

The basic format for a Jewish wedding

Compiled and prepared by Rabbi Ziona Zelazo

1. The *Ketubbah* signing

The tradition of the *Ketubbah* signing is usually a private ceremony between the bride, groom and their parents. I like to also include any other individuals who are special to the couple, if they wish to. Today, the modern *Ketubbah* reflects the mutual obligation of the bride and the groom to each another. It has lots of flexibility. It could be phrased in Hebrew and in English, it could use your own words of love and commitment, expressed with poetry or prose and beautiful art. In general it includes the date of the wedding and is signed by the couple and their two appointed witnesses, who are not blood related family members to the bride and groom.

The traditional *Ketubbah* text is phrased in Aramaic, and also includes the groom's financial responsibilities to the bride, as well as his obligation to respect her and provide for her needs. I can provide a translation of this text if necessary.

2. The *Badeken* (The veiling of the bride)

Veiling of the bride by her bridegroom takes place immediately after the signing of the *Ketubbah*. The Rabbi assists the groom in reciting a specific blessing to his bride and then lowers the veil.

The *Badeken* reflects the Biblical story of Jacob and Rachel. After his wedding to what Jacob thought, to Rachael, he found that he had actually married Leah, Rachel's sister. So now, the groom double checks to make sure he has the right bride and then lowers the bride's veil himself. At this time, parents will recite a blessing to their children and their new daughter-in-law and or son-in-law.

3. The *chuppah* - The wedding canopy

The wedding canopy is probably the one item on the wedding list that makes people believe that it IS a Jewish wedding. Indeed, it is so. This canopy can be as simple as four poles with a tallit, or an extensive structure with pillars and flowers. No matter how

much you will spend on this *chuppah*, the sacred space that this *chuppah* creates will make your marriage ceremony valid.

4. Circling

Upon entering the *chuppah* there is a ritual of circling. Originally, the bride circles the groom seven times. In contemporary egalitarian weddings the circling is shared by the couple.

5. The exchange of rings

The exchange of rings is the central act of the marriage ceremony. In Jewish law, a verbal declaration of marriage is not legally binding. There must be an act of formal physical acquisition of some object of known value. The bride and groom can place a ring on the left index finger of each other's left hand.

6. The Seven Blessings

A cup of wine is poured into the new Kiddush cup the bride and groom share connecting with the seven blessings, either sung or recited. I encourage the couple to choose 7 different individuals from family and friends to recite one blessing each. These blessing could be personal as well.

After the blessings, the bride and groom drink the wine.

7. The finale

After the rabbi pronounce the couple as husband and wife the groom breaks the glass with his right foot and the guests loudly say "*Mazal Tov!*" This is the finale!