords are removed and placed on display.>

5. HANDFASTING – 6 CORDS & PROMISES

Celebrant: Know now before you go further, that since your lives have crossed in this life you have formed ties between each other.

As you seek to enter this state of matrimony you should strive to make real, the ideals which give meaning to both this ceremony and the institution of marriage.

Celebrant: Do you still seek to enter this ceremony?

Bride & Groom: We do.

Blessing of the Hands

Celebrant: These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, for a lifetime of happiness.

These are the hands that will countless times wipe the tears from your eyes: tears of sorrow and tears of joy.

These are the hands that will comfort you in illness, and hold you when fear or grief racks your mind.

These are the hands that will hold you tight as you struggle through difficult times.

These are the hands that will give you support and encourage you to chase your dreams. Together, everything you wish for can be realized.

<Prepare the cords>

Celebrant: Back in earlier years, the hands would be bound with whatever was available – vines, colourful cords, or scarf. Today we will use these cords to symbolize the binding, or promises.

The first promise

Celebrant: Groom, Will you be Bride's faithful partner for life?

Groom: I will

Celebrant: Bride, will you be Groom's faithful partner for life?

Bride: I will.

Celebrant: Will you be each other's constant friends and one true love?

Bride and Groom: We will.

<First cord is draped across Bride and Groom's hands>

Celebrant: And so the first binding is made.

The second promise

Celebrant: Bride, do you promise to love Groom without reservation?

Bride: I will.

Celebrant: Groom, do you promise to love Bride without reservation?

Groom: I will.

Celebrant: Will both of you stand by one another in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want?

Bride & Groom: We will.

<Second cord is draped across Bride and Groom's hands>

Celebrant: And so the second binding is made.

The third promise

Celebrant: Bride, will you stand together with Groom your times of joy and sorrow?

Bride: I will.

Celebrant: Groom, will you stand together with Bride your times of joy and sorrow?

Groom: I will.

Celebrant: Will you share the burdens of each so that your spirits may grow in this union?

Bride & Groom: We will.

<Third cord is draped across Bride and Groom's hands>

Celebrant: And so the third binding is made.

The fourth promise

Celebrant: Groom will you always to be open and honest with Bride, for as long as you both shall live?

Groom: I will.

Celebrant: Bride, will you always to be open and honest with Groom, for as long as you both shall live?

Bride: I will.

Celebrant: And so the fourth binding is made.

<Fourth cord is draped across bride and groom's hands>
And so the fourth binding is made.

The fifth promise

Celebrant: Groom, will you cause her anger?

Groom: I May.

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Bride: No

Celebrant: Bride, will you cause him anger?

Bride: I may

Celebrant: Is that your intent?

Bride: No

Celebrant: <To Both>

Will you take the heat of anger and use it to temper the strength of this union?

Bride & Groom: We Will.

Celebrant: Will you dream together to create new realities and hopes for this marriage?

Bride & Groom: We will.

<Fifth chord is draped across bride and groom's hands>

Celebrant: And so the fifth binding is made.

The sixth promise

Celebrant: Bride, Will you honour this man?

Bride: I will.

Celebrant: Groom, Will you honour this woman?

Groom: I will.

Celebrant: Will you both seek to cherish and strengthen that honour?

Bride & Groom: We will.

<Sixth cord is draped across Bride and Groom's hands>

Celebrant: And so the 6th binding is made.

Binding of all promises

Celebrant: The knots of this binding are not formed by these chords but instead by your vows.

Either of you may drop the chords, for as always, you hold in your own hands the making or breaking of this union.

The cords are removed and placed on display

6. HANDFASTING – 6 (3X3) RIBBONS WITH OTHERS TAKING PART

Celebrant: We will now perform the ancient Celtic hand fasting ritual where 3 ribbons, each with a significance of their own, will bind this couples, joined hands.

Person 1: I place this Red ribbon as a sign of romance, partnership and happiness.

Person 2: I place this White ribbon, for peace, sincerity and devotion.

Person 3: I place this gold ribbon for unity, prosperity and longevity.

Person 4: I now tie the ribbons together to signify the tying of the knot.

Celebrant: As this knot is tied, so are your lives now bound together.

Woven into these ribbons, into the very fibres, are all the hopes of all your friends and family, and of themselves, for a new life together.

With the fashioning of this knot you tie all the desires, dreams, love, and happiness wished here in this place to your lives for all time.

In the joining of hands and the fashioning of a knot, so are your lives now bound, one to another.

By this ribbon you are now and forevermore bound to your vow.

May this knot remain tied for as long as love shall last.

May this ribbon draw your hands together in love, never to be used in anger.

May the vows you have spoken always be sweet on your lips.

As any child discovers when they are learning to tie their own shoes, the first move is to cross the ends.

The cross creates the (X), which is the symbol of partnership and union.

As your hands are bound by this ribbon, so is your partnership held by the symbol of this knot.

Two entwined in love, bound by commitment and fear, sadness and joy, by hardship and victory, anger and reconciliation, all of which brings strength to this union.

Hold tight to one another through both good times and bad, and watch as your strength grows. I shall now remove the ribbons.

7. TYING THE KNOT – SEAFARERS

Seafarers are renowned for the art form of “knotting”.

Knots were created from the simple to extraordinarily elaborate and some just for their beauty or for special significance.

The “true-lover’s knot” was one of these.

A simple and clear knot, implying its forthright goal.

It is made up of two overhand knots, linked together, just as lovers link their hearts.

A sailor would tie the knot loosely, and send it to his “intended” who, upon receiving:

- i) untie it, meaning the proposal was rejected, or
- ii) send it back, leaving it loose, just as she had received it, meaning the sailor would be welcomed home, but more wooing was required, or
- iii) send it back, but tightened, meaning the sailor should return quickly to her loving arms.

Ritual

Celebrant: <GROOM>, since you are asking <BRIDE> to marry you, take these cords (**Celebrant hands <Groom> the ropes**), which represents the bond between you, and tie the knot which signifies your intentions for your gathered.

Celebrant: (**Speaking to <Groom> and <Bride>**): These two cords represent your pasts, your own individual and separate lives before.

(<Groom> ties the simple knot and hands the rope to <Bride>)

Celebrant: <BRIDE>, will you please give your response by tightening the knot, representing that you will always hold <GROOM>’S heart to yours.

(<Bride> tightens knot and hands rope to Celebrant. Celebrant holds knot up for all to see.)

Celebrant: It is known to be one of the simplest knots to tie, but it is also one of the strongest there is; it will not break, and will only become stronger when under pressure. The rope itself will break before the knot comes undone.

Celebrant: As you intertwine your pieces, you are joining your two lives into one.

The finished knot symbolises your future, and how your love and marriage will continue to be strong despite any trials life may throw your way.

Please demonstrate the strength of the knot you have just formed

<Groom> and <Bride> each hold onto a rope end and lean apart>

Celebrant: We see by this knot that they B&G share the same intentions and that they will hold each other's heart tight, forming a strong bond from here to forever.

Let this knot be a symbol of the strength of your love for each other.

8. THE RED STRING OF FATE

(also referred to as the Red Thread of Marriage),

To the Chinese, red is the colour of love, courage and good fortune.

There is an East Asian belief originating from Chinese legend. Where the Gods tie an invisible red cord around the ankles of those that are destined to be lovers regardless of place, time, or circumstances, and though the cord may stretch or tangle, will never break. In Japanese and Korean cultures, it is thought to be tied around the little finger.

As they grow, the string gets shorter and brings them closer.

Celebrant : There is a belief originating from a Chinese legend that the Gods tie an invisible red cord to those that are destined to be lovers regardless of place, time, or circumstances, and though the cord may stretch or tangle, will never break.

As they grow, the string gets shorter and brings them closer.

To symbolise this arrival, I ask the Bride to now tie a string to her new husband's hand

<a red string is tied to the groom's finger>

Red is the colour of love, courage and good fortune.

Bride: I tie this thread to show that our love has always been destined

Celebrant : I ask the Groom to now tie a string to his bride's hand

<a red string is tied to the bride's finger>

Groom: I tie this thread because you are my love and my destiny

9. THE RED STRING OF FATE & RED GOBLET CEREMONY COMBINED

(also referred to as the Red Thread of Marriage),

To the Chinese, red is the colour of love, courage and good fortune.

There is an East Asian belief originating from Chinese legend. Where the Gods tie an invisible red cord around the ankles of those that are destined to be lovers regardless of place, time, or circumstances, and though the cord may stretch or tangle, will never break. In Japanese and Korean cultures, it is thought to be tied around the little finger.

As they grow, the string gets shorter and brings them closer.

The red string of fate and red goblet ceremony share the legend in that when the string has finally brought them face to face and the couples have matured, they sip from two goblets tied together by red string, symbolizing unity and blessings for shared good fortunes.

Celebrant : <invites mothers/or representative relative to come forward & prepare goblets>

Celebrant : There is a belief originating from Chinese legend that the Gods tie an invisible red cord to those that are destined to be lovers regardless of place, time, or circumstances, and though the cord may stretch or tangle, will never break.

As they grow, the string gets shorter and brings them closer.

<A red string is tied to the goblets>

< decanter of red wine is held in view>

Red is the colour of love, courage and good fortune.

A sweet wine tells us that <Bride> and <Groom> will always enjoy Celebrating the joy of life.

<couple sip from the goblets>

10. THE RED RIBBON WITH GOLD THREAD

- Celebrant:** This moment is one that has been long awaited.
- And we can find an inkling of that in this red ribbon, that is laced with gold thread.
- Red is the colour of love, courage and good fortune.
- Gold is the symbol of all that is precious.
- You both have these qualities within you and see them with each other.
- There is a belief originating from Chinese legend, where the Gods tie an invisible red ribbon to those that are destined to be lovers regardless of place, time, or circumstances, and though the ribbon may stretch or tangle, it will never break.
- As they grow, the ribbon gets shorter and brings them closer.
- Mystics believe that our souls are connected by a gold thread. It marks all that is good and precious within us and is a guiding line through eternity that we might always find each other.
- Celebrant:** Today, to mark his path and journey, I ask our witnesses, to each take a ribbon end and tie one end to the Groom's wrist, and the other end to Bride's wrist.
- (witnesses ties the ribbon to groom's wrist)*
- Celebrant:** we tie this ribbon to show that your love has always been destined
- (witnesses ties ribbon to bride's wrist)*
- Celebrant:** we tie this ribbon because you are each other's greatest love and destiny.
- (later after vows)*
- Celebrant:** I now cut this ribbon, because your destiny is fulfilled.
- (cuts ribbon near wrists)*
- Leaving only a strand on your wrists (or fingers) as a reminder.
- You may choose to display the ribbon prominently in your home as reminder of this day and of your vows.