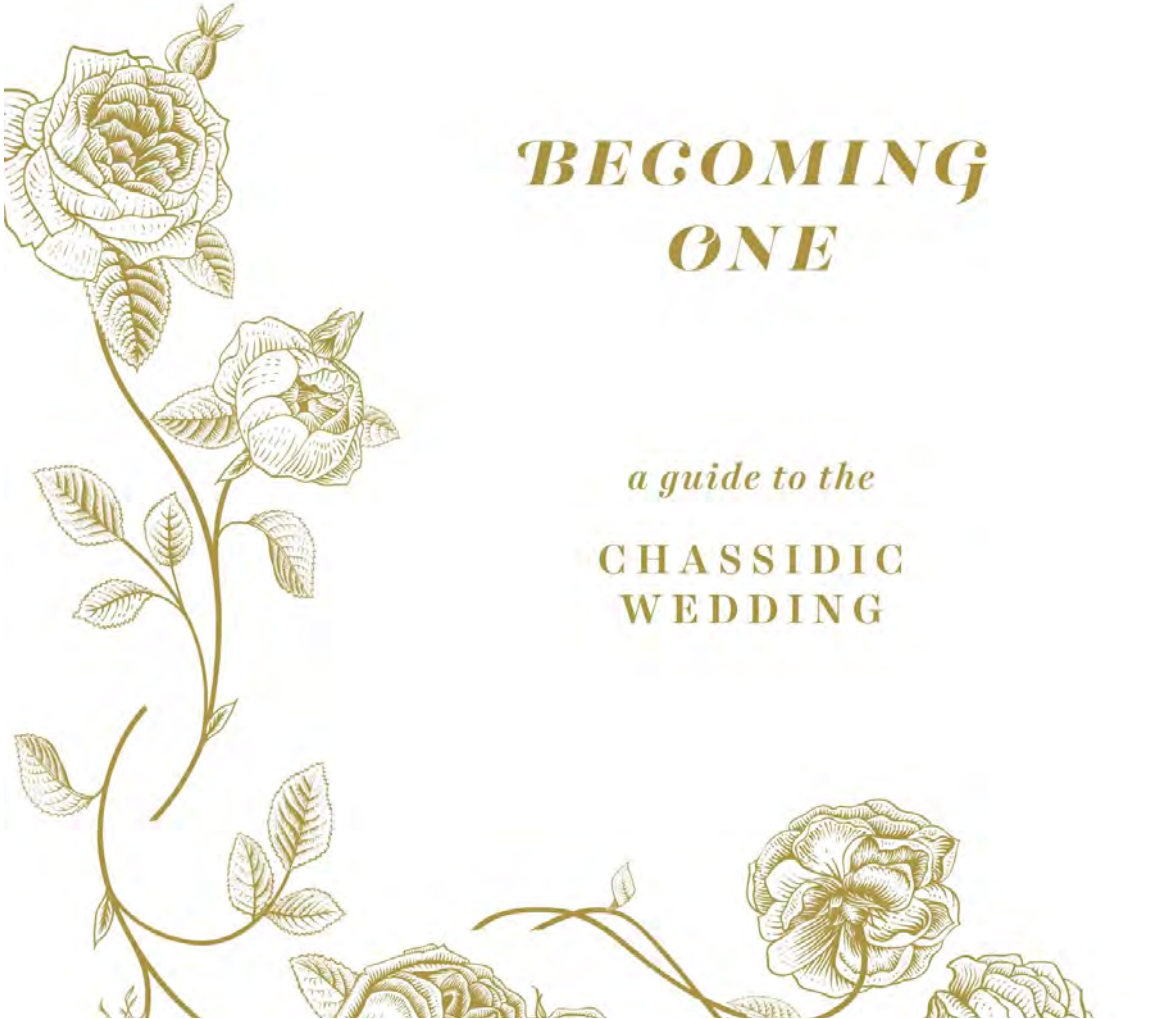


BECOMING ONE

a guide to the

CHASSIDIC WEDDING

Dear Family & Friends,

It is our honor to share with you the great joy and holiness of the most significant day in our lives - our wedding day.

There are many beautiful and meaningful customs of a Jewish wedding ceremony that may be unfamiliar to you. The purpose of this guide is to present a brief explanation of each aspect of the traditional Jewish wedding. We hope that you will find this guide helpful in navigating this event and celebrating its many colorful components with deeper insight and joy.

According to Jewish tradition, while standing under the *chupah* (wedding canopy) the bride and groom have a heightened spiritual awareness and energy. Drawing down unique levels of blessing, they are considered to have the ability to bless others on their wedding day. Therefore, we would like to bless you and your family and all those dear to you with health, happiness, and prosperity. We add a prayerful wish for the ultimate blessing upon mankind—our redemption by the Righteous Moshiach (Messiah) who will herald a time of peace, understanding and blessing for all.

Thank you for joining in our simchah.

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a guide to the

CHASSIDIC WEDDING

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The Jewish Wedding

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A traditional Jewish wedding is a tapestry woven from many threads, with roots—historical, mystical, cultural and legal—in over 3,800 years of Jewish life. Our sages teach that, on the cosmic level, every marriage ceremony is a reenactment of the eternal union that was formed between G-d and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai with the giving of the *Torah*, and that the wedding day is a personal *Yom Kippur*—the holiest and most auspicious day of one's life.

But a marriage is also an intricate legal transaction by which bride and groom enter a mutually binding commitment. Thus, the rituals and customs of the marriage ceremony derive from both its legal particulars and its underlying spiritual themes—the body and soul of the Jewish wedding.



Kabbalat Panim

WELCOMING THE GUESTS

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The Jewish wedding traditionally begins with a reception, the *kabbalat panim*, held in honor of the bride and groom. Our sages tell us that the bride is like a queen and the groom is like a king. On the wedding day, the bride and groom have a special power over their lives and their surroundings. All their previous sins and failings are forgiven, and they are empowered to chart a new future for themselves and to bless their loved ones and friends. It is to honor their special status that we hold a reception for them, as we would for visiting royalty.

Two separate receptions are held (usually in adjacent rooms), one for the bride and another for the groom. Traditionally, the bride and groom refrain from seeing each other for a full week before their wedding, increasing their love and yearning for each other, and their joy in seeing each other at the *badeken* (veiling ceremony), which follows the reception.

The bride sits on a decorative throne-like chair. Her friends and family approach, wish her *mazal tov* and give her their blessings. At the groom's reception, songs are sung, and in the *Chabad* tradition the groom delivers a chassidic discourse. Hors d'oeuvres, light refreshments and *l'chaims* are served at both receptions.

This reception is also the time to complete and sign the two legal wedding documents: the *tena'im* (engagement contract) and the *ketubah* (marriage contract). After reading the *tena'im*, a china or glass plate is broken. The shattering of the plate reminds us that even at the height of our personal joy, we must remember the destruction of Jerusalem. It also symbolizes the finality of the commitment.

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The Badeken

VEILING CEREMONY

After the *kabbalat panim* comes the *badeken*, the veiling ceremony. A procession led by the groom heads to the bridal reception room, where the groom covers the bride's face with a veil.

The custom of covering the bride's face with a veil originates with our matriarch Rebecca, who covered her face when meeting her groom, Isaac, for the first time.

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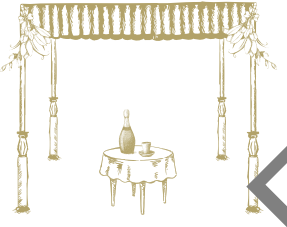
The veil emphasizes the groom's recognition that his bride's beauty is not only external, and hence temporary, but also an inner beauty that she will never lose. The custom also emphasizes the innate modesty that is a hallmark of the Jewish woman.

The bride's face remains veiled for the duration of the *chupah* ceremony, affording her privacy during this holy time.

After the groom veils the bride, their parents and grandparents approach her and bless her. The groom's entourage then leaves the room. The bride and groom prepare to go to the *chupah*, the marriage canopy, and everyone else proceeds directly to the site of the *chupah*.

→ *For more on why a bride wears a veil, see*
www.chabad.org/5679: *Why Does a Bride Wear a Veil?*

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The Chupah

MARRIAGE CANOPY

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The *chupah*, which sits atop four poles, can be an ornately decorated tapestry, or it can be a simple cloth or a tallit. Open on all sides with a (cloth) roof overhead, the structure of the *chupah* symbolizes the couple's commitment to establish a home that will be open to guests, as was the tent of our ancestors, Abraham and Sarah.

→ *For another perspective on the meaning of the chupah,*
visit ***www.chabad.org/758622****: What is the Significance of the Chupah?*

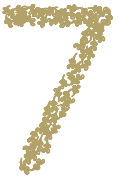
It is customary for the *chupah* ceremony to be held beneath the open skies, a way of recalling G-d's blessing to Abraham that his descendants be as numerous as the stars.

A *chupah* held under the open sky also symbolizes the couple's resolve to establish a household that will be run according to "heavenly" and spiritual ideals.

The day of the wedding is considered a personal *Yom Kippur* for the bride and groom. As such, the bride and groom traditionally fast all day until after the *chupah*, and the groom wears a *kittel*—the long white robe worn on *Yom Kippur*—during the ceremony. The pristine white *kittel*, and the bride's white gown, symbolize the young couple's purity on their personal day of atonement, as they begin a new life together. Their slates have been wiped clean, and they have been forgiven for any prior sins.

The Shechinah, Divine Presence, graces the presence of every *chupah* ceremony. Also present are the souls of the bride and groom's deceased ancestors, who descend from their heavenly abode to join this holy event.

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The Procession

Royalty is always escorted by an entourage, and on the day when they are likened to king and queen, the bride and groom are accompanied to the *chupah* by escorts, usually their parents, who serve as their personal honor guards." (Some have the custom for the grandparents of the bride and groom to join this entourage as well.)

The escorts lock elbows with the bride and groom while leading them to the *chupah*. They hold candles, symbolizing the fervent wish that the couple's life together be filled with light and joy.

The groom is led to the *chupah* first, where he awaits the arrival of his bride. When the bride joins the groom under the *chupah*, she walks around him seven times before standing next to him. Seven signifies a creative completion, like the seven days of creation, a passage beyond the physical into the spiritual. Just as the seventh day of

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creation was the Shabbat, the day that completed and crowned the creation of the world, so do the bride's seven circles around the groom signify their completed quest for each other.

Once the bride and groom are standing side by side under the *chupah*, the cantor welcomes them on behalf of all those gathered by singing several Hebrew hymns, which also include a request for G-d's blessings for the new couple.

The Rebbe's Letter

It is the *Chabad* custom to give someone the honor of reading the personally signed letter of blessing that the Lubavitcher Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory—would customarily send to every bride and groom upon receiving their wedding invitation.

As the Rebbe continues to so powerfully influence our lives, and with the knowledge that a tzaddik's blessing is eternal, the text of the letter is read and translated.

You can see the text of the letter, in Hebrew and English, at the end of this guide.

After this, we are ready to begin the actual marriage ceremony.

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The Kiddushin

BETROTHAL

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According to *Torah* law, marriage is a two-stage process. The first stage is called *kiddushin*, loosely translated as "betrothal," and the second stage is known as *nisu'in*, which is the finalization of the nuptials. Both *kiddushin* and *nisu'in* take place under the *chupah*. *Kiddushin* takes place when the groom gives the bride the wedding band, and *nisu'in* takes place through standing under the *chupah*, where husband and wife unite under one roof for the sake of marriage and where the *Sheva Berachot*, the seven marriage blessings, are recited. According to some opinions, the *nisu'in* is not complete until the couple spends some time alone together in a secluded room following this ceremony.

Kiddushin translates literally as "sanctification," signifying the uniqueness of a Jewish marriage— a union in which G-d's presence can be found and the relationship between man and wife elevated in holiness.

The betrothal ceremony is performed over a cup of wine. As King David says in Psalms, "Wine cheers man's heart," and there is no mitzvah more joyously celebrated than a wedding. The rabbi who is performing the ceremony holds a cup of wine and recites the *hagafen* (wine) blessing. Then he recites the betrothal blessing, which thanks G-d for sanctifying us with the mitzvah of betrothal before marriage. The bride and groom then sip wine from the cup.

The groom then places the wedding band on the bride's finger while proclaiming: "With this ring, you are consecrated to me according to the law of Moses and Israel."

The betrothal must be witnessed by two designated witnesses.

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The Ketubah

MARRIAGE CONTRACT

After the groom places the ring on the bride's finger, the *ketubah*, marriage contract, is read aloud. The *ketubah* shows that marriage is more than a physical and spiritual union; it is a legal and moral commitment as well. The *ketubah* details the husband's main obligations to his wife to provide her with food, clothing and conjugal relations, along with other contractual obligations.

→ *Visit* ***www.chabad.org/477326***

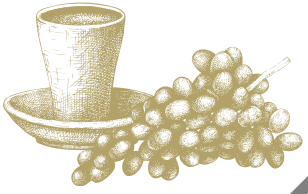
for a more in-depth understanding of those obligations.

The *ketubah* document is reminiscent of the wedding between G-d and Israel, when Moses read the *Torah*, the "Book of the Covenant," to the children of Israel prior to the "*chupah* ceremony" at Mount Sinai. In the *Torah*, G-d, the groom, undertakes to provide for all the physical and spiritual needs of His beloved bride. It is this precious "marriage contract" that has assured our survival through millennia.

Reading the *ketubah* serves as a separation between the two stages of the marriage ceremony, *kiddushin* and *nisu'in*.

After the *ketubah* is read, it is handed to the groom who then gives it to the bride.

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Sheva Berachot

FINALIZING THE NUPTIALS

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We now proceed to the final stage of the marriage ceremony, the *nisu'in*, which occurs when the *Sheva Berachot*, the "Seven Blessings," are recited under the *chupah*.

The first blessing is the blessing on wine, and the remaining six are marriage-themed blessings. The bride and groom once again sip from the wine in the cup.

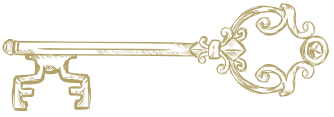
At this point the souls of the groom and bride reunite to become one soul, as they were before they entered this world. Included in the Seven Blessings is the blessing for the bride and groom to discover that same delight in one another as they knew in their pristine, primal state in the Garden of Eden.

→ *Each of the Sheva Berachot has an inner meaning that pertains to marriage. For an exploration of some of those meanings, visit* ***www.chabad.org/477372****: Inner Meaning of the Sheva Berachot.*

The ceremony concludes with the groom breaking a glass with his foot. As with the breaking of the plate after the *tena'im*, the shattering of the glass reminds us that even at the height of our personal joy, we must remember the destruction of Jerusalem. After the glass has been broken, the guests shout "*Mazal tov*!"

→ *For a bride's perspective of the ceremony, visit* ***www.chabad.org/143703****: The Merging of Two Souls.*

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Cheder Yichud

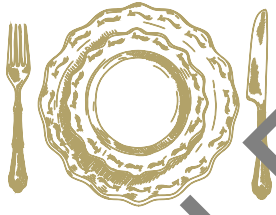
ROOM OF SECLUSION

Immediately after the *chupah*, the bride and groom adjourn to a private room, where they spend a few minutes alone.

After all the pomp and ceremony, it is time for the bride and groom to share a few moments of privacy. Even when surrounded by a crowd that is showering them with love and attention, the couple must take a few moments to be there for each other. This is an important lesson for marriage: the couple should never allow the hustle and bustle of life to completely engulf them, but should always find the time to focus exclusively on each other.

Inside the *yichud* room, the bride and groom traditionally break their wedding day fast.

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Reception

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Participating in a wedding feast and gladdening the hearts of the bride and groom on their special day is a great *mitzvah*. The Talmud relates that the greatest sages would set aside their *Torah* study for the sake of entertaining a new couple with song and dance.

When the bride and groom emerge from the *yichud* room to join their guests, they are greeted with music, singing and dancing. The male guests dance with the groom, and the female guests dance with the bride, the men's and women's sections separated by a *mechitzah* (partition). The singing and dancing, often accompanied by juggling acts and other forms of good cheer in honor of the bride and groom, continue throughout the reception.

Birkat Hamazon

GRACE AFTER MEALS

The wedding meal is followed by the Grace After Meals and the recitation of the *Sheva Berachot*, the same seven blessings that were recited beneath the *chupah*.

The *Sheva Berachot*, which draw divine blessings on the couple's married life, are recited over a cup of wine. There is a deep mystical connection between wine and marriage. Wine "gladdens the heart." But in order to produce this heart-gladdening beverage, a grape must be crushed. Married life is full of crushing moments, but the key is to overcome those challenging occasions together, which leads to new levels of love and happiness.

The person leading the Grace After Meals holds a cup of wine. Afterward, the *Sheva Berachot* are said. Six people are invited up, each one to say another blessing while clasping a second cup of wine. At the conclusion, the person who led the Grace After Meals recites the *hagafen* (wine) blessing aloud and sips from his cup. The two cups are mixed, and the bride and groom each drink a bit.

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After the Wedding

The bride and groom begin their first week of their new life together in the embrace of their families and community, as is the Jewish custom. For the week following the wedding, close friends or relatives host festive meals in the new couple's honor. Each festive meal is called "*Sheva Berachot*," referring to the seven blessings that are recited there.

A beautiful event has now reached its conclusion, and a solid foundation of joy and blessing has been laid for the eternal edifice that is the Jewish home.

Mazal Tov!

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Letter to the Bride & Groom

TEXT OF THE LETTER THAT THE REBBE WOULD SEND UPON BEING NOTIFIED OF THEIR WEDDING PLANS

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ב"ה,	*By the Grace of G-d,*
ברוקלין, נ.י.	*Brooklyn, New York*
שלום וברכה!	*Greeting and blessing!*
במענה על ההודעה מקביעות זמן החתונה...	*In response to your notification that the date of your wedding has been set for...*
הנני בזה להביע ברכה ברכת מזל טוב מזל טוב ושהי' בשעה טובה ומוצלחת ויבנו בית בישראל בנין עדי עד על יסודי התורה והמצוה כפי שהם מוארים במאור שבתורה זוהי תורת החסידות.	*I would like to convey my blessings of mazal tov, mazal tov. May the wedding be held at a good and auspicious time, and may you build a home among the Jewish people, an everlasting edifice, upon the foundations of Torah and mitzvahs, as they are illuminated by the inner light of the Torah—that is, the teachings of Chassidus.*
בברכת מזל טוב מזל טוב	*With blessings of mazal tov, mazal tov,*
[חתימת יד קדשו]	*[The Rebbe's signature]*

Glossary

Badeken (Yiddish) The ceremony where the bridegroom covers the bride's face with a veil.

Chabad A Chassidic movement that emphasizes the importance of "*Chabad*," an acronym for the Hebrew words for "wisdom, understanding and knowledge"; the philosophy that studies the deeper dimensions of creation and G-d's relationship with the world.

Chatan Bridegroom.

Chupah Wedding canopy.

Hagafen Blessing recited on wine or grape juice.

Kabbalat Panim The reception that precedes the wedding ceremony.

Ketubah Marriage contract.

Kiddushin The first stage of the wedding ceremony. *Kiddushin* is accomplished when the groom gives the bride the ring.

Kittel (Yiddish) A long white frock traditionally worn by married men on *Yom Kippur*. Also worn by the groom under the chupah, symbolizing that it is his personal *Yom Kippur*.

L'Chaim (lit. "to life") A toast or blessing exchanged over strong drink.

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Mazal Tov Traditional congratulatory wish expressed for happy events.

Mechitzah Partition separating between men and women's sections in synagogue or at events.

Nisu'in Second and final stage of marriage (see *Kiddushin*), which is effected by standing under the marriage canopy and through the recitation of the *Sheva Berachot*.

Sheva Berachot The Seven Blessings recited under the wedding canopy and during the week of festivities that follows the wedding.

Tena'im Engagement contract.

Torah The body of Jewish religious teachings encompassing all of Jewish law, practice and tradition.

Yichud When the bride and groom are secluded following the chupah

Yom Kippur The "Day of Atonement." The fast day falling on Tishrei 10, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar.

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