



Rev. Ann Fuller

Many Jews who are not active in a synagogue or temple may still wish to honor their cultural heritage. There are many excellent books to help Jewish and inter-faith couples incorporate these traditions into their wedding ceremony.

Here are some particularly helpful resources:

[Make Your Own Jewish Wedding: How to Create a Ritual That Expresses Your True Selves](#) by Ana Schwartzman and Zoë Francesca

[The Creative Jewish Wedding Book](#) by Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer

[The New Jewish Wedding](#) by Anita Diamont (who can't love a book by the author of [The Red Tent?](#))

The four main elements of Jewish weddings from the Talmud are:

1. Kiddushin: A ceremony during which the groom gives something of value to the bride and recites the phrase, "You are hereby consecrated to me with this ring according to the rite of Moses and Israel." after which two blessings are said, one over wine and one over the betrothal.
2. Ketubah: The marriage contract. The marriage contract must be presented and delivered before the marriage blessings are recited.
3. Nissuin: The consecration of the marriage under a chuppah (canopy), during which a second cup of wine is filled and the Seven Blessings are spoken, after which the groom steps on a glass.
4. Seudat Mitvah: A feast and celebration.

Below is a sample contemporary Jewish wedding, but it is by no means THE Jewish wedding. As you will notice, the Kiddushin is not included and the Seudat Mitvah is assumed to be the reception following the wedding ceremony. This particular order of service is not reflective of Reform, Conservative or Orthodox ritual but rather an ethnically Jewish wedding I officiated at a hotel.

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Processional

The order of the processional in a Jewish wedding is typically as follows:

1. Officiant
2. Both sets of grandparents
3. Best man and male attendants
4. Groom flanked by parents (mother on right, father on the left)
5. Maid of honor and bridesmaids
6. Flower girls
7. Bride flanked by parents (mother on right, father on the left)

When the bride approaches the chuppah, her parents step back towards their seats and she circles it either three or seven times and then stands at the groom's right side.

Presentation of the Couple

Officiant: Who brings this man to be married this day?

Grooms relatives: *We do*

Officiant: Who brings this woman to be married this day?

Bride's relatives: *We do*

Opening Words

Officiant: You may be seated.

We gather this hour to witness the union of (bride) and (groom) as husband and wife. Today they publicly pledge themselves to one another in the presence of those whom they wish to have bless and support their marriage from this day forward. With your presence at their marriage ceremony today, (bride) and (groom) ask you to share in their future. Today they create a relationship founded on the circles of love each bring to this union. At times like these it is right and fitting to remember those who have been important in their lives but are unable to be with us at this moment. We hold their absent loved ones, especially _____, fondly in our hearts at this hour of commitment.



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Presentation of the Ketubbah

The text of the Ketubbah is read by the officiant and presented to the groom who signs it. The groom then presents it to the bride and lowers her veil over her face. Rather than the traditional text, many contemporary couples choose a ketubbah from an artist or Judaica store that is more modern and based on gender equality. You may even write and decorate your own. These websites and a Google search for "ketubbah" or "ketubah" will provide you with lots of ideas from which to choose. Many couples subsequently frame and display the Ketubbah in their home.

<http://www.ketubbah.com/>

<http://www.ketubahstore.com/>

<http://www.modernketubah.com/>

Affirmation of Marriage

(Bride) and (groom), it is our wish for you today that you will always trust, respect and celebrate one another. That you will grow and change together by unselfishly encouraging, appreciating, nurturing and supporting one another. You have shared with me how much you cherish one another's kindness, humor, honesty, compassion and caring. As life is full of its challenges and absurdities I'm especially delighted to see you really appreciate the ability to make one another smile and laugh. May you remain ever mindful of the gifts you bring to one another and your marriage.

You must always remember that life guarantees change. When we love, we do not love all the time the same way. When love wanes, act loving and it will return. When irritation creeps in, act compassionate and it will recede. Life gives us the gifts of transition and growth and you must embrace the changes and trust that these changes will strengthen your marriage. How we act influences how we feel. Remain mindful of how you treat one another, not just the words you speak.

(Bride) and (groom) the covenant of marriage is formed exclusively by the mutual exchange of pledges between you and then only you can breathe life into these words and transform them into a meaningful union of heart, body and soul.

Exchange of Vows

An exchange of vows is not present in a traditional Jewish wedding, but contemporary couples usually choose to include some sort of vow exchange. The words and the format of the vows are entirely at the couple's discretion.



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(Bride), do you give yourself freely in marriage? Do you promise to encourage and inspire (groom). Do you intend to laugh with him in times of joy, to comfort him in times of sorrow and struggle? do you promise to love him in good times and in bad, when life seems easy and when it seems hard, when your love is simply and when it is an effort? Do you promise to cherish him and always hold him in highest regard, from this day and through all the days of your lives? ~ *I do.*

(Groom), do you give yourself freely in marriage? Do you promise to encourage and inspire (bride). Do you intend to laugh with him in times of joy, to comfort him in times of sorrow and struggle? do you promise to love him in good times and in bad, when life seems easy and when it seems hard, when your love is simply and when it is an effort? Do you promise to cherish him and always hold him in highest regard, from this day and through all the days of your lives? ~ *I do.*

Blessing Over Wine

Officiant: "Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine."

The couple sips the wine in the cup after this blessing.

Exchange of Rings

A blessing of the rings or explanation of the symbolism is entirely optional in a secular Jewish wedding, but not typically part of a religious Jewish ceremony. Many contemporary couples choose to have something said by the officiant because it is familiar and tends to contribute to a smooth explanatory flow of the ritual.

Officiant: Do we have the rings?

Best Man: We do.

Officiant: Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe, we call for your blessing for these rings and for the man and woman who wear them. May their rings be a symbol of their eternal love and reminders of the covenant they make with one another this day.

Officiant: Please repeat after me as you place the ring on (bride's) finger.

Bride: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."

Officiant: Please repeat after me as you place the ring on the (groom's) finger.

Bride: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."



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The Nissuin Ceremony

A second glass of wine is poured and the seven blessings are recited. They may be recited by family members and guests selected by the bride and groom.

1. Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.
2. Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe, who creates all things in your glory.
3. Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe, who created mankind.
4. Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe, who formed humanity in his image, in the image of his likeness, and fashioned for him out of his very self a mate for all eternity.
5. May the barren land rejoice and be glad when her children are gathered back to her in joy. Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, who makes Zion rejoice in her children.
6. Grant abundant joy to these beloved companions, as you gladdened your creation long ago in the Garden of Eden. Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, who gladdens groom and bride.
7. Blessed are you, Adonai, our god, ruler of the universe, who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, songs of joy, delight and pleasure, love and harmony, peace and friendship. Soon, Adonai, our God, may we hear in the cities of Judaea and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride, the jubilant voices of lovers from their chuppot, and of youths from their feats of song. Blessed are you, Adonai, who gladdens the groom and bride.

After the blessings, the bride and groom drink from the second cup.

Declaration of Marriage

The declaration of marriage is not required in a religious Jewish ceremony, but is generally expected in contemporary marriage ritual.

(Bride) and (Groom), you have publicly declared your intent to join together in matrimony. You have made promises to one another, symbolized by the exchanging of vows and the giving and receiving of rings. I am honored to pronounce you husband and wife. Please kiss your bride.

The groom lifts the veil and removes it from the bride's face as he kisses her.

Breaking of the Glass

There are no required words that need be said when the groom (or the bride and groom) break the glass. He/They may simply step on the glass after they have kissed and leave it at that. Today many couples use a light bulb secured in an attractive cloth bag.



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Officiant: The breaking of this glass serves as a reminder of the sanctity of marriage, and that the love of the bride and groom should last for as long as it would take to make the glass perfectly whole again. In a moment (groom) will break the glass signifying the end of the ceremony and the time for celebration. It also signifies the last time (groom) gets to "put his foot down."

Mazel Tov!

Explanation of Yichud

I would like to take this opportunity to mention to you, the guests, that _____ and _____ will be spending a few moments alone together, immediately following the ceremony. This is a custom called Yichud, which means "union" in Hebrew. It gives the couple an opportunity to share, privately, the power and importance of this moment in their lives. They will return shortly to greet you. Ladies and gentleman, I present to you, Mr. and Mrs. _____!

Recessional

1. Bride and Groom
2. Bridesmaids and Groomsmen
3. Grooms Family
4. Brides Family
5. Officiant