



InterfaithFamily.com's mission is to empower people in interfaith relationships – individuals, couples, families and their children – to make Jewish choices, and to encourage Jewish communities to welcome them.

InterfaithFamily.com offers consultation and resources for synagogues, agencies and schools of all affiliations to assist them in their welcome and engagement of interfaith families and all those who are interested in exploring Judaism.

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How to Make Your Wedding Jewish



Law and Traditions

The rabbis of long ago who codified Jewish law made it very easy for Jewish couples to be joined in marriage. Only four things are necessary: the exchange of an item worth more than a few cents (the ring), the recitation of a ritual formula of consecration, two witnesses and the physical consummation of the partnership.

All the rest are traditions! The wedding canopy or chuppah, the seven wedding blessings, the breaking of the glass, wine, music, shouting Mazel Tov and the rabbi or cantor leading the blessings all are optional.

The entire legal wedding service would fill only a page or two. It is the optional traditions that give the ceremony color and flavor.

In many communities, the customs or traditions have become so emotionally meaningful that many assume they are essential.



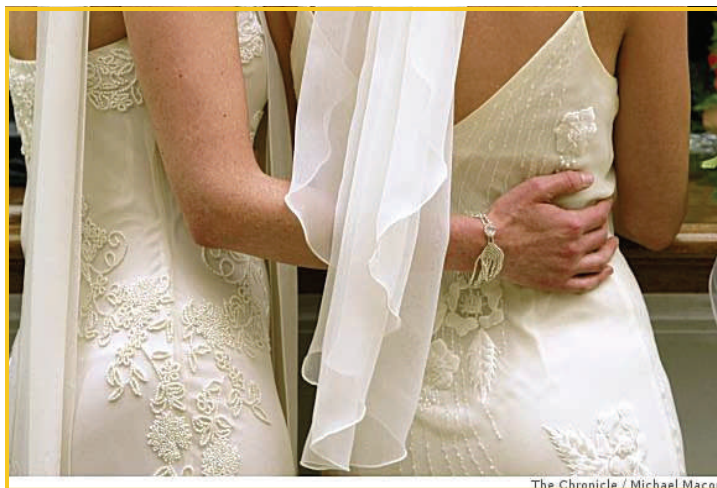
We offer some suggestions for you to consider as you envision a life together. Remember, the wedding will fly by in a matter of hours while your marriage is meant to last a lifetime.

- ◆ Start with introspection. Each one of you needs to think about your own religious and ethnic identity, your values, and your heritage. Consider the meaning that your own traditions and community gave to your life. What do you want to continue? What do you want to pass on?
- ◆ Imagine the future and how you picture yourselves as a couple and as a family. What rituals will celebrate the birth of your children? What ceremonies and traditions will support you when you grieve? How will you relate to extended family at holiday time?
- ◆ Learn about each other's background. Encourage your partner to share his/her history. Attend religious events and family celebrations together to experience first hand each other's tradition. You will need to choose a religion for your new family.
- ◆ Take a workshop. Interfaith groups provide support and broaden your perspective. Sometimes just hearing others (besides one's partner) express themselves can be enlightening. You will meet other couples who share your experience and may have suggestions that are useful.
- ◆ Keep the lines of communication open with your parents. Let them know how much thought you are giving to your decisions. Reassure them that their values will be passed on to the future whatever decisions are made and that they will be an important part of your future.
- ◆ Expect changes in yourself and your partner over time. People may agree to things in the throes of passion that don't feel comfortable later on. Births and deaths may bring up feelings that weren't predictable. Talking openly and honestly will be important although it is sometimes difficult. Better to have the hard discussions now than later.

According to the Zohar, the central book of Jewish mysticism, God creates new worlds constantly by causing marriages to take place. The wedding is only the first day of that new world. It takes a lifetime of attention to maintain it.

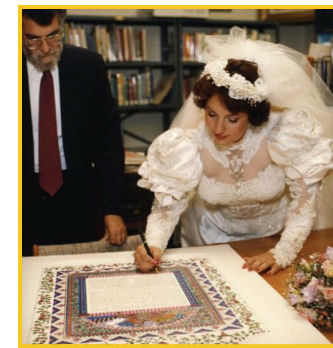
Questions to Consider Together before Meeting with Clergy

1. Now that you know that a Jewish wedding does not need a rabbi or cantor, you need to ask yourself what personal religious or spiritual experiences or family history leads you to want there to be clergy participation at your wedding celebration.
2. What do you want to accomplish by having a Jewish wedding? What will be lost if there is no clergy?
3. How comfortable are you with ritual, prayer, and language about God? How comfortable are you with Hebrew and the traditional Jewish wedding blessings?
4. What are some of the challenges you anticipate in preparing your ceremony with the inclusion of clergy?
5. What role are you planning for religion and this clergy in your family's future?
6. What community will you join to share holiday celebrations and lifecycle events?



The Ketubah

The *ketubah* is a legal contract, pure and simple. In its original form, it does not mention love or the establishment of a Jewish home or even God. It was a contract whereby the groom promised, in front of two witnesses, to support the bride. The *ketubah* was then given to the bride as a guarantee of that promise.



It is considered to be an early feminist document since giving rights to women was not common in other first century cultures. It may also have contributed to the strength of the Jewish family, because it made abandonment of a wife into a costly decision.

Modern *ketubot* (plural of *ketubah*) include two parallel declarations, in both Hebrew and English, of the couple's commitment to each other, and a joint declaration of the couple's connection to God, Torah and the Jewish people. LGBT *ketubot* use gender appropriate language instead of "bride and groom," and interfaith *ketubot* honor the tradition and values of both families.

Because Judaism also has a tradition of making every commandment as beautiful as possible, modern *ketubot* are illuminated and decorated with watercolors, paper-cutting, silk screening and lithography.

The signing of the *ketubah* may take place in a private corner just before the ceremony, or be integrated into the wedding ceremony.



Wedding Traditions

Symbolism

On one level, every partnership in Judaism is modeled on the covenant of God and the Jewish people. Each celebrates the choice to set someone or something apart as special, to make it consecrated or holy- *kadosh* in Hebrew.

The Celebration



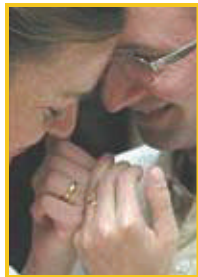
The purpose of the party is to increase the joy of the couple, who are treated as royalty. Guests entertain them with juggling, mime, dancing and silly tricks of all kinds. Circle dancing and line dancing bring everyone onto the floor in simple steps with the goal of dancing with the bride and the groom. The best known custom is when the bride and groom (and the mothers and fathers) are lifted up on chairs and whirled around each other.



The last three blessings speak of God's redemption of the Jewish people, peace and friendship, the ability to feel joy and to rejoice together with those around us. The Jewish marriage is an act of mutual free will, so there is no "giving away" of the bride. Nor are there any promises "to have and to hold, to honor and obey" and no "I dos."

Breaking the Glass

The ceremony concludes with the breaking of the glass. Some see it as reminder of the destruction of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, or of the need to recall that marriage is as fragile as glass. Others claim it is a vestige of a medieval custom that scared off evil spirits. Whatever the interpretation, the shattering of the glass is always accompanied by shouts of "*Mazel Tov*" or congratulations as the commitment is sealed with a kiss.



Yichud

This Hebrew word, which simultaneously implies alone and togetherness, is the name for the Jewish tradition of the couple taking time apart from their guests after the ceremony to reflect and rejoice on the day and their love for each other.

The Hebrew word for marriage is *kiddushin*. The person who reads the wedding blessings is known as the *mesader kiddushin*, the one who orders the ceremony of sanctification or setting apart. The idea of setting someone apart, declaring them special for you, invested with value and meaning, is the foundation of a Jewish wedding ceremony.



Bedeken

This custom recalls the story of the Biblical Jacob who found that his bride was not Rachel but her sister, Leah. Nowadays, only after signing the *ketubah* does the groom cover his bride's face with a veil symbolizing that he chooses her for more than her beauty. The bride may pin a flower on the lapel of her groom to actively show her choice of her husband.

Raising the Chuppah

Traditionally the *chuppah* or marriage canopy is supported by four poles held by four friends who communicate their support of the marriage by keeping the *chuppah* over the heads of the wedding party. Both parents

lead their son or daughter to the *chuppah* and stand beneath it at the side demonstrating that Jewish weddings are the union of families as well as the couple. The couple stands beneath the *chuppah*, creating an island of sanctified space.

Like the biblical tent of Abraham and Sarah, the open sides of the *chuppah* symbolize the openness of the couple's home and recognize that every Jewish home is part of a community.



Circling the Groom

The custom of the bride circling the groom creates an invisible wall or a symbolic circle of intimacy. In recent times, the custom was discarded because some thought it was a display of the bride's subservience to her husband. Some couples choose to circle each other to equalize the custom.

The Wedding Ceremony

The traditional Jewish wedding ceremony includes two sections that express the holiness of the couple's decision to marry. The *birchot erusin* or blessings of betrothal be-

gin with a blessing over the wine. Part of this blessing says "God has permitted us to marry only certain people through *chuppah* and *kiddushin*."

Solid gold or silver rings representing the wholeness and harmony of the relationship are exchanged with the words, "With this ring, you are consecrated to me as my husband (or wife) in accordance with the religious teaching of Moses and the people of Israel." In other words, the Shabbat is to Jewish time and Jerusalem is to Jewish space, just as you are to me. This statement also confers the seal of Jewish authenticity by affirming that the wedding is within the Jewish legal code.

The recitation of seven wedding blessings recapitulates the history of God's relationship to the world. The first four blessings celebrate God the creator by blessing wine, the creation of all things, man and woman and being created in God's image. The couple shares a cup of wine from a special kiddush cup for the first time as they rejoice in their love.

