



**InterfaithFamily.com**

Encouraging Jewish Choices & A Welcoming Jewish Community

# GUIDE TO WEDDING CEREMONIES FOR INTERFAITH COUPLES

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Tips for Planning an Interfaith Wedding .....	4
What Makes a Wedding Jewish? .....	6
The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation .....	9
The Jewish Wedding Canopy (Huppah): An Explanation.....	10
Circling: An Explanation .....	11
Blessing Over the Wine.....	12
The Ring Ceremony .....	13
The Seven Blessings (Sheva B'rachot): An Explanation.....	14
Breaking the Glass: An Explanation .....	16
Timing and Location of a Jewish Wedding .....	17
Jewish Wedding Dress: Special Concerns.....	17
Finding a Rabbi or Cantor to Officiate at an Interfaith Wedding .....	18
Key Differences Between a Jewish Wedding and Christian Wedding.....	20
Common Ground for Jewish-Christian Weddings .....	21
Potential Pitfalls in Planning a Jewish-Christian Wedding Ceremony .....	22
Sample Introduction of the Huppah.....	23
Sample Poems, Prayers and Readings.....	24
Sample Rituals .....	31
Acknowledgement of Different Faiths.....	32
Blessing Over the Wine: Additional Liturgy .....	33
Sample Ring Ceremonies .....	36
Sample Candle Lighting Ceremonies .....	42
The Seven Blessings: Alternative Wordings and Explanations .....	45
Sample Ways to End the Ceremony .....	48
Sample Program Definitions.....	51
Samples of Ceremony Order.....	54
Recommended Books .....	59

## Introduction

InterfaithFamily.com first published “Wedding Ceremony Ideas for Interfaith Couples” in June 2005. Since then it has become our most popular downloadable resource.

In April 2007, we began soliciting contributions for an update to the resource. The new resource, titled “Guide to Wedding Ceremonies for Interfaith Couples” not only includes wedding ceremony ideas but also extensive explanatory information on Jewish wedding rituals.

The booklet opens with background information on weddings in the Jewish tradition, including information on special concerns for interfaith couples. It includes sample rituals and readings, variations on traditional blessings and rituals and ideas for ceremony order.

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Barbara Binder (*Teaching Jewish Life Cycle: Insights and Activities*, A.R.E. Publishing, Inc.)

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We owe a particular debt to Rabbi Lev Baesh, who volunteered his expertise to review this document to ensure that it is Jewishly “sound.”

Throughout the document we refer to “bride” and “groom.” However, most, if not all, of the ceremonies and rituals are easily adapted for same-sex couples.

The Jewish wedding is a complex and beautiful ritual, with many facets. For those interested in learning more about Jewish weddings beyond what is discussed in this document, please refer to [MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com), or speak to a rabbi.

## **Tips for Planning an Interfaith Wedding**

1. Involve family and friends in the planning. They will be more connected to the wedding if they have been a part of making the day a special one.
2. Provide a program with definitions and explanations of the various traditions and rituals represented in the ceremony, and ask the officiant to explain them during the ceremony.
3. Acknowledge the couple's two faith backgrounds at various points during the ceremony.
4. Choose readings that either are common to both traditions, or do not offend either one. Many wonderful readings used by interfaith couples do not come from any religious tradition, while other readings and prayers that do come from one religious tradition are not inconsistent or off-putting to participants from another faith. Consult with clergy over any questions or concerns you may have. (see Sample Poems, Prayers and Readings, page 24)
5. Similarly, include rituals that are common to both traditions, or do not offend either one, such as breaking the glass (see Breaking the Glass: An Explanation, page 16), or lighting a Unity Candle. (see Sample Candle Lighting Ceremonies, page 42).
6. Create an interfaith ketubah, the Jewish marriage contract. (see The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation, page 9)
7. Involve both families and traditions with the huppah, the Jewish wedding canopy (see The Jewish Wedding Canopy (Huppah): An Explanation, page 10):
  - Have the parents who are not Jewish make the huppah covering.
  - Have members of both families decorate and/or hold the huppah poles.
  - Have the huppah covering reflect the tradition of the family that is not Jewish. One couple with a Chinese background had guests sign a red silk piece of material that was then used for the huppah covering (in the Chinese culture red symbolizes joy and features prominently in wedding clothing and ritual objects).
8. Choose seven friends and family members from both sides to offer either the original or alternative versions of the “sheva b'rachot,” the seven blessings traditionally recited during a Jewish wedding. (see The Seven Blessings (Sheva B'rachot): An Explanation, 14)
9. Be sure that anything said in Hebrew--and any other language incorporated into the ceremony--is translated so that everyone present can understand.
10. Include inclusive activities such as the handshake of peace, passing around a hallah, or joining hands to sing a song together or to wish the couple well.

11. Incorporate an interfaith gift-giving ritual into the ceremony. Have the bride offer a ritual religious item to the parents of the groom. Have the groom do the same with the parents of the bride. (submitted by Rev. June Radicchi)

12. Don't split the guests at the ceremony between "guests of the bride" and "guests of the groom." Mix them together. (submitted by Rabbi Mark Golub)

## **What Makes a Wedding Jewish?**

There are many answers to this question. In its most basic form, a Jewish wedding simply codifies a contract between two individuals. From the standpoint of Jewish law, all that is required for a Jewish wedding to occur is either the signing of a marriage contract (ketubah) in the presence of two witnesses, or the groom giving the bride a simple metal ring, with words of promise, in the presence of two witnesses. The rest of the rituals people commonly associate with Jewish weddings--the marriage canopy (huppah), the breaking of the glass, the presence of a rabbi or cantor--are all traditions. It should also be noted that a cantor is as qualified--and legitimate--an officiant as a rabbi.

Modern progressive and secular Jews have a more elaborate conception of what a Jewish wedding entails. For modern Jews, a Jewish wedding usually includes, at minimum, the presence of a rabbi or cantor, a huppah, a ketubah, breaking of the glass, a ring ceremony and recitation or chanting of the seven blessings.

Modern-day Orthodox Jews have a different view of a Jewish wedding. While a rabbi's or cantor's presence is not required, every Orthodox wedding includes a rabbi or cantor. There is also a whole series of ceremonies preceding the actual wedding ceremony. Some of these ceremonies have been adapted by progressive Jews.

Here are typical orders of ceremony of two kinds of Jewish weddings:

- 1) Modern-day progressive Jewish wedding (see page 6)
- 2) Modern-day Orthodox Jewish wedding (see page 7)

### **Modern-day progressive Jewish wedding**

1. Signing of the ketubah (see The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation, page 9), usually half an hour before the scheduled wedding start time.
2. Wedding ceremony – This typically takes place under a huppah. (see The Jewish Wedding Canopy (Huppah): An Explanation, page 10)
  - a. Processional – Bride is escorted by parents to groom
  - b. Circling in some form (see Circling: An Explanation, page 11)
  - c. Formal engagement blessing
    - i. Rabbi or cantor offers blessing over the wine (see Blessing Over the Wine, page 12)
    - ii. Rabbi or cantor offers blessing over couple
    - iii. Sip of wine is given to groom and the bride
  - d. Reading of the ketubah (see The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation, page 9)
  - e. Exchange of vows
  - f. Ring ceremony (see The Ring Ceremony, page 13)
    - i. Groom places ring on bride's finger

- ii. Groom recites declaration that bride is reserved/consecrated for him
        - iii. Bride places ring on groom's finger
        - iv. Bride recites same declaration
      - g. Recitation or chanting of the Seven Blessings (see The Seven Blessings (Sheva B'rachot): An Explanation, page 12)
      - h. Closing benediction
      - i. Breaking of the glass (see Breaking the Glass: An Explanation, page 16)
      - j. The kiss!
    3. Yihud – Alone time for the bride and groom before rejoining reception
    4. Wedding party – Typically includes blessing over bread and blessing over wine offered by family and friends, as well as the wedding couple and their parents being lifted up in their chairs

### **Modern-day Orthodox (traditional Jewish) wedding**

1. Pre-wedding rituals
  - a. Aufruf
    - i. Groom called to Torah on Sabbath before wedding
    - ii. Bride and groom given pre-wedding blessing
    - iii. Couple showered with candy and raisins, or nuts, signifying a sweet future
  - b. Bride's reception – The bride sits on a throne and is entertained by female friends. No men are allowed.
  - c. The groom's reception (tish) – This occurs simultaneously with the bride's reception. No women are allowed.
    - i. Men offer toasts to groom
    - ii. Groom attempts a learned discourse, but is purposefully interrupted by his guests.
    - iii. Completion and validation of the ketubah
2. The veiling ceremony (the bedeken) In Hebrew, bedeken means "to check." In this ritual, the groom unveils the bride to "check" that it's the right woman.
  - a. Groom is escorted to the bride's reception area
  - b. Groom unveils and reveals bride
  - c. Groom returns to the groom's reception area
3. Preparation for the huppah – Groom is dressed by his attendants in a white cotton robe. (see Jewish Wedding Dress: Special Concerns, page 17)
4. Arrival at huppah – For the huppah ceremony to occur, 10 Jewish males over the age of 13 must be present. (see The Jewish Wedding Canopy (Huppah): An Explanation, page 10)
  - a. Groom arrives at the huppah before the bride
  - b. Bride circles the groom three or seven times
  - c. Bride stands to the right of the groom
  - d. Bride and groom face guests with the rabbi's back to the guests

5. Engagement (erusin)
  - a. Formal engagement blessing
    - i. Rabbi or cantor offers blessing over the wine (see Blessing Over the Wine, page 12)
    - ii. Rabbi or cantor offers blessing over couple
      1. Leader gives cup of wine to groom, who drinks of it
      2. Cup is given to bride, who drinks of it
  - b. Ring ceremony (see The Ring Ceremony, page 13)
    - i. Groom places simple metal ring on bride's finger
    - ii. Groom recites declaration that bride is reserved/consecrated for him
6. Reading of the ketubah (see The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation, page 9)
7. Nuptials (nissuin)
  - a. Chanting of the Seven Blessings (see The Seven Blessings (Sheva B'rachot): An Explanation, page 12)
  - b. Breaking of the glass (see Breaking the Glass: An Explanation, page 16)
  - a. Yihud – Alone time for the bride and groom. In some cases, the bride and groom share their first meal together as husband and wife in seclusion and rejoin wedding party.
8. Wedding party
  - a. Festive meal
  - b. Guests attempt to entertain the couple
  - c. Everyone says grace after the meal.
  - d. Recitation of seven blessings again
  - e. After most guests leave, those closest remain for "Mitzvah Dance" with couple. "Mitzvah" means "good deed," and people dance with the couple because it is considered a "mitzvah" to make the couple happy on their wedding day.

## **The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation**

Traditionally, a ketubah is a legally binding marriage contract that “verifies that the groom has acquired the bride and agrees to provide for her, and includes a lien to be paid by the groom in case of divorce,” according to Valerie S. Thaler (“Updating the Traditional Jewish Wedding: Some Contemporary Innovations,” MyJewishLearning.com). It is signed by two witnesses, and the bride’s only participation is a choice either to accept or to reject the arrangement. In Israel, Orthodox ketubahs are still legally binding documents. For a full transcript of the traditional ketubah text, see “Explaining the Ketubah Text” by Rabbi Maurice Lamm (<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/Marriage/LiturgyRitualCustom/Ketubah/Ketubahtext.htm>).

Modern ketubahs are personalized works of art, including both the text of the symbolic marriage contract and artwork in the margins. The text of modern ketubahs (or ketubot, the plural in Hebrew) has been adapted to fit better the modern understanding of marriage as a partnership based in love. Modern ketubahs often include statements of love and commitment. Some couples use the ketubah to detail how they will share responsibilities and resolve conflicts. Many modern couples include both the traditional text in Hebrew as well as their own text in English. Ideas for ketubah text can be found at sites like [ketubahketubah.com](http://ketubahketubah.com), [ketubah.com](http://ketubah.com), [Modernketubah.com](http://Modernketubah.com) and [ketubah-gallery.com](http://ketubah-gallery.com), as well as in books like *The New Jewish Wedding, Revised*, by Anita Diamant.

In most modern Jewish weddings, the couple signs the ketubah a half hour before the wedding ceremony in the presence of two witnesses, their immediate family and the wedding party.

Ketubahs are considered prized wedding mementoes and are typically framed and hung in a prominent place in the couple’s home after the wedding. Many people hire professional ketubah-makers to create a one-of-a-kind calligraphed work of art.

## **The Jewish Wedding Canopy (Huppah): An Explanation**

A huppah--often spelled “chuppah”--is a Jewish wedding canopy with four open sides. A Jewish wedding ceremony typically occurs under a huppah.

The huppah typically consists of a square cloth made of silk, velvet or cotton, supported by four poles. The poles are often held upright by friends of the bride and groom. The poles can also be free-standing and decorated with flowers. Couples can make their own huppah, use the synagogue’s huppah or rent one from a Jewish bookstore.

The huppah symbolizes the new home that the bride and groom will create. The ancient rabbis compared the huppah to the tent of Abraham, the forefather of Judaism. Abraham was famed for his hospitality; his tent had entrances on all four sides so that travelers coming from any direction would have a door to enter.

The creation of the huppah can offer a way to involve your guests and your family’s two cultures in the wedding. The huppah could include patterns and materials that are traditional to the non-Jewish partner’s culture. Some couples also send their guests squares of fabric and ask them to decorate the squares with words or drawings that will be significant to the couple. The couple then has the squares sewn together into a quilt which becomes the huppah covering.

Some couples also use a family heirloom, such as a grandfather’s tallis (prayer shawl), a prized family tablecloth (from Irish culture) or other sacred fabric, as the huppah covering.



**Brian and Kia Silverman’s quilted huppah**

Source: Kaufman, Michael, “Love, Marriage and Family in Jewish Law and Tradition,” MyJewishLearning.com

## **Circling: An Explanation**

In traditional Jewish weddings, the bride circles the groom three or seven times. This ritual typically occurs either before entering the huppah or during the wedding ceremony. In traditional terms, circling is a way for the bride to create an invisible wall around the groom, “to protect him from evil spirits, from the glances of other women and from the temptations of the world,” says Anita Diamant in *The New Jewish Wedding, Revised*.

Modern progressive Jews have adapted the ritual to make it more egalitarian, with each partner circling each other. Some couples view circling as a symbol of the way they’ll define the home space for the couple, each seeing themselves responsible for protecting and supporting each other. A typical mutual-circling ritual with seven circles would see the bride circle the groom first three times in a clockwise manner, followed by the groom circling the bride three times in a counter-clockwise manner. They then complete one last circle together.

## **Blessing Over the Wine**

The blessing over the wine is a standard element of almost all Jewish life cycle ceremonies. For those who do not drink wine, grape juice is an acceptable substitute:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, boreh p'ri ha-gafen.

## **The Ring Ceremony**

The giving of a ring by the groom to the bride in the presence of two witnesses formalizes the marriage. Jewish law requires the ring to be precious metal, have some value, be unadorned by stones and not have any decorations cut out of it. The traditional ring ceremony is simple: the groom places the ring on the index finger of the bride's right hand and says, in Hebrew, "Behold, by this ring you are consecrated to me as my wife according to the laws of Moses and Israel." (*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration*: "Haray at mekudeshet li b'taba'at zu k'dat moshe v'yisrael.").

In the progressive Jewish movements, couples typically adapt the ceremony to provide a role for both the bride and groom. In some communities, the bride will quote a Biblical verse that speaks of love, often "I am my beloved and my beloved is mine" (from Song of Songs) and place a ring on the groom's right index finger. In other progressive Jewish communities, the bride repeats the groom's consecration in Hebrew, with the necessary grammatical gender changes.

For ideas on adapting the ring ceremony, see Sample Ring Ceremonies, page 36.

## **The Seven Blessings (Sheva B'rachot): An Explanation**

The Seven Blessings are a key part of a Jewish wedding ceremony. The blessings are adapted from ancient Rabbinic teachings, beginning with the blessing over the wine and ending with a communal expression of joy.

Many couples read the prayers in both Hebrew and English. There are also numerous modern English variations on the blessings.

Many couples also ask friends or relatives to read some or all of the blessings. Or you may ask all the guests in attendance to read the blessings from a wedding program. Some couples create their own blessings, or ask honored guests to create their own. See *The Seven Blessings: Alternative Wordings and Explanations*, page 45.

The Hebrew transliteration and English translation of the blessings follow:

1. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, boreh p'ri ha-gafen.

2. Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has created everything for your glory.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, she-hakol barah lichvodo.

3. Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of Human Beings.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, yotzer ha-adam.

4. Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has fashioned human beings in your image, according to your likeness and has fashioned from it a lasting mold. Blessed are You Adonai, Creator of Human Beings.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, asher yatzar et ha-adam betzalmo, b'tzelem dmut tavnito, vehitkon lo mimenu binyan adei ad. Baruch Atah Adonai yotzer ha-adam.

5. Bring intense joy and exultation to the barren one (Jerusalem) through the ingathering of her children amidst her in gladness. Blessed are You, Adonai,

Who gladdens Zion through her children.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Sos tasis v'tagel ha-akarah, b'kibbutz bane'ha letocha b'simchaa. Baruch Atah Adonai, mesame'ach tzion b'vaneha.

6. Gladden the beloved companions as You gladdened Your creatures in the garden of Eden. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who gladdens groom and bride.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Sameach te-samach re'im ahuvim, k'samechacha yetzircha b'gan eden mi-kedem. Baruch Atah Adonai, mesame'ach chatan v'kalah.

7. Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, Who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, mirth, glad song, pleasure, delight, love, brotherhood, peace, and companionship. Adonai, our God, let there soon be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the grooms' jubilation from their canopies and of the youths from their song-filled feasts. Blessed are You Who causes the groom to rejoice with his bride.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:*

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, asher barah sasson v'simcha, chatan v'kalah, gila rina, ditza v'chedva, ahava v'achava, v'shalom v're'ut. Me-hera Adonai Eloheinu yishama b'arei yehudah u'vchutzot yerushalayim, kol sasson v'eKol simcha, kol chatan v'ekol kalah, kol mitzhalot chatanim me-chupatam, u'nearim mimishte neginatam. Baruch Atah Adonai mesame'ach chatan im hakalah.

## **Breaking the Glass: An Explanation**

As Judith Seid says in *God-Optional Judaism*, “If you are having a Jewish wedding, you probably have to break a glass. You can forgo almost every other element, but if you don’t break glass, folks will not believe you are really married.”

Progressive or traditional, religious or secular, Jewish weddings almost always include a breaking of glass at the end of the ceremony. Traditionally, the man alone broke the glass; today, some couples break the glass together or break two glasses. The glass-breaking is typically followed by a communal “Mazel tov!”, which means “good fortune” in Yiddish and is the equivalent of “Congratulations!”

To avoid injury, the glass is typically covered in cloth. Some people use a wineglass, others a lightbulb--which breaks very easily.

There are countless interpretations for the tradition of breaking a glass. Some see it as a reminder of the destruction of the First Temple of Jerusalem. Others say it is meant to remind us that marriage is as fragile as glass. It also has been interpreted to demonstrate how life is so fragile that the couple should enjoy every day as if it were their last together.

For ideas for readings to accompany the breaking of the glass, see *Sample Ways to End the Ceremony*, page 48.

## **Timing and Location of a Jewish Wedding**

One of the difficulties of planning a Jewish wedding is that Jewish weddings are forbidden on the Jewish Sabbath, which lasts from sundown Friday night to nightfall on Saturday night. Even in the more liberal Jewish movements, such as Reform and Reconstructionist, Jewish weddings are not permitted on the Sabbath. However, rabbis who do officiate at interfaith weddings often are willing to officiate at weddings that begin late Saturday afternoon. To determine the time that the Jewish Sabbath begins and ends, visit <http://www.chabad.org/calendar/location.asp?aid=6226>.

Typically, Jewish weddings are held on Saturday night, often beginning with a Jewish ritual service called Havdalah, which marks the end of the Sabbath. Jewish weddings are also often held on Sunday afternoon.

In traditional Jewish communities, Tuesday is considered an auspicious day to hold a wedding.

Jewish weddings are also forbidden on all the major Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashanah (two days, typically September or October), Yom Kippur (one day, September or October), and Passover (eight days, March or April). Most rabbis will also not officiate at a wedding during Shavuot (one day, May or June) and the first and last days of Sukkot (September or October). Also, traditionally, Jewish weddings are not held during the three-week period between the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av (July or August) and during the 40 days between the second day of Passover and Shavuot, with the exception of the thirty-third day in between, although more progressive rabbis will officiate during these periods. For a full schedule of Jewish holidays in any given year, visit [www.hebcal.com](http://www.hebcal.com).

Jewish weddings may occur anywhere. Many people hold them in their family's synagogue, but Jews often hold weddings outdoors.

## **Jewish Wedding Dress: Special Concerns**

At Jewish weddings, brides typically wear wedding dresses like you'd find at other weddings. The veil is a bit more common because the unveiling of the bride is a part of the traditional Jewish ceremony. (see page 7)

Most grooms dress in suits, although some also wear a tallis, a Jewish prayer shawl with knotted fringes on the end. More traditional grooms wear a kittel, a belted white robe. In some Jewish families who can trace their roots to Spain and North Africa (known as Sephardic Jews), the bride and groom may be wrapped in a large tallis during some portion of the wedding ceremony.

## **Finding a Rabbi or Cantor to Officiate at an Interfaith Wedding**

While some rabbis officiate at interfaith weddings, rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings is a controversial issue in the American Jewish community. Depending on where you live, it may be difficult to find a rabbi to officiate at your interfaith wedding. However, those rabbis that do officiate are often willing to travel to accommodate your needs.

You should be aware that many rabbis impose conditions prior to agreeing to officiate. Some conditions include: a promise to raise the children Jewish; enrollment in an introductory Judaism class; a promise from the non-Jewish partner to convert; no co-officiation with a clergy person from another faith tradition; ceremony does not occur in a place of worship of another religion; membership in the rabbi's synagogue.

Many rabbis, especially in the Reform and Reconstructionist movement, may decline to officiate but will refer you to someone who does or lend a sympathetic ear and offer a welcome for you and your spouse after you are married.

Each Jewish movement has a different policy on intermarriage, so it is helpful to know what movement your desired rabbi hails from. Here is summary of each movement's policy on officiation at intermarriages:

- Reform movement – The association of Reform rabbis discourages its members from officiating at intermarriages, but does not forbid it. Recent surveys suggest roughly half will officiate at an intermarriage. A few will co-officiate with clergy of another faith.
- Conservative movement – Conservative rabbis are forbidden to officiate at intermarriages. If they officiate, they risk losing their membership in the Conservative rabbinical association.
- Reconstructionist movement – The rabbinical association of the Reconstructionist movement feels it is not appropriate for rabbis to officiate at interfaith weddings, although they may participate in some capacity. Recent surveys suggest roughly half will officiate at an intermarriage. Reconstructionist rabbis are forbidden from co-officiating at intermarriages with clergy of another faith, although some do.
- Secular Humanistic Jewish movement – Nearly all Secular Humanistic rabbis will officiate at intermarriages. Many will co-officiate with clergy of another faith.
- Orthodox movements – An Orthodox rabbi is forbidden to officiate at an interfaith wedding.

Your best bet for finding a rabbi is filling out InterfaithFamily.com's Officiation Request Form, at <http://www.interfaithfamily.com/officiationrequest>. InterfaithFamily.com has access to many rabbis across the country who officiate. This referral service is free.

Another potential resource is the Rabbinic Center for Research & Counseling, which sells a list of rabbis who officiate. The list is \$30 and is available via their website, [www.rcrconline.org](http://www.rcrconline.org).

## **Key Differences Between a Jewish Wedding and Christian Wedding**

Along with the already-discussed aspects of a Jewish wedding, there are some key differences to negotiate if you are planning a hybrid Jewish-Christian wedding.

### **The Procession**

In most Christian weddings, the groom does not walk down the aisle, but waits at the front. After the bridesmaids enter, the woman is brought to her new husband by her father, signifying the handing over of possession of the woman from one man to another.

The traditional Jewish wedding procession, on the other hand, generally starts with the huppah bearers, followed by the groomsmen, the groom and his parents, followed by the bridesmaids, followed by the bride and her parents.

### **Vows**

In a traditional Jewish ceremony, only the man makes the statement of marriage. (see The Ring Ceremony, page 13) Christian weddings include vows by both.

### **Location**

A typical Christian wedding is held inside a church. Jewish weddings may be held in a synagogue, outdoors or other wedding location.

Source: Seid, Judith. [\*God-Optional Judaism\*](#). Citadel, 2001.

## **Common Ground for Jewish-Christian Weddings**

A co-officiated or mixed Jewish-Christian wedding offers many opportunities for the couple to honor both of their traditions and make all their guests feel welcome. Some of the rituals that guests, and officiants, of both faiths, will likely welcome are:

1. Lighting of a Unity Candle. This modern Protestant tradition involves three candles. The mothers of the bride and the groom each light one of the taper candles. During the ceremony, the bride and the groom each take one of the taper candles and light the pillar candle together. This ritual is not traditionally part of Jewish weddings, but candles are a significant part of Jewish practice, so it is unlikely to offend Jewish guests. (see Sample Candle Lighting Ceremonies, page 42)
2. The pronouncement. The announcement that so-and-so and so-and-so are now “husband and wife” (or other pairing) is perfectly acceptable to Jewish guests, although not part of Jewish tradition.
3. The assent of the congregation. This Christian tradition of asking the guests whether they support the couple is not offensive to Jews.
4. Vows. Spoken vows are not traditionally Jewish because they are covered by the language in the ketubah, but they are close in spirit to the declarations associated with the ring ceremony. Many couples incorporate vows into the ring ceremony. (see The Ring Ceremony, page 13)
5. Breaking the glass. While unfamiliar to Christian guests, this tradition is rarely offensive to them. (see Breaking the Glass: An Explanation, page 16)
6. Use of the huppah. This is not a Christian tradition, but everyone seems to appreciate this beautiful addition to the wedding ceremony. (see The Jewish Wedding Canopy (Huppah): An Explanation, page 10)
7. The ketubah. Many interfaith couples now incorporate ketubahs into the ceremony. The wording can include mention of both partners’ faiths and their discussion of how they plan to handle potential religious impact/issues in the family. (see The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation, page 9)
8. Circling. The circling of the groom--or the bride, or both--might seem strange to Christian guests, but will not be offensive. (see Circling: An Explanation, page 11)

## **Potential Pitfalls in Planning a Jewish-Christian Wedding Ceremony**

Mixed weddings provide potential opportunities and obstacles to honor both partners' traditions and to make all the guests feel welcome. Some potential obstacles are:

1. Use of the name "Jesus" or "Christ." Jews often feel very uncomfortable with the use of these words.
2. Use of the word "Adonai," the Hebrew word for God. Christians may feel uncomfortable with the use of this word.
3. Christian ministers often tell guests "let us pray," ask them to bow their heads or ask the guests to kneel. All three traditions are foreign to Jews and may make them uncomfortable.
4. In traditional Jewish weddings, the ketubah is read aloud. The traditional ketubah includes language about what happens if the couple divorces. This may make Christian guests--especially Catholic ones--uncomfortable. (see The Jewish Marriage Contract (Ketubah): An Explanation, page 9) In choosing the ketubah text, carefully read the language to ensure it speaks to your family's situation--and not an Orthodox Jewish couple's partnership.
5. Jewish weddings often include the sharing of wine. Some Christian traditions do not allow the consumption of alcohol.
6. The Jewish wedding ceremony includes Hebrew, even in progressive congregations. This will be foreign to non-Jewish guests. Providing translations for the Hebrew is often helpful.

Source: "Notes for Officiators at Interfaith Weddings," Judith Seid.

## **Sample Introduction of the Huppah**

Surrounded by loved ones whose joy and prayers are with you, you stand at this huppah, a symbol of your new home. Its four sides are open, symbolizing the importance of community and of participation in each other's lives. Friends and family fill the home. May your home be a shelter against the storms, a haven of peace, a stronghold of faith and love.

## **Sample Poems, Prayers and Readings**

### **Sonnet XLII, Sonnets from the Portuguese**

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of everyday's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints--I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.



### **Song Of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a**

I hear my Beloved.  
See how he comes  
leaping on the mountains,  
bounding over the hills,  
My beloved is like a gazelle,  
like a young stag.

See where he stands  
behind our wall. He looks in at the window,  
He peers through the lattice.

My beloved lifts up his voice,  
he says to me,  
"Come then, my love,  
my lovely one, come.

My dove hiding in the clefts of the rock,  
In coverts of the cliff,  
show me your face,  
let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet  
and your face is beautiful."

My beloved is mine and I am his.  
He said to me:  
“Set me like a seal on your heart  
Like a seal on your arm.  
For love is strong as death,  
Jealousy relentless as Sheol.  
The flash of it is a flash of fire,  
A flame of the Lord himself.”  
Love no flood can quench  
no torrent drown.

---

**Hosea 2:21**

And I shall betroth thee unto me forever,  
Yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness,  
And in loving kindness and in compassion;  
And I shall betroth thee unto me in faithfulness.  
-submitted by Rabbi Miriam S. Jerris

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**Prayer of St. Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
when there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.  
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand,  
to be loved as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

---

**Sonnet XVII from Cien sonetos de amor**  
by Pablo Neruda

I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,  
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.  
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,  
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms

but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;  
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,  
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.  
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;  
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you, so close that your hand on my chest is my  
hand, so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.



## Reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (two versions)

*1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a*

1. Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I am going to show you a way that is better than any of them.

If I have all the eloquence of men and women or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing.

If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all mysteries and knowing everything, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but am without love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I possess, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but am without love, I gain nothing.

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous or selfish, it does not take offense and is not resentful.

Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins, but delights in the truth. It is always ready to excuse, to trust and to endure whatever comes. Love does not end.

There are in the end three things that last: Faith, Hope and Love; and the greatest of these is Love.

2. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part,

and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.



### **From Romans 12:9-11**

Let love be without pretense. Hate what is evil, hold to what is good. Love one another with fraternal charity, anticipating one another with honor.

-submitted by Rabbi Miriam Jerris



### **Responsorial Psalm**

*Based on Jeremiah 29:11 and 31:3, Isaiah 54:10, Micah 6:8, and I John 4:12*

READER: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

RESPONSE: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

READER: It is God who speaks: The mountains may depart, the hills may be shaken, but my love for you will never leave you and my covenant of peace with you will never be destroyed.

RESPONSE: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

READER: I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you.

RESPONSE: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

READER: What is good has been explained to you. This is what God asks of you – only this: to act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with your God.

RESPONSE: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.



### **Apache Marriage Poem**

Now you will feel no rain,  
for each of you will be shelter for the other.

Now you feel no cold,  
for each of you will be warmth to the other.

Now there is no more loneliness,  
for each of you will be companion to the other.  
Now you are two persons,  
but there is only one life before you.  
Go now to your dwelling to enter into  
the days of your togetherness.  
And may your days be good  
and long upon the earth.

---

**From Al-Fatiha (The Opening), the Holy Qur'an**

In the name of God, the infinitely Compassionate and Merciful.  
Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds.  
The Compassionate, the Merciful. Ruler on the Day of Reckoning.  
You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help.  
Guide us on the straight path,  
the path of those who have received your grace;  
not the path of those who have brought down wrath, nor of those who wander  
astray.  
Amen.

---

**Psalm 128**

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in God's ways.  
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go  
well with you.  
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive  
shoots around your table.  
Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.  
The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days  
of your life.  
May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

---

**From The Little Prince**

By Antoine de Saint Exupery

The little prince saw a rose garden. "You are not at all like my rose," he said to the flowers. "No one has tended you and you have tended no one."

"You are beautiful, but you are empty," he explained. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you. But in herself alone my rose is more important than all the hundreds of other roses: because it is she that I have watered... because it is she that I have sheltered... because it is she that I have

listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is my rose.”

The little Prince understood that it is his commitment to his rose that makes it so important. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tended.

---

## Nuptial Blessing

Let us ask God for his continued blessing on the bride and the groom: Lord, may your fullest blessing come upon them so that they may together rejoice in your gift of married love. May they be noted for their good lives and be parents filled with virtue. May they be glad that you help them in their work and know that you are with them in their need. May they reach old age in the company of friends and family.

---

## Always Love Each Other

By Larry S. Chengges

If you can always be as close and happy as today,  
Yet be secure enough to grow and change along the way.  
If you keep for you alone your love as husband and wife,  
Yet find the time to share your joy with others in your life.  
If you can be as one and walk through marriage hand in hand,  
Yet still support the goals and dreams that each of you have planned.  
If you dare to always go your separate ways together,  
Then all the wonder of today will stay with you forever.



### Proverbs 30:18

There are three things too wonderful for me;  
Yea, four I cannot fathom I cannot see;  
The way of an eagle in the air,

The way of a serpent upon a rock,  
The way of a ship in the midst of the sea,

And the way of a man with a woman  
and a woman with a man.

The way of men and women.  
Struggling with self and other, the I and the not-I,  
seeking that elusive shadow within  
sometimes by aimlessly wandering without.  
But the work of a spouse  
is not to be the shadow of the other,  
but to help the other be who that person truly is.  
We tend to seek out reflections of ourselves to love  
and are sorely troubled when the other person fails to mirror our needs,  
our desires and our truths.  
But true union begins when we look  
beyond the mirror of self-absorption  
to see who we have met on his or her own terms.  
-submitted by David Roller



### **Shehecheyanu**

Blessed are You, O God, for giving us life, sustaining us and allowing us to reach  
this joyous time.

*Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:* Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam  
shecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higyanu lazman hazeh.



## Sample Rituals

A cup of white wine is passed up the bride's side, a cup of red wine is passed up the groom's side. The bride and groom pour the two cups together. The facilitator points out that once the wine has mingled it cannot be separated. It can be poured back into separate containers, but it will always be mixed. A blessing is said and the couple sip from the cup.

-submitted by Marcia Spiegel



Use a Havdalah candle as the unity candle.

-submitted by Aimee Goldberg



For Buddhist or Hindu interfaith weddings, incorporate fire from a candle into the walk around the fire, typical of Hindu marriages. Or have 108 candles glowing during the Buddhist-Jewish marriage ceremony.

-submitted by Julia Gutman



## **Jumping the Broom**

For Jewish-African-American weddings, a good counterpart to breaking the glass is "jumping the broom." During slavery, African-Americans did not have the legal right to marry. But they still got married in a ceremony that typically involved taking vows in the presence of a witness and leaping over the handle of a broom

-submitted by Marissa Fireman

## Acknowledgement of Different Faiths

Today, [bride] and [groom] have chosen to marry. Their love unites two different lives, families, and faiths. While appreciating the differences between their traditions, [bride] and [groom] believe that being together is far better than being apart. Because of their commitment to each other, I have asked them to remember that although their faiths have different histories, it was not always so. I have asked the bride to remember that Yeshua (whom Christians call Jesus) was a Jew, who interpreted his Jewish traditions in a particular historical moment. And I have asked the groom to remember that many Christian traditions have their roots in Jewish traditions, but that the traditions have been interpreted differently in particular historical moments. Out of these two distinct traditions, [bride] and [groom] have come together to honor the best of both, and to focus on their similarities rather than their differences.



This ceremony is a tribute to the bride and groom's creativity and mutual respect. It joins their cultural traditions and memories and symbolizes their wonderful commitment to honoring their very different roots. It testifies to their eagerness to share with one another the wealth of their individual heritages and, at the same time, to build together a unique partnership based on sharing, on joy, on learning, and on celebration.



[Bride] and [groom] have created this ceremony. They have woven from threads of two traditions a fabric that represents who they are together. Out of two different and distinct traditions, they have come together to learn the best of what each has to offer, appreciating their differences, and confirming that being together is far better than being apart from each other. As we bless this marriage under the huppah, the Jewish symbol of the new home being consummated here, we will later light the unity candle, the Christian symbol of two people becoming one in marriage.

## **Blessing Over the Wine: Additional Liturgy**

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share this cup of wine, you undertake to share all the future may bring. May you find life's joys doubly gladdened, its bitterness sweetened, and all things hallowed by true companionship and love.

Two cups are before you. By your choice, only one of the cups is reserved for the two of you alone. You decided to share the first cup with those who have been partners in your lives thus far, the ones who have helped to make you the individuals you are.

This cup of wine symbolizes the gratitude [bride] and [groom] have for the loving care and teaching of parents, the ties of heart and mind and memory that link brothers and sisters, and for the friendships that fill this cup to overflowing.



Although you are two distinct persons, both respecting the dignity of the other, you have chosen to unite your lives and to seek your happiness together. Your individual joy will be all the greater because it is shared. Your individual fulfillment will be all the stronger because it rests in the fulfillment of the other.

We have come to the moment of the service when you will share a cup of wine – not just once, but twice, to honor both of your heritages.

In the culture of the Jewish people, wine is the symbol of happiness. Take this goblet and drink the wine as an affirmation of your hope for the future, a future that welcomes your dreams and makes them real.

Ashray hehatan v'hakalla sheyimtzoo ahava b'nee-soo-een.

Happy are the man and woman who find love in marriage.

Drink from the cup.

We also honor the ancient Chinese wedding tradition of tuan yuan [twen yu-wen], or "completing the circle." The wine cups are tied together with a red string. Reminiscent of the weddings of the Sung dynasty, the partners sip the wine, then cross arms to exchange the cups and drink again. The sharing and mingling of the wine symbolizes a harmonious married life.

Drink from the cup, cross arms and drink again.

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share the cup of wine, you undertake to share all that the future may bring. All the sweetness life's cup may hold for you should be sweeter because you drink it together; whatever drops of bitterness it may contain should be less bitter because you share them.

---

Two thoughts are suggested by this cup of wine. The first is that wine is a symbol of the sweetness we wish for your life. There will be times when you drink from other cups, from bitter ones; but life offers opportunity to savor the sweetness. The awareness of the possibility of a life filled with true meaning is what we toast: the good that is life. The second is that wine is a symbol of sharing. You have shared many years together, and out of this time has grown the love which brought you to this day. As you continue to share in each other's life, you will, as a symbol of this enduring cooperation, share this cup of wine. As you share this cup of wine, you share all that the future may bring.

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## **Wine and Wishes**

By Eva Goldfinger

Weddings are a time for hope and rejoicing. Let us fill the cups that clear today of past regrets and future fears. \_\_\_\_\_ (groom) would you pour some wine into \_\_\_\_\_'s (bride) goblet. [do so] \_\_\_\_\_ (bride) would you pour some wine into \_\_\_\_\_'s (groom) goblet [do so]. When regrets and fears can be put aside, our lives can be filled with hope and renewal.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ your parents, through hard work and dedication and with a great deal of love, partially filled your cups of life with ingredients required to make you strong, wise and decent. They have reason to be proud and you have a great deal for which to be grateful.

It is traditional to express our joy, hopes and blessings for the bride and groom by reciting seven blessings. When I call your name would you please come up, raise a goblet and honor \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ by reciting a blessing.

[Officiant calls up each reader. As they come up, officiant gives them the goblet. Using the microphone, they will read the blessing from my binder, then return the cup to officiant and go back to their spots/seats]

Insert Seven Blessings here. See pages 14, 45.

[Officiant hands goblet to groom and bride]

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, raise your cup in a toast to life and your continued freedom and autonomy, and say "to life/l'chaim/(other language)" [raise cup, say "to life/l'chaim/\_\_\_\_\_"]

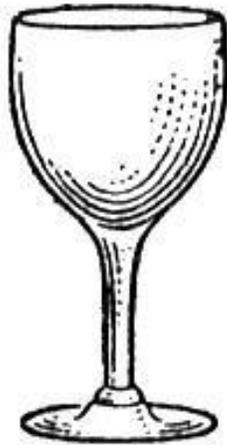
Now take a sip of wine from your own cup to savor the richness of your life. [drink]

Although you are two separate individuals and will continue to be so after your wedding, you have willingly chosen to seek and build happiness together. Raise the goblets, in a toast to a lasting and fulfilling marriage--and say: "to love and to unity". [say it]

Now offer each other a sip from your cup, to symbolize the sharing of your lives. [hang onto your cups, place it to the lip of your partner and they will tip it and sip from it. Drink from cup consecutively to avoid spillage.]

As you have just sipped from the goblets of wine, so may you, in enduring union and devotion, draw sustenance, comfort, and joy, from the cup of life. May you find the balance between individuality and togetherness, uniqueness and unity.

To show appreciation to your parents would you give them a sip of wine from your cup. [do so, then goblets replaced on table].



## Sample Ring Ceremonies

The groom's giving and the bride's acceptance of a ring is the central act of the ceremony. The Hebrew declaration that they'll say in English - called "ha-ray aht" – "With this ring you are sanctified to me as my (spouse)" - contains thirty-two letters. In Hebrew, the number thirty-two is written with letters that spell the word "heart." The groom and bride are thus giving their heart to each other as they recite these words.

[Editor's Note: The traditional formulation of the "ha-ray aht" begins with "Ha-ray aht m'ku-de-shet lee, b'ta-ba-at zo," which means "By this ring, you are consecrated to me," and ends with "k'dat Moshe v'Yisrael," which means "in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel." Formulations of the "ha-ray aht" used by rabbis who officiate at intermarriages include the following alternative endings:

- "I'fee emunataynu," "in the eyes of God"
- "be-ayni Elohim v'adam," "in the eyes of God and humankind"
- "k'dat Elohim oo-v'nay adam" "in accordance with Divine and human law"
- "k'dat yisrael v'ahava," "in love and equality" (literally "in accordance with the religion of Israel and in love"
- "k'derech no-ha-gey yisrael b'a-ha-va u-v'ka-vod," "according to the traditions of the people of Israel in love and in respect"

Some rabbis who officiate at intermarriages, instead of using the "ha-ray aht," use "Ani L'dodi v'dodi lee," which means "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.]"



BRIDE and GROOM:

I promise to love you, to respect you, to laugh with you, and to soothe your tears. I promise to share my life openly and honestly with you and to encourage and nurture your growth. Together, we continue this journey of exploration, trust, and communication. I promise to savor each day, reveling in our loving relationship and in pursuit of our happiness.

OFFICIANT: These rings in their unbroken wholeness are tokens of your union and of your love. They represent the enduring trust and affection that you bring to one another, and are the outward and visible symbols of an inner spiritual bond.

OFFICIANT: [Bride] and [Groom], please repeat after me:

With this ring, I join my life with yours in loving kindness, compassion, and faithfulness.

[Place the ring]

You are my beloved and you are my friend.



BRIDE: Garlands of unity

GROOM: and all our closest and dearest surround us

BRIDE: blessings like these come once in life

GROOM: good fortune smiles upon us

BRIDE: we are honored by the presence

GROOM: of family, friends and the divine spirit

BRIDE: let all your smiling eyes bear witness

GROOM: I present to you my heart and soul as your husband and friend

BRIDE: I present to you my heart and soul as your wife and friend



As by these rings you symbolize your marriage bond, may their meaning sink into your hearts and bind your lives together by dedication and faithfulness to each other. Truly, then, will these rings celebrate the words of the Song of Songs (8:6-7):

Wear me as a seal upon your heart,  
As a seal upon your arm;  
for love is strong as death,  
passion fierce as the grave.  
(For love is infinitely strong ...)  
Many waters cannot quench love;  
No flood can sweep it away ...

GROOM: I give you this ring as a sign for all to see of the commitment I have made to you.

Ha-ray aht m'ku-de-shet lee, b'ta-ba-at zo, l'fee emunataynu.

Be consecrated to me as my wife in the eyes of God.  
With this ring I join my life with yours.

BRIDE: I give you this ring as a sign for all to see of the commitment I have made to you.

Ha-ray Atah m'ku-de-shet lee, b'ta-ba-at zo, l'fee emunataynu.

Be consecrated to me as my husband in the eyes of God.  
With this ring I join my life with yours.



BRIDE: I, [Bride], take you, [Groom], to be my loving husband.  
And I promise you, before God and these witnesses, that I will be to you a true and loving wife;  
true to you in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and adversity;  
and that forsaking all others I will keep myself for you, and to you only, all the days of my life.

GROOM: I, [Groom], take you, [Bride], to be my loving wife;  
And I promise you, before God and these witnesses, that I will be to you a true and loving husband;

true to you in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and adversity;  
and that forsaking all others I will keep myself for you, and to you only, all the days of my life.

The wedding rings are symbols of attachment and fidelity in Jewish tradition. The ring represents the cycle of life and a link in the chain of generations.

These rings are tokens of your union and of your love. Wedding rings are regarded as fitting symbols of marriage because they are fashioned to have neither a beginning nor an end. They represent the enduring trust and affection that you bring to one another and are the outward and visible symbols of your inner spiritual bond.



**GROOM:** In the presence of God and before our family and friends I, [Groom] choose you, [Bride] to be my wife, to have and hold from this day forward, secure in the knowledge that you will be my constant friend, my faithful partner in life, and my one true love. I promise to share with you in times of joy as in times of trouble; to talk and to listen; to honor and appreciate you; to promise for and support you in trust and in love.

**BRIDE:** In the presence of God and before our family and friends I, [Bride] choose you, [Groom] to be my husband, to have and hold from this day forward, secure in the knowledge that you will be my constant friend, my faithful partner in life, and my one true love. I promise to share with you in times of joy as in times of trouble; to talk and to listen; to honor and appreciate you; to promise for and support you in trust and in love.

**OFFICIANT:** We have all witnessed your exchange of vows. Now is the time to affirm your love and commitment by exchanging your rings. Wedding rings are enduring symbols of affection and trust that you share for one another. The wedding rings are the outward and visible symbols of an inward and spiritual bond, signifying the uniting of this man and this woman in marriage. The rings are made of precious metals, indicating the preciousness and abiding value of the love, which they symbolize. They are made in the form of a circle; they have neither beginning nor end, signifying the eternal and infinite nature of the bride and groom's love for each other. In wearing these rings, you proclaim your intent to reflect this loving relationship with one another.

(Officiant with bride and groom repeating short phrases after him)

As you, [Groom], place this ring on [Bride]'s finger, say to her these words:

**GROOM:** With this ring, I thee wed. I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and respect, forsaking all others. I promise to love you and care for you, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, from this day forward.

OFFICIANT: As you, [Bride], place this ring on [Groom]'s finger, say to him these words:

BRIDE: With this ring, I thee wed. I take you to be my husband, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and respect, forsaking all others. I promise to love you and care for you, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, from this day forward.

In keeping with the declaration you have made, you have given and received these rings. They are a token of your union, a symbol of enduring love. May they remind you that your lives are to be bound together by devotion and faithfulness.



(To the Groom)

The woman who stands by your side is about to become your wife. She will look to you for gentleness, for support, for understanding, for encouragement, and for protection. You must never take [Bride] for granted, but be continually sensitive to her needs. Your life and love will be [Bride]'s greatest source of joy.

[Groom], will you take [Bride] to be your wife? Will you love and respect her? Will you be honest with her always? Will you stand by her through whatever may come? Will you make whatever adjustments are necessary so that you can genuinely share your life with her?

(To the Bride)

The man who stands by your side is about to become your husband. He will look to you for gentleness, for support, for understanding, for encouragement, and for protection. You must never take [Groom] for granted, but be continually sensitive to his needs. Your life and love will be [Groom]'s greatest source of joy.

[Bride], will you take [Groom] to be your husband? Will you love and respect him? Will you be honest with him always? Will you stand by him through whatever may come? Will you make whatever adjustments are necessary so that you can genuinely share your life with him?

Marriage Vows

I, [Groom], take you, [Bride], to be my wife, my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion; to share my life with yours. To build our dreams together, while allowing you to grow with your dreams; to support you through times of trouble, and rejoice with you in times of happiness; to treat you with respect, love, and loyalty through all the trials and triumphs of our lives together: and to give you all the love I can give my whole life long.

I, [Bride], take you, [Groom], to be my husband, my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion; to share my life with yours. To build our dreams together, while allowing you to grow with your dreams; to support you through times of trouble, and rejoice

with you in times of happiness; to treat you with respect, love, and loyalty through all the trials and triumphs of our lives together: and to give you all the love I can give my whole life long.



OFFICIANT/FAMILY MEMBER: Do you, \_\_\_\_, welcome \_\_\_\_ as your wife, offering her your love and encouragement, your trust and respect, as together you create your future? If so, say “I do”.

OFFICIANT/FAMILY MEMBER: Do you, \_\_\_\_, welcome \_\_\_\_ as your husband, offering him your love and encouragement, your trust and respect, as together you create your future? If so, say “I do”.

(The officiant requests the rings)

OFFICIANT: The wearing of a wedding ring is the outer sign of your inner commitment. It says to all the world that “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” We place the wedding band on our hands in two stages: first it is placed on the right forefinger and then it is moved to the traditional ring finger on the left hand. We do this for two reasons.

The first is that marriage is a free will act of commitment. You freely choose to be each with the other. To place your ring on your own ring finger (as you will do in a moment) is a symbolic way of making the commitment public. The second reason is that the forefinger of the right hand is called the Heart Finger, for a vein runs from that finger directly to the heart. When your vows are exchanged you are, in fact, speaking heart to heart and thus it is appropriate that the ring touch the Heart Finger.

As a token of this love and devotion for each other, and of this covenant of marriage which you are entering into, I ask each of you to recite the words of the prophet Hosea, and to place a ring onto the finger of your betrothed as you do so:

COUPLE (together): With this ring, I betroth you to me forever; I betroth you to me, in righteousness and justice; in love and compassion; I betroth you to me in everlasting faithfulness.

(The officiant asks the bride or groom to repeat the following)

BRIDE: I choose you this day to love and confide in, to hold on to and to reach out from.

(The officiant asks the bride or groom to repeat the following)

GROOM: I choose you this day to believe in and share with, to learn from and to grow with.

(The officiant asks the bride and groom to repeat the next line together and, as they do so, move their own rings from the Heart Finger of the right hand to the ring finger of the left hand)

COUPLE (together): I choose you this day to give you my heart.

-by Rabbi David Roller



## Sample Candle Lighting Ceremonies

Out of two different and distinct traditions, the bride and groom have come together to learn the best of what each has to offer, appreciating their differences, and confirming that being together is far better than being apart from each other. As we bless this marriage under a huppah (wedding canopy), this Jewish symbol signifies that the bride and groom are joining together under one roof.

A marriage brings together two individuals, with separate lives, to perform the lifelong pledge of uniting as one. The lighting of a unity candle is a Christian symbol of two people becoming one in marriage. These candles before us symbolize the union of your marriage. The two outer candles represent the two of you as individuals. The center candle, which you will kindle together, represents the unity which will continue to develop as you are married. The external candles will remain lit, to show that, even in your unity, you may also remain as individuals.

[Mothers light the individual candles, Bride and Groom light the unity candle while music is played.]



Candlelight symbolizes the commitment of love these two people are declaring today.

Before you, you see three special candles. The two smaller candles, lighted prior to the ceremonies by their mothers, symbolize the lives of the bride and groom as individuals. In marriage, they do not lose their individuality, yet are united in so close a bond that they become one. They will now light the large center candle from the smaller candles to symbolize this new reality.

A famous mystical rabbi, Baal Shem Tov, who lived centuries ago, said: From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. And when two souls are destined to find each other, their two streams of light flow together and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being.



To begin this wonderful ceremony, I would like to invite the two mothers to light the unity candle. In lighting these candles the two mothers honor the lives of their children, the lives they brought into this world. To the bride and the groom, the lighting of these candles symbolize the joining of two families. The two side candles represent the young couple's individual lives and how each is unique and special. The center candle represents the new oneness they are choosing in marriage. In mutual up building, they give to one another: light, warmth, guidance, and love. But in marriage, the self is not extinguished. The side candles remain lit because wholeness and fullness of life depend upon the balance of individuality and togetherness. As the two mothers light their candle, they offer their love, respect, and support for this marriage.

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The tradition of the Unity Candles is meant to symbolize the stages of your lives. The two lit candles represent your lives to this moment. They are two distinct lights, each capable of going its separate way. To bring joy and radiance into your home, there must be a merging of these two flames into one.

As you each take a candle and together light the center one, you will extinguish your own candles, thus having the center candle represent the union of your two lives into one flesh. You begin to light the center candle as I say: "As this center light cannot be divided, let not your lives be divided. From this time onward may your thoughts be for each other rather than on your individual selves; may your plans be mutual, your joys and your sorrows shared."

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Before you are three candles. The two smaller candles symbolize the individual lives of the Bride and Groom. As they reflect on their lives, the Bride and Groom wish to express their gratitude to their parents.

BRIDE and GROOM read:

The Fifth Commandment is to honor thy mother and father. We thank our parents for the many sacrifices they made on our behalf, the guidance they give us, and the wonderful role models they have been. The parents, have experienced the challenges and joys of marriage, but through it all they have stayed together and passed on their values to their children. We hope and pray that we will be as successful in marriage as our parents.

The third candle symbolizes the combination of these two strong families. Today, the bride's parents acquire a son, and groom's parents acquire a daughter, a new experience for each couple. We invite them to come forward and light the large candle to symbolize the joined families.

Bride and Groom each light a small candle. Then our parents use those candles to light the larger candle.

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(Instead of three candles, use a seven-branched candelabra. Each partner recites in each other's languages the names of those their partner chose to memorialize.)

BRIDE and GROOM: Standing before us are candles waiting to be lit. Once kindled, light shows us the way. Endowed with love, light gives renewed strength. Light, that beacon of hope, kindles warmth within our hearts, wisdom in our minds, and passion in our souls.

OFFICIANT: Candle lighting has been traditionally used in a variety of ways in Jewish tradition. The bride and groom have chosen to use candlelight during their

wedding ceremony to remember those that are especially missed on this day. The bride and groom have benefited from the love, devotion and guidance of those who have come before them and in whose memory they will now light these candles.



Fire is one of the basic elements on earth. Many ancient people worshipped it as the source of life itself. Throughout history, many different societies have used candle lighting to celebrate and acknowledge special holidays and events. For us, the light of these candles represents the foundation of love, its heat and its fragility.

These three candles represent each one of you and your marriage. You will take your individual candles and light the large candle in the center, the candle representing your unity in marriage. But I don't want you to blow out your individual candles, for your individual selves will remain burning and bright even as you become unified in your lives together. Let the lighting of these candles reflect our thoughts on this day. Prior to this moment you each walked separate paths. Now as you light your candle, you embark on a marital partnership--a single path together.

-by Rabbi Miriam Jerris



As you light your separate candles, you honor your separate selves: your uniqueness and your autonomy. This candle represents the light of your being: your special talents, needs, visions and gifts--all that makes you who you are, you honor with this flame. As you blend your flames to light the third candle, you celebrate the power of separate lights to ignite a common flame of passion and commitment, and to come together as one.

-by Rabbi David Roller

## **The Seven Blessings: Alternative Wordings and Explanations**

[Bride] and [Groom] I now bless you with these traditional blessings.  
(Hebrew before English for each blessing)  
Blessed are you, God, who created life.  
Blessed are you, God, who created man and woman.  
Blessed are you, God, who unites man and woman.  
Bless these two who stand before you as you blessed the first couple in the Garden of Eden.  
Blessed are you, God, who grants the joy of marriage.  
May we all see the day when the world will echo with the sounds of feasting and singing. Praised is love, blessed be this union.

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share this cup of wine, you promise to share all that the future may bring. As you drink from this cup, so may you draw contentment, comfort, and happiness from your own cup of life. May you find life's joys heightened, its bitterness sweetened, and all things hallowed by true respect, companionship and love.



The First Blessing is "Kiddush"--sanctification of God's name over the wine.  
The Second and Third Blessings celebrate the theme of creation in a sequence that builds to the blessing of marriage.  
The Fourth Blessing is a challenge to fulfill the potential for creativity, blessing, and peace.  
The Fifth Blessing affirms that the bride and groom's marriage is made up of both passion and friendship.  
The Sixth Blessing blesses the bride and groom separately. Their relationship as beloved companions requires that each be able to stand alone even as they come together, bringing individual gifts to the marriage.  
The Seventh Blessing brings the bride and groom to rejoice together, united in gladness, surrounded by ten shades of joy and a chorus of jubilant voices.



May you be generous and giving with each other.  
May your sense of humor and playful spirit always continue to enliven your relationship.  
May you always respect the diversity of humankind.  
May you act with compassion to those less fortunate and with responsibility to the communities of which you are a part.  
May you appreciate and complement each other's differences.  
May you always share yourselves openly with your friends and family.  
May your home be a haven of blessing and peace.



Blessed are You God, Source of the world, who creates the fruit of the vine.  
Blessed are You God, Light of Life, who created everything for your glory.

Blessed are You God, Spirit of all things, who has created the human being. Blessed are You God, Foundation of every life, who fashioned humanity in Your likeness, and prepared for us a shape and form in your image, from one generation to the next and for all eternity. Blessed are You God, who has created human beings.

Zion will surely celebrate and exult in the coming together of her children. Blessed are You God, who brings joy to Zion through her children.

Give pleasure to these beloved companions as you did to your creation in the Garden of Eden so long ago. Blessed are you God, who makes the hearts of this couple rejoice.

Blessed are You God, Source of the universe, who has created each of these two people, their delight and their happiness, their rejoicing and singing and dancing and festivity, love and friendship, peace and pleasure. Oh God, may the voices of this celebration be heard in the streets of our cities and the hills of our countryside. May the words of this couple go out with gladness from their wedding huppah, and may the music of their friends and guests surround them. Blessed are You God, who brings joy to the hearts of this couple.



### **The Seven Blessings**

Adapted from Deena Metzger

Blessed is the one who created the fruit of the vine. Bless the two of you who come out of long traditions of struggling to find out what it is to be human. May you be full of the wine of life. May the life force and the knowledge of the human heart always be with you.

Blessed is the One. All creation mirrors your splendor and reflects your radiance. Bless the two of you. May the two of you know that all beauty comes from the Great Heart, and may you always live in its radiance.

Blessed is the one who created human beings. Bless the two of you. May you know it all--joy and struggle, beauty and sorrow, sweat, tears, solitude, companionship, laughter and ecstasy. May your marriage be strong enough to support you to experience whatever you must as you come to know yourselves and each other and to discover the entire range of your humanity in the process of soul making.

Blessed is the one who created Woman and Man in the divine image, so we may live, love and perpetuate life. Bless the two of you. May you delight in the wonder and impossibility of the fact that you are so similar and so different--may the difficulty and enormous pleasure of being a man and woman continually fascinate and engage you and be the source of your bonding.

Blessed is the one who brings people together and unites the divided. In joy we have come to witness this marriage of many cultures. It is said that everyone gets married at a wedding. Bless the two of you who bring us together through your union today.

Blessed is the one who rejoices that the love between this woman and this man is as the very first love in the Garden. Bless the two of you who recreate the world for us and for yourselves. May your love be as old and as new as the first love, and may you also bring new life, in all its forms, into the world.

Blessed is the creation of joy and celebration, lover and beloved, gladness and jubilation, pleasure and delight, love and solidarity, friendship and peace. Soon may we hear in the streets of the city and the paths of the fields the voice of joy, the voice of gladness, the voice of lover, the voice of beloved, the triumphant voice of lovers from the canopy and the voice of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed is the joy of lovers, one with another.

## Sample Ways to End the Ceremony

### **Concluding Prayer**

You have now affirmed before God, your families, and your friends your bond of love and commitment. You have come from different backgrounds. You have walked different paths. You are different individuals. Your love has transcended these differences. In the years before you, may the richness of the traditions that have nurtured you enhance and brighten your lives and others' as you help to create and shape the future.

May the spirit of love be ever a part of your lives, so that the union we here celebrate this day be worthy of continued celebration tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Yivarechecha Adonai v'yismerecha.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

Ya-er Adonai panav aleilcha vichuneka.

May God's countenance be lifted upon you and may God be gracious to you.

Yisa Adonai panav aleichca v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May God's countenance be upon you, and may God give you peace.

### **Pronouncement of Marriage**

You have both joined voluntarily in this ceremony of marriage, and have been formally united as husband and wife in the presence of your family and friends. As you have declared openly your clear intentions to be considered before all the world as a married couple, and have exchanged rings and vows attesting thereto, it is my pleasure and honor to pronounce you husband and wife.

### **Breaking of the Glass**

We conclude the ceremony with the traditional breaking of the glass. The breaking of the glass, like the commitment you make today, is irrevocable and permanent. As the groom breaks the glass, I invite everyone to shout, "Mazel Tov" which means "Congratulations and Good Luck!"



We have come to the final act of this service, which will actually be observed with two final scenes each a link to your different heritages.

First, you will enact an age-old Chinese ritual of bowing, first to your ancestors, then to your parents and friends, and finally to yourselves.

[Bow to candles, parents, each other.]

Now, in keeping with the Jewish custom, we will end the service with the ritual breaking of the glass. This ceremony seems to have as many explanations as there are rabbis officiating at weddings.

For some, the glass is supposed to remind us of all the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people over the centuries, starting principally with the destruction of the temple.

For others, it is a reminder of the fragility of life and all human relationships.

For the romantics among us, and surely there are still a few left, it is supposed to be as difficult to put the glass back together as it is to break the newly married couple apart.

Anthropologists offer the appealing idea that the sound of the breaking glass is intended to scare away the evil spirits which prey on couples and try to wreak havoc in their relationship. Since we're inclined to look for the repressed, core explanation underlying our modern rituals, this answer is appealing, but since the only demons we're afraid of reside deep within us, we doubt the loud noise will do much to scare them away.

The bride and groom also think the ritual is just plain fun, and that is reason enough to perpetuate it. Fun is good. Breaking the tension is also good. Breaking things and not getting punished for it, is good too.

So now, if for nothing more than the sake of tradition, the groom will break the glass. Let it signify, once and for all, that he and the bride are husband and wife and that it is time to begin the celebration of their marriage.

[The glass is stepped on.]



### **Message with Breaking of the Glass**

By Rabbi Miriam Jerris

There are several reasons why it is customary for a glass to be broken at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony. Symbolically, the breaking of the glass reminds us of the fragile nature of life. The custom has also come to symbolize the shattering of the old and the beginning of the new. The breaking of the glass insures the uniqueness of the moment that arises and passes away, a letting go of the past and looking toward the future. Since this is an intermarriage ceremony, that brings together two people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, let us, with this symbol, become especially mindful of the barriers that people erect between one another, and hope that with the breaking of the glass, we will see a breaking down of the barriers between people and help create a world based on love, unity, peace, and understanding. The breaking of the glass is irrevocable and permanent; so, too, may this marriage last an infinity of time--as long as it would take to reassemble the broken pieces of this glass. The breaking of the glass represents a turning point in your lives as you pledge your love today and make a new commitment to one

another. This is the time when you turn from living your separate lives to creating a new family together.



Just as church bells are sometimes rung at the end of a Christian marriage, people of the Jewish faith smash a wine glass. Among the many interpretations of these two customs, one is that the loud noise of both the church bells and the breaking of the glass scares away evil spirits wishing harm to the newly married couple.

Breaking a glass summons the Jewish culture's notion that sweetness can only exist alongside of bitterness--breaking the glass reminds us that although this wedding has provided joy, the world is still in turmoil, and requires our care and love, Its breaking is not only a reminder of sorrow, but also an expression of hope for a future free from all violence. Frailty of the glass also suggests the frailty of human Relationships. The glass, then is broken to "protect" the marriage with the implied prayer, "As this glass shatters, so may your marriage never break."

-by Rabbi Lawrence M. Schuval

## **Sample Program Definitions**

### **Ketubah**

- Marriage contract with spiritual significance but not legally binding.
- A Jewish legal marriage document with a legacy spanning two thousand years. It is typically signed before the wedding ceremony by the bride and groom and at least two witnesses. The original formulation was written by Shimon ben Shetach, head of the ancient rabbinical court at the end of the first century CE. It was a legal document that detailed some of the rights and obligations of the bride and groom. It offered some protection, in this case for the bride, in the event of divorce. Given the era in which it was written it was quite extraordinary, giving some legal rights to women in an age when they had few. Modern ketubot are typically spiritual, not legal, covenants that the bride and groom make with one another, and use egalitarian language. The ketubah is often written as an illuminated manuscript, and becomes a work of art in itself. Many couples frame it and display it in their home.

### **Huppah**

- Wedding canopy that signifies a home or shelter.
- A Jewish wedding canopy that usually consists of four poles with a tallis (Jewish prayer shawl) suspended between them. At one time, the huppah was the marriage tent or room in which the bride and groom consummated their marriage; today it has many meanings. Primarily it symbolizes God's presence and the new home the couple will create together. The sides of the canopy remain open to symbolize the importance of the couple's involvement in their general community and with their family and friends.
- The bride and groom are brought to the huppah (wedding canopy) by both parents. It is a symbol of the home to be built and shared by the couple. It is open on all sides, just as Abraham and Sarah had their tent open all sides to welcome their friends and family. Four friends and family members will hold up the poles of our huppah, symbolizing the importance of family and friendship in supporting and strengthening our home.

### **Unity Candle**

- The lighting of the unity candle symbolizes the merging of two families into one.
- A visual symbol of two individual lives joining together as one in the new union of marriage
- Two candles symbolize the bride and groom's individual lives, the third their life together. Lighting the center candle symbolizes that henceforth their light will shine together for each other, for their families, and for their community.

## **Circling**

- In Jewish tradition, the bride circles the groom seven times, symbolizing the creation of a new family circle and forming a “wall” of protection for the groom. We are adapting this ritual for our ceremony by each circling the other three times and then we will circle once together. This circling symbolizes the creation of a new and protective home and the intertwining of our lives.

## **Breaking of the Glass**

- This symbolizes the breaking down of barriers between people of different cultures and faiths. After the glass is broken everyone yells “Mazel Tov,” which means good luck.
- The fragility of the glass suggests the frailty of human relationships. The glass is broken to protect this marriage with the implied prayer: “As this glass shatters, so may your marriage never break.”
- Shattered glass symbolizes the fragility of our relationship and reminds us that we must treat our relationship with special care. This custom was also incorporated into the ceremony to remind everyone that even at the height of personal joy, we must, nevertheless, remember the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. On a lighter note, thought by some to be the last time the groom ever gets to put his foot down.
- It teaches us that in times of joy we must also realize life brings sadness and sorrow. The sound of the breaking glass is said to frighten away evil spirits who might spoil this joyous occasion with their mischief. It also warns us that love, like glass, is fragile and must be protected. The promises made by the bride and groom, like the broken glass, are irrevocable. The breaking of the glass also serves as a reminder of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and all subsequent sufferings of the Jewish people. Even in a moment of such great joy, we are asked to remember that there is still pain and suffering in the world and that we have a responsibility to help relieve some of that suffering.
- It reminds us that love, like glass, is fragile and must be protected. The glass is broken to protect the marriage with an implied prayer: “May your marriage last as long as it would take to repair this glass.” The shattering of the glass concludes the ceremony on a high note.
- At the conclusion of the ceremony, we are breaking the glass together--as a reminder that working through the challenges and celebrating the successes of life is best done together. One interpretation of the custom is that even in the happiest times, we must remember there is still much suffering in the world. For the bride and the groom, the shattering of this glass also symbolizes the breaking down of barriers between people of different cultures and faiths.

**Hora** - A traditional Jewish dance of celebration performed at the beginning of the reception.

**Mezinke** - Dance to honor parents who have married their last daughter. This will take place towards the end of the reception.

**Yihud** - Means union in Hebrew. A Jewish custom where the Bride and Groom spend a few moments alone together immediately following the ceremony. It gives the couple an opportunity to share, privately, the power and importance of this moment in their lives. They will greet you at your tables during the reception.

**Giving of the Rings** - For many Jews, the giving of the ring has come to represent the “kinyan,” that the bride be given--and that she accept--something of nominal value from the groom. The double-ring ceremony that is the custom in modern times has come to symbolize for some the endless love between a husband and wife. Others see the circle as representing a link to the past and a commitment to the future.

**Shehecheyanu** - A joyous blessing that is recited at the arrival of any long awaited occasion is a joyous blessing that is recited at the arrival of any long awaited occasion

### **Kiddush Cup/Wine**

- Symbolic of the cup of life. It is used in the Jewish tradition when saying the prayer for the sanctification of the wine on the Sabbath and on holidays. As we share the cup of wine, we undertake the sharing of all that the future may bring. The sweetness of the wine represents the joy of the occasion.
- In the Christian tradition the wine is significant for several reasons. Most importantly to Christians, the wine is symbolic of the blood of Jesus’ sacrifice. Before he died, Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples. During their celebration, Jesus exhorted his disciples to remember his sacrifice in the bread and the wine of their Passover meal. Passover is the celebration of the angel of death “passing over” the homes of the Jews in Egypt who marked their doors with the blood of a sacrificed lamb prior to the Exodus. Similarly, Christians often refer to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb because of his sacrifice. So it is in the celebration of a Jewish tradition, Passover, that symbols of our two faiths merge and that wine becomes a significant symbol to Christians. In the context of a wedding, wine is important to Christians for another reason. It was at a wedding feast in Cana where Jesus’ first recorded miracle occurred; turning water into wine.

### **Seven Blessings, or “sheva b’rachot”**

- Traditionally recited during a Jewish wedding. The words that are spoken are meant to link the bride and groom to faith in God as Creator of the world, Bestower of joy and love, and the ultimate Redeemer.
- Seven blessings are recited with themes that include the creation of the world and humankind, the importance of marriage, and the hope for harmony in the world.

## Samples of Ceremony Order

Seating of Grandparents  
Processional  
Rabbi's Opening Remarks & Blessing  
Explanation of the Huppah (see pages 10, 22)  
Remembering Loved Ones  
Circling (see page 11)  
Exchange of Vows  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Lighting the Unity Candle (see page 42)  
Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
Blessing over wine  
Breaking the Glass (see pages 16, 52)  
Concluding Benediction (see page 48)  
Recessional

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Processional  
Opening Remarks  
Readings  
Remarks by Judge  
Lighting the Unity Candle (see page 42)  
Prayers  
Exchange of Vows  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Pronouncement (see page 48)  
Closing Prayer (see page 48)  
Breaking the Glass (see pages 16, 52)  
Recessional

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Processional  
Greetings  
Invocation  
Blessing for the First Cup  
Birkat Erusin: The Betrothal Blessings  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Reading the Ketubah (see page 9)  
Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
Pronouncement (see page 48)  
Breaking the Glass (see pages 16, 52)  
Recessional  
Yihud

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Arrival at the Huppah (see pages 10, 22)

Circling (see page 11)  
Havdalah  
Rabbi's greetings  
First cup of wine  
Remembrance  
Group blesses the wedding  
Exchange of Vows  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Reading the Ketubah (see page 9)  
Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
Second cup of wine  
Breaking the Glass (see pages 16, 52)  
Yihud



Reading and Signing of the Ketubah (see page 9)  
Processional  
Opening Statement  
Candle Lighting (see page 42)  
Readings (see page 24)  
The Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
Explanation of the Seven Blessings  
Reading of the Ketubah and Homily  
Declaration of Intentions  
Marriage Vows  
Blessing for the Marriage  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Kiddush (Sharing of Wine)  
Breaking of the Glass (see page 16)  
Declaration of Marriage  
Introduction  
Recessional



Processional  
Opening Poem  
Opening Remarks by Rabbi  
Welcoming Remarks and Opening Prayer by Father  
Readings (see page 24)  
Marriage Blessing and Introduction to the Seven Blessings by Rabbi  
The Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
Blessing over the wine by Rabbi  
Lighting the Unity Candle (see page 42)  
Readings (see page 24)  
Exchange of Vows by Father  
Reading of the Ketubah Text by Bride and Groom (see page 9)  
Exchange of Rings by Rabbi (see pages 13, 36)

Pronouncement by Father  
Breaking of the Glass (see page 16)



Welcome  
Explanation of Huppah (see pages 10, 22)  
Remembering Loved Ones who have died or are sick  
Acknowledging Different Traditions (see page 32)  
Prayers and Readings (see page 24)  
First Cup of Wine – Blessing over the wine (see pages 12, 33)  
Vows & Ring Exchange (see pages 13, 36)  
Lighting the Unity Candle (see page 42)  
Reading of the Ketubah (see page 9)  
Remarks by Rabbi  
General Marriage Prayer & Blessing  
Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45) & Second Cup of Wine  
Closing  
Explanation of Yihud  
Presentation of Couple  
Breaking of the Glass (see page 16)



Processional  
Opening Statement  
Explanation of Huppah (see pages 10, 22)  
Prayer/Shehecheyanu (see page 30)  
Blessing of the Wine (see pages 12, 33)  
Reading of the Seven Blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
New Testament Reading  
Marriage Vows  
Blessing and Exchanging of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Prayers  
Pronouncement  
Benediction  
Breaking of the Glass (see page 16)



Processional  
Lighting of the Unity Candle (see page 42)  
Opening Remarks and Blessings  
Reading of the Ketubah (see page 9)  
Exchange of Vows  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Lighting of the unity candle by bride and groom (see page 42)  
Seven wedding blessings (see pages 14, 45)  
Blessing over the wine (see page 12)  
Concluding Prayer

Pronouncement of Marriage (see page 48)  
Breaking of the Glass (see pages 16, 48)  
Nuptial Embrace  
Introduction of the couple  
Recessional

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Prelude  
Processional (to Air from the Water Music, Handel)  
Bridal Procession (to Canon in D, Pachelbel)  
Signing of the Ketubah (see page 9)  
Welcome  
Reading from Scriptures:  
Genesis 24: 48-51; 58-67  
Mark 10: 6-9  
Blessing over the Wine (see page 12)  
Statements of Intention  
Exchange of Vows  
Blessing of Rings  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
The Seven Blessings (each read by different honored guest) (see pages 14, 45)  
Pronouncement of Marriage  
Benediction  
Breaking of the Glass (see pages 16, 48)  
Recessional (to Ode to Joy, Beethoven)  
-Submitted by Elizabeth McNamara Mueller

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Ketubah signing (together or separately) (see page 9)  
Processional  
Explanation of Huppah (see pages 10, 22)  
Words of Welcome (to set the mood)  
Presentation of Bride  
Invocation (opening prayer)  
Scriptural Reading (typically Corinthians) (see page 26)  
Officiant's Remarks  
Reading of Ketubah (with explanation)  
Pledging of Vows  
Exchange of Rings (see pages 13, 36)  
Presentation of Roses (surprise for moms and grandmas)  
Lighting of Unity Candle (or optional Unity Sand) (see page 42)  
Wedding Blessings (chanted by officiant)  
Sharing of Wine (very special with family Kiddush cup)  
Blessing of Bride and Groom  
Pronouncement of Marriage  
Breaking of the Glass, with explanation (see pages 16, 48)  
Introduction of Couple (with kiss)

## Recessional

-submitted by Barbara and David Niles



Signing of the ketubah (see page 9)  
Couple escorted to huppah (see page 10)  
Circling (see page 11)  
Welcome to the couple and guests  
Blessing over the wine (see page 12)  
Blessing over the home  
Blessing for family or friends who have died  
Reading of the ketubah  
Vows  
Ring ceremony (see pages 13, 36)  
Readings (see page 24)  
Silent meditation  
Closing benediction (see page 48)  
Breaking of the glass (see page 16)  
Yihud  
-by Rabbi Lev Baesh

## **Recommended Books**

Diamant, Anita. [\*The New Jewish Wedding, Revised\*](#). (272 pages, Scribner, 2001)

Kaplan-Meyer, Gabriele. [\*The Creative Jewish Wedding: A Hands-on Guide to New & Old Traditions, Ceremonies & Celebrations\*](#). (244 pages, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004)

Lerner, Devon. [\*Celebrating Interfaith Marriages: Creating Your Jewish/Christian Ceremony\*](#). (288 pages, Owl Books, 1999)

Matlins, Stuart M., ed. [\*The Perfect Stranger's Guide to Wedding Ceremonies\*](#). (200 pages, Skylight Paths Publishing, 2000)

Seid, Judith. [\*God-Optional Judaism: Alternatives for Cultural Jews Who Love Their History, Heritage and Community\*](#). (226 pages, Citadel Press, 2001) (specifically the chapter on weddings, 165-179)