

The Jewish Wedding Guide

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The Jewish Wedding

"A successful marriage is dependant on inviting G-d into the relationship" – The Talmud

Marriage is a holy institution in Judaism. It is a sacred bond, a reciprocal fulfillment, an inherent good and divine command. The will of the Creator desires that His work may endure.

This sanctity is reflected in the details of the wedding ceremony and in the entire wedding day proceedings, prior to the consecration under the *Chuppah* (wedding canopy).

The wedding day is like a personal Yom Kippur for the Bride and Groom (Kallah and Chosson). The couple is forgiven for all their past wrongdoings as they begin a new life together. They fast until after the ceremony; add Yom Kippur confessions to their afternoon prayers; recite the Book of Psalms, and ask for forgiveness for the wrongdoing of their youth, committed knowingly or unknowingly, before staring their new life together.

Standing under the Chuppah, their life's destiny is set, and all past reckoning erased.

Before the Chuppah

Kabbalas Ponim – Greeting the Chosson and Kallah

By custom, the Chosson and Kallah do not see each other for a week before the wedding. Therefore, separate welcoming receptions are held for the Chosson and Kallah. At the receptions, relatives and friends greet them and offer their heartfelt wishes.

Tenna'im – The Conditions of Marriage

Jewish tradition specifies that prior to the marriage ceremony, standard "*Tenna'im*" (conditions) be stipulated in a written document by the groom and bride and their respective parents. This document is read aloud, underscoring the commitment of the Chosson to fulfill his promises to his Kallah.

After reading the Tenna'im, the mothers of the couple break a plate, signifying that just as the breaking of the plate is irreversible, so should the marriage be an everlasting one.

Ma'amar "Lecha Dodi" – Chassidic Discourse

It is customary that the groom recite the *Maamar* "Lecha Dodi" -- a Chassidic discourse on the significance of marriage, according to Jewish mysticism. The discourse elaborates the elevation which the groom and bride attain through their bond in marriage. This Chassidic discourse was originally delivered by the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of blessed memory, in the year 5689 (1929) at the wedding of his daughter, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, of blessed memory, to the present Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Bedeken – Veiling of the Bride

Before the Chuppah ceremony, the groom, escorted by his father and father-in-law, and accompanied by relatives and friends, goes forward to veil the bride. During this procession a Chassidic melody composed by the founder of Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), known as "The Alter Rebbe's *Niggun* of Four Stanzas" is sung.

The veil is placed over the Kallah's face, for it is said that at the time of her ceremony the Divine Presence rests on her face. The veil is reminiscent of the Biblical account of Rebecca covering her face upon seeing Isaac before their betrothal.

The Chabad custom is to cover the Kallah's face with an opaque veil so that she can neither see nor be seen, providing her with complete privacy at this most auspicious time of her life.

At the conclusion of the Bedeken, it is customary for the parents to bless the Kallah.



When the Chosson veils his Kallah, he is saying, "I will cherish and respect not only the 'you' that is revealed to me, but also those elements of your personality that are covered from me. As I bond with you in marriage, I am committed to all of you, all of the time."

The veil covers up the beauty and charm of the Kallah, reflecting the greater significance of that which is hidden. No matter the exterior qualities of a woman, her inner character and personality traits are more important. Beauty fades, but spiritual qualities grow stronger over time.

The Wedding Ceremony

Chuppah – The Canopy

The wedding ceremony takes place under a Chuppah. Open on all four sides, the Chuppah is likened to Abraham's house, which, according to tradition, had entrances on all four sides as a reflection of his great hospitality.

In coming under the Chuppah, the couple makes a statement that their house will be as open to guests as was Abraham's tent.

Because the Chuppah is meant to represent a house, it is usually erected outdoors under the stars, as Abraham was promised that his descendants would, one day, be like the "stars of the heaven." Since every Jewish marriage is a continuation of Abraham's progeny, it is befitting that the marriage be conducted under the stars.

Chassidic philosophy teaches that several generations of departed ancestors of the newly wedded couple descend from the "world of truth" to attend the wedding of their progeny.

The Chosson escorted by his father and father-in-law proceed to the Chuppah, followed by the bride who is escorted by her mother and mother-in-law. This procession signifies the Kallah's transition from her parents' home to her husband's. The groom awaiting the arrival of the bride symbolizes his welcoming her into his new "home."

The Seven Circles

When the Kallah joins the Chosson under the Chuppah, she circles him seven times. Seven signifies a creative completion, like the seven days of creation, a passage beyond the physical into the spiritual. Just as the seventh day was the creation of the Shabbat, the day that completed the creation of the world, so do the seven circles around the Chosson signify their completed quest for each other.

During the wedding ceremony the Kallah stands at the right side of the Chosson, as the Psalmist states, "at the right hand does the queen stand."



A man once asked his teacher: For how long is the Chosson considered a king and the Kallah a queen? "As long as you treat your wife as a queen, you are considered a king", was the teacher's response.

The Rebbe's Letter

It was the Rebbe's custom to respond to wedding invitations by sending a letter of blessing to the Chosson and Kallah. In recognition of the Rebbe's continuous influence in our lives, and the profound message of continuity it sends, and the knowledge that the Rebbe's blessing is forever present with the Chosson and Kallah, the Rebbe's letter is read.



“May you build a true Jewish home, an eternal structure on the foundations of Torah and its Mitzvoth, as they are illuminated by the inner light of Torah, namely the teachings of Chassidus.”

– from the Rebbe’s letter to a Chosson and Kallah

The Ceremony

The Talmud and custom advise us that the marriage ceremony should entail three aspects: the giving of a valuable (ring), the presentation of the Kesubah, and the adjournment to a private room (representing intimacy).

It takes two witnesses to attest that all three aspects of the consecration have taken place “in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel.” Two witnesses are called upon to stand under the Chuppah and witness the procedures.

The Kiddushin – Betrothal Benediction

During the Kiddushin, the Rabbi makes two blessings. The first blessing is over a cup of wine, the traditional symbol of joy. In the second blessing we thank G-d for the sanctity of marriage. The couple shares the wine from the cup to remind themselves that they will share together for the rest of their lives. Kiddushin is completed with the Chosson giving the Kallah the ring.

The Chosson uses only a simple gold band, without engravings or gemstones, in order to ensure that there be no uncertainty or confusion as to its value.



The perfect roundness of the ring symbolizes an unspoken prayer; just as a ring must be made of plain gold without blemishes or obstructions, so it is hoped that the marriage will be one of simple beauty, free from strife or conflict which might, G-d forbid, destroy its perfect "roundness".

As the Chosson places the ring on his Kallah’s finger, he says, *“Harei at mekudeshes li b’tab’as zo kedas Moshe v’Yisrael”*; “Behold, you are consecrated to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel.” These words signify the divine origin and holy seal of truth that characterize both Torah (the laws of Moses and Israel) and the marriage. The sentence contains 32 Hebrew letters, the numerical equivalent of the word *lev* (heart).

The Kesubah – Marriage Contract

“I will cherish, honor, support and maintain thee in accordance with the custom of Jewish husbands who cherish, honor, support and maintain their wives in truth.”

– from the Kesubah

Next the Kesubah (marriage contract) is read aloud. This reading separates the betrothal blessings from the marriage blessings (known as the “Sheva Brochos” or seven blessings). The Kesubah is a binding document that details the husband’s obligations to his wife. In the Kesubah, the Chosson pledges that

he will “work for, honor, provide for, and support [his wife], according to the practices of Jewish husbands.” The tradition of the Kesubah, written in Talmudic Aramaic, dates back thousands of years.

Following the reading of the Kesubah, the contract is handed over to the Kallah by the Chosson.

Sheva Brochos – Seven Marriage Blessings

The concluding portion of the marriage ceremony is the recitation of seven blessings. Usually, several different people are given the honor of pronouncing these blessings.

Breaking a Glass

At the conclusion of the seven blessings, the couple drinks from the second cup of wine. Then the Chosson breaks a glass with his right foot as an additional remembrance of the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Traditionally, the breaking of the glass was incorporated into the ceremony to remind everyone that even at the height of one’s personal joy, we must nevertheless remember our communal pain over the loss of the Temple. The breaking of the glass symbolizes the breaking of our hearts as we remember the catastrophe. By remembering sad times in an hour of happiness we enable ourselves to recall happiness when there is reason to be sad.

Yichud – Union

After the ceremony, the Chosson and Kallah adjourn to a Yichud (private) room. The few minutes the couple shares together allude to their new, intimate relationship. While they are alone, the husband and wife break their fast.



Marriage comes in three forms: The singular marriage, the twosome marriage and the three-dimensional marriage.

In the singular marriage, one individual is dominated and consumed by the other party. The ego of one swallows up his partner’s existence.

In the twosome marriage, each partner preserves his/her distinctions, making their marriage an exercise in argumentation, divisiveness and strife.

Then there is marriage in its true sense – the three-dimensional marriage, where two individual persons join to create a third reality – a life together.

That is why the Torah was given in the third month of the Jewish calendar, the month of Sivan: The purpose of Torah is to create a three-dimensional marriage between G-d and the world.

The Seudas Mitzvah – Wedding Feast

Most Jewish celebrations (marriage, circumcision, etc.) are followed by a Seudah (meal or feast) to honor the occasion. At this meal all guests participate in the mitzvah of “*L’sameach chassan v’kallah*” (to make the Chosson and Kallah rejoice, or to rejoice with the Chosson and Kallah.)

As a Mitzvah, the meal is very important. The Talmud relates many instances where the greatest of our sages have set aside their diligent study of Torah in order to rejoice with the new couple.

In accordance with Jewish law and custom, men and women eat and dance separately. Often, the separation is effected by a *mechitza* (screen or partition). The separation reflects the values of *tznius* (modesty), one of the virtues in which Jewish marriages have excelled throughout the ages.

At the end of the Seudas Mitzvah, *birchas ha’mazon* (grace after meals) is recited, and the same Sheva Brochos that were recited under the Chuppah are repeated.



By dancing around the Chosson and Kallah, the community expresses its support for the couple. As a part of the Jewish people, they need never fear facing life alone.

After the Wedding

In contradistinction to a non-Jewish custom, in which the Chosson and Kallah travel to a honey-moon location, Jewish custom prefers that the couple begin their new life together in the comfort of their familiar community. In the week following the wedding, it is customary that friends or relatives host festive meals each day in the new couple’s honor. Each festive meal is called “*Sheva Brochos*” after the seven blessings that are recited.



A young unmarried woman was discussing with the Rebbe some prospective matches that had been suggested to her, and she explained why none of them appealed to her. The Rebbe smiled, “You have read too many romance novels,” he replied. “Love is not the overwhelming, blinding emotion we find in the world of fiction. Real love is an emotion that intensifies throughout life. It is the small, everyday acts of being together that make love flourish. It is sharing and caring and respecting one another. It is building a life together, a family and a home. As two lives unite to form one, over time, there is a point where each partner feels a part of the other, where each partner can no longer visualize life without the other at his or her side.”

Thank you for joining us in our Simcha.

Levi and Ella Potash

*May we merit the ultimate redemption with
Moshiach Now!*