

Jewish Wedding Traditions

We want you to enjoy the beauty and holiness of our wedding day traditions and participate comfortably in the events of your choice. Following are reflections on the components of a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony.

Groom's Tish

The word "tish" means table. Upon arrival at the House of the Book, male guests will be greeted by Avram and his attendants at a Groom's Table. There, you will have an opportunity to offer the groom words of wisdom and prayers. In the spirit of celebration, it is customary for the groom to be interrupted when he speaks or attempts to impart wisdom. Traditionally, guests are encouraged to sing silly songs, offer a toast, and in general, create merriment. At the conclusion of the Tish, Avram will be escorted merrily into the ketubah signing ceremony to meet Abby.

Haknassat Kallah

According to Jewish tradition, the bride on her wedding day is like a queen. The commandment of *haknassat kallah* reflects this tradition by insisting, among other things, that every bride (especially a poor or orphaned bride) must be provided with a dowry, a wedding dress, and every thing she needs for the wedding day. Traditional rabbis go so far as to say that the community must sell a synagogue item, even one that has a donor's name on it, and even a scroll of the Torah, in order to raise money for an orphaned bride. Celebrating with the bride is one of the few Jewish commandments said to secure one's place in the world to come.

Upon arrival at the House of the Book, female guests will be greeted by Abby and her attendants as she sits on her "throne." Guests are encouraged to give Abby blessings and praise. On this day, at her spiritual zenith, Abby will also offer blessings to those that greet her. It is said that the bride and groom are closer to God on their wedding day than on any other day of their lives, and that the prayers that Abby offers today will be heard especially by God.

At the end of the ceremony, Abby will be escorted with song and dance to meet Avram.

Ketubah (The Marriage Contract)

The bride and female guests will join the groom and male guests for the signing of the *ketubah*. A *ketubah* is a Jewish legal contract developed over 2,000 years ago. Traditionally, the *ketubah* outlines the material obligations of the groom to the bride and the bride to the groom. Many couples today choose to incorporate their values and their spiritual obligations to one another in the *ketubah*, as well. While a *ketubah* may be any shape or size, a couple may choose to make their *ketubah* a work of art and display it in their home. The groom and bride may not engage in "marital relations" unless two valid witnesses have signed a *ketubah*.

Bedeken (Veiling of the Bride)

Avram will cover Abby's face with her veil immediately before the wedding ceremony. The use of the veil is rooted in the biblical story of Rebecca as told in the Book of Genesis. When Rebecca first saw Isaac, her betrothed, she veiled her face. The veil symbolizes the idea of modesty and conveys the lesson that however attractive physical appearances may be, the soul and character are paramount.

Elements of the Chuppah Ceremony:

Chuppah (Canopy)- The Jewish wedding ceremony is held under the sacred space of the *chuppah*. The *chuppah* is fashioned in the shape of Abraham's tent, which stood open on all four sides as an invitation to all who passed by. The *chuppah* symbolizes the desire of the bride and groom to build a home as loving and open to friends, family, and community as was Abraham's home.

Hakafot (Circles) - As Abby approaches Avram under the chuppah, she will circle him seven times. The custom of the bride circling the groom is explained in many ways. The book of Jeremiah states that "A woman encompasses a man" [31:22]. Moshe Isserlis (a 16th century Jewish scholar) explained that because the chuppah evokes the marital chamber, in circling the groom the bride creates a sort of invisible wall around him and their symbolic new home. In some mystical traditions, circling was associated with protection from the evil eye.

There are several interpretations of the significance of the number seven: seven is the number of days of creation, and the wedding ceremony is the creation of a new household; seven is the number of times the phrase "when a man takes a wife" occurs in the Bible; seven is the number of times Joshua circled the walls of Jericho in order to bring them down, and in circling her groom a bride brings down any wall that may remain between them.

Erusin or Kiddushin – (Betrothal) - The marriage ceremony consists of two parts, the first of which is the betrothal benediction. It begins with a blessing, recited by the Rabbi, over a full cup of wine. Traditionally, only the bride receives a wedding band, and she accepts it without necessarily speaking in return. Abby and Avram will exchange wedding bands, each to be placed on the right index finger (which stems from the ancient belief that the index finger was directly connected to the heart) as marriage vows are recited.

Nissuin (Marriage) - The second part of the ceremony consists of the recitation of The *Sheva B'rachot* (The Seven Blessings) over a second cup of wine. These include blessings first to sanctify the day, second to honor our Creator and third to celebrate the creation of human beings. The fourth, fifth and sixth bless the couple's marriage. The seventh blessing is said in honor of Israel and the wedding couple.

Breaking of the Glass - The ceremony concludes when the groom breaks glass under his foot. Wedding guests shout "*Mazel Tov!*" ("Good luck"/"Congratulations!"/"May the stars favor you!") after the glass is broken. One interpretation of this custom suggests that the broken glass "protects" the marriage with the implied prayer that as the glass shatters so may the marriage never break; in so many pieces as the glass is shattered, so may the couple's happiness be multiplied. The glass breaking also serves as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple and other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, a reminder that even in times of joy we also remember times of sorrow.

Congratulations to YOU!

In the Jewish tradition, a "*mazel tov!*" is offered not only to the couple but also to the guests. The tradition teaches that when two people are bound in holy matrimony, their love for each other

offers a small healing towards the brokenness of the world, bringing us a step closer to a time when the world will be at peace.

Yichud

After the ceremony, Abby and Avram will spend a few minutes in privacy, in a room “guarded” by friends. Traditionally, a Jewish bride and groom would have never been alone in a room before their wedding day. Urban legend suggests that this is the time the couple would consummate their marriage. Instead, Abby and Avram will eat special food set aside for them and revel in their newfound status of husband and wife.

Wedding Reception

When Abby and Avram enter the room, guests will greet them with joyous dancing and singing. In keeping with *hakhmassat kallah*, it is traditional for guests to amuse the bride and groom by performing skits, telling jokes, and creating laughter.

Before the meal starts, the *motzi*, a prayer of thanksgiving, will be offered. The bride and groom are thankful for the occasion to celebrate with friends and family over a wedding feast. At the end of the meal, guests may choose to join in the *birkhat hamazon*, the grace after meals, and the repetition of the *sheva brachot*, the seven blessings for marriage.

Fun facts about Jewish Weddings (from www.ketubah.com):

- Historical *ketubot* from Yemen and North Africa include a clause which stipulate that a husband cannot make his wife relocate to another city if she does not wish do to so. In the event that he wanted to move when his wife did not, the husband was obligate to give his wife a divorce.
- While a ring is the customary token which the groom bestows on his bride to signify their betrothal, other articles are permitted, so long as they meet the requirement of having a certain minimal value. In earlier times items as diverse as fruits and prayerbooks were used.
- One tradition holds that a husband and wife should read the *ketubah* aloud to one another if they are fighting. Doing so will remind them of their wedding day, and bring to mind the love and respect that they share.
- Religious law prohibits one from summoning a groom to court on the day of his wedding, or during the three days prior to it.
- While religious law requires that the wedding ring be very simple, 16th and 17th century Jews in Eastern Europe partook in a custom whereby there was one very ornamental ring owned by the community, and given to each couple for use on their wedding day. The ring often included a three-dimensional representation of the Temple, and was replaced with a simple ring, suitable for daily wear, after the ceremony was over.

For additional information about Jewish weddings, please visit:

<http://www.ketubah.com/engine.cfm?i=72>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_views_of_marriage

<http://www.jewfaq.org/marriage.htm>

http://www.aish.com/literacy/lifecycle/Guide_to_the_Jewish_Wedding.asp

<http://www.brides.com/weddingstyle/traditions/feature/article/105563>

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/Marriage/LiturgyRitualCustom/ModernCustoms.htm>

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