

WEDDING REQUIREMENTS AND THE ORDER OF THE CHUPPAH

(Slight changes are made for a woman who has been previously married)

A. BEFORE THE WEDDING

1. Preliminaries

The couple should come to the shul to fill in all of the documentation and the secretary will be happy to assist you in what is required before the wedding can go ahead. Please note that every couple requires the same documentation regardless of their background.

Although it is not required for the ceremony, it is suggested that the couple enters into an Antenuptial Contract, which they can obtain from their attorney.

The civil marriage officer, who is usually the Rabbi, will complete the Marriage Register, which is finalized on the day of the wedding. He will then issue you with a Marriage Certificate.

2. Jewish Marriage Education, Marriage Preparation Course

The Jewish Marriage Education deals with the practical and spiritual elements of the Jewish marriage and is conducted over a series of several weeks in private consultations. The Rabbi will study with the groom and the Rebbetzin with the bride. There is no charge. (Couples from overseas should study with an Orthodox Rabbi and Rebbetzin of their choosing. A letter from the Rabbi should be provided confirming that the couple has completed the course. Please contact the Shul should you require any assistance in finding an Orthodox rabbi in your area)

The second course is the Marriage Preparation course, run under the auspices of FAMSA, and comes highly recommended by many psychologists and psychiatrists. Both of these courses can greatly enhance the relationship and coping skills of the couple. Please speak to the Rabbi and he will be glad to connect you with the relevant parties.

Both of these courses are compulsory for all couples marrying under the auspices of a Synagogue affiliated with the South African Union of Orthodox Synagogues.

3. The Shabbos before the Wedding

It is customary that the groom is called to the Torah on the Shabbos before the wedding. This is known in Yiddish as the **Ufruf**, which literally means “to be called up.” Besides the groom, other family members should also receive an aliyah such as the fathers of the bride and groom, other family members and friends. Please note that there are only so many aliyot available and that not all family members can always be accommodated. A full list containing Hebrew

names must be made available to the office timeously before the Shabbos. It is usually customary for the couple to sponsor the bracha and the office can be contacted in terms of the costs. This Shabbat is also known as the “**Shabbat Kallah**” (the “Shabbos bride”) and it is customary that the bride celebrates together with her female friends and family in the afternoon following the shul service. Please speak to the Rebbetzin regarding details of this celebration.

4. **Day of the Chuppah**

The day of the Chuppah is considered a very momentous occasion for the couple and it is considered in Jewish Law as a “personal Yom Kippur.” The Talmud states that one’s sins are forgiven on the day of his wedding as each of the couple becomes a new person. It is therefore customary that the couple engages in the 3 facets well known to Yom Kippur, which are T’suvah (Repentance), T’fillah (Prayer) and T’zeddakah (Charity). All three of these should be emphasized on the day of the Chuppah and it is also customary that the couple fasts from the morning of that day until the Chuppah. Please consult the Rabbi in regard to the laws of this fast and the customs of the day and when the fast is **not** applicable.

The prevalent custom is for the bride and groom not to see or speak to each other the entire day on which the Chuppah will be held. This means from sundown the night before until the Chuppah. There are others who have the custom not to see each other for 7 days before the Chuppah, but at least one day should be kept.

5. **Appropriate Dress for the Occasion**

The Chuppah is a religious ceremony, regardless of whether it is in shul or not, and therefore appropriate dress should be worn. The couple should note that several blessings are made by the Rabbi and Chazan in their presence and it would be most inappropriate to recite G-d’s name in front of a person who is scantily clothed. Please consult with the Rabbi and Rebbetzin as to what is considered appropriate and modest dress for the ceremony. This also applies to the retinue.

B. **ORDER OF THE CHUPPAH**

6. **Signing the Ketubah**

The groom should arrive 15-30 minutes before the Chuppah to finalise the **Ketubah**. The **Ketubah** is the official Jewish marriage document which contains:

The date, location, names of bride and groom and the financial (and other) obligations of the parties. **A couple may not live together unless they possess a valid Ketubah**, so it should always be kept safe and copies should be made. **The Ketubah also serves as proof of Jewishness.**

The Rabbi explains the contents of the Ketubah to the groom and asks the groom to officially obligate himself to the conditions therein by performing a symbolic act known as “**Kabalat Kinyan.**” Usually this is done by the Rabbi asking the groom

to hold on to his (the Rabbi's) pen or handkerchief and thereby the "transaction" is finalised. This is done before two kosher witnesses* (Eidim), who then sign their names on the Ketubah. The Rabbi holds on to the Ketubah until he presents it to the bride under the Chuppah.

Note:

***Definition of "two kosher witnesses":** Two Jewish men over the age of 13, who are not related to each other or to the bride and groom and **who observe strictly** all the mitzvot of the Torah, usually these are the Rabbi and Chazan.

7. **The Bedekken**

The groom is then escorted by all the men to the bride's room, where he performs the "bedekken," i.e. he pulls the veil over the face of the bride. This is to ensure 100% the identity of the bride. At this point anyone wishing to offer a blessing to the bride may do so, especially the parents. The Rabbi gives the traditional blessing (given to Rivkah by her parents when she went to marry Isaac: see Genesis chapter 24 verse 60).

"Our sister, may you come to be
thousands of myriads (and may your offspring
inherit the gate of its foes)"

This is the actual beginning of the Chuppah ceremony.

8. **Escorting the bride and groom** (congregation stands)

The **groom** is then escorted – arm in arm – to the Chuppah, he goes first **to establish the Chuppah as his property**, into which he is bringing his bride. (Part of the wedding fees includes the rent of the Chuppah for this purpose.)

Normally, the groom is escorted by his mother and father **or** another couple such as an uncle and aunt or other such prominent members of family.

The Chuppah should face **northwards**. The groom enters and stands on the left facing the Rabbi. The escorts stand outside the Chuppah, to his left. The couple should have 4 pole holders. These are usually friends of the groom, but they can also be relatives and friends of the bride. Please note that because the Chuppah is a religious ceremony, all of the pole holders and members of the retinue should be Jewish.

Usually the choir sings as the groom and bride approaches. The **bride** follows, accompanied by her mother and father (or other family members). If she has a retinue, they go first and should stand on the right side of the Chuppah.

Upon entering the Chuppah, she circles the groom 7 times, and ends off standing on the groom's right. Her escorts should stand on her right, outside the Chuppah.

9. **Kiddushin**

The “Kiddushin” is the procedure which actually effects (brings about) the marriage.

Before the ring is handed over, the Rabbi makes two blessings over a cup of wine (or grape juice) called “Birchat Eirusin” (Marriage/Betrothal Blessings). The bride and groom must pay attention to these blessings and answer Amen” in agreement. (For the text see Artscroll Siddur Pg 202.)

After the blessings, the groom and bride are given some wine to drink. The Rabbi asks the **fathers** (male escorts) to give the couple to drink.

The Rabbi will now ask the two official witnesses to take their place to observe the handing over of the ring, usually the Rabbi and the Chazan.

The best man hands the ring to the Rabbi who asks the groom if it is his (**a borrowed ring is invalid**) and shows it to the witnesses to establish that it is worth at least the minimum value of a “Prutah” (ancient currency). The ring must be plain gold or silver without any stones.

The Rabbi then gives the ring to the groom, who holds it in his right hand, ready to put on the **right index finger** of the bride. The bride should not have any jewellery or gloves on her hand. The groom then pronounces the marriage formula in Hebrew (usually the Rabbi dictates this to him) and English (if necessary). The ring is then handed over.

Both must be aware that by the bride’s acceptance of the ring, they become married and both should understand the meaning of the marriage formula. (For text, see Artscroll Siddur Pag 204). The witnesses must view this ceremony for the marriage to be valid, whereafter they say the word, “Mekudeshet” (betrothed!)

The marriage formula is as follows:

HA’RAY AT MEKUDESHEH LI BETABA’AT ZU, KEDAT
MOSHE VEYISRAEL.

Behold, you are sanctified to me with this ring, in
accordance with the Law of Moses and Israel.

The couple are now halachically married.

10. **Reading the Ketubah/Address to couple** (congregation may sit)

To provide a break before he says the “Sheva Brachot” over a second cup of wine, the Rabbi now reads the Ketubah in the original Aramaic and an extract in English. Thereafter the Ketubah is given to the bride (who should hand it to her mother (or other family member) to safeguard until after the wedding).

The Rabbi then addresses the couple.

11. **Sheva Brachot** (congregation stands)

A second cup of wine is filled and the Rabbi (or Chazan) recites 7 blessings especially composed for the occasion of the wedding and which speak about: the crowd who has gathered to bring joy to the couple; the creation of man and woman; the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the joy experienced by groom and bride. The couple should pay attention to the blessings and answer "Amen" in agreement. (For text see Artscroll Siddur Pg 206.)

Thereafter the **mothers** (female escorts) give the couple some wine to drink. Sheva Brachot are also recited at the reception following "bentsching" and at every festive meal for the following 7 days (including the day of the wedding) if a minyan is present.

The **Birkat Hamazon and the Sheva Brachot**, which are recited at the wedding reception, are part of the **religious aspect of the wedding**. Therefore, it is important that the person chosen to conduct the benching should be an individual who is knowledgeable and religiously observant.

Before choosing someone to conduct the Birkat Hamazon and the Sheva Brachot, please consult with the Rabbi. The person leading the grace after meals and the seven blessings does not have to be a Rabbi, **but** the individual must be knowledgeable and observant.

Also, most brides and grooms would like to have at least some of the music and dancing at the reception to be Jewish or "Israeli" style. Please understand that in order for there to be a great spirit and a good vibe, the band which you choose must be competent and adept at playing Jewish music. Although every musician will tell you that he is capable of playing any kind of music, very few really are that knowledgeable and versatile when it comes to playing Jewish music "with Taam." Therefore, if you're interested, feel free to contact the rabbi for input on how to enhance the traditional Jewish dancing at your wedding.

12. **Breaking the glass**

The groom breaks a glass (or light bulb) in accordance with the verse in Psalms (Chapter 137) "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you. If I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy."

In other words, even at times of immense happiness we must remember the destruction of our Temple and the Exile from our land.

13. **Yichud**

The bride and groom are now escorted by all present, from the Chuppah to a private room where they will spend some time alone together. (This is called "Yichud.") They should have something to eat and drink, while two official witnesses guard outside the room for several minutes.

Judaism promotes affection and intimacy between couples and recognizes that these are basic to the relationship of husband and wife. However, there are certain areas of the relationship that are shared only between the couple, to the

exclusion of all other parties. The moment immediately after the couple has been joined in marriage is such a time and we therefore reserve that moment of intimacy to be enjoyed by the couple alone. You will therefore not hear the Rabbi say to the groom under the Chuppah, "You may now kiss the bride." The Yichud room becomes the appropriate place for the couple to demonstrate their physical affection for each other without a crowd looking on.

14. **Civil Marriage**

The civil marriage is usually finalised at this point. The Marriage Register requires the signatures of husband, wife (in the wife's maiden name) and 2 witnesses. These can be any two individuals, but usually it is the best man and maid of honour. The couple is then issued a Marriage Certificate.

MAZAL TOV !

With thanks to the Claremont Wynberg Hebrew Congregation