

AUFRUFF
MARRIAGE CEREMONY/KIDDUSHIN
SHEVA BRAKHOT
BREAKING THE GLASS
GROOM AND BRIDE/KHATTAN VE-KALLA

THOUGH THE TORAH ASSUMES THAT MEN AND WOMEN WILL MARRY—"Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24)—nowhere does it specify a marriage ceremony. The ceremony's details are codified, rather, in the *Talmud.

In the talmudic era, a man and woman formally signified their intention to marry a full year before the wedding, in a ceremony known as *erusin*. During the twelve months following the *erusin*, the woman was expected to assemble her trousseau and prepare for marriage, while the man readied himself financially. If either party wished to terminate the *erusin*, which was a legally binding engagement, a full ceremony of divorce had to be carried out (see *Get*). Today, both *erusin* and marriage (*nisu'in*) take place at the wedding.

On the Sabbath preceding the wedding, the groom (*khattan*) is honored by being called up to the Torah for an **aliyah*. (Some *Sephardic Jews honor the groom at the first Sabbath service *after* the wedding.) In many congregations, when he finishes blessing the Torah, members of the congregation throw candy at him, symbolically expressing their wishes that he and his fiancée have a sweet future. This special Sabbath celebration is known by the Yiddish word *auftruff*. Among Orthodox Jews, the bride (*kalla*) is usually not present at the *auftruff*. Jewish custom, not law, dictates that the bride and groom not see each other the week before the wedding.

The wedding day is regarded in Jewish law as sacred, a sort of mini-*Yom Kippur*. The bride and groom are encouraged to fast, and even to recite certain penitential prayers that are also said on the Day of Atonement. The wedding ceremony itself is brief and simple. There is an ancient cus-

tom—it is not mandatory, and its origin is uncertain—that under the canopy, the bride walks around the groom seven times. Afterward, the couple stands in front of the officiating rabbi, who recites the first two blessings, which are those that were recited at the ancient ceremony of *erusin*. The groom then places a ring on the forefinger of the bride's right hand and recites nine words in Hebrew: "*Ha-rei aht me-ku-deshet li be-ta-ba' aht zoh, ke-daht Moshe ve-Yisra'el*—You are hereby sanctified unto me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel."

The rabbi then reads aloud the Aramaic marriage contract known as the *ketuba* (see next entry), which lists the groom's obligations to the bride. He then recites the seven marriage blessings (*sheva brakhot*), which consecrate a Jewish wedding.

The ritual that concludes the public part of the ceremony is the smashing of a glass under the groom's foot. The glass is first wrapped in a cloth napkin so that no one is injured by flying fragments. The tradition of breaking a glass dates back to the Talmud. Rav Ashi was celebrating his son's wedding when the atmosphere among the guests, many of whom were rabbis, grew raucous. The rabbi lifted up an exceedingly valuable white glass and smashed it in front of them. The Talmud reports that the shocked guests sobbed up quickly (*Brakhot* 31a). Breaking a glass soon became incorporated into all wedding ceremonies, though with a different rationale. The smashing of something valuable slightly diminishes the great joy of the occasion, and serves as a poignant reminder that the "Temple is still in ruins. I once introduced the ceremony at the wedding of close friends as follows: "The smashing of the glass reminds us as well that we still live in an unredeemed world. May the children of your union help to bring about the world's redemption."

Given the sadness that the breaking of the glass is intended to evoke, it is almost comical that at all Jewish weddings today, the act produces joyous shouts of "*Mazal Tov!*" (Congratulations! or literally, "Good luck!"). In consequence, Rabbi Maurice Lamm has suggested that rather than wait till the end of the wedding to perform this ritual, the glass be broken in the middle of the ceremony.

After breaking the glass, and before the bride and groom join the wedding reception, they are taken to a locked room where they stay alone for about ten minutes. This is known as *yikhud* (separation), and is a symbolic ceremony of great significance. In Jewish law, a man and woman who are not married or closely related are forbidden to be alone in an inaccessible room.

Yikhud, then, is the final act in the wedding ceremony, indicating that the couple is now married and sexually permitted only to one another.

For the week after the wedding, it is traditional for relatives and friends of the newly married couple to make a party for them each day. At least one of the guests at each party should be someone who was not at the wedding itself, and who will therefore bring a new and spontaneous reaction of joy to the occasion. At each party's conclusion, when the **Birkat ha-Mazon* (Grace After Meals) is said, the same seven blessings that were recited under the canopy are repeated. Because these seven blessings are known in Hebrew as *sheva brakhot*, these wedding parties have become known as *sheva brakhot*, and among traditional Jews, it is common for someone to say, "I am going to a *sheva brakhot* tonight for so-and-so."

SOURCE: Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*.



THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT / KETUBA

THE KETUBA IS THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT THAT ALL GROOMS ARE required to give their brides at a Jewish wedding. It spells out the husband's obligations to the wife, and is considered so binding that a couple whose *ketuba* has been lost is forbidden to live together until a new one is written. In the *ketuba* the man undertakes to provide his wife with "food, clothing, and necessities, and live with you as a husband according to universal custom."

The phrase "live with you" is a euphemism for sexual relations. The rabbi spelled out this obligation contractually because they believed that most women would be too shy or modest to initiate relations, and needed protection from a husband's possible sexual indifference. During times when polygamy was still permitted in Jewish law (see *Ban on Polygamy—The Decrees of Rabbi Gershom*), the guarantee of sexual relations also protected older and less attractive wives from being ignored. The minimal frequency

of marital relations legislated in the Talmud was based on a man's profession and the amount of time he spent at home: "Every day for those who have no occupation, twice a week for laborers, once a week for ass-drivers; once every thirty days for camel drivers; and once every six months for sailors" (*Mishna Ketubot* 5:6; *Ketubot* 62b–62b). As Rabbi Louis Jacobs has noted: "A husband cannot change his occupation without his wife's consent if this will affect her conjugal rights—from an ass-driver to a camel-driver, for instance—since it can be assumed that a wife will prefer to have her needs satisfied even if, as a result, her husband's earnings will be less." For married couples, part of the Sabbath joy is to have relations on Friday night.

The clause obligating a man to supply his wife's financial needs entitles him to her earnings; however, the wife has the option of releasing him from this responsibility, and keeping all her income.

Consistent with Judaism's legal, and generally nonromantic, character, the *ketuba* also spells out the husband's financial obligations in the event of divorce or death. In recent years, the Conservative movement has added a clause to the *ketuba* that effectively compels the husband to give his wife a Jewish divorce, a *get*, in the event of a civil divorce (see *Get and Agumdh*). A growing number of Orthodox rabbis are asking grooms to sign a civilly binding prenuptial agreement to this effect.

The *ketuba* currently used was written in the second century B.C.E. Just before the wedding ceremony, two witnesses sign the document, certifying that they have witnessed the groom agreeing to abide by all of its provisions. During the ceremony, the document is read aloud in the original Aramaic, summarized in English, and then entrusted to the wife.

Throughout Jewish history, scribes and artists have created elaborate and illuminated *ketubot* (plural of *ketuba*), which often are displayed in the couple's house. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in beautiful *ketubot*, and an increasing number of couples, instead of using a standard printed *ketuba*, are commissioning artists to design the document.

SOURCES: Louis Jacobs, *What Does Judaism Say About?*, pp. 281–288, discusses Judaism's attitudes toward sex. On the *ketuba* itself, see Louis M. Epstein, *The Jewish Marriage Contract*.

Throughout the woman's period, and for seven days after, she is called *tahmay*. Unfortunately, the only translation for *tahmay* is "impure," a word that carries an infinitely worse connotation in English than in Hebrew. *Tahmay* is simply an ancient term applied to anyone who is forbidden to have contact with sacred food, or to enter the Temple precincts in Jerusalem (see *The Temple/Beit ha-Mikdash*). For example, if a man or woman comes in direct contact with a corpse, then the Torah legislates that they are *tahmay* for seven days. Certainly, no stigma of impurity is attached to them for having touched a dead body; nonetheless, because they are *tahmay*, certain ritual acts are forbidden to them.

Many modern Jews have nonetheless expressed discomfort with the laws of family purity, feeling that they might cause a menstruating woman to feel like a pariah. On the other hand, Dr. Norman Lamm, the current president of *Yeshiva University, has written a brilliant overview of the laws of sexual separation, entitled *A Hedge of Roses*, in which he argues that these laws have enhanced Jewish marital and sexual happiness. An Orthodox Jewish educator told me she believes that *taharat ha-mishpakha* is responsible for maintaining a frequent level of sexual activity among Orthodox couples. Studies of the American population, she noted, indicate that newly married couples have sexual relations very frequently. After several years, however, the frequency declines dramatically, and continues to decline throughout the marriage. Among Orthodox Jews, however, the prohibition of sexual relations for twelve successive days each month leaves a couple hungering for each other, even after many years of marriage. Even if the couple's biological clocks are not normally in sync, they will certainly be so at the end of the twelve days. The Talmud specifically recognized the rejuvenating effect the laws of separation can have on a marriage: "The husband becomes over-familiar with his wife and tires of her. Thus, the Torah prohibited her to him [for certain days each month] so that she may remain as beloved to him as she was on her wedding day" (*Niddah* 31b).

Before sexual relations resume, however, one more ritual must be carried out: The wife must go to a *mikveh* (ritual bath). Most *mikva'ot* (plural) are located in buildings, although a lake, river, or ocean—in fact, any body of natural water—can serve as a valid *mikveh*.

Women go to the *mikveh* on the first evening on which they are permitted to resume relations. The *mikveh* is run by women, and no men are present when women use it. The woman undresses and immerses herself in the waters of the *mikveh* while totally unclothed. She then recites a blessing to God "who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded con-

MIKVEH

LAWS OF FAMILY PURITY /
TAHARAT HA-MISHPAKHA

THE TORAH CATEGORICALLY PROHIBITS SEXUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN husband and wife during the woman's menstrual period (Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18), as well as during other times of uterine bleeding. The rabbis, concerned that women would not be able to distinguish the sources of the bleeding, collapsed all distinctions (see Leviticus 15:25-33) and decreed that sexual relations be prohibited for a full seven days after the woman has experienced the last flow of blood.

The laws concerning sexual separation are known as *taharat ha-mishpakha* (the laws of family purity). Along with the *Sabbath and **kashrut*, these laws constitute one of three ritual areas whose strict observance generally differentiates Orthodox from non-Orthodox Jews.

While the law in the Torah only forbids intercourse during a woman's menstrual period, subsequent Jewish laws also forbid any heterosexual contact that might stimulate sexual excitement and lead to relations. Those Jews who strictly observe *taharat ha-mishpakha* do not kiss, hug, or otherwise touch their spouse during the forbidden days. At night, husband and wife sleep in separate beds. Some Orthodox males will not hand something directly to their wives during this time; they set the desired object down on a table for the wife to pick up.

Unlike the Sabbath and *kashrut*, the laws of family purity are virtually unknown to non-Orthodox Jews. In the Orthodox world, however, new books on the subject are constantly being published, often directed toward engaged couples. In one recent work, the author advised couples not to go for pleasure rides in automobiles during the forbidden days. If it was absolutely necessary for them to drive together, he advised the nondriving partner to sit in the backseat.

cerning immersion." Only after thoroughly immersing herself is a woman permitted to resume sexual relations with her husband.

Unmarried women do not go to the *mikveh*; if they did, they would presumably be permitted to have relations, and Orthodoxy in no way wishes to encourage premarital sex. An Orthodox rabbi told me that the most unusual query ever posed to him came from a young Orthodox woman who had decided to live with her boyfriend. "No matter what you say, rabbi," she told him, "I plan to move in with my boyfriend. When I do so, is it better that I put a ring on my finger and go to a *mikveh* each month and immerse myself, or not go to a *mikveh* at all?" The rabbi ruled that attending a *mikveh* was preferable. Other rabbis have ruled the opposite, that it is preferable that she not go to the *mikveh* in such a case, since permitting her to do so would lead to increased promiscuity. Indeed, although it will come as a surprise to most non-Orthodox Jews, an unmarried woman who goes to the *mikveh* and sleeps with her boyfriend is committing a lesser offense, according to Jewish law, than a married Jewish couple that has sexual relations without the woman going to the *mikveh*.

The only unmarried woman who is expected to go to the *mikveh* is a bride just before her wedding. For that reason, among traditional Jews it is always the woman who sets the wedding date, so as to ensure that it not fall within her forbidden days.

Many women whose weddings I have performed—most of whom were non-Orthodox—have told me that the trip to the *mikveh* was one of the spiritual high points of their lives and significantly deepened the sense of sanctity surrounding their marriage.

Although the *mikveh* is generally associated with menstruating women, it is also indispensable in the conversion of non-Jews to Judaism. The one ritual act required of female converts is immersion in a *mikveh*, while men who convert are required to immerse themselves, and undergo *circumcision.

The Christian ritual of baptism is based on the *mikveh* immersion. The institution itself is so ancient that remnants of a *mikveh* have been found in the remains of the destroyed Jewish fortress at *Masada.

In contemporary American-Jewish life, interdenominational conflicts have unfortunately sometimes erupted around the use of the *mikveh*. In most cities, the *mikva'ot* are under the control of Orthodox Jews; in general, the Orthodox are almost the only ones who use them. Many Orthodox rabbis will not permit Reform and Conservative rabbis to use the *mikveh* to perform conversions. (Since the Orthodox do not regard non-Orthodox conversions as valid, they do not wish such ceremonies to gain a

patina of respectability through the use of a *mikveh*.) The Conservative Jewish community of Los Angeles has, as a result, built its own *mikveh*. Significantly, the Conservative movement has never officially ruled that monthly immersion in a *mikveh* is optional for its female adherents; in practice, however, few Conservative Jews practice the laws of family purity. Thus, the Conservative *mikveh* was built largely for use by converts.

Some Jewish men, particularly among the *Hasidim or those with mystical inclinations, periodically immerse themselves in the *mikveh*, especially before Jewish holidays. A few do so daily or just on Fridays, in preparation for the Sabbath.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READINGS: Norman Lamm, *A Hedge of Roses*; Blu Greenberg, *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*, pp. 120–136; Moses Tendler, *Pardes Rimmonim: A Marriage Manual for the Jewish Family*; Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld, and Sharon Strassfeld, eds., *The Jewish Catalog*, pp. 167–171.

BEIT DIN

THROUGHOUT MOST OF JEWISH HISTORY, THE COMMUNITY VEHEMENTLY opposed its members' summoning each other before gentile courts. Jews who had legal disputes with other Jews were expected to summon their opponents before a *beit din* (Jewish court) composed of three rabbis. Each side was entitled to choose one rabbi, and then the two rabbis would choose a third rabbi. The *beit din* would hear the testimony and arguments of each side. Litigants would generally represent themselves, and were questioned by the judges—who would then issue a ruling.

There are still American Jews, almost all of them Orthodox, who bring business disputes before rabbinic courts. In one instance several years ago, both sides in the case agreed to abide by the rabbinic court ruling, but after the decision was announced, one of the litigants sued again in civil court. He argued that the rabbi had been prejudiced against him. One of the three rabbis was subpoenaed, and the judge asked him to respond to the litigant's