

Tisch and Kaballat Panim

When you arrive, you are invited to join the Chatten (groom) and Kallah (bride) at their respective pre-wedding gatherings. The Kallah's gathering is called the *Kaballat Panim* (Hebrew for "Welcoming the Faces") where she looks forward to greeting you and welcoming you to the wedding.

At the Chatten's *Tisch* (Yiddish for "table"), the Chatten may choose to share words of Torah on his wedding day. To enhance the festive atmosphere guests are encouraged to sing festive songs and toast to the Chatten and Kallah. During this time, several religious marital documents are reviewed and signed. The *Tena'im* ("conditions" document) comes from a medieval tradition to bind families together before a marriage. It is the official announcement of the engagement, starting off a series of steps leading into marriage. Following the signing and reading of the *Tena'im* document, members of the Chatten and Kallah's families ceremonially break a plate. As with many traditions today, this can have several meanings, ranging from the remembrance of the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to an acknowledgement of the bride and groom leaving their parents' homes and needing new plates.

Following the *Tena'im*, the *Ketubah* ("marriage contract") is reviewed. The *Ketubah* is the traditional agreement that has been integral to Jewish marriages for thousands of years. It outlines the bride and groom's emotional, spiritual, and material obligations to each other in their married life together as they build their Jewish home.

Both the *Tena'im* and the *Ketubah* are witnessed by dear friends of the Chatten, Kallah and their families.

Bedeken

At the end of the *Tisch*, the Chatten is escorted by his family and friends, with music and dancing, to greet his Kallah at the *Bedeken* (Yiddish for "covering"). After confirming that the Kallah is the woman he intends to marry, the Chatten lowers her veil before the wedding ceremony. The source of the custom of veiling the bride can be traced to the matriarch Rebecca, who veiled herself as an act of modesty upon seeing her husband-to-be, Isaac, approaching. The veil is also featured in the story of the wedding of Rebecca's son, Jacob, who was tricked into marrying his intended bride's sister after failing to look under her veil prior to the wedding. Many interpret the veiling of the Kallah to symbolize the Chatten's commitment to love, value, and cherish all aspects of his Kallah, even those that cannot readily be seen.

The Chatten and Kallah's parents each give a blessing to their children, after which the Chatten is danced away. As the *Bedeken* ends, guests proceed to find a seat in the *Chupah* ("wedding canopy") room.

Chupah

The *Chupah* ("wedding canopy") is symbolic of the home that the Chatten and Kallah will form together. As it is open on all four sides, the *Chupah* signifies that their house will always be open to friends, family, and guests, and that the Chatten and Kallah's love for one another will radiate out into the larger world. The temporary nature of the *Chupah* also symbolizes that the real importance of a home lies not in the materials used to construct it or the possessions that fill it, but the people who live within it.

As the Chatten arrives at the *Chupah*, the Chazzan (Cantor) welcomes him with the song *Mi Adir*.

"He Who is mighty above all, He Who is blessed above all, He Who is great above all, He Who is distinguished above all, may He bless the Chatan and the Kallah."

The Chatan's parents help him into his Kittel (White ritual robe). Both the Chatan and Kallah wear white garments under the Chupah, symbolizing purity, renewal, royalty and a connection to the Divine.

The bride is similarly welcomed as she arrives at the Chupah by the Chazzan, who sings Mi Ban Siach:

"He Who understands the speech of the rose among thorns, the love of a bride, Who is the joy of the beloved ones, may He bless the Chatan and Kallah."

While the Chazzan sings, the Kallah circles the Chatan seven times, which parallels the symbolism of the wedding ring she receives from him. The number seven holds further significance as the number of times the phrase, "and when a man takes a wife," appears in the Torah, as well as the number of days it took to complete the world.

The wedding ceremony is comprised of two parts: kiddushin ("sanctification") and nissuin ("nuptials"). While more than a thousand years ago these ceremonies occurred separately, they are now performed together.

Kiddushin & Erusin

Kiddushin is the sanctification of a man and woman to each other. The *Kiddushin* ceremony begins with a blessing over wine recited by the Rabbi who is officiating over the service, known as the *Mesader Kiddushin* ("Organizer of the Betrothal"). A second blessing reflects the sanctity of marriage and celebrates G-d's role in the union. The Chatan and Kallah both share the wine, showing their commitment to sharing their lives together.

The *Kiddushin* ceremony closes with *erusin* ("betrothal"), when the Chatan offers and the Kallah accepts a ring on her right index finger. The band is round with no piercings or stones, representing the commitment to an unbroken union and the couple's unending commitment to each other. It must be owned by the Chatan and be of significant value to qualify. As he places the ring on the Kallah's finger, the Chatan recites the ancient betrothal formula in Hebrew; "Behold, you are consecrated to me with this ring, according to the laws of Moses and Israel."

At this point the Chatan and Kallah are formally married. But wait, there's more!

Afterwards, the *Ketubah* is read in its original Aramaic. Following the reading of the *Ketubah*, the Chatan will publicly present the marriage contract to the Kallah signifying his acceptance of its obligations to her.

Nissuin

The second half of the ceremony consists of the recitation of the *Sheva Berachot* ("seven blessings"). These blessings recount the history of the world, the connection of man to the Divine, and thanking Him for the beauty of the moment and splendor of life. These blessings are recited over a second cup of wine.

The Chatan and Kallah are honored to have close family, friends, and distinguished guests say and sing these blessings.

Sheva Berachot

First blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלֶכֶּ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

Second blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי-יִנּוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהִכֵּל בְּרָא לְכַבּוֹדּוֹ.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who has created all things for His Glory.

Third blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי-יִנּוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.

Blessed are You, our G-d, King of the universe, Creator of Humanity.

Fourth blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי-יִנּוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ,
בְּצֵלֶם דְּמוּת תְּבֻנִיתוֹ, וְהִתְקִין לוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּנִין עֲדֵי עַד: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ,
יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe,

Who created men and women in Your image, that together they might perpetuate life.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Creator of Humanity.

Fifth blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה: בְּקִבוּץ בְּנֵיהָ לְתוֹכָהּ בְּשִׂמְחָה, שׁוֹשׁ תְּשִׁישׁ וְתִגַּל הָעֵקֶרָה
מְשִׂמַח צִיּוֹן בְּבִנְיָהּ. יְיָ.

May Zion rejoice as her children return to her in joy. Blessed are You. Lord our G-d, Who causes Zion to rejoice in her children.

Sixth blessing

בְּרוּךְ: כְּשִׂמְחָה יִצִּירָהּ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן מִקֶּדֶם, שִׂמַח תְּשִׂמַח רְעִים הָאֱהוּבִים
מְשִׂמַח חֵתָן וְכֵלָה. יְיָ-אַתָּה יְיָ.

Grant perfect joy to these loving companions, as You did for the first creatures in the Garden of Eden.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Who creates the joy of groom and bride.

Seventh blessing

חֵתָן, אֲשֶׁר בְּרָא שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה, יִנּוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם-יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי-בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ
יְיָ-מְהֵרָה יְיָ, אֲהַבָּה וְאַחֲוָה שְׁלוֹם וְרַעוּת, גִּילָה רְנָה דִּיצָה וְחֻדוּה, וְכֵלָה
קוֹל שְׂשׂוֹן וְקוֹל, יִנּוּ יִשְׁמַע בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחוּצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם-אֱלֹהֵי
וְנַעֲרִים, קוֹל מְצַהֲלוֹת חֲתָנִים מְחַפְּתִים, קוֹל חֵתָן וְקוֹל כֵּלָה, שִׂמְחָה
מְשִׂמַח חֵתָן עִם הַכֵּלָה. יְיָ-בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ: מִמְּשִׂתָּה נְגִינָתָם

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, Who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, pleasure and song, delight and rejoicing, love and harmony, peace and companionship. O Lord, may there always be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, voices of joy and gladness, voices of the groom and the bride, these joyful cries from under the *Chupah*, and the jubilant voices of the young and the young-at-heart feasting and singing with great rejoicing. Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Who is rejoicing together with this groom and this bride.

Breaking the Glass

The wedding ceremony ends with the Chazzan singing *Im Eshkakekh Yerushalayim* ("If I forget you, O Jerusalem"), moving verses from Psalm 137 that remind us that even in this moment of our greatest joy, we should not forget the ideal of a rebuilt Jerusalem and our obligation to fix the many imperfections of the world. Here, "Jerusalem" symbolizes our community, the Jewish people, civil society, and, of course, the city of Jerusalem itself.

A glass is placed under the Chattan's foot during the song and as the song concludes the glass is broken by the Chattan. As the glass is broken, we are reminded of the incomplete nature of society, that our work of *Tikkun Olam*, "repairing the world," is ongoing. The shattered glass can symbolize the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and the many other Jewish communities that have been in danger throughout history. On a happier note, the glass could also represent that each of us are part of something larger and that while we may be scattered about and apart, we can all fit back together.

Once the Chattan stomps on the glass, that's the cue to shout "MAZEL TOV!" and usher the Chattan and Kallah from their *Chupah* with song and dance.

Yichud

The path from the *Chupah* leads the bride and groom to the Yichud room. All are invited to join the crowd dancing the newly married couple from the *Chupah*. *Yichud* ("seclusion" or "together") grants the newlyweds a few moments alone to reflect on the enormity of the day and rest their feet. As a required component of the Jewish wedding ceremony, the couple must be undisturbed during *yichud*. For that reason, there will be guards stationed at the door who will prevent anyone from entering.

Seudat Mitzvah

Immediately after the *Chupah*, while the couple is in the *Yichud* room, everyone is invited to the *Seudat Mitzvah* ("festive meal"). The meal and party after a wedding are some of the greatest celebrations in Jewish tradition. The reception is where the guests engage in the *mitzvah* of making the Chattan and Kallah happy. The Chattan and Kallah's greatest joy will come from seeing all of the guests having a wonderful time!

When the Chattan and Kallah return from the Yichud room, the first round of dancing begins right away with *Simcha* ("happy!") dancing: lots of circles, chairs flying around, stomping, singing, and other assorted craziness. Guests are encouraged to present *Shtick* to the Chattan and Kallah: dances, skits, and other antics to entertain the royal couple.

At the end of the meal, we will conclude with *Birkat HaMazon*, the Grace After Meals, which will include a repetition of the *Sheva Berachot* heard under the *Chupah*.

Od Yeshama

During the day, from the *Tisch* through the party, one will hear the traditional wedding song *Od Yishama* played and sung. "May there always be heard in cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, voices of joy and gladness, voices of the groom and bride"