



A BRIDGE TO HOLINESS: PLANNING YOUR WEDDING

Rabbi Michael Torop

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be able to help you plan your wedding ceremony. It is a moment of supreme holiness, *kedusha*, in the lives of a couple. Not accidentally, the mystics of our tradition sensed that the wedding itself was capable of raising all creation to a higher spiritual level.

When two people get married, it is more than two people celebrating and confirming their love. It is the replay in miniature of the covenant between God and Israel. At this moment, bride and groom are no longer themselves, but they become Adam and Eve, cradled yet again in the Garden of Eden, but hearing the liturgy tell them that their marriage may be the piece that brings about the days of Messiah. The shattering of the glass at the end of the ceremony clearly has its roots in ancient superstition, but we interpret it now as a memory of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem: a memory and an invocation that out of darkness there can be hope.

I am eager to help you plan your wedding ceremony, and I hope to be of help to you in any way possible. Please keep in mind the following procedures that will help facilitate this act of *kiddushin*: this act of holiness.

A word about the *Mikvah* (ritual bath). It is traditional for women to go to the *mikvah* before getting married. This symbolizes the juncture between what was, and what is about to become. It is a way to symbolize and create a sense of renewal and a sense of “starting out fresh.” Some men go to *mikvah* before weddings as well. I strongly endorse the use of *mikvah*, as it is an incredibly powerful experience. In St. Petersburg, we are fortunate to be able to use the Gulf of Mexico, which is a natural *mikvah* adding beautiful esthetics to the religious ceremony. If you are interested, please ask me for details.



1. There are certain things that you will need your caterer to provide for you at the location of the wedding (if the wedding is not being held at the Temple)

A. A *chuppah* (wedding canopy). This is the traditional locale of the Jewish wedding. There are several options for a *chuppah*. The first is a free-standing *chuppah*. Florists are able to supply them. An even more beautiful option is to have four friends hold a *chuppah* made of a large tallit that would cover your heads. This has the added advantage of helping you include friends in the ceremony. *Temple Beth-El* owns a large blue and white tallit and *huppah* poles which may be used at the Temple, or may be borrowed for use off-site.

B. A small table, covered with a white tablecloth, under the *chuppah*.

C. On the table, you will need 2 goblets filled with wine. White wine is acceptable. A beautiful touch is for the goblets to be what you would use for *kiddush* in your own homes, or *kiddush* cups owned by members of your families. Your caterer will provide these goblets, should you wish.

D. Your caterer must provide a small glass wrapped in a white linen napkin. This will be smashed at the end of the ceremony by the groom. Please do not use light bulbs.

II. Documents: You will need the following documents in order to get married.

A. A valid State of Florida wedding license (apply for the wedding license at the Pinellas County Government Center, 1800 66th St. North, 582-7681)

B. A *ketubah* (Jewish wedding contract). Though originally a Jewish legal document, Reform Judaism sees the *ketubah* as a spiritual document that attests to the covenantal relationship between husband and wife. I will be happy to provide you with an egalitarian *ketubah*, or if you wish, you may have a *ketubah* created by a Jewish artist (I have an appropriate text for the artist to calligraphy into his/her artwork). You can also purchase a ready-made *ketubah* at any dealer in Judaica. A final option is to use the web service, www.ketubah.com that offers a number of artistic renderings and a selections of texts. I prefer the Toronto Reform Text or, secondarily the Reform Text, available on that site. In any case, the English translation of the Hebrew/Aramaic text should be egalitarian, whenever possible.

*** As part of the information for your *ketubah*, you will need to know your Hebrew names and the Hebrew names of your parents.

C. You will need witnesses for both the civil and Jewish documents. This is a good way to honor friends, and relatives. The **two** witnesses for the civil document can be anyone. The **two** witnesses for the *ketubah* **must** be adult Jews not related to either of you. The *ketubah* witnesses must know their Hebrew names as well.

D. The documents will be signed **twenty minutes** before the ceremony. (**Thirty minutes** if signing separately)

III. Please make every provision for the ceremony to start on time, as announced in your invitation.

IV. Music: I believe that music is an integral part of Jewish life and of the wedding ceremony in particular. Choose your music for the processional and recessional wisely. I recommend Israeli and Jewish music with love themes, such as "*Dodi Li*".

Regarding "Here Comes the Bride": "Here Comes the Bride" is also known as the wedding march from *Lohengrin* by Wagner. Wagner's place in the consciousness of the Jew is particularly problematic. His German racial theories, his conception of the master race, and his virulent Antisemitism all contributed to birth of Nazism and by implication, the Holocaust. I strongly discourage the use of "Here Comes the Bride" at Jewish weddings, and I respectfully request that you choose another, more appropriate selection.

V. Photography and Video: Photography and/or video can be used at the following times: during the signing of the *ketuba*; during the processional; at the shattering of the glass; and during the recessional. In order to maintain the sanctity and dignity of the ceremony, please ask your photographer to refrain from photography at any other time. Video of the ceremony may be taken from behind the guests only, with the video camera on a fixed tripod, using existing lighting only.

VI. Opportunities for enhancement.

A. MAZON, the Jewish Hunger Fund: This is a unique mitzvah. MAZON asks American Jews to give 3% of the cost of a *simcha--brit* or baby-naming, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, wedding-- to help fight world hunger. It then distributes that money to various agencies across the country and the world. They have been amazingly successful. Do consider contributing to MA.ZON in honor of your wedding. Sharing one's joy, symbolically, with the hungry is one of the most powerful Jewish things that we can do.

B. Sheva berachot cards for participants: The sheva berachot, the seven wedding blessings, are the essential liturgical moment of the wedding ceremony. Many couples have found it meaningful to have the translations of those blessings recited by friends and/or family members. It is a beautiful touch. Let me know if you are interested.

VII. Sample processional for the wedding: Many couples ask about the processional. Unless your caterer or wedding consultant has a better idea, here's one that works every time (i.e., the couple always gets to the *chuppah* (and they always get married!).

In order:

Chuppah holders with huppah (when applicable)

Rabbi

Maid of honor with best man

Groom walked down by parents

Bride walked down by parents

Anita Diamant, [The New Jewish Wedding](#) is an excellent resource here. Feel free to consult it.

Good luck and stay in touch! I'll answer any questions that you have in mind.