WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION TO WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE

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The purpose of the *rabbi* at a wedding is to ensure that the extremely detailed wedding *halachot*, as set out by the *Shulchan Aruch*, are followed correctly. If not, the wedding might not be *kosher*.

A Jewish marriage includes: a written document (*ketuba*); a financial transaction (ring) in front of two *kosher* witnesses; and physical intimacy.

Witnesses

- The witnesses must be *shomer Shabbat* Jewish men.
- The bride and groom should confirm verbally that these are the two (and the only two) witnesses that they want.

Ring

- The groom must confirm that he acquired and owns the ring.
- The groom must say *Harei at mekudeshet li* ... to the bride and place the ring on her (index) finger.

Ketuba

- The *ketuba* must be *kosher*.
- Before the *chuppa*, someone (anyone, including women) must fill in (no *safrut* is required for this): the *Hebrew* names of the bride and groom; the date the wedding is taking place; the wedding location (city, etc.); and that a *kinyan* was made.
- The *ketuba* must be signed by two *kosher* witnesses.

PRE-DATING

Cosmetic Surgery

Cosmetic surgery to help get married is permitted.

DATING

Giving Information about Potential Mate

You must tell whatever you know that is relevant about a potential date that someone is considering marrying.

NOTE Since it is for a purpose, there is no issue of *lashon ha'ra*.

Dating only People You May Marry

You should date only people whom you may marry.

EXAMPLES

- A convert must have had a *kosher* conversion.
- *A cohen* may not date divorcees, converts, or a woman both of whose parents converted before she was born.

- The person must not be a *mamzeir* or child of *mamzeirim* (offspring of a forbidden union).

NOTE A *mamzeir* is permitted to marry another *mamzeir*.

Checking Jewish Lineage

If there may be any question about the Jewish lineage of a bride-to-be or bridegroom, his or her female antecedents should be confirmed as having been Jewish (born of a Jewess OR halachically converted) back to when a *shomeret Shabbat* woman has been positively identified (or back as far as possible). As a practical matter, three or four generations may be as far back as most Jews can be traced.

Also, make sure that if there was any divorce, that the divorce was *kosher*, with a *get*.

Checking on Whether the Couple May Marry

The *mesader kidushin* (organizer of the wedding ceremony) should research whether the couple is permitted to marry. This should be done well in advance of the wedding date.

PRE-WEDDING

Not Seeing Each Other

Some people have a custom for a groom and bride not to see each other for the seven days leading up to their wedding.

Bride and Groom Fast

The bride and groom must not eat or drink any food from 72 minutes before sunrise on the day of their wedding, even if their wedding takes place after sunset on the following Jewish calendar day.

Bride to the Mikva

The bride must go to the *mikva* before she may have relations with her husband.

Groom to the Mikva

The groom should immerse himself in a *mikva* on his wedding day. He may immerse in the ocean, but should not be alone while immersing.

Offspring at Parent's Re-Marriage

A child should not attend the wedding of a parent, such as if the parent gets married after divorce, after the death of first spouse, or if never married--or halachically married--before his/her child was born.

WEDDING

WEDDING: HOW MANY MEN

Jewish Wedding: Minimum Number of Men

The minimum number of men at the *kidushin* part of a wedding is two Jewish males, at least 13 years old (needed as witnesses), plus the groom.

WEDDING: WITNESSES

Jewish Wedding: Witnesses: Four Pairs

A Jewish wedding requires four pairs of witnesses, but the same witnesses may be used for all four parts: *tanayim; ketuba; kiddushin; yichud*. Each witness must be:

- A *shomer-Shabbat*, adult male,

- Not related to the bride or groom,
- Not related to each other, and
- Known to be an honest person.

NOTE There is no requirement to have only people who were born into *shomer-Shabbat* families as witnesses.

NOTE For more on relatives as witnesses, see Witnesses: Relatives in Jewish Courts.

WEDDING: TANAYIM

Tanayim and Acquisition

Tanayim are written; an acquisition (*kinyan*) is made; and the *tanayim* are read. The mothers of the bride and groom break a china plate.

WEDDING: KETUBA

Who May Write the Ketuba

The *ketuba* may be written by anyone, whether male or female, Jew or non-Jew.

Ketuba Process

The *ketuba* is written before the wedding but is not finished until just before the signing, when one or a few last words are filled in. The *ketuba* is signed by two *kosher* witnesses after *tanayim*.

NOTE The *ketuba* is read later, under the *chuppa*.

Meaning of the Ketuba

The *ketuba* at a wedding is required and the husband obligates himself through the *ketuba* to support his wife. The *ketuba* may be the world's oldest document for women's rights!

Financial Responsibility of Husband

The husband, not the wife, has the responsibility of financially supporting the family. This is the *halacha* and NOT an opinion! That the husband must support his family is explicitly stated in every *ketuba*.

Safekeeping a Ketuba

A woman must keep her *ketuba* under her control, but it does not need to be with her or even be in her home. It may be kept with her parents or anywhere else safe. It should not be displayed in public. If she has definitely lost her *ketuba* (she cannot find it in any place where it should have been), she may not live with her husband unless she has another *ketuba* written.

WEDDING: UNDER THE CANOPY (CHUPPA)

Bride's Jewelry

A bride may wear other jewelry in addition her wedding ring under the *chuppa*. It is only a custom of some people not to do so.

Bridegroom's Kittel

A bridegroom is not required to wear a *kittel* under the *chuppa*, although many people have that custom.

WEDDING: STEPS OF MESADER KIDUSHIN

The First Blessings

The *mesader kidushin* (organizer of the wedding ceremony) makes sure that all procedures are done properly. He says the blessing on the cup of wine and fulfills that requirement for both the bride and groom. He says the second blessing and fulfills it for the groom. In both cases, the bride and groom must have the intention

that the *mesader kidushin* is saying those blessings on their behalf. The groom and bride drink some of the wine.

Confirming the Witnesses

The *mesader kidushin* asks the witnesses if they are related to either the bride or groom or each other. He then asks the bride and groom if they want these and only these witnesses to be their witnesses.

Checking the Ring

The *mesader kidushin* then takes the ring and asks the groom "Is this your ring? If so, how did you acquire it?" It must have been acquired in accordance with Jewish law. He shows the ring to the witnesses and asks if it is worth at least a *pruta*. If they say yes, the groom takes the ring and says "*Harei at mekudeshet li*…" and places the ring on the bride's index finger of her primary hand. The witnesses must hear the groom say " *Harei at mekudeshet li*..." and must see him place the ring on her hand. The wife should not take the ring off of her index finger until after they leave the *chuppa*. The couple is now married!

Importance of Ring

The wedding ring given by the groom to his bride is important since it represents his "acquisition'" of his bride; after giving the ring, they are married.

Modifying the Ring

The wedding ring may be modified after the wedding, such as for size.

WEDDING: LAST FIVE BLESSINGS

Saying the Blessings

The next set of blessings is said by one or more people. The couple must intend to fulfill their requirements by hearing the blessing on the wine. The groom and bride drink some of the wine.

WEDDING: BREAKING THE GLASS

Break the Glass

A glass is broken in commemoration of the destruction of the *Temple*.

WEDDING: YICHUD ROOM

Yichud Room

The couple goes to the *yichud* room. The witnesses must make sure that no one else is inside and that there is only one entrance/exit. The couple is locked in for five minutes. They must eat some food while inside.

WEDDING: FESTIVE MEAL

Timing of Wedding Meal

If both people have been married before, *l'chatchila* the wedding (*chuppa*) may not start during the day and the meal at night. You must start the meal before sunset or else start the wedding after sunset.

WEDDING CUSTOMS (THESE ARE NOT HALACHOT!)

Wedding Customs: Couple Separates for Seven Days

The couple does not see each other for seven days before the wedding. They may speak on the phone.

Wedding Customs: The Aufruf

On the *Shabbat* before the wedding, the groom has an *aufruf* at which he receives an *aliya*.

Wedding Customs: What the Bride Buys

The bride buys for the groom:

- *Talit* and *kittel*,
- Watch, and
- Set of the *Talmud*.

She also pays for the wedding except for what the groom pays for (see below).

Wedding Customs: What the Groom Buys

The custom is for the groom to pay for the band, photos, video, flowers, liquor, and wine.

NOTE In *Eretz Yisrael*, it is customary for the bride and groom to split the wedding expenses.

Wedding Customs: Prenuptial Agreement

A prenuptial agreement is permitted but it must state that the *ketuba* gets settled separately.

Wedding Customs: Groom to Mikva

The groom goes to *mikva* on the wedding day.

Wedding Customs: Wedding Shomer

The groom and bride each have a guardian (*shomer*/*shomeret*) with them from daybreak of the wedding day (some grooms have a *shomer* from the *aufruf*) until they are married.

Wedding Customs: Tanayim

Tanayim are written before the main ceremony and two guests are honored as witnesses. The *tanayim* are read out loud.

Wedding Customs: Accompanying the Bride and Groom

There are various customs about who accompanies the bride and groom but none are *halachically* required.

Wedding Customs: Chuppa

The *chuppa* should be under the open sky (via a skylight) or outdoors where practical.

Wedding Customs: Bride Circles Groom

The bride walks seven times around the groom counterclockwise, as seen from above, and stands on the right side of the groom.

Wedding Customs: Baruch HaBa

Someone sings *baruch ha'ba*... for the groom and *brucha ha'ba'ah* for the bride.

Wedding Customs: Drinking the Wine

The *mesader kidushin* does not drink the cup of wine but the bride and groom normally do.

Wedding Customs: Wedding Ring

It is not traditional for the bride to give a ring to the groom, and it is forbidden for the bride to give a ring to the groom at the *chuppa*.

Wedding Customs: Reading of the Ketuba

After the blessings on the wine have been said and the wine has been drunk, the *ketuba* is read. This separates the two sets of blessings.

Wedding Customs: Second Cup of Wine

The second cup of wine is given to the groom by the father of the bride and to the bride by the mother of the groom.

SHEVA BRACHOT

Introduction to Sheva Brachot

At the end of the wedding meal, the seven blessings (*sheva brachot*) are said in *birkat ha'mazon*. The final blessing is on wine. This is the only required festive meal after the wedding. Any festive meal on the subsequent six days is optional but, when held, all the blessings are required.

Sheva Brachot: Celebration Period

If the bride and/or groom had never been married before, there are seven days of celebration (don't go to work, no *tachanun*). If both bride and groom were married before, there is one day of *sheva brachot* (in *birkat ha'mazon*) at the meal eaten after the *chuppa*, but three days of celebration (don't go to work, no *tachanun*).

NOTE Neither husband nor wife should go to work; however, if the husband gives his wife permission, she may work.

How Many Present at Sheva Brachot

To be able to say the special blessings after a festive *sheva brachot* meal, there must be present at least:

- 10 Jewish males at least 13 years old, and
- One person (male or female) who was not present at the wedding or at any meals since then with the bride and groom.

Sheva Brachot: Order of Blessings

The order of blessings is the same every time *sheva brachot* are said--except under the *chuppa*, when the first blessing is borei pri ha'gafen.

NOTE At all other times, *borei pri ha'gafen* is the final blessing.

NOTE If the blessings are said out of order, it is OK.

Sheva Brachot: What To Eat in order To Bless

A *man* saying any of the seven blessings does not need to have eaten bread at that meal, but he must have eaten enough food (anything except water or salt) to say an after-blessing.

Sheva Brachot: When to Bless

At any meal with bread that was made to honor the bride and groom during the first week of marriage, say the introductory lines each time (dvei haser...; the leader says the leader's lines and everyone else says their lines), even if you have two or more such meals in one day.

Sheva Brachot: Who Drinks

1. Under the *chuppa*, the groom and bride drink the wine.
2. At the meals, the *sheva brachot* leader plus the bride and groom drink, and anyone else who wants to drink may do so.

Sheva Brachot: Over Which Cups To Bless

- Birkat ha'mazon is made on one cup of wine at *sheva brachot*.
- The first six *sheva brachot* blessings are made on the second cup.
- Borei pri ha'gafen is made on the first cup.

Sheva Brachot: Mixing the Cups

After the blessings have been said:

- Pour some wine from the two cups into a third cup.
- Pour some wine back into the first two cups.
- The bride, groom, and person who made the blessing each drink from a different cup.

NOTE Each cup will contain some wine from each of the original two cups on which the blessings had been made.

FIRST WEEK OF MARRIAGE

Making the Bride Happy

The groom is commanded to make his bride happy for seven days. He may not go to work (unless she wants him to do so). He must be with her and do whatever she wants, even if it goes against his judgment of what is reasonable.

Being Together

Neither the husband nor the wife should be alone for the first seven days after their marriage. If they are apart, they should each be accompanied by someone else. This is a custom and not a *halacha*.

NOTE There is no requirement for bride and groom to be together all of the time during the seven days after their wedding if they don't want to be together.

FIRST YEAR OF MARRIAGE

Making the Bride Happy for First Year

The husband is required during the first year of marriage to make his wife happy. He should go where she wants, do what she wants, etc., within reason. After the first year of marriage, the couple should work out their differences via compromise from the husband and from the wife.

FAMILY FINANCES

Wife's Assets Brought into Marriage

Property that the wife brings into the marriage can remain hers if she chooses, or she can say her husband may use the item but he will owe her for that amount. It is best to give it into the marriage and she will be owed that same value regardless of passage of time. At the wedding, a gift to the bride will be the bride's; a gift to the bridegroom will be the bridegroom's.

Wife's Earned Assets

A woman who works does not have to give her husband the money. If a woman wants to keep her earnings for herself, she must tell her husband that he should not provide her with food. He is then exempt from feeding her, but he must still provide her with shelter, clothing, medical expenses, jewelry, and makeup (and certain other needs).

POST-MENOPAUSE

Beds after Menopause

A married couple does not need to have separate beds once the wife has passed menopause, but it may still be possible for the wife to become *nida*, in which case they would have to sleep separately.

DIVORCE

Spouse You Decide To Divorce

You may not have intercourse with a spouse whom you have decided to divorce.

Receiving the Ketuba

At a Jewish divorce, the *ketuba* is given back to the *man* or destroyed after he has paid the money he owes to his now-ex-wife, as written in the *ketuba*.

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