

Wedding Service Guide

The Jewish wedding has a number of components, most of which are optional. This guide presents a basic template for a wedding. However, it is understood that many aspects of the ceremony will change according to the family's and congregational tradition.

The requirements for a wedding are simple: 1) the couple, both bride and groom, must be Jewish and single; 2) there must be at least 2 Jewish witnesses; 3) the wedding must be conducted by clergy (Rabbi, Cantor (also known as Hazzan), or other appointed by congregation) who have been authorized by the State to solemnize marriages and 4) the couple must have a valid civil marriage certificate. Prior to the ceremony, the ketubah should be inspected and completed by the clergy. It is customary for the bride and groom to go to a mikvah if possible.

The following should be provided specifically for the ceremony:

- Ketubah
- Chuppah (usually a large tallit, if not provided by the synagogue or wedding hall)
- Rings (solid, without stones)
- Wine and 2 cups
- Glass (easily broken; sometimes a light bulb is used)
- 2 witnesses (Jewish, who know their Hebrew names, unrelated to each other or the couple)

In addition to the clergy officiating, it is customary to have musicians for the processional and recessional music.

Marriage Template

Ketuba signing and delivery

Bedeken or Kabbalat panim

Tisch

Processional

Encircling – with Song

Baruch haba and Mi Adir

Welcome

Erusin (also known as kiddushin)

 Blessing over wine

 Exchange of Rings

 Formal betrothal (harei mekudeshet... and ani l'dodi..), Exchange of vows

Wedding talk and reading ketuba

Nisuin

 Sheva brachot

 Priestly Blessing

 Break glass

Recessional (Siman tov)

Yichud

Component Description in Normal Order

Ketuba signing and delivery **Who: Clergy, Couple, 2 Witnesses**
(required)

The ketubah, the marriage contract written in Aramaic, outlines the chatan's various responsibilities to provide his wife with food, shelter and clothing, and to be attentive to her emotional needs. Protecting the rights of a Jewish wife is so important that the marriage may not be solemnized until the contract has been completed.

The document is signed by two witnesses, and has the standing of a legally binding agreement. The ketubah is the property of the kallah and she must have access to it throughout their marriage. It is often written amidst beautiful artwork, to be framed and displayed in the home. The reading of the ketubah, in the ceremony, acts as a break between the first part of the ceremony (Kiddushin or erusin ("betrothal")), and the latter part - Nissuin ("marriage"). The groom formally accepts all the unilateral obligations to which he commits himself in the ketubah by executing a kinyan sudar, a traditional legal consent and agreement process. The officiating rabbi hands him a small article of clothing such as a handkerchief, and the groom, before two witnesses (who may not be close relatives of bride or groom), takes it and lifts it up symbolically to affirm consent, before returning it to the clergy.

While the ketubah is very formulaic, there are important differences between the traditional ketubah and the modern ketubah. The most important difference is the inclusion of a clause which insures that, in the event of divorce, the "get" cannot be withheld from the kallah.

Bedeken and/or Kabbalat panim **Who: Clergy, Couple, Parents**
(optional)

It is customary for the chatan and kallah not to see each other for one week preceding the wedding. This increases the anticipation and excitement of the event. Therefore, prior to the wedding ceremony, the chatan and kallah greet guests separately. This is called "Kabbalat Panim."

Jewish tradition likens the couple to a queen and king. The kallah will be seated on a "throne" to receive her guests, while the chatan is surrounded by guests who sing and toast him. At this time there is an Ashkenazi tradition for the mother of the bride and the mother of the groom to stand together and break a plate. The reason is to show the seriousness of the commitment: just as a plate can never be fully repaired, so too a broken relationship can never be fully repaired.

Next comes the bedeken, the veiling of the kallah by the chatan. The veil symbolizes the idea of modesty and conveys the lesson that however attractive physical appearances may be, the soul and character are paramount. It is reminiscent of Rebecca covering her face before marrying Isaac (Genesis ch. 24).

The Ashkenazi custom is that the chatan, accompanied by family and friends, proceeds to where the kallah is seated and places the veil over her face. This signals the groom's commitment to clothe and protect his wife. Unlike other religions, Judaism mandates that the groom sees his bride prior to the ceremony to ensure that he is marrying the correct woman. The Torah tells the story of Jacob, who intended to marry Rachel, but unknowingly married her sister Leah, whose identity was hidden by her veil. During the bedeken, the groom will lower the bride's veil and symbolically set her apart from all others

Tisch..... Who: Groom and Friends
(optional)

The groom's reception (Yiddish: hoson's tisch, for "table") for men is held at a table laden with food and drink. Seated adjacent to the groom are his father and the bride's father, surrounded by the rabbis. Around the table are male guests, relatives, and friends of the groom, who toast the groom and sing. [Today, many grooms opt to have female friends and relatives at their tish as well.] Often, the room in which the groom's reception is held is where the late-afternoon Minchah prayer service takes place.

It is customary for a groom to deliver (or attempt to deliver) a learned discourse at the tisch ("table"). But traditionally he is interrupted by his friends shortly after beginning, with lively singing and rhythmic clapping in which all present join to prevent him from continuing. This custom is not intended as an affront or as an act of disrespect to the groom, but is designed to protect the groom who may be less than scholarly, lest he be shamed on what should be his most joyous day.

Processional Who: Clergy, Couple, Parents, Best Man/Bridesmaids, Musicians
(required)

The actual procession order for the clergy, Parents, groomsmen, bridesmaids, Groom and Bride is determined by local custom. Music is played during the procession, but there are no particular standard melodies for this. The groom should be waiting just outside the chuppah when the bride arrives.

Encircling – with Song..... Who: Couple, Hazzan
(optional)

The custom of circling occurs when the bride arrives at the chuppah. The bride traditionally circles the groom seven times. This could symbolically represent the seven blessings recited during the ceremony, the seven days of creation, or the entry of the bride into the seven spheres of her beloved's soul. It is also said that on her wedding a bride possesses special powers and she circles her groom in an effort to create a guarded area around him. This act also defines the new family circle and sets apart the space that the couple will share.

Baruch haba and Mi Adir.....Who: Couple, Hazzan
(required)

The traditional welcome of the bride is the following:

Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we bless you out of the house of the Lord. O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. Serve the Lord with joy; come before him with exulting.

He who is mighty, blessed and great above all beings, may he bless the bridegroom and the bride.

בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם יי, בִּרְכוּנוֹכֶם מִבֵּית יי.
בָּאוּ נְשִׁיתְחֻוּהָ וְנִכְרַעְהָ, נִבְרַכָּה לְפָנֵי יי עַשְׂנוּ.
עֲבְדוּ אֶת יי בְּשִׂמְחָה, בָּאוּ לְפָנָיו בְּרִנָּה.

מִי אֲדִיר עַל הַכֹּל, מִי בְּרוּךְ עַל הַכֹּל, מִי גָדוֹל עַל הַכֹּל,
הוּא יְבָרֵךְ הַחַתָּן וְהַכֻּלָּה.

Welcome under the Chuppah

The wedding ceremony takes place under the chuppah (canopy, meaning “that which covers or protects”), a symbol of the home that the new couple will build together. It is open on all sides, just as Abraham and Sarah had their tent open all sides to welcome people in unconditional hospitality.

The Ashkenazi custom is to have the chuppah ceremony outside under the stars, as a sign of the blessing given by God to the patriarch Abraham, that his children shall be "as the stars of the heavens" (Genesis 15:5). Sefardim generally have the chuppah indoors.

The Ashkenazi custom is that the chatan and kallah wear no jewelry under the chuppah (marriage canopy). Their mutual commitment is based on who they are as people, not on any material possessions.

The kallah follows the chatan, and both are usually escorted to the chuppah by their respective sets of parents.

Under the chuppah, the Ashkenazi custom is that the kallah circles the chatan seven times. Just as the world was built in seven days, the kallah is figuratively building the walls of the couple's new world together. The number seven also symbolizes the wholeness and completeness that they cannot attain separately.

The kallah then settles at the chatan's right-hand side.

[At this point, the Sefardic custom is that the chatan says the blessing She'hecheyanu over a new tallit, and has in mind that the blessing also goes on the marriage. The tallit is then held by four young men over the head of the chatan and kallah.]

Welcome **Who: Clergy**
(optional)

Erusin (also known as kiddushin)

Blessing over wine..... **Who: Clergy, Couple**
(required)

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast hallowed us by thy commandments, and hast given us command concerning forbidden marriages; who hast disallowed unto us those that are betrothed, but hast sanctioned unto us such as are wedded to us by the rite of the nuptial canopy who hallowest thy people Israel by the rite of the nuptial canopy and the sacred covenant of wedlock.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל הָעֲרִיּוֹת,
וְאָסַר לָנוּ אֶת הָאֲרוּסוֹת, וְהִתִּיר לָנוּ אֶת הַנְּשׂוּאוֹת לָנוּ עַל יְדֵי חֲפָה וְקִדּוּשֵׁין.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מְקַדֵּשׁ עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל יְדֵי חֲפָה וְקִדּוּשֵׁין.

Exchange of Rings..... **Who: Clergy, Couple**
(required)

Formal betrothal..... **Who: Groom, Bride**
(required)

The groom and bride will then exchange wedding vows in Aramaic:

Groom: Behold, thou are consecrated unto me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel.

The bride says: I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.

הָרִי אֶת מְקַדְּשֵׁת לִי, בְּטַבְעֶת זֶה, כְּדַת מִשֶּׁה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל. (groom)
אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי (bride)

The rings we exchange are unbroken circles, free of precious stones, without beginning or end. In ancient times, "something of value" often was a coin, but today it usually is a ring. The ring must be of solid gold, with no stones or gems, and it must, at the ceremony, be the bridegroom's property. Only one ring, given to the bride by the groom, is required by Jewish law. This ring represents the wholeness achieved through marriage and a hope for an unbroken union. The ring may be engraved inside. They represent the wholeness achieved through marriage and a hope for an unbroken union. When we exchange rings, we will each place the ring on the other's

forefinger. This tradition stems from the ancient belief that the forefinger was directly connected to the heart. By giving each other these rings, we are symbolically giving each other our hearts.

Wedding talk and reading of ketuba..... Who: Clergy
(required)

The rabbi or cantor will say a few words about marriage and the couple and will proceed with the public reading of the ketuba.

Nisuin
Sheva brachot..... Who: Hazzan
(required)

After this, the sheva brachos, or seven blessings, are recited, either by the cantor, or at many weddings a different blessing is given to various people the families wish to honor. The blessings are also recited over a full cup of wine. The blessings begin with praising G-d for His creation in general and creation of the human being and proceed with praise for the creation of the human as a "two part creature," woman and man. The blessings express the hope that the new couple will rejoice together forever as though they are the original couple, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The blessings also include a prayer that Jerusalem will be fully rebuilt and restored with the Temple in its midst and the Jewish people within her gates. At this point the couple again share in drinking the cup of wine.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

Blessed art thou. O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast created all things to thy glory.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast made man in thine image, after thy likeness, and hast prepared unto him, out of his very self, a perpetual fabric. Blessed art thou, O Lord, Creator of man.

May she who was barren (Zion) be exceeding glad and exult, when her children are gathered within her in joy. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who makest Zion joyful through her children.

O make these loved companions greatly to rejoice, even as of old thou didst gladden thy creature in the garden of Eden. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who makest bridegroom and bride to rejoice.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, mirth and exultation, pleasure and delight, love, brotherhood, peace and fellowship. Soon may there be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the jubilant voice of bridegrooms from their canopies, and of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who makest the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהִפֵּל בְּרָא לְכַבּוּדּוֹ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצַלְמֵ דְמוּת
 תְּבֻנֹתוֹ, וְהִתְקִין לוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּנִין עֲדֵי עַד. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.
 שׁוֹשׁ תְּשִׁישׁ וְתִגַּל הָעֵקָרָה, בְּקִבוּץ בְּנֵיהָ לְתוֹכָהּ בְּשִׂמְחָה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְשַׂמַּח
 צִיּוֹן בְּבִנְיָהּ.
 שְׂמַח תְּשַׂמַּח רַעִים הָאֲהוּבִים, כְּשִׂמְחָה יִצִּירָךְ בְּגַן עֵדֶן מִקֶּדֶם. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי,
 מְשַׂמַּח חַתָּן וְכֻלָּהּ.
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה, חַתָּן וְכֻלָּהּ, גִּילָה,
 רְנָה, דִּיצָה וְחֻדוּדָה, אֲהָבָה וְאַחֻוּהַ וְשָׁלוֹם וְרַעוּת. מְהֵרָה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יִשְׁמַע בְּעָרֵי
 יְהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, קוֹל שְׂשׂוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה, קוֹל חַתָּן וְקוֹל כֻּלָּהּ, קוֹל
 מְצַהֲלוֹת חַתָּנִים מְחַפְּתֵם וְנִעָרִים מְמַשְׁתֵּה נְגִינָתָם. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְשַׂמַּח חַתָּן עִם
 הַכֻּלָּהּ.

Priestly Blessing..... **Who: Clergy, Couple, Parents**
 (optional)

It is customary for the clergy to give the Priestly Blessing to the couple as the traditional blessing of peace for the family and the congregation.

THE LORD BLESS THEE, AND KEEP THEE: THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE
 UPON THEE, AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO THEE; THE LORD TURN HIS FACE UNTO
 THEE, AND GIVE THEE PEACE.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יי וַיִּשְׂמְרֶךָ.
 יֵאָר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֶנֶךָ.
 יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם.

Break glass..... **Who: Couple**
 (optional)

The groom breaks a glass by stamping on it. This custom dates back to Talmudic times, and symbolizes the idea of our keeping Jerusalem and Israel in our minds even at times of our joy. Just as the Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed, so we break a utensil to show our identification with the sorrow of Jewish exile. The verse, "If I forget thee O' Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning: If I do not raise thee over my own joy, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth", is sometimes recited at this point. With the breaking of the glass the band plays, and the

guests usually break out into dancing and cries of "Mazaltov! Mazaltov!" (Some say, tongue in cheek, that this moment symbolizes the last time the groom gets to "put his foot down")

Recessional (Siman tov)..... Who: Couple, Musicians
(required)

Yichud..... Who: Couple
(optional)

It is customary for the newly married couple to share some time in privacy to reflect on the sanctity of their wedding ceremony and rejoice in their new life. During yichud, the bride and groom feed each other, a token that they will sustain each other throughout their marriage. After yichud, they are ready to join their family and friends to celebrate. Jewish law provides for this time as a way for the couple to savor their joy, to reflect on these awesome and precious experiences.

As we leave the chuppah, it is the obligation of each of you to carry on in joyous fashion the traditional mitzvah of celebration by bringing fun and laughter to the newlyweds.

MARRIAGE AND THE POSITION OF WOMAN IN JUDAISM

Marriage is that relationship between man and woman under whose shadow alone there can be true reverence for the mystery, dignity, and sacredness of life. Scripture represents marriage not merely as a Mosaic ordinance, but as part of the scheme of Creation, intended for all humanity.

They do less than justice to this Divine institution who view it in no other light than as a civil contract. In a contract, the mutual right and obligations are the result of agreement, and their selection and formulation may flow from the momentary whim of the parties. In the marriage relation, however, such rights and obligations are high above the fluctuating will of both husband and wife; they are determined and imposed by Religion, as well as by the Civil Law. The contract view fails to bring out this higher sphere of duty and conscience, which is of the very essence of marriage.

the purpose of marriage is twofold—(a) posterity, and (b) companionship.

(a) The duty of rearing a family figures in the Rabbinic codes as the first of the 613 *Mitzvoth* (ordinances) of the Torah (Genesis 1.28, *Be fruitful and multiply*). To this commandment is due the sacredness and centrality of the child in Judaism—something which even the enlightened nations of antiquity could not understand. The Roman historian Tacitus deemed it a contemptible prejudice of the Jews that “it is a crime among them to kill any child”. What a lurid flashlight these words throw on Graeco-Roman society! It is in such a society that Judaism proclaimed the Biblical teaching that the child was the highest of human treasures. *O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing that I go childless?* was Abraham’s agonizing cry. Of what value were earthly possessions to him, if he was denied a child who would continue his work after him? This attitude of the Father of the Hebrew people has remained that of his descendants throughout the ages. A childless marriage was deemed to have failed in one of its main purposes. In little children—it was taught—God gives humanity a chance to make good its mistakes. Little children are “the Messiahs of mankind”—the perennial regenerative force in humanity. No wonder that Jewish infant mortality is everywhere lower than the non-Jewish—often only one-half of that among the general population.

(b) Companionship is the other primary end of the marriage institution. Woman is to be the helpmate of man, עזר כנגדו. A wife is a man’s other self, all that man’s nature demands for its completion physically, socially, and spiritually. In marriage alone can man’s need for physical and social companionship be directed to holy ends. It is this idea which is expressed by the term *kiddushin* (“the sanctities”) applied to Jewish marriage—a term which, aside from its original sacerdotal meaning, signifies the hallowing of two human beings to life’s holiest purposes. In married life, man finds his truest and most lasting happiness; and only through married life does human personality reach its highest fulfilment. *A man shall leave his father, and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife*, says Scripture (Genesis 2. 24). Note that it is the man who is to cleave to his wife, and not the woman, physically the weaker, who is to cleave to her husband; because, in the higher sphere of the soul’s life, woman is the ethical and spiritual superior of man. “Even as the wife is”, say the Rabbis, “so the husband is”. The celibate life is the unblest life: Judaism requires its saints to show their saintliness *in* the world, and amid the ties and obligations of family life. “he who has no wife abides without good, help, joy, blessing, or atonement. He who has no wife cannot be considered a whole man” (Talmud). All forms of extra-marital companionship outside the sacred estate of matrimony, unhallowed by Religion and unrestrained by its commandments, Judaism considers an abomination. And such

extra-marital relations are prohibited just as sternly with non-Jewish women as with Jewish. Thus, Joseph resists the advances of the *heathen* temptress with the words: *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* (Genesis 39. 9); and the Book of Proverbs is clear on the attitude of Judaism to the “strange woman”—married or unmarried. No less emphatically than in Scripture is purity of life and thought demanded by the Rabbis. The founders of the Christian Church adopted in its entirety the Jewish view on extra-marital relations.

The Biblical ideal of marriage is monogamy. The Creation story and all the Prophetic portions of Scripture speak of the union of a man with *one* wife. Whenever a Prophet speaks of marriage, he is thinking of such a union—lifelong, faithful, holy. Polygamy seems to have well-nigh disappeared in Israel after the Babylonian Exile; and early Rabbinic literature presupposes a practically monogamic society. Though the *formal* abolition of polygamy, through Rabbenu Gershom, only took place in the year 1000, monogamy had been the rule in Jewish life long before the rise of Christianity.

For the questions and problems concerning the dissolution of marriage, see *Deuteronomy*, 314-319 (932-4). In this connection, the words of the late Dr. Friedlander should be noted. “We acknowledge the principle laid down in the Talmud, “the law of the Country is binding upon us” (דינא דמלכותא דינא); but only in so far as our civil relations are concerned. With regard to religious questions, our own religious Code must be obeyed. Religiously neither civil marriage nor civil divorce can be recognized, unless supplemented by marriage or divorce according to religious forms. Furthermore, marriages allowed by the Civil Law, but prohibited by our Religious Law, cannot be recognized before the tribunal of our Religion”.

It is astonishing to note the amount of hostile misrepresentation that exists in regard to woman’s position in Jewish life. Yet the teaching of Scripture is quite clear. God created man in His own image; male and female created He them (Genesis 1. 27)—both man and woman are in their spiritual nature akin to God, and both are invested with the same authority to subdue the earth and have domination over it. The wives of the Patriarchs are the equals of their husbands. Miriam, alongside her brothers, is reckoned as one of the three emancipators from Egypt (Micha 6. 4); Deborah is “*Judge*” in Israel, and leader in the war of independence; and to Hannah (I Samuel 1. 8) her husband speaks: “Why weepest thou? am not I better to thee than ten sons?” In later centuries, we find woman among the Prophets—Huldah; and in the days of the Second Temple, on the throne—Queen Salome Alexandra. Nothing can well be nobler praise of woman than Proverbs 31 (see p. 404); and, as regards the reverence due to her from her children, the mother was placed on a par with the father in the Decalogue, Exodus 20. 12; and before the father, in Leviticus 19. 3. A Jewish child would not have spoken to his grief-stricken mother as did Telemachus, the hero’s son in the *Odyssey*: “go to thy chamber, and mind thine own housewiferies. Speech shall be for man, for all, but for me in chief; for mine is the lordship in the house”.

The property rights of woman became clearly defined in the Talmudic period. Her legal status under Jewish law “compared to its advantage with that of contemporary civilizations” (G. F. Moore). “In respect to possessing independent estate, the Jewish wife was in a position far superior to that of English wives before the enactment of recent legislation” (I. Abrahams).

A conclusive proof of woman’s dominating place in Jewish life is the undeniable fact, that the hallowing of the Jewish home was her work; and that the laws of chastity were observed in that home, both by men and women, with a scrupulousness that has hardly ever been equalled. The Jewish Sages duly recognized her wonderful spiritual influence, and nothing could surpass the delicacy with which respect for her is inculcated: “Love thy wife as thyself, and honour her more

than thyself. Be careful not to cause woman to weep, for God counts her tears. Israel was redeemed from Egypt on account of the virtue of its women. He who weds a good woman is as if he had fulfilled all the precepts of the Torah” (Talmud).