

## **The Isis Wedding Rite**

**By: Olivia Robertson**

### **The Eternal Knot An Introduction to the Ceremony**

*"To find the Other is to find Oneself:  
All Nature is expressed in one loved face."*

So says the Bard of the Druids in our Isis Wedding Rite. To unite with another soul is the goal of the Lover: through this devotion selfishness and loneliness fade away. When twin souls unite in Divine Union, it is through discovery of The Immortal Beloved that they find their own real selves. Such is the truth underlying the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, perfect wife and husband. In classical Greece Plato brought forth the ideal of twin souls divided and discovering reunion through love. Centuries later medieval troubadours travelled throughout Europe singing of fulfilment through the romantic devotion of lovers. Within our secret dreams, we have this knowledge in ourselves.

But one is not for ever able to concentrate on one other person, excluding all others! To find the other is indeed to find oneself. But this very love is creative, and kindles a like flame in receptive hearts. Families become friendly. Children are drawn into incarnation. Friendship expands to include animals, birds, trees and flowers, in an ever widening circle.

Through this increasing community, an elaborate interrelationship is woven; a tapestry of glowing colours and intricate design. Each new friendly connexion makes an additional knot in this tapestry of life. The good in any true relationship cannot be undone or broken, because by its very nature it belongs to the eternal Sphere of Archetypes. No annulment, no divorce exists in the Web of the Universe. That which is ugly, unnecessary or diseased has no part in this manifestation of the Divine Plan. We lose nothing that is a living part of ourselves or of others. What is lost could never have had real value.

Through the understanding gained of how to live pleasantly with those around us, cosmic awareness begins to dawn. This is a natural awakening of the soul, as a plant grows, flowers and bears fruit. This community of souls interconnected through love and wisdom has been symbolized by medieval philosophers as 'Rosa Mundi', a rambling rose bush that grows throughout all spheres, and flowers in the hearts of all beings and existences.

In our Wedding Rite one Temple Maiden says:

"So each to each the man and woman call  
For that which is the secret wish of all."

This hidden mystery of the heart is well fulfilled in the soul's true realm, the psychic sphere. How may we realize this for ourselves? Ritual provides a means of uniting the physical with the psychic realm. As we participate in a Rite, we find ourselves in relationship with beautiful symbols that speak to us in the mysterious language of our souls.

"The veil between the faery world and ours  
May sometimes vanish for enchanted hours."

A Temple Maiden speaks these words during our Rite, which itself may induce an awareness of the happy Land of Immortality. For ritual objects used in this material world have special associations with

inner consciousness. A golden ring reminds us of eternal Love, a white veil, of Youth, and parti-coloured confetti relates us to the Archetypal Elements. Certain notes of music, when struck in a particular order, affect our consciousness. Particular arrangements of colour, the glitter of metals, the flame of candles, stir memories of our souls' wanderings.

I had long dreamt of a magical Wedding Ceremony that would unite the souls of those participating in an eternal reality. Then one day two friends of ours, Bernard and Julia, asked us to perform such a Rite in my brother Lawrence's Temple of Isis. Bernard had often played the dulcimer he had made himself, during Temple ceremonies of dance drama. So we undertook to perform the wedding ceremony with pleasure. On the evening of the day of their Registry Office marriage, we enacted our first Wedding Rite. In the presence of many of our friends, we introduced through music, incense, candlelight and flowers all that could bring harmony for Bride and Bridegroom.

Our next wedding was in front of a wider audience, and its renewal was to reach television viewers throughout Ireland. Swadesh Poorun asked us to use our Rite for his marriage with my niece Melian, in addition to their Registry Office wedding. As Swadesh had been trained in the Indian tradition, we found the prospect of great interest, and were happy to agree.

My brother, as Priest of Isis, asked me to act as Hierophant, as he particularly wished to emphasise the long neglected priesthood of women. I accepted the role.

We decided to divide the Rite into three parts: the first to be Egyptian, because of the Temple dedication to Isis; the second to be Indian, with an invocation to the Indian Goddess Lakshmi. We chose for the final part a dedication to the Irish Goddess Dana and the ethereal People of Sidhe. This was suitable for the Bride, with her affinity with the Sidhe: even the colour of her hair was the true faery red-gold.

For the Egyptian part of the Rite, my brother and I decided to use the great Invocation to Isis and the Goddess's response, from The Transformations of Lucius Apuleius. My brother considered that this was appropriate, since Apuleius was a priest-initiate of Isis, and so had personal knowledge of her Divinity. We chose the translation by William Adlington, written in 1566.

For the Indian part naturally I discussed the matter with Swadesh. I had written a variant of the Christian marriage ceremony and suggested using this. Swadesh read it and then said:

"An Indian marriage ceremony is very different. We do not rely on words. There is no talk of 'Man' or 'Woman.' You as Priestess would refer to us as 'these two Spirits,' or 'Fire uniting with Water.' For unification to take place - in a comprehensive sense - Spirits which dwell within and all around us are called upon and they are brought together."

"This sounds like a Western occult ritual", I observed. "Such rituals are guarded as secret by most Western Esoteric Orders. I suppose that in place of words we shall use the language of symbols?"

"If you agree. Material things - such as grain - may be used to convey spiritual meaning. Our aim is for the two of us, Bride and Bridegroom, to blend all the elements of our consciousness."

"You mention the word 'elements.' In what way do you propose we should use these?"

"Being a uniting ceremony, we unite the Spirits of the Elements," replied Swadesh. "We call upon them in a certain order."

"I see that this corresponds to Western occult practice. In this part of the Rite you actually suggest that we should invoke the Elemental Spirits themselves?"

"I do. And I realize, as you do, that this is a serious matter. These Spirits must be treated with respect, if we expect them to respect our ceremonies."

"Indeed so," I agreed. "We in Ireland have always had the wisdom to show respect for our 'People of the Sidhe,' as we call these Spirits. By the way, that is like your Sanskrit for the Powers, isn't it? The Siddhis."

"These truths are traditionally known in most religions," observed Swadesh. "They are expressed differently, that is all."

"Nowadays psychologists might call the process 'integrating the various aspects of consciousness through the use of associative symbols'," I said. "Another sort of person would say that one is happy when enjoying beautiful art! Anyway how do you, using Indian tradition, suggest we symbolize the unifying process for your marriage?"

"We first call on the Spirit of Fire, who acts as a catalyst," replied Swadesh. "Next we unite the Spirit of Water with that of Fire. The water used in the ceremony must be drawn from a well or spring. It has to be pure and fresh, coming from the depths of the earth."

"This is part of our own Irish tradition," I said. "We use the water from our well within the Castle. It is said to be a holy well."

"This water will be perfect. The uniting of Fire and Water means much more than the uniting of two souls. Water coming deep from the earth contains lifegiving force and, as it unites with Fire, it rises and unites further with the Element of Air."

"The ancient science of Alchemy contained this knowledge. I imagine we will use incense to represent the Spirit of Fire?"

"Certainly," answered Swadesh. "We drop water on incense burning in an earthenware pot. To introduce the Spirit of Air Melian and I will move the smoking pot in the air, in a circular movement."

"Mind, symbolized by 'Air' is becoming increasingly important in modern marriage," I observed. "We in the West represent this quality as an attribute of the God Mercury. Do you notice that people astrologically associated with the planet Mercury - such as journalists and broadcasters, like harmonizing ideas and people? You as a play producer need this quality."

"I agree that Mind is very important. But one does need stability in any relationship - particularly marriage! That is where the Spirits of Earth help. They bring strength, fruitfulness and abundance."

"Our Irish leprechauns are associated with good luck," I commented. "They own pots of gold and work hard at making shoes and boots. Encouragement for the bread-winner! Stones are often used to represent earth."

"We use grains. These can take the form of rice, oats or barley. They are good potent forces: many races throughout the world have used them for thousands of years. To add grain to our pot is to give that which contains all the energies which make for pulsating life."

"I understand that in Eastern tradition you use five elements?"

"This is so. The Fifth Element, Akasha, unites the other four."

"In the Western tradition we call this vitalizing psychic force 'Aether.' What shall we use to symbolize it?"

"Olive oil or ghee - clarified butter may represent the Aether for us," replied Swadesh. "This oil must be pure - not from a bottle from a factory. It has to be home-made. Oil contains many different powers in a beautiful state of balance. So Bride and Bridegroom add a little oil to the pot, so that the other elements in it may be blended. So may our two Spirits be in harmony."

"In the West we do not usually invoke the Elemental Powers in a public ceremony ... it will be an extraordinary experience to help to do this."

"It should be very effective for what we intend," observed Swadesh. "As the Wedding Rite progresses, more and more power is brought through, and various kinds of Spirits join us. As those taking part in the ceremony unite all the forces, the Spirit of Smoke carries these all round the Temple. The Spirit of Smoke is a great carrier, and all the time is transporting the other Spirits."

"This is why incense is used in most religious ceremonies," I commented. "It has an evocative effect on the consciousness."

"True. And the Spirit of Smoke never forgets. During the Ritual you, as Priestess, open the Third Eye of Bride and Bridegroom by putting water on each forehead. This may lead the Bride and myself to forget our own bodies and our own immediate environment. But the Smoke, when treated with respect, comes to us when we inhale it, and brings recollection."

"This is certainly so," I agreed. "Scent is a potent bringer of forgotten memories. Incense awakens the dormant psychic faculty."

"Indeed yes. Smoke travels a lot, and to many deep and normally inaccessible places in our minds and bodies. It distributes much from one to another. It will carry forces from the Bride and me to you, to the Priest, the guests, the stones, the flowers, the wood, the slates...."

"Splendid!" I exclaimed. "This is the very universal application we wish to emphasise. To unite with one is to unite with all, as our auras blend in harmony."

"Also the smoke gives a blue aura," added Swadesh; "A very nice thing to have."

On another occasion Swadesh and I discussed the ceremony of the tying of the Bridal Knot. This, he explained, symbolizes eternal union. As the Hierophant who was to tie the knot, I gave much thought to the implications. I never like the idea of binding anything or anybody.

As I always do when I wish to understand something, I had a meditation. Through this meditation I learnt what this tying of the knot represents. The knot itself is truly for ever. It symbolizes all that is good and enduring in souls joined in harmony. But how wise the old priests were who devised the Rite! For Bride and Bridegroom are not in this ceremony tied to one another by each wrist, as I had imagined. Instead each voluntarily holds a corner of a handkerchief. The knot is tied with the loose ends. Thus they hold it in freedom.

The knot has greater significance. It symbolizes one twist in the Web of the Universe, which intricately binds all that lives in an elaborate network of relationship. Yet, like the spider's web, it is woven from a single strand.

Swadesh and I also considered the traditional Hindu circling by Bride and Bridegroom of the Holy Fire. I commented that this appeared to me to be an enactment similar to the Dervish dance representing the path of the Moon and Planets through the zodiac: hence a symbol of our own human cyclic movement through past, present and future around the fire of eternal life.

"It also reminds me of 'The Magic Flute'," I added; "You know the test Tamino and Pamina undergo through Fire and Water? This is very like our Wedding Rite. In the final Act, you remember that hero and heroine enter the Temple of Isis and Osiris for their reward, their marriage. Lawrence intends that we use for our procession down the Temple passage 'The March of the Priests' from the opera."

"A good choice. And there is spiritual meaning in 'The Magic Flute' itself as an instrument," said Swadesh. "Flute music indeed has very real magical quality. Most Spirits love flute music. I would not dream of having this wedding without the flute! I propose that we have its music recorded from the Taj Mahal. Taj Mahal is a Power Place. Some of the tunes you will be hearing during our ceremony are believed to have been played by the God Krishna himself."

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed. "And for our Irish section we will use music associated with the Sidhe, played on the harp. It would be ideal if we could introduce dance drama at this point."

For this final part of the Rite, I desired to convey the faery atmosphere of Ireland, that emanates from mountain, lake, wood and river. Our own myth has for romantic setting no less a place than the Sea at the World's End, the Atlantic Ocean which still shows forth visions of the lost continent of Atlantis for those with second sight.

Hy Brasil, Tir na nOg, the immortal countries across the Western ocean, fired the imagination of our forebears and drew forth the drama and poetry of the recent Celtic revival. So I chose as speech for the Bridegroom the call of the God Midir to his wife Etain, who had left the land of Fairy to join humankind.

Niamh of the Golden Hair, a Sea Goddess associated with the Atlantean tradition, attracted me as an archetype for the Bride. Niamh appears on a white sea horse to the human youth Oisín, and asks him to come with her to Tir na nOg, Land of Youth.

For both these ancient Irish poems I used the 1911 translation by T. W. Rolleston, from his "Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race."

Niamh's poem brought forth not only the character of Melian, but conveyed the atmosphere of our valley between two rivers.

I asked Melian what was her feeling about invoking The Sidhe at her wedding.

"The Sidhe are Spirits which are in harmony with Nature," she replied. "The invocation of such Spirits is very important, as a marriage is a joining together and harmonizing of two Spirits."

"Are the Sidhe as real to you as the Devic Beings are to Swadesh?" I inquired.

"Oh yes," she answered. "They are very real. They are the protective Spirits of Ireland."

Our ceremony took place on the 28th of June, 1975. Thirty guests attended. The event was subsequently announced in the wedding columns of The Times and The Irish Times as having taken place in The Temple of Isis, Huntington Castle.

On the 9th of December in the same year the Wedding Rite was reenacted for Telefís Éireann for their programme "News-Round." The Producer of the television film was Peter McNiff. This re-enactment was no worry to Swadesh and Melian, because Swadesh explained that Indian marriage could be renewed, sometimes yearly - for instance after the birth of a child. His own parents in Mauritius had had their own marriage renewed five times. This custom therefore made our performance of the second ceremony authentic. Once again we were taking part in a sincere Rite. The film was shown on 11th January, 1976.

On this occasion we had more participants in the ceremony. Our friend the painter Desmond was Guardian of the Gate. My youngest niece Lucy, who had often taken part in our dance dramas, was a Temple Maiden. Kathy, the other Temple Maiden, had made earthenware vessels for the Temple in our pottery. Alyn, a young poet, was Bard of the Irish Druids.

My brother, Priest of Isis, wore the traditional blue Egyptian priestly headdress: it was similar to the Pharaoh's crown of Lower Egypt, with the Uraeus, a gold snake, in front. He wore his black academic gown and hood, and a maniple bearing the ancient ankh or pasha emblem. I wore a gold head-dress and black, red and gold robes, with the symbolic gold girdle and topaz ring.

The costumes were not all specifically associated with any one tradition, but were intended to produce the effect of symbiosis of various cults. The Bride wore an eighteenth-century tiara and a white lace gown with a girdle of red poppies. We were fortunate in possessing an antique Chinese mandarin robe for the Bridegroom. It was embroidered with symbolic gold designs on scarlet satin. Both Temple Maidens were dressed in velvet caftans embroidered with flowers, one in blue, the other in red. The Bard was robed in a blue tabard ornamented with a yellow Celtic design. He wore over this a white hooded cloak. A long grey hooded cloak was worn by the Guardian of the Gate. The Temple was lighted by many candles. Kathy and Lucy decorated it with branches with the green, gold and orange coloured leaves of winter, for the television Rite.

We had many pleasant reactions to our two ceremonies from those of differing shades of religious belief. A neighbouring Catholic priest congratulated Swadesh on the wedding: he said he had heard that the ceremony had been beautiful. Indeed, after the first wedding we had immediate response. Three couples who had been guests at the Rite came to us and asked for similar weddings! Two wished to marry for the first time: the other pair had had a church wedding and now wished to have their marriage renewed through our Rite in the Temple of Isis. When this was agreed upon, I felt that our part of the mystical mystic rambling rose bush was beginning to flower.