

MOSAIC LAW CONGREGATION

WEDDING GUIDE

Edited by Rabbi Reuven H. Taff—updated 11/2019

HOW DOES JEWISH TRADITION RELATE TO US AS AN ENGAGED COUPLE?

The importance of marriage in the Jewish tradition is summed up in the Talmudic statement that when one marries, one becomes a complete person. Marriage is regarded as the ideal state. In the very first book of the Bible, God tells Adam "it is not good for man to live alone."

Marriage is considered a mitzvah, a divine commandment. When a Jewish couple marries, it becomes possible for them to fulfill Judaism's first Biblical obligation -- "be fruitful and multiply." A Jewish marriage celebrates the creation of a new Jewish family. For this reason, the Zohar says, "God is constantly creating new worlds by causing marriages to take place." Thus, Judaism has always viewed marriage as a sacred covenant.

Your wedding day will likely be one of the most significant occasions in your life. It is a consecration, a sanctification of life itself. Indeed, the Hebrew word for marriage is *Kiddushin*- "Holiness." It is derived from the Hebrew word *Kadosh*, which means to be holy, separate and distinct. When you enter the bonds of *Kiddushin*, you enter a relationship that says to you and to the world that you are now set apart from everyone else. Your lives are now inextricably bound together by a holy bond. The Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of Hassidism, said it well: "From every human being there arises a light that reaches to heaven. When two souls are destined to find each other, their streams of light flow together, and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being."

HOW SHALL WE SELECT THE DATE OF OUR WEDDING?

The selection of your wedding date will, to some extent, reflect your personal priorities. You will also need to take into account schedules and prior commitments of the Rabbi and Cantor, as well as your close family and special friends.

Please remember that Jewish tradition also places some limitations on the choice of a wedding date. Weddings are not held on the Sabbath, major Jewish holidays or *Chol Ha-Moed* so that we do not mix -- and consequently dilute -- each joyous occasion. In addition, marriage is considered a legal transaction, and such transactions are not permitted on the Sabbath and Festivals. Days commemorating tragic events in Jewish history are also not appropriate times for a marriage celebration. (The three weeks prior to *Tisha B'av* from 17 Tammuz thru 9 Av and minor Fast Days). While Conservative Jewish practice does permit weddings to be held during the *S'fira* period (from the end of Passover to Shavuot), specifically after *Lag B'Omer*, it is recommended that weddings not be scheduled during this period so that friends or family members who practice

Orthodox Judaism may attend. On Saturday nights, a wedding ceremony is to begin no earlier than one-half hour after Havdalah (the conclusion of the Shabbat).

MARRIAGE ELIGIBILITY **ACCORDING TO THE STANDARDS OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM**

The Rabbi and Cantor of Mosaic Law Congregation will officiate at the wedding of any couple who are either the children of Jewish mothers or who have been converted to Judaism according to the process designated by Jewish law.

Any questions regarding the Jewish status of the bride or groom should be addressed to the officiating Rabbi at the time of the booking. Divorced individuals must have secured a *Get*, or Jewish divorce, before remarriage. If a *Get* has not been received, the rabbi can assist in arranging a *Get* thru the Rabbinical Assembly Bet Din in Los Angeles.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

A wedding day should be a joyous day for loving companions, as liturgy connotes, regardless of their sexual orientation. If the couple is choosing to live Jewish lives, build a Jewish home and raise Jewish children, our traditional rabbinate must seize the opportunity to welcome and work with these families at their most precious lifecycle moments. If we don't, we risk further alienation and falling into an abyss of religious irrelevance by denying these couples their rightful place of belonging. The rabbi and cantor of Mosaic Law Congregation are delighted to offer to officiate at a same-sex Jewish marriage ceremony as long as both partners are Jewish according to Jewish Law.

HOW SHALL WE CHOOSE THE LOCATION OF OUR WEDDING?

There is no finer way to highlight the spiritual nature of your wedding than to hold the ceremony in the synagogue, a setting that provides an aura of sanctity and spirituality. Some families hold weddings at their home in an atmosphere of warmth and intimacy.

Because a Jewish wedding is considered a religious as well as a social occasion, the meal served at the celebration is an integral part of the ritual. This ritually prescribed feast is known as a *Se'udat Mitzvah* and should, therefore, be a Kosher meal.

For these reasons, we encourage you to hold your reception at the synagogue, at home or another location where Kashrut will be observed. If the reception will not be held at a Kosher facility, it is suggested that the ceremony itself be held at the synagogue. **The Rabbi and Cantor of Mosaic Law will be permitted to officiate at a wedding off the synagogue premises if the meal and reception will be kosher, (under rabbinical supervision), or completely dairy and/or Pareve. Synagogue policy dictates that the rabbi and cantor will attend the wedding reception outside the synagogue premises if the menu for all guests is either kosher or dairy/Pareve. The reason for this rule is that the reception is an extension of the wedding ceremony and is of itself a *Seudat***

***Mitzvah* (meal of the mitzvah). For any additional questions on this topic, contact the rabbi directly.**

BOOKING YOUR WEDDING

Before setting the date and booking the facility for the wedding, please be sure that the Rabbi and Cantor's calendar are clear. Contact the rabbi directly at rabbi@mosaiclaw.org.

All reservations for wedding ceremonies, receptions, and wedding rehearsals in the Main Sanctuary, *Bet Midrash*, Courtyard, Social Hall and Grand Hall at the Center at 2300 are made through the synagogue by calling Kate Pidwerbecki, MLC Facilities Coordinator. Kate may be contacted by calling (916) 488-1122. You can also email Kate at Katep@mosaiclaw.org. She will have additional information on fees or charges for the rental of the synagogue facility.

WEDDING OFFICIANTS

It is the policy of the Board of Trustees at Mosaic Law that the Rabbi and Cantor shall officiate at every wedding held on the synagogue premises. In the event you wish clergy from another synagogue or temple to co-officiate, please discuss this with the rabbi of Mosaic Law as soon as possible.

MEETING WITH THE CLERGY

It is important for the couple to meet with the officiating Rabbi at least six months prior to the wedding date. At this time, the Rabbi will review the nature of the Jewish Wedding Ceremony and the values that sustain and nurture marriage. The couple will also have the opportunity to share their personal history and their hopes for the future. This interview enables the couple to express their feelings about this momentous occasion in their lives. It is important that the couple bring their Hebrew names, as well as the Hebrew names of their parents. The Rabbi will give to the couple a *Wedding Information Form* to complete as well as a *Prospective Newlyweds Questionnaire*, which should be completed and returned to the rabbi as soon as possible.

The couple should also arrange to meet with the Cantor four months prior to the wedding to discuss the wedding music and the engagement of the appropriate musicians. The Cantor participates in the wedding ceremony, chanting the traditional wedding blessings (*Sheva Brachot*) and other liturgical portions. The Cantor also may sing to the bride as she approaches the chuppah, usually a selection from a Biblical text -- most often from "The Song of Songs."

CAN ANY RING BE A WEDDING RING? MAY WE HAVE A DOUBLE RING CEREMONY?

The giving and accepting of an item of value in the presence of witnesses is the most important part of the Jewish wedding ceremony. It has become almost universal Jewish

practice to use a ring as the token of the marriage bond. Just as the ring has no beginning and no end, it is the wish of every bride and groom that their love be unending.

One ring, given by the groom to his bride, is required by Jewish law. However, double-ring ceremonies are now the norm.

The ring must be made of plain metal, usually gold, with no precious stones and of one piece. The ring to be given to the bride must belong to the groom. After reciting the marriage proposal aloud, the groom places the ring on the index finger of the bride's right hand and recites the appropriate betrothal formula.

HARAY AT M'KUDESHEH LI B'TABAAT ZO K'DAT MOSHEH V'YISRAEL

By this ring you are consecrated unto me as my wife in accordance with the Law of Moses and the people of Israel.

The bride places the ring on the groom's finger and recites the following:

HARAY ATA M'KUDASH LI B'TABAAT ZO K'DAT MOSHEH V'YISRAEL

By this ring you are consecrated unto me as my husband in accordance with the Law of Moses and the people of Israel.

WHAT IS THE KETUBAH?

IF WE HAVE A KETUBAH, DO WE ALSO NEED A CIVIL MARRIAGE LICENSE?

The Ketubah is a Jewish legal document confirming the religious bond of your union. It does not replace a standard civil marriage license which the officiating Rabbi will need in order to perform the ceremony.

A marriage license can be obtained by applying to the County Clerk-Recorder's Office of Sacramento County, 600 8th St., downtown Sacramento and should be arranged for within thirty days prior to the marriage. The phone number is (916) 874-6334. The toll-free number outside the (916) area code for the State of California only is: (800) 313-7133.

The traditional Ketubah has been used by Jews for more than two thousand years, and is written in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud. The great innovation of the Jewish marriage document is the recognition that not only love, but also responsibility is necessary in a Jewish marriage.

The Ketubah can be a beautiful work of art. Should you decide to have a Ketubah especially designed, be sure to commission an artist well in advance so it will be ready in time for your wedding day. The artist must also confer with the officiating Rabbi to ensure the exact wording and spellings of the Hebrew names and places in your Ketubah. Feel free to search the Internet for websites, which contain various artistic designs of Ketubot. While Mosaic Law does not recommend any particular website or artist, be sure to consult with the rabbi to insure that the proper text is approved before ordering your

Ketubah. Some Ketubah sites that couples choose are: www.ketubah.com; <https://ketubah-arts.com/>;

WHAT IS THE CHUPPAH, AND WHAT DOES IT SYMBOLIZE?

The central symbol of the wedding is the Chuppah or wedding canopy under which the bride and groom stand. The Chuppah, representing the home they will establish together, has four corner posts but no walls. Traditionally, the bride's and groom's parents stand around the couple beneath the Chuppah to symbolize that parents are the foundation upon which the bride and groom will establish their own home. The open walls of the Chuppah indicate that the couple's new home should be open, an integral part of their extended family and community. Mosaic Law has two *Chuppot* or your florist can help you design one should you desire. The Chuppah may be as simple as a Tallit suspended on poles or be as elaborate as you wish.

WHAT IS THE AUF RUF?

The Auf Ruf ceremony is a unique occasion to honor the groom and bride at a Synagogue Service. The word "Auf Ruf", derived from the German, refers to the "calling up" of the groom-to-be (and at Mosaic Law, the bride-to-be) to the Torah for an Aliyah giving public recognition and welcoming the bride and groom to the congregation.

At this time, the Rabbi will bless the couple and inform the congregation of their forthcoming marriage. The bride should wear a head covering on this occasion.

Traditionally, the Auf Ruf is scheduled on the Shabbat immediately prior to the wedding. If that Shabbat is inconvenient, the Auf Ruf can take place earlier. Although it is customary for the Auf Ruf to be held in the synagogue of the groom, it may also be held in the synagogue of the bride.

You should call the Rabbi to schedule your Auf Ruf. If you desire a copy of the Torah blessings, he will make them available.

If the family wishes to throw candy, a gesture of well-wishing, sweetness and fertility, the candy must be soft, wrapped and kosher. Candy should be thrown after the concluding blessing of the Torah Aliyah.

It is traditional for the groom's family and/or bride's family to sponsor or co-sponsor the Kiddush following the Auf Ruf ceremony. Arrangements may be made through the Synagogue office.

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE WEDDING CEREMONY BEGINS?

About thirty minutes before the formal wedding ceremony begins, the marriage license is signed by one or two witnesses (California requires one witness, but also permits two). The witnesses may be related to the bride or groom and may be of any religious faith. Then the Ketubah is signed. By the symbolic act of Kinyan or acquisition, the groom and

bride accept a material object from the Rabbi, usually a handkerchief or other item of value, lifts it, and then returns it. In this way, the couple demonstrates their willingness to fulfill the obligations as stipulated in the Ketubah.

According to Jewish Law, two witnesses, usually knowledgeable and observant Jews, related to neither the bride nor the groom, sign the Ketubah. The witnesses must be able to sign their names and the names of their parents in Hebrew. Some Ketubot also have space for the signatures of the bride, groom, rabbi and cantor, although Jewish Law does not require these signatures.

THE VEILING OF THE BRIDE (BEDEKEN)

After the signing of the Ketubah, a short ceremony called *Bedeken* - the veiling of the bride - takes place. In Genesis 24:60, we read the story of Rebecca's first meeting with Isaac. As Isaac, who is to be her husband, approaches, "she took her veil and covered herself." Thus, when the groom lowers his bride's veil, she is blessed with the words offered to Rebecca by her mother and brother, before she left for her marriage to Isaac: "Oh sister, may you grow into thousands of myriads..." The groom recites verses of this blessing as he veils the bride. The rabbi upon request will print out this blessing for the groom to practice before this ceremony will take place.

THE WEDDING PROCESSION

The custom of escorting the bride and groom to the Chuppah is an ancient one. Throughout Jewish history, brides and grooms have been compared to kings and queens, who always appear with an entourage. The tradition of attendants continues to this day.

The order of the procession and the number of participants is not fixed by Jewish Law. Some customs have continued over the years, and these may help serve as guides. The family may decide the order of the procession and who stands under the Chuppah. Non-Jews may be part of the wedding procession.

Many families provide for a marriage coordinator to aid in facilitating these arrangements.

Since Judaism has always emphasized the important role of parents, it is usual for the couple to be escorted by their parents or to have their parents stand at their side under the Chuppah. At the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom walk down the aisle together, followed in reverse order by those who participated in the processional.

A word about the dress code. The bride should be veiled during the wedding procession. However, it is not necessary for any of the other women under the Chuppah or in the congregation to wear a head covering. All men in the wedding party and in the congregation must wear a *kippah* or *yarmulka*. You may wish to order color coordinated *kippot* imprinted with the wedding date and names of the bride and groom. These are available through the Mosaic Law Women's Network Judaica Shop.

WEDDING REHEARSAL

Should you desire a rehearsal prior to the wedding, please contact the synagogue office to reserve the date and time. The wedding coordinator you select usually guides the rehearsal. The rabbi and cantor do not attend the wedding rehearsal.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

Flowers

Flowers enhance the beauty of the ceremony and the celebration which follows. Any florist can be utilized, but must be approved by the Synagogue and must have a copy of Certificate of Workmen's Compensation Insurance on file in the Synagogue office.

Lit candles are not permitted in the Main Sanctuary because of the fire hazard. Hurricane glass covers by order of the fire marshal must protect lit candles at the wedding reception on the synagogue premises.

Photography

Photographs and videos ensure a lifetime of memories. Please note the following Synagogue regulations regarding these two important items.

Pictures may be taken during the wedding ceremony without a flash. The professional photographer may photograph the wedding party at the rear of the Sanctuary or Chapel during the processional. Posed pictures may be taken before and after the ceremony. The photographer and video photographer may record the Bedeken, the signing of the Ketubah and license and the preparation for the wedding procession. A video camera may be set up in advance at the far end of the Bimah, distant from the Chuppah. During the wedding ceremony it is permitted for the photographer and videographer to stand near the Chuppah. But flash or bright lights are not permitted during the ceremony.

Both the video and still photographer must have a copy of Certificate of Workman's Compensation Insurance on file in the Synagogue office.

The Wedding Ceremony

Mosaic Law Congregation follows a traditional wedding ceremony, with the blessings and traditions of our heritage. The ceremony itself consists of two distinct and successive portions.

The first is Betrothal or *Erusin* which includes the betrothal blessings and the first cup of wine, the marriage proposal, and the giving of the ring. This is followed by the transition stage when the Rabbi reads the Ketubah.

The second ceremony, the nuptials or *Nisuin*, consists of the seven wedding blessings. After these are concluded, the Rabbi addresses the couple and then pronounces them husband and wife. This is followed by the threefold priestly benediction offered by the Cantor and Rabbi. Then, a glass is broken by the groom, "*Zecher L'churban*," in memory

of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 and the centuries of exile that followed. The breaking of the glass concludes the wedding ceremony.

Following the recessional, many observe the custom that the bride and groom proceed immediately to the bridal room where they spend a few minutes alone. Called "Yichud", this experience gives the newly married couple a peaceful time for shared reflection before the wedding reception. The witnesses who signed the Ketubah traditionally "stand guard" outside of the Yichud Room until the married couple exit from Yichud.

It is possible to personalize the ceremony. Please consult the officiating Rabbi.

The Wine

Wine is used in virtually all Jewish ceremonies of joy and celebration. Two glasses of wine are used in the ceremony, one for Erusin, betrothal, the other for the Nisuin (the marriage ceremony). In each case, the bride and groom share from each cup. They may, if they wish, use their own Kiddush cups. It is required that a bottle of unopened white wine (kosher of course) be provided by the bride and groom for the ceremony. Grape juice may be substituted for wine upon request from the bride and groom.

THE BETROTHAL BLESSINGS

After the initial blessings over the wine, the Rabbi recites the Birkat Erusin or betrothal blessing. The bride's attendant raises the bride's veil as she and the groom share the wine, after which the veil is lowered. It will be raised again for the second cup of wine, and at that time, remains off the bride's face.

THE SEVEN BLESSINGS OF MARRIAGE - SHEVA BRACHOT

The following blessings are chanted in Hebrew by the Cantor. At their conclusion, the bride and groom drink from the second cup of wine.

Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created all things for your glory.

Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of humankind.

Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created man and woman in Your image, fashioning them as mates, that together they might perpetuate life.

Praised are You, O Lord, Creator of humankind.

May Zion rejoice as her children are restored to her in joy.

Praised are You, O Lord, who causes Zion to rejoice at her children's return.

Grant perfect joy to these loving companions, as You did to the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden.

Praised are You, O Lord, who grants the joy of bride and groom.

Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created joy and gladness, bride and groom, mirth, song, delight and rejoicing, love and harmony, peace and companionship. O Lord our God, may there ever be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem voices of those joined in marriage under the bridal canopy, the voices of young people feasting and singing.

Praised are You, O Lord, who causes the groom to rejoice with the bride.

WHAT RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES ARE RELATED TO THE WEDDING RECEPTION?

The reception following the wedding ceremony is truly a Simcha, an occasion of great joy - singing, dancing and merrymaking are the rule. The bride and groom are often lifted on chairs and carried around the room. It is a religious commandment, a Mitzvah, to rejoice with the bride and groom.

You may wish to share your joy with others by making a donation to Mazon, a Jewish response to hunger. A voluntary contribution of 3% of the cost of your celebration adds a rich dimension of community service to your celebration. Information about Mazon can be obtained by going to following link: <https://www.mazon.org/>

In a traditional wedding reception, the meal ends with the recitation of the Grace After Meals, Birkat Ha-mazon. In the special Grace for weddings, the Seven Blessings (Sheva Berachot) recited under the Chuppah are repeated. Friends and relatives of the bride and groom can be honored with the recitation of selected blessings. Two cups of wine are poured together into a third cup, from which the bride and groom drink in symbolic acceptance of the union of their lives. You may wish to order printed "benchers" and select both a leader for the Grace After Meals and participants for the Sheva Berachot.

The ritual of reciting the Birkat Hamazon and Sheva Berachot at your reception is a beautiful way to thank God for the blessing of this most special day in your lives and for all the blessings of life.

CREATING YOUR JEWISH HOME

Important as the wedding is, it is merely the prelude to your new life as a married couple. What kind of Jewish home will you have? To help you design a pattern of Jewish living, we suggest that you acquire the following ritual and ceremonial objects:

- Sabbath and Festival Candlesticks
- A Kiddush Cup
- A Challah Cover and Challah Knife
- Havdalah Set (Candle Holder, Kiddish Cup and Spice Box)
- A Passover Seder Plate and Cup of Elijah

- A Chanukah Menorah
- Mezuzzot

These are the ritual objects you will need to celebrate Judaism in your home. All these objects are beautiful, visual reminders of the cycle of Jewish life. Undoubtedly, the best known remains the Mezuzzah, which is attached to the door posts of the home and contains the words of the Shema.

We hope as well that your home will have Jewish books. We recommend the following Jewish Books for your new home:

- Tanach (Hebrew Bible)
- Siddur (Prayerbook)
- Shabbat Benchers (Shabbat Ritual and Song Books)
- Passover Haggadot
- The First and Second Jewish Catalogs by Michael Strassfeld
- The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary by Michael Strassfeld
- To Life! by Rabbi Harold Kushner
- Jewish Literacy by Joseph Telushkin
- Jewish Wisdom by Joseph Telushkin
- Teaching Your Children About God by Rabbi David Wolpe
- Conservative Judaism: The New Century by Rabbi Neil Gillman
- Shabbat Seder by Ron Wolfson

We trust that you will soon identify with the larger Jewish community. If the wedding couple are not members of Mosaic Law, you are accorded one year's free membership. It is important to remember that the establishment of a Jewish home means relating in a positive way to the community.

The ideal Jewish home is one in which there is SHALOM BAYIT, an atmosphere of peace and harmony. It is a home in which virtues are taught more by example than by precept, and where the joy of living is found in shared tasks and responsibilities. We hope this will be your home, and we wish you every happiness in your new life.

MAZAL TOV!

For any additional questions contact our rabbi at rabbi@mosaiclaw.org.