

*Jeffrey*

*weds*

*Niki*

*May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

## *The Vedic Hindu Wedding Ceremony*

### *Introduction*

*The Hindu wedding ceremony or Vivah is a sacrament contained within the Vedas (ancient Hindu scriptures) dating back to between 3000-5000 BC. The marriage ceremony is the thirteenth of the sixteen Samaskara or rites of passage that a person follows during his or her lifetime. The wedding takes place under a sacred altar known as the mandap. The four pillars of the mandap symbolize the four parents of the bride and groom and the vital role they have played in raising, sheltering, and supporting their children. The priest will recite mantras in Sanskrit, the root of all modern Indian languages.*

### *Baarat (Groom's procession)*

*Jeff and his family arrive at the wedding place dancing to music and a drummer. Jeff refuses to come down from the horse until he is promised riches and gifts.*

### *Ponkhan (Welcoming of the groom)*

*Maya, the bride's sister carries a poorna kumbha (pot with a coconut) on top of her head as an auspicious beginning to the ceremony.*

*Neeta, the bride's mother leads the bridal procession and welcomes Jeff and his entire family.*

*The ceremony involves Jeff shattering a small clay pot (saapath) with his right foot, symbolizing his strength and his commitment to overcome all obstacles for love and spiritual unity.*

*A sacred thread (varmala) is circled around Jeff, from head to foot, which will be used later in the ceremony to seal the marriage bond between Jeff and Niki.*

### *Milni (Welcoming of the groom's family)*

*The entire bride's family and friends are at the door greeting and welcoming Jeff, Anita, Andrew, and their entire family and escorting them to the wedding hall. Niki's cousins will try and hide Jeff's shoes. Traditionally, Jeff must leave with the same shoes he came in with and he will have to pay through his nose to get them back.*

### *Ganesh Puja (Prayer to Lord Ganesh)*

*Ceremony begins with a prayer (Puja) to the lord Ganesh – remover of Obstacles, who brings eternal peace and an atmosphere of tranquility.*

### *Kanya Daan (Giving away the bride)*

*The bride's parents, Neeta and Sanjay give their daughter (Kanya), Niki as the greatest gift on earth (Daan) to the groom, Jeff by placing Niki's right hand over Jeff's right hand. Jeff holds Niki's right hand (Hasta Melap) and they both vow to love, cherish and protect each other throughout their life.*

### *Var Mala and Ganthibandhan (Tying the nuptial knot)*

*The priest places a loop of cotton thread with multiple loops around the shoulders of Niki and Jeff. It is said that although a single thread can be easily broken, many threads together form a strong bond. Similarly, the combined strengths and virtues of Jeff and Niki will create an indestructible bond. The priest ties the wedding knot (Ganthibandhan) as a symbol of permanent union between Jeff and Niki as husband and wife.*

### *Mangal Sutra and Sindoor*

*Jeff ties a gold necklace of sacred black beads (Mangal Sutra) around Niki's neck and places red powder (Sindoor) on the crown of her forehead as a symbol of his love and devotion to distinguish her as a married woman – his wife. Jeff and Niki exchange wedding bands (blend of the two cultures) as part of the American tradition.*

### *Mangal Phera (Walk around the fire)*

*This ritual is the most sacred event of the marriage ceremony. The priest lights the Holy Fire and prays to the lord of Fire (Agni) for the couple's love to last as long as fire has existed on earth. With the Fire as their witness, Jeff and Niki walk around the fire four times.*

*Niki's cousin brothers, Rushil, Naavik, Akhil, and Arpan give Niki rice grains, which she hold in her palms and offers to the fire at the end of each round. Jeff leads the first three rounds, and Niki leads the last round. Each round represents the goals of life set forth in the vedas: Dharma (righteousness), Artha (prosperity), Kama (worldly pleasures), Moksha (spiritual salvation and liberation). Niki leads the last round signifying her determination to stand first beside her husband in happiness and sorrow..*

*At the end of mangal phera, Niki sits to the left of Jeff signifying she has taken the place closest to his heart. Also, the one who sits down first at the end of the last round will be the domineering partner in the marriage.*

### *Saptapadi (Seven steps together)*

*The couple then takes seven steps (Saptapadi) of friendship together and takes a vow with each step:*

- *We will live with honor and work together to provide for our household.*
- *We will develop our physical, mental, and spiritual strength.*
- *We will work to earn wealth and prosperity through the proper means .*
- *We will share each other's joys and sorrows.*
- *We will raise strong and virtuous children.*
- *We will be honest, faithful and loyal to each other.*
- *We will be lifelong friends – Husband and Wife.*

### *Kansar Bhakshan (Nourishing the relationship)*

*Niki and Jeff feed a sweet (Kansar) to each other to signify the celebration of their perfect union, to reflect mutual care and nourishment, that they will share all things in their lives.*

### *Akhand Saubhagyavati (Blessings from Married Women)*

*Married women from family and friends will whisper (Saubhagyavati Bhava) in Niki's ear wishing her well in her newly married life and praying for the couple to have a long and happy married life.*

### *Aarti and Ashirvad*

*Invoking God within their hearts, the priest with family, friends and all present offer their blessings and good wishes to the newly-wed couple. Thus, now they are declared Husband (Pati) and Wife (Patni).*