

# YOUR JEWISH WEDDING AT NNLS



NEW  
NORTH  
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SYNAGOGUE



# MAZAL TOV

We are delighted that you will be celebrating your wedding with our community. We wish you and your family mazal tov, and every happiness for the future.

These notes are concerned with your Jewish wedding. Please see the accompanying letter for more information about the civil requirements. You will have a chance to discuss all these matters in your meetings with your rabbi, our wedding administrator Helen Foster, and our volunteer marriage secretaries. Please read what follows, and if you have any questions, do ask.

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# FIXING THE DATE

## & OTHER FORMALITIES

We appreciate that there are many people who need to be involved in a wedding. Please do approach your rabbi and agree a date before firmly committing to a specific date with your venue or any suppliers.

The date will need to be acceptable in terms of *halacha* (Jewish law). We will generally not officiate at a wedding on Chol Hamoed (the intermediate days of Succot and Pesach), between Pesach, and Lag Ba'Omer, nor during the Three Weeks before the Ninth of Av. (HebCal is a useful tool to start identifying acceptable dates.)

Both bride and groom must be members of the synagogue.

A wedding service may take place anywhere, outdoors, in a synagogue, in a home or in a hotel, so long as the couple stand beneath a *chuppah*.

A Jewish wedding requires two *eidim* (witnesses). They must be knowledgeable about Judaism, and of good character, and be able to sign their names in Hebrew on the *ketubah* (wedding certificate). Your rabbi can act as an *eid*.

The food at the celebration needs to be kosher. Please see "Your Celebration" on page 19 in this booklet for more details about what is acceptable.

# PAPERWORK



You may need to supply proof of your Jewish status – your parents' *ketubah* or a conversion certificate. In case of divorce you will also need to supply a get and a decree absolute. Do let us know if this may be difficult. We recognise that there are circumstances where this documentation may not be available, and we will be happy to help.

After that you will also need to meet with one of our volunteer marriage secretaries. They look after the administration for the civil registration of the marriage but they will also take lots of information from you pertaining to the civil and religious (and celebratory) aspects of your wedding, so you will certainly find this meeting very practical and helpful.

The synagogue will keep copies of documentation in case you need them in the future.

Helen Foster – the synagogue's wedding administrator – will email you on behalf of the rabbinic team to invite you to a short course (consisting of 4 sessions) and a Friday night dinner for couples preparing to marry. Your officiating rabbi will also want to meet with you again.

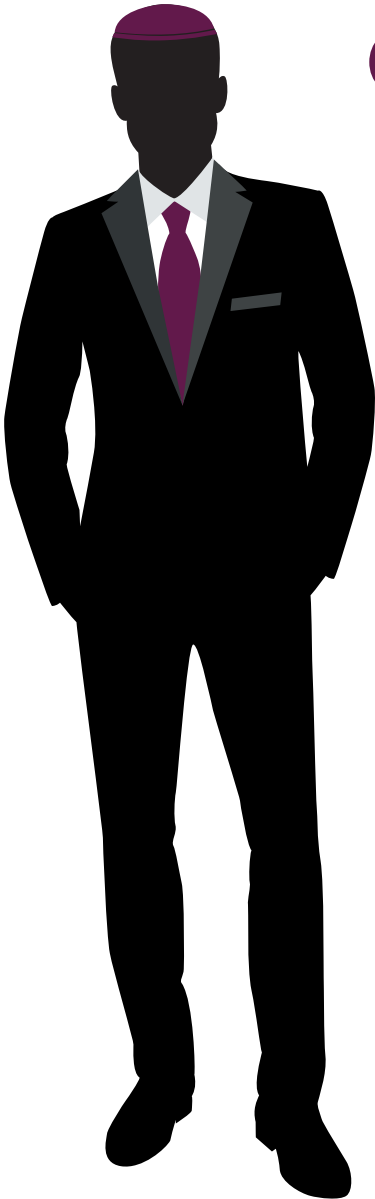
# THE SERVICE

The wedding service is brief, usually lasting about three quarters of an hour, but it is full of significance, containing many elements which symbolise the meaning of marriage in Jewish tradition.

Some of these are halachically required, but others are traditions, which means that there may be more flexibility about their performance. It is always lovely to include personal features such as songs, prayers, and appropriate music. Your rabbi will be very happy to discuss ways to make your wedding meaningful to you, and to involve people who you wish to honour.

The basic outline of the service, and of the rules according to which it must be conducted, are as follows.

# BEFORE THE CEREMONY



It is usual for, the family and the *chatan* (groom) to mingle with the guests as they arrive while the *kallah* (bride) readies herself in the room where the pre-wedding formalities will take place.

Some grooms host a *tisch* (table), a semi-formal gathering where friends are invited to say a few words of encouragement and Torah, toast the groom, and then escort him to meet the bride.

Some brides choose to host a similar, parallel, event for their friends.

The bride and groom do not meet until the *bedecken* (covering) ceremony (described on following page).



# THE BEDECKEN

Ever since Jacob was given Leah to marry instead of Rachel, it has been customary to ask the couple if these are indeed the partners they are expecting to meet beneath the *chuppah* (wedding canopy). Usually this is done in the room where the bride has been readying herself, in the presence of the wedding party. This takes place while the guests are taking their seats in the room where the ceremony will be conducted.

The rabbi will invite the two *eidim* (witnesses) to sign the *ketubah* (wedding certificate) in the presence of both bride and the groom. Then, both bride and groom in turn symbolically accept the terms of the *ketubah*.

The rabbi will then invite the parents (or close relatives) of the bride and groom to take a few private moments to bless or embrace their child before the ceremony commences.

The groom now helps to cover the bride with her veil – hence the name *bedecken* which means “covering” in Yiddish. Some couples like to make this gesture reciprocal by having the bride help the groom put on his *tallit* (prayer shawl). Some *chatanim* put on the *tallit* at the *chuppah*, though the wearing of a *tallit* is optional.



# PROCESSIONAL

There are many customs regarding the procession to the *chuppah* and the accompanying music and songs.

Traditionally the groom and his party proceed to the *chuppah* first. When he, and everyone else, is ready, the bride enters. Some couples like to perform the *bedecken* at this point, en route to the *chuppah*.

The most widespread tradition is for both parents to accompany their child to the *chuppah*. But as families and circumstances differ, other family members, or indeed friends, may do the escorting.



# THE CHUPPAH

*Chuppah* is a biblical word coming from a root meaning “to cover” or “to enclose”. In the Torah this root is used to indicate the encompassing protection of God.

The symbolism of the *chuppah* beneath which the marriage is solemnised has been understood to represent the new home the couple will create together. In our day the *chuppah* is a canopy – often consisting of a *tallit* (prayer shawl) which is covered on top but open on all four sides. Maurice Lamm understands this openness to signify that “Marriage, though exclusive and inviolable, is not a closed system. The family is part of the community, the community part of the world. True love that makes marriage beautiful must make life beautiful.” (*The Jewish Way In Love And Marriage* p. 214).

If you are marrying in a synagogue you will probably use a fixed *chuppah*. If marrying elsewhere you may want to borrow one of the synagogue’s sets of *chuppah* poles to which you can attach the corners of a *tallit* or other decorative cloth. Friends can be



appointed to hold a pole each during the ceremony. In either case the poles can be decorated with greenery and flowers.

The following diagram illustrates where the bride and groom stand at the *chuppah*. The couple face the rabbi, the bride standing to the right of the groom. (Towards the end of the ceremony it is possible to turn outwards, towards the guests.)



It is a beautiful tradition for the bride to walk seven times round her groom beneath the *chuppah*. This has been interpreted as the symbolic building of a wall of love and protection around their relationship. Some couples choose to divide the circling between them by doing three and half circles each.

The couple are welcomed to the *chuppah* with the words *Mi Adir*, "May God who is mighty, blessed, and great above all bless the bridegroom and the bride".

At this point the rabbi will generally address the bride and groom and the assembled guests. The purpose of the address is to welcome everyone, to appreciate the bride and groom and their families, to foster the spirit of joy, and to share relevant reflections on love and marriage in Jewish life and wisdom.

# KIDDUSHIN

The first part of the ceremony is called *kiddushin*, from the same root as *kadosh*, meaning something set apart and holy. By means of the *kiddushin* the bride and groom are set apart from all other potential relationships to enter a sacred bond with and devote themselves to one another.

The *kiddushin* are solemnised with a cup of wine over which it is declared that this is a marriage according to Jewish law and custom. Traditionally the cup is given to the groom's father, who gives it to the groom to drink, and then to the bride's mother who gives it to the bride to drink.

The key moment of the *kiddushin* ceremony is the giving of ring(s). The ring should be made of gold or another precious metal and should not contain jewels. It may be engraved, with the couples' initials for example, or with a verse such as *Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li* – I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine – from the Song of Songs.

Jewish law stipulates that the groom give a coin or precious item (nowadays a ring) to his bride in the presence of two *eidim* (witnesses – see page 4). The ring must belong to the groom, so that he is genuinely in a position to give it to the bride. This constitutes the formal act of betrothal. Before giving the bride the ring, the groom recites the traditional formula:

*Harei at mekuddeshet li*

*betaba'at zo*

*kedat Moshe veYisrael*

הָרִי אֶת מְקֻדְשֶׁת לִי  
בְּטַבַּעַת זֶה  
כְּדַת מֹשֶׁה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל

*Behold you are consecrated to me  
with this ring  
according to the law of Moses and Israel*

The bride must indicate her agreement.

We encourage couples to do a two-way ring ceremony. There are various ways this can be done and your rabbi can advise. Options include the bride giving a ring and saying:

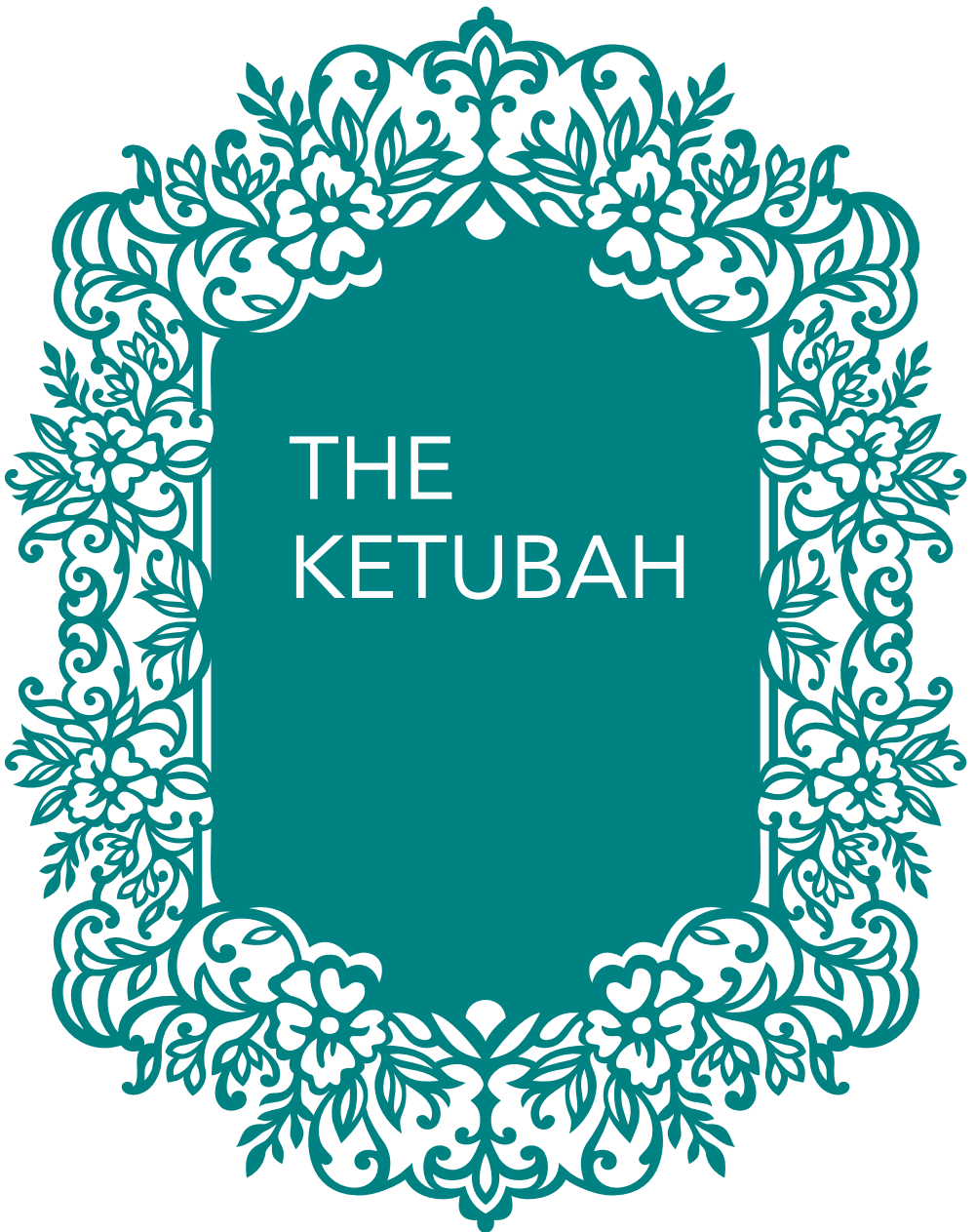
אָנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי

*Ani Ledodi veDodi Li*

*I am my beloved's and  
my beloved is mine.*

There is more to say about the exchange of rings and the *ketubah* in the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, and we are happy to explore this with you.





*Ketubah*, literally “document”, is the marriage contract. The traditional *ketubah* is an instrument created by the Rabbis of the Talmud to outline the obligations which a man undertakes toward his wife upon marriage, and to enshrine her basic personal and financial rights. There is some flexibility around the wording of the *ketubah*, but the *ketubah* has always been the signifier of a Jewish marriage. Many couples display it in their homes as an object of beauty and a symbol of their commitment to each other.

You may wish to order your *ketubah* through Rabbi Chaim Weiner the head of the European Masorti Bet Din who will happy to discuss options with you.

For more information please see [www.lechaimketubot.com](http://www.lechaimketubot.com). Alternatively, you can commission an artist or scribe to write your *ketubah*. **Before making a choice or ordering a ketubah online, please supply your proposed wording to your officiating rabbi to make sure all details are correct.**

The *ketubah* is one of the areas in the wedding where some (and increasingly more) options are available. Most couples in our community use a traditional *ketubah* with some minor egalitarian adjustments.

Some couples prefer a *brit ahuvim* to a *ketubah*. This type of contract comes from the area of Jewish property law, rather than from the traditional marriage laws. In a *brit ahuvim*, two parties enter into an equal partnership with one another.

In a typical *brit ahuvim* contract, the first part describes the nature of the marital covenant and places it within the Jewish tradition as recorded in the Talmud and the Hebrew Bible. The second part reflects the couple’s personal commitments to each other. As such this is a very individual document tailored to each couple’s needs.

The *ketubah* (or *shtar brit* in the case of *brit ahuvim*) must be signed by two *eidim* (witnesses). Historically the *eidim* have been religiously observant Jewish men, but Masorti communities permit women as witnesses too. They must not be related to the bride or groom or each other. The witnesses will need to be approved by the rabbi and will need to be informed well in advance as they are required to sign the *ketubah* in Hebrew using their Hebrew names.

# THE NISSUIN

Before the second part of the ceremony, the *nissuin* or nuptials, begins, the *ketubah* is read aloud. Generally only a part is read in the original Hebrew and Aramaic, while a version is read in English in full.

The second cup of wine is then taken, over which the *sheva brachot* (seven marriage blessings) are sung. The theme of these blessings is joy – God’s delight in the creation of the human being, Zion’s joy in her children, and the happiness of the bridegroom and the bride. The cup is then given to the bride’s father to give to the groom, and to the groom’s mother, to give to the bride, indicating that marriage is not just a bond between two individuals but a link between two families.

The rabbi concludes the ceremony by blessing the couple using the traditional Priestly Blessing “May God bless you and protect you...”

The final act of the ceremony is the smashing of a glass by stamping on it. Traditionally the groom does this, but some couples choose to break a glass each. A widely accepted explanation of this custom is

that even in times of joy we must remember that we are still in mourning for the fall of Jerusalem and what it represents, – that neither the Jewish people nor the world are yet at peace. Nevertheless, at this point every one calls out “Mazal Tov”. There are often a few moments of music or dancing before the couple leave the *chuppah*.

There are now civil matters to attend to which are explained in the accompanying letter.



# YICHUD

Afterwards the bride and groom go to a designated room (usually the bride's room) where they spend 15-20 minutes alone together. Two friends should be designated as *shomrim* (guards) in front of the door. This is an essential and meaningful time to be together and share thoughts and feelings about the ceremony. You can then rejoin your guests to continue celebrating.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

## FAMILY

A wedding is a time for joy. Frequently everyone is delighted; parents on either side welcome their future son- or daughter-in-law with love and the preparations for the wedding are made in an atmosphere of shared excitement.

But often life is more complicated. Sometimes family members whom the bride and groom would deeply have wished to be present are no longer alive and joy is accompanied by a note of mourning. It is probably wise to acknowledge this, both to one another in the preparations for the wedding and at the wedding itself, perhaps by incorporating a small gesture or ritual into the ceremony. Marriage almost always brings to mind the fullness of life and its varied experiences, as family and friends recall other weddings, other people, other gatherings. (We break a glass at the end of the ceremony for exactly this reason.)

There may be contention in families in the period before a wedding. Even the Talmud notes that there is no *ketubah* without a quarrel. The bride and groom may experience this as hurtful. But it is not so surprising if one thinks of the number of relationships which change as a result of a marriage. Though a wedding is principally the formalisation and celebration of a relationship between two individuals, it also marks a turning point in relationships within two families, as well as a multitude of new contacts between them.

It is important, therefore, for all those concerned with the planning of a wedding to be as thoughtful and inclusive as possible.

Parents, grandparents, and members of the wedding party who are not Jewish are of course welcome to accompany the bride and groom to the *chuppah* and stand beneath it.



# MUSIC

You will want to give careful thought to the music at your wedding. Music, whether choral or instrumental, greatly enhances the atmosphere of celebration and joy. Moments when it is especially important to have appropriate music are for the bride's entrance and after the close of the ceremony.

Musical friends are of great benefit if you have them! But if you would like to have music but do not know whom to ask to play or sing, your rabbi may be able to make some suggestions.

# YOUR CELEBRATION

A Jewish wedding means that as well as your commitment to each other, you are also signalling your commitment to the chain of tradition. Your wedding will say much about your values and concerns and the life you mean to live.

You should be serving kosher food to your guests, and you have several options about how to do this.

- You can hire a kosher caterer.
- You can hire the caterer of your choice and arrange for Masorti Kosher Supervision through the European Masorti Bet Din. More information can be found here [www.masortikosher.com](http://www.masortikosher.com)
- You can serve only vegetarian or vegan food.

Please see our booklet about Simchas for more information.

# OTHER TRADITIONAL PRACTISES

## THE AUFRUF

The *aufruf* (Yiddish for “call up”) traditionally refers to the honour accorded to the bridegroom when he is called to the Torah. In an egalitarian service this honour is offered to both bride and groom. Originally the *aufruf* probably took place on the Shabbat after the wedding, when the bride and groom could celebrate their new status together with the congregation.

Nowadays the *aufruf* generally takes place on the Shabbat preceding the wedding or the Shabbat prior to that. Please notify the Synagogue if you wish to have your *aufruf* in the community. It will be the Synagogue’s pleasure to call you to the Torah, and, if possible to offer other honours in the service to members of your families and friends.

## NOT SEEING ONE ANOTHER

It is traditional for bride and groom to not see each other in the days prior to the wedding. This heightens the moment when you meet at the *bedecken* just before ascending to the *chuppah* to marry.

# THE MIKVEH

Traditionally, Jewish brides have immersed in the mikveh in the days prior to their wedding. Thereafter, Jewish women are supposed to immerse in the mikveh every month, a week after the end of their period.

Increasingly, grooms too, are also arranging to go the mikveh before the wedding, and sometimes as part of a monthly practice too.

It is not the Masorti attitude to police such personal matters. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to know what traditional Jewish wisdom has to say about sexuality, so we will make sure you are informed about these practices, and we encourage you to explore them.

The pre-wedding mikveh visit is a unique and frequently powerful spiritual event. Our rabbis – male and female – are always happy to help you plan and organise a visit in a way that works for you.

# FASTING

It is customary for the bride and groom to fast on their marriage day until after the *chuppah*. However, if the wedding takes place on Rosh Chodesh or on any other day on which one may not fast, the couple do not do so. Traditionally the bride and groom add the confessional prayers of Yom Kippur to their morning service. The reason for both these customs is similar; marriage is a new beginning and one embarks on it forgiven and renewed.

# TZEDAKAH

A wedding is a wonderful celebration and it is an appropriate time to consider the importance of *tzedakah*, giving charity and contributing to the educational and charitable needs of the Synagogue and the wider community.

# FURTHER READING

The following books offer a broad range of teachings, reflections and suggestions. Whereas they represent different viewpoints, they all contain materials which may help you to understand the traditions underlying the Jewish wedding ceremony and the Jewish approach to married life.

*Beyond Breaking the Glass:  
A Spiritual Guide to Your Jewish Wedding*  
by Rabbi Nancy H Wiener

*The Jewish Way In Love And Marriage*  
by Maurice Lamm

*The Jewish Wedding Now*  
by Anita Diamant

*Engendering Judaism:  
An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*  
by Rachel Adler

For a range of excellent, varied and informative articles see:

[www.myjewishlearning.com/  
category/live/weddings-and-marriage](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/live/weddings-and-marriage)





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### **If you are thinking about starting a family...**

It is important to have carrier screening for Jewish genetic disorders (JGDs). Jnetics provides screening to identify if you are a 'carrier' for certain severe, recessive JGDs, including Tay-Sachs. Carriers are unaffected themselves but may be at risk of passing on a JGD to their children. Screening enables couples to explore various options to manage any identified risk and have children unaffected by these severe – yet utterly preventable – genetic disorders.

For more information about JGD screening and to book an appointment, please visit [www.jnetics.org](http://www.jnetics.org)





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