

Dear Family and Friends,

Welcome to our wedding! We are delighted that you are here to share in our joy. We have prepared this guide to help you understand the rituals and events that will take place today.

Before the Ceremony

The wedding day is the start of a new life for the *Kallah* (bride) and *Chatan* (groom). It is considered a personal Yom Kippur, because they are forgiven for past mistakes as they begin their new life together. For this reason, as a symbol of purity, they both wear white garments during the ceremony. To heighten the couple's anticipation of being united, it is customary for the Kallah and Chatan to refrain from seeing one another for the week preceding the wedding.

Kabbalat Panim

The Kallah and Chatan are likened to royalty on their wedding day, and so they receive guests in two separate receptions before the ceremony. In one room the kallah sits on her "throne" and receives her guests. The chatan receives guests at the *tisch* (table), where the *Ketubah* (marriage contract) is signed by two witnesses and later given to the bride during the ceremony. The *Ketubah* is the Jewish legal contract that states the husband's obligations to his wife throughout his life. His obligations are to cherish and support her with food, clothing, shelter, and personal attention.

Badeken: Veiling the Kallah

The Bedeken is one of the most moving parts of the wedding day. Family and friends now escort the groom to his bride with singing and dancing. The chatan will then place a veil over the kallah's head. The veiling has two meanings: first, it allows the groom to verify that it is indeed his kallah whom he is marrying, thus alluding to the ruse that Laban played on Jacob in replacing his daughter Rachel with Leah at the time of the wedding. Second, it signifies that the groom is marrying his bride for her inner beauty, and not for her external appearance, and

highlights the modesty and personal privacy of a Jewish woman (alludes to when Rivka veiled herself upon first meeting her future husband, Isaac).

Chuppah: Wedding Canopy

The Chuppah, wedding canopy, represents the new home that the couple will build together. The Chuppah is open on all sides to remind us that like Abraham and Sarah's tent, this couple's new home will be open to all. It preferably takes place under the stars, either outside or under a skylight, to recall the blessing of G-d to Abraham that his children be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). According to tradition, at this time, the Heavens are open for the bride and groom, and their prayers are answered. Traditionally, the groom wears a *kittel*, the white garment worn on Yom Kippur, symbolizing purity and holiness.

When the kallah reaches the Chuppah, she circles her chatan seven times. This encircling symbolizes the intertwined nature of the couple's life from this point forward, and the idea that they inhabit a sphere that no one else is allowed to penetrate. Moreover, the number seven is symbolic of completion and fulfillment, as in the seven days of creation. Seven signifies the passage beyond the physical world into the spiritual.

The ceremony is composed of two parts: *Kedushin* (betrothal) and *Nisuin* (nuptials). Both are introduced with a blessing for the wine, the traditional symbol of joy.

Kedushin: Betrothal

In front of two witnesses, the groom places a ring on the kallah's right index finger, because of a tradition that a special artery connects the right index finger to the heart. As he does so, he says, "Behold, you are consecrated unto me in accordance to the laws of Moses and Israel." The ring should be a simple band of precious metal, and should contain no stones which, unlike metal, can irreparably break. The ring, therefore, symbolizes purity, malleability, and endlessness. The Ketubah is then read aloud, and accepted by the bride.

Nisuin: Nuptials

The Nisuin consists of seven blessings, known as the Sheva Brachot, that will be recited by family and friends. These blessings thank G-d for creating the world, enabling humanity to perpetuate itself, assuring the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people and of the land of Israel, and rejoicing over the Chatan and Kallah. The couple will then drink from the second cup of wine.

After the completion of the blessings, the chatan will break a glass to remind us that even in times of great rejoicing, we should not forget the destruction of the Holy Temple and the subsequent exile of the Jewish people. Until the Temple is rebuilt, we will not be able to experience complete joy.

Seudat Mitzvah: The Wedding Feast

After the ceremony, the couple is escorted amid music and shouts of “Mazal Tov!” to *yichud* (seclusion) in a private room. There they will spend a few moments alone before joining the guests for a festive dinner and dancing. There is an explicit commandment in the Torah to rejoice with the new couple, which is fulfilled by dancing with the bride and groom and entertaining them. The evening is completed with the Grace after meals and another recitation of the Sheva Brachot.

Thank you for sharing this happy occasion with us! It is because of you, our family and friends, that today is so joyous and memorable. May we share in many more joyous celebrations in the future.

(Some people also list the people who will walk down that aisle to the chuppah)