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# Joining Ceremonies

**Spiritually Rich,  
Non-Religious  
Ceremonies for Lovers**



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## **Introduction:**

There are many books about marriage ceremonies, and I have written some marriage ceremonies myself. However, there is not much written about other kinds of ceremonies for lovers, for example, ceremonies for starting what you might call a "serious" lover relationship, or for moving in together. Not all couples want to get married. This does not mean that they do not want or need to pledge some commitments to one another for building a happy, successful relationship. I therefore think we are in need of some ceremonies that people can use for the times in their lives when they don't feel marriage is an appropriate choice for their relationship.

Some percentage of people choose to be married for the majority of their lives. Some people choose to never marry. What will perhaps become the new norm, is that many people will spend some decades of their lives in a marriage, and some decades in non-marriage types of relationships. Some of these non-marriage relationships may be quite long-term and serious, and I therefore think couples could benefit from participating in some kind of ceremony to provide structure and inspiration for such relationships.

Likewise, most young people will participate in several serious relationships before settling into a marriage. It would be nice if these non-marriage relationships could be ended on more amicable terms than they often are, and perhaps converted to friendships. What would make this more

## **Non-Legal Joining Ceremonies (Continued)**

likely, is if people entered such relationships with an awareness that they might not be life long and an attitude that that is okay. This first ceremony *Vows for Successful Lovers* cultivates this kind of healthy attitude. *Vows for Successful Lovers* is also appropriate for middle age couples who are involved in a serious relationship that may or may not evolve into a marriage.

The second ceremony is a “moving in together” ceremony for people who do not want to be legally married. I have known a good many couples who have had happier and longer relationships than their married counterparts. I think legal marriage is a great thing. But it is nor for everybody, nor appropriate for every stage of life. I think sometimes people think if they are not getting married, there is no need for a formal ceremony, but I beg to differ. I think a moving in together ceremony is a great way to celebrate, define expectations, and share your goals and aspirations with family and friends.

### **This chapter contains:**

#### **1) Vows for Successful Lovers**

#### **2) A Joining Ceremony for Moving In Together**

(For Couples not Intending to Marry)

## Vows for Successful Lovers

It is quite clear that most people will participate in romantic/sexual relationships, other than marital partnerships, during their lifetime. Though marriage is a satisfying state of being, it is definitely not the appropriate choice for all romantic/sexual relationships. Yet, without the formal structure of marriage, couples sometimes neglect to define their expectations for their relationship. This can lead to a lot of misunderstanding.

My sense is that we are in need of a ritual for establishing some basic guidelines for non-marital love relationships. A serious romantic, sexually intimate relationship creates a great deal of emotional vulnerability between the two people involved. Taking time at the onset of such relationships to make some "relating" agreements can help ensure that this vulnerability is protected.

This ceremony is designed to be a private, as opposed to public ceremony, i.e. perhaps to be recited on a hilltop in the moonlight. The agreements are therefore not legally binding, nor are there any witnesses to the vows. To borrow a phrase from olden days, it is a "gentle person's agreement." The following ceremony is just an example to demonstrate the kinds of issues couples might want to address in such a ceremony. No doubt, couples would want to write their own ceremony.

When I was young, the terms "going steady" or "going together" was how you described a relationship that had moved beyond the casual level. I am not sure what the current term should be for when you are

**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

ready to move beyond “hooking up” but are not ready to get married. But that is the type of relationship this ceremony is written for. This ceremony is also appropriate for middle age couples who are involved in a serious relationship that may or may not evolve into a marriage.

## **The Vows**

### **Person #1:**

“I love you. Being with you enhances my life, and brings me much joy. When I am with you, I feel vibrantly alive. When I look into your eyes, or hold you in my arms, our souls reach out to one another, and I feel a warmth in the depth of my being. I believe you have many things to teach me, and I treasure the deep intimacy that is developing between us.”

### **Person #2:**

“I love you. Every day that I spend with you helps me to grow into a more full human being. I delight in your smile. The warmth and sparkle in your eyes makes me want to share my deepest self with you, and discover more and more of you. This wonderful connection between us exists on many levels; emotional, intellectual, and spiritual.”

### **Person #1:**

In order that our love may grow, and our relationship be all it can be, I make the following pledges.”

**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

**Person #2:**

"So as to nurture the love we share, I make the following pledges."

**Person #1:**

"I pledge honesty to you. Not only do I promise not to purposely deceive you, but I promise not to lie to myself and repress the truth because it may be painful. I promise to do all I can to be in touch with myself and to share anything with you that I believe you would want or need to know."

**Person #2:**

"I pledge this to you also."

**Person #2:**

"I promise to not stop myself from taking risks in relating to you because I am fearful. To do so would be settling for less than we could be, and prohibit any chance for improvement."

**Person #1:**

"I pledge this to you also."

**Person #1:**

"I promise to truly listen to you, to strive to the best of my ability to understand what you are thinking and feeling. I promise to give you feedback, so that you may understand yourself better."

**Person #2:**

"I pledge this to you also."

**Person #2:**

"I promise not to be critical in a destructive way. I promise to not belittle your efforts,

**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

knowing that you are doing the best you are capable of at the time."

**Person #1:**

"I also promise this to you."

**Person #1:**

"I promise to be patient. I promise to give you the space and time you need to work things through at your own pace and to not push you."

**Person #2:**

"I pledge this to you also."

**Person #1:**

"I pledge to be monogamous with you. Though I know I will at times feel sexually attracted to other people, I choose to make a commitment not to act on those feelings. I want to focus my energy on this relationship, because I believe that to be sexually intimate with more than one person leads to feelings of fragmentation. Only when I give myself wholly to one person am I able to reach and maintain that special, deep, intense level of intimacy. However, I realize I cannot meet all of your needs, nor you all of mine. I believe that each of us will grow by experiencing close friendships with other people. We will reserve sexuality for one another, but recognize that deep friendships with people of the opposite sex are normal and healthy."

**Person #2:**

"I also pledge to be monogamous with you. I have found that only within a one-to-one relationship can I feel safe enough to

**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

open the deepest levels of myself and achieve full intimacy. I know I will sometimes feel sexually attracted to other people, but I choose not to act on those feelings. Sexuality demands an intense commitment of emotional energy, and my time and energy commitments with you would not allow me to adequately meet the emotional needs of another sexual relationship. I also choose to be monogamous so that I have time for friends, family, myself, my work, and for community involvement. However, I also believe very strongly that we should grant one another the freedom to experience close friendships with other people. I think we will be enriched by these experiences and have more to give one another as a result."

**Person #1:**

"I pledge a commitment to my own personal growth, because when I grow, my growth enriches the relationship, and when I allow myself to stagnate, that stagnation permeates the relationship."

**Person #2:**

"I also promise this to you."

**Person #2:**

"I pledge to acknowledge at all times that each of us has needs to be considered and respected, and I pledge to search for creative solutions to conflicts and workable compromises."

**Person #1:**

"I also promise this to you."



**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

**Person #2:**

"I promise not to run, or give up, when relating becomes difficult, knowing that relationships, like life, have their rough spots. I promise to take time to find out if the problems can be solved before terminating the relationship."

**Person #1:**

"I also promise this to you."

**Person #1:**

"I promise to remember that as much as we now love each other, we cannot predict that we will always love each other as we do today, or that we will want to remain together for the rest of our lives. I acknowledge that we are both growing, changing people, and that as a result of our on-going life experiences, we may become unable to continue to meet each other's needs as lovers. I promise to remember that each of us must manifest our destiny as individuals, and that we may not always be able to do that within the context of our lover relationship."

**Person #2:**

"I, too, promise to remember that, as much as we now love each other, we cannot know how we, as people, may grow and change in the future. I pledge to remember that the words "I love you" are always a statement of fact, not a promise. I promise to remember that we may someday find that our life paths are no longer compatible."

**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

**Person #1:**

"If we should find that we can no longer meet each other's needs, I pledge to participate in a termination process. I promise to share with you, to the best of my ability, why I believe the relationship is no longer meeting my needs."

**Person #2:**

"I pledge this to you also."

**Person #2:**

"If we choose to terminate our relationship as lovers, I promise to remember that the length of a relationship is not a measure of its success or failure. I promise to measure the success of our relationship by the extent to which it helped each of us to grow towards our fullest potential as human beings."

**Person #1:**

"I also promise this to you."

**Person #1:**

"If we choose to end our relationship as lovers, I promise to accept the pain of that ending as growing pains, and to look back with appreciation at all we received from one another."

**Person #2:**

"I also promise this to you."

**Person #2:**

"I commit myself to nurturing our love to the best of my abilities. May this passion between us prompt us to touch souls each day, in a new way, and become more whole."

**Vows  
for  
Successful Lovers  
(Continued)**

I look forward to sharing and exploring our deepest selves with one another.”

**Person #1:**

“I commit myself to nurturing our love to the best of my abilities. I will strive each day to make our relationship a vehicle for the personal evolution of each of us. I rejoice at the thought of knowing and loving you more deeply, and through that process discovering myself more fully.”

# A Joining Ceremony

[For couples moving in together who do not intend to marry.]

## **Introduction:**

Some couples choose to have a long-term love relationship without the legal structure of marriage. I have known a significant number of unmarried couples whose relationships have lasted far longer than their married counter-parts. Marriage does not necessarily represent a stronger or deeper commitment to a relationship. Perhaps for some people it does, but that is not true for all couples.

Obviously, some couples choose to have a long-term live together relationship with no ceremony at all. If that works for them, more power to them. However, I have always thought that ceremonies are helpful. They don't have to be elaborate or expensive, just a gathering of friends and family to celebrate one of the good things in life: a successful lover relationship!

## **The Vows**

### **Man:**

"Greetings. We want to thank all of you for being with us today to help us celebrate this important occasion."

### **Woman:**

"We would like to proclaim our love for one another and have all of you witness the vows we are making to one another as we join our lives in a deeper way."

## **A Joining Ceremony (Continued)**

### **Man:**

"We deeply appreciate that all of you, our family and friends, are willing to provide such a loving presence for us to do this."

### **Woman:**

"Many people have inquired of both of us why we have chosen to not get legally married. We therefore thought we would start this ceremony by sharing some thoughts about why we have chosen not to marry.

I have fleeting moments of wanting you to marry me. A part of me desires to have you stand up and publicly declare before family and friends that you will always love me--that you will always, till the day you die, be sitting across the dinner table from me with your smiling face. I sometimes want you to promise me that you will make passionate love to me for the next thirty years.

But -- another voice, my wiser self, tells me that these things cannot be bought with a marriage contract. This part of me makes me ask myself if I would want you to sit across the table from me every night if you didn't want to be there. And it makes me ask myself if I really think you'd be smiling when you sat there, if you were sitting there, not out of desire to be sharing your life with me, but because you promised that you would. And I also realize that the passion we have together when we make love, that I treasure so dearly, cannot be given out of loyalty--it is gift that must be given in the moment -- a natural expression of feeling and desire. I believe that our unwillingness to make empty promises to one another is what has sustained the vibrancy of our love."

## A Joining Ceremony (Continued)

### **Man:**

"I too, would like to say something about why I have not chosen to marry you, because I think that decision has affected our relationship in some very significant ways. Of course we have watched many of our friends and acquaintances marry, and I have been forced to again ask myself why I do not want to marry you, considering my deep feelings for you.

I am opposed to marriage because it seems to cultivate the idea that some unbreakable bond has been created. Yet inevitably I think every couple must come to grips with the fact that the bond that exists between lovers exists only as a result of their ability to meet one another's needs, and share compatible life goals and aspirations. And in all truth, this bond is not necessarily permanent. The concept of a marital bond tends to cloud the fact that the only permanent bond any of us has is to our own soul. Two people may find that the paths they each need to walk in this life at some point diverge. If this happens, to remain together would require one of them to follow behind on the other's path, rather than to continue to journey along his/her own life-path. The concept of "getting married" also seems to me to imply that a couple's relationship has reached some fixed, unchanging state, when in fact relationships are flowing and ever-changing. I think if we were to get married, I would inevitably begin to think of this relationship in static terms, the very word "married" implies a static state. When I say I have a relationship with you--this implies a here and now experience that will change and

## **A Joining Ceremony (Continued)**

evolve in whatever ways it is meant to. This is a conceptual framework that feels right to me.”

### **Woman:**

“Though we are not getting legally married, in buying a home together, we are becoming partners in a deeper way. We would therefore like to proclaim why we have chosen to deepen our relationship and exchange some vows for embarking on this new phase of new life together.

\_\_\_\_\_, sharing my life with you sustains and enriches me. The person you are seems to balance and complement who I am. Relating to you continually prompts me to learn and grow. You inspire me to explore new ways of being. Over the past four years we have experienced a joyous passion, much laughter, and wonderful companionship. We have also confronted pain and frustration. We have valued the love we share enough to struggle through the hard times. We have learned to transcend our differences, and find the deeper commonality. My love for you has continued to deepen as I discover, again and again, that we share so many of the same dreams, aspirations, and visions of the world.

\_\_\_\_\_, you offer me comfort and solace in my times of despair, and through your unfaltering support, I am able to heal my bruises and return to the challenges of life. Because of the wonderful love we have shared, I want to move our relationship to a deeper level.”

### **Man:**

“I would also like to speak, with family and friends as witness, about the love I feel towards you. You have brought a depth and

## A Joining Ceremony (Continued)

richness to my life. There exists between us a bond so strong that I feel as though I have known you for longer than just this lifetime. Our relationship serves as a vehicle for the personal evolution of each of us. Each day we help one another to become more fully human.

To tell all the reasons I love you would take more time than we have here tonight. But let me voice some of the important ones:

*--You insist that I live in a healthy manner. You inspire me to make decisions which reflect growth, consideration, and wisdom. You reinforce and strengthen my desires to be a compassionate and caring human being.*

*--You help me to share myself with others when perhaps I would be reluctant. You help me to remember how important it is to connect with the greater community of which I am a part.*

*--Perhaps the most important thing I am learning from you is the importance of play. You point out to me how happy and smiling I am when I allow myself the freedom and the time to let the child in me out to play. I am forever grateful for how you have helped me discover this playful and joyful part of myself.*

I look forward to deepening my connection with you by creating a home together."

### **Woman:**

"We've been loving and growing and laughing and crying together. I want to say that I feel incredibly thankful for every



## A Joining Ceremony (Continued)

moment we have shared together. I think you are an amazing person, and it is a joy to watch you become a wiser and more full human being, day by day, year by year.

Knowing you has enriched me in so many ways I cannot begin to enumerate them. It also just feels really nice to share the simple pleasures of life with you--a new snowfall, an evening of dancing, a campfire. I hope that we share many more years together.

So I just want to say "Thank you Universe for leading me to this remarkable man! He is one of the greatest joys of my life." And I'll just leave it at that. I just want to bask in my thankfulness and appreciation for what we have with one another. I'm not going to try and control this relationship or direct it, but rather experience it as fully and completely as I can, as it unfolds."

### **Man:**

"Let me try and return that toast. Thank you for being in my life. I love you. Living with you is a glorious adventure. So many of my experiences are made richer because you share in them. I can envision and very much hope that we will grow old together. However, if we find that we change in ways that make it impossible for us to live together happily as life partners, this will not take away from my appreciation of the years that we did share. This relationship is a beautiful part of my life, and I will remember it as such, regardless of what changes we may go through in the future. If at some point in the future we decide to end our lover relationship because it is no longer meeting our mutual needs, there will be no need to rip our photo albums apart--as if this chapter of our lives were some kind

## A Joining Ceremony (Continued)

of mistake, some detour that we took by accident. I treasure the memories we have had together, and I always will."

### **Woman:**

"We would like to end this ceremony with an exchange of vows we want to make to one another, which we hope will serve as inspiration and encouragement to us as we embark upon the next part of our journey together."

### **Man:**

"The overall commitment we would like to make to one another is to strive to the best of our abilities to maintain full intimacy with one another -- to allow ourselves to know one another in our entirety. We turn to the words of Carl Rogers, an amazing therapist who taught humanity a tremendous amount about developing deep, loving, growing, relationships:"

### **Woman:**

*"I will risk myself by endeavoring to communicate any persisting feeling, positive or negative, to my partner--to the full depth that I can understand it in myself -- as a living, present part of me.*

*Then I will risk further by trying to understand, with all the empathy I can bring to bear, his or her response, whether it is accusatory and critical, or sharing and self-revealing."*

### **Man:**

*"Perhaps I can discover, and come closer to, more of what I really am deep inside-- feeling sometimes angry or*

## A Joining Ceremony (Continued)

*terrified, sometimes loving and caring, occasionally beautiful and strong or wild and awful -- without hiding these feelings from myself. Perhaps I can come to prize myself as the richly varied person I am.*

*Perhaps I can openly be more of this person. If so, I can live by my own experienced values, even though I am aware of all of society's codes."*

### **Man:**

*"Then I can let myself be all this complexity of feelings and meanings and values with my partner -- be free enough to give of love and anger and tenderness as they exist in me. Possibly then I can be a real member of a partnership, because I am on the road to being a real person. And I am hopeful that I can encourage my partner to follow his or her own road to a unique personhood, which I would love to share."*

*Carl R. Rogers (1972) Becoming Partners: Marriage and Its Alternatives. New York, NY Dell Publishing Co.*

### **Woman:**

"We realize that this kind of deeply intimate relationship creates a mutual vulnerability. When two people allow themselves to become vulnerable to one another, it is important that they relate to one another out of maturity and responsibility. I therefore today want to renew my commitment to interact with you with you with caring, respect, consideration, patience and gentleness."

### **Man:**

"I likewise want to reaffirm my commitment to interact with you with kindness and

## **A Joining Ceremony** (Continued)

integrity. I promise to be sensitive to your needs. I pledge to appreciate you as a beautiful and unique human being, whom it is truly an honor to know."

### **Woman:**

"We appreciate that all of you, who are such important people in our lives, being with us today. We hope you will be frequent visitors in our new home in the years to come."

### **Man:**

"Having to decide what to say as we stand here today has prompted us to come to an even clearer and deeper understanding of this intriguing adventure we are continually creating together. We would like to end this ceremony with a song by Bob Franke."

### ***Thanksgiving Eve***

*It's so easy to dream of the days gone by.  
It's so hard to think of the times to come.*

*And the grace to accept  
Every moment as a gift,  
Is a gift that is given to some.*

*What can you do with your days  
But work and hope?  
Let your dreams bind your work  
to your play.*

*What can you do with each moment  
of your life  
But love till you've loved it away?  
Love till you've loved it away.*

*There are sorrows enough for  
the whole world's end,  
There are no guarantees but the grave.*

## **A Joining Ceremony** **(Continued)**

*And the lives that we live,  
And the times we have spent,  
Are a treasure too precious to save.*

*What can you do with your days  
But work and hope?  
Let your dreams bind your work  
to your play.  
What can you do with each moment  
of your life  
But love till you've loved it away?  
Love till you've loved it away.*

*What can you do with your days  
But work and hope?  
Let your dreams bind your work  
to your play.  
What can you do with each moment  
of your life  
But love till you've loved it away?  
Love till you've loved it away.*

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