Welcome to Spotlight. I'm Liz Waid. And I'm Joshua Leo. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live. A man and a woman are standing together. They look extremely happy. A crowd of happy people also stands around the man and woman. As the man and woman walk away, the crowd throws rice at them! So why are this man and woman so happy? It is because it is their wedding day! The man is a groom, and the woman is a bride - a newly married couple. The crowd's rice is a symbol. The crowd wishes the couple happiness and success. Today's Spotlight is on marriage customs. All around the world getting married is an important event. And many times, there are different important or fun traditions that go along with getting married. Today we look at some fun and interesting marriage customs from around the world. People throw rice at weddings in many different cultures. In India, rice is a very important food. People there throw the rice to wish that the new couple has plenty of food in their new marriage. In ancient China, people threw rice to wish the new couple many children. But rice is only one thing people throw at weddings! Grains are very popular to throw at weddings. That is because grains are symbols for life and fertility. Many people want to wish a new married couple success and many children. Marriage is a special event because it combines so many different parts of life. It involves traditions, religious practices, and civil laws. And many of these things change over time! Many of our modern marriage customs come from ancient traditions. For example, many ancient people groups believed in evil spirits. They believed that the presence of evil spirits could harm the couple getting married. So, many ancient traditions aimed to confuse evil spirits or frighten them away. For example, the custom of throwing rice or grains began this way. People thought the rice would take the spirits' concentration away from the bride and groom. Another tradition comes from an ancient Roman custom. Brides and grooms in many different cultures have their friends or families stand with them in the wedding ceremony. These are attendants. The ancient Romans believed that the evil spirits would become confused with so many people around. They would not know which couple was the bride and groom. Of course, these thoughts are not common today. But the custom of having attendants remains! Some marriage customs are designed for the time before a wedding. They aim to make sure the bride and groom will be a good couple. An engagement is a period of time AFTER a man and woman have promised to marry each other, but BEFORE the wedding. In the United States, it is common for a man to ask a woman's father for his blessing. The man does this before he becomes engaged. In Bulgaria, this tradition is similar, but a little different. If a man wants to become engaged to a woman, he needs his friend's help. The man's friend asks the woman's father for his blessing. If the father agrees to the engagement and marriage, he talks to his daughter. He asks his daughter three times if she wants to marry the man. If she answers "yes" all three times, the man can visit her house. Many religious practices also influence marriage plans. It is important to be prepared for marriage. That is because it is a promise. Christians believe God created marriage for people. They believe that God created the world and everything in it. He created people to be together. The Christian Bible tells people that a marriage is permanent. When a couple gets married, they come together as one. They are no longer separate. The link between two married people is a beautiful thing. It is an act blessed by God. So people need to treat it seriously. Many wedding traditions celebrate the uniting of a couple. A South African tradition uses fire as a symbol of unity. In this tradition, parents of the bride and groom take part of a fire from their own homes. They bring the fire to the bride and groom's new house. Then they light a new fire for the couple, with both flames. And a traditional Hindu wedding unites more than just a bride and groom. It unites the bride and groom's families! A wedding in this tradition will usually involve a whole community with friends, family, and other relatives. Marriage is a serious event. But it is also a reason to CELEBRATE! Many wedding customs celebrate how much FUN a wedding can be! In many parts of the Middle East a bride and groom celebrate the wedding with five separate parties! The parties happen before and after the marriage. And they include many of the bride and groom's family members. Wishing luck and happiness to a bride and groom before their marriage is popular all over the world. One interesting custom comes from Germany. Before the wedding, guests visit the house a bride and groom will live in. The guests bring ceramic, or baked clay, dishes. They break the dishes in front of the house. And the bride and groom must clean up the mess. If the couple works well together and keeps the area clean, they will have a happy marriage. It shows that the couple can work together. Food is another way people celebrate weddings. Traditions in the Caribbean call for a special cake. It is called a "Black Cake". Mothers give their daughters the recipe, or directions, for the cake. The recipe passes from generation to generation. And each woman tries to improve the recipe. The cake includes basic ingredients like flour, sugar and butter. But it also includes dried fruits. And it is served with a Hard Rum alcohol sauce. In Bermuda, there is another tradition using cakes. On top of the wedding cake, there is a small young tree. After the wedding, the bride and groom plant the tree at their home. As their marriage grows, so does the tree. Many marriage traditions are very old, and very beautiful! Marriage is a special link between two people. Celebrating with friends, family, and the whole community is a wonderful thing. But it is also good to remember that marriage is more important than just following traditions and customs. It does not matter if a wedding is big or small, if it costs a lot or a little, or if it follows traditional customs or not. A marriage is about a beautiful promise between two people - the bride and groom - a husband and wife. We would love to hear about marriage customs in your culture. Or tell us about your wedding! Share your comments on the discussion page of our website at http://www.radio.english.net. Or send us an email at radio@English.net. This program was written and produced by Liz Waid. The voices you heard were from the United States. This program is called "Marriage Traditions." We hope you can join us again for the next Spotlight program. Goodbye!