

How to have a Jewish wedding that expresses your values

Alma and Dan, Limmud 2015

1. Birkat Eirusin – Betrothal Blessing

Traditional text

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us with the commandments, and who has commanded us concerning *arayot*, and who has prohibited to us women who are betrothed and who has permitted to us women who are married to us through *chuppah* and *kiddushin*. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, who sanctifies Israel through *chuppah* and *kiddushin*.

Alternative version

You abound in blessing, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us with the commandments, and who has commanded us concerning purity in the intimate realm (*ve-tzivanu al ha-to'har be-chayei ishut*), and has sanctioned exclusive intimacy within marriage by the ceremony of the *chuppah* and *kiddushin*. You abound in blessing, Adonai, Who blesses the People of Israel through *chuppah* and *kiddushin*.

2. Kiddushin – Betrothal

Mishna Kiddushin 1.1

A woman is acquired (*niknet*) in three ways, and she can get her freedom in two ways. She is acquired through money, through a written deed, or through sexual intimacy. By money: The School of Shammai say a *dinar* or the worth of a *dinar*. The School of Hillel say: A *perutah* or the worth of a *perutah*.

Talmud Kiddushin 2a

Why is it stated, 'a woman is acquired (*niknet*)'? For it is written, 'So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the border thereof round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession (*le-miknah*).

Bavli Kiddushin 5b

If a groom gives the bride money or its equivalent and declares “Behold you are sanctified to me”, she is *mekudeshet*. But if she gives it to him, and says “Behold I am sanctified to you,” she is not *mekudeshet*. Rav Papa says: ‘Thus it is only when he both gives and speaks that *kiddushin* is valid.

Rabbi Gordon Tucker comment on Bavli Kiddushin 5b (Kerem 5, 1997)

Now our understanding of marriage, a millennium after Rabbeinu Gershom ben Yehuda (960-1030 CE) and given the pervasive mutuality in our culture concerning marriage is such that active language on the part of the woman during *kiddushin* is anything but absurd, and thus can be part of a marriage formula in which the groom’s parallel and traditional declaration is not displaced. Given all this ... one can only conclude that this additional active declaration cannot invalidate the marriage. Anyone who feels otherwise should have the burden of proof.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (1895– 1986): Iggerot Moshe, Even Ha’ezer 3:18

In these things where, after the groom betroths with a ring, the bride also gives the groom a ring under the *chuppah* and says “I am betrothed to you” or “You are betrothed to me” certainly the *kiddushin* – since it was after she was betrothed according to the law – constitutes a valid *kiddushin* but these things are void and silly (*hevel ve-shtut*)...and if they would stipulate a double condition according to the laws of conditions that the *kiddushin* would be established only if she would also give him a ring afterwards also with a declaration certainly the *kiddushin* would be valid when the condition was fulfilled.

3. Edut Nashim – Female witnesses

Berachot 19b, Shabbat 81b and 94b, Eruvin 41b, Megillah 3b, Menachot 37b

Gadol kevod habriyot shedokkeh lo ta’aseh sheba-Torah – Great is the demand of human dignity in that it supersedes a negative principle of Torah.

4. Ketubah – Marriage contract

Literal translation Orthodox Aramaic

On the _____ day of the week, the _____ day of the month _____ in the year five thousand seven hundred and _____ since the creation of the world, the era according to which we reckon here in the city of _____ that _____ son of _____ said to this virgin _____ daughter of _____. “Be my wife according to the practice of Moses and Israel, and I will cherish, honour, support and maintain you in accordance with the custom of Jewish husbands who cherish, honour, support and maintain their wives faithfully. And I here present you with the marriage gift of virgins, two hundred silver *zuzim*, which belongs to you, according the law of Moses and Israel; and I will also give you your food, clothing and necessities, and live with you as husband and wife according to universal custom.” And Miss _____, this virgin consented and became his wife. The trousseau that she brought to him from her father's house in silver, gold, valuables, clothing, furniture and bedclothes, all this _____, the said bridegroom accepted in the sum of one hundred silver pieces, and _____ the bridegroom, consented to increase this amount from his own property with the sum of (one hundred) silver pieces, making in all (two hundred) silver pieces. And thus said _____, the bridegroom: “The responsibility of this marriage contract, of this trousseau, and of this additional sum, I take upon myself and my heirs after me, so that they shall be paid from the best part of my property and possession that I have

beneath the whole heaven, that which I now possess or may hereafter acquire. All my property, real and personal, even the shirt from my back, shall be mortgaged to secure the payment of this marriage contract, of the trousseau, and of the addition made to it, during my lifetime and after my death, from the present day and forever.” _____, the bridegroom, has taken upon himself the responsibility of this marriage contract, of the trousseau and the addition made to it, according to the restrictive usages of all marriage contracts and the additions to them made for the daughters of Israel, according to the institution of our sages of blessed memory. It is not to be regarded as a mere forfeiture without consideration or as a mere formula of a document. We have followed the legal formality of symbolic delivery (*kinyan*) between _____ the son of _____, the bridegroom and _____ the daughter of _____ this virgin, and we have used a garment legally fit for the purpose, to strengthen all that is stated above, and everything is valid and confirmed.

Attested to _____ Witness

Attested to _____ Witness

Egalitarian text with additions from ancient manuscripts

On the ___ day of the week, on the ___ day of the month of ___, in the year ___ from the creation of the world according to the traditional way of counting, here in ___ ,

We witness that the bride _____ said to the groom _____ : “You are consecrated to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel, and you will be my friend and partner in covenant (*chaveri ve-ish briti*¹), and I will cherish, respect and support you in the way of Jewish women, who cherish, respect and support their husbands faithfully,”

And the groom _____ said to the bride _____ : “You are consecrated to me according to the laws of Moses and Israel, and you will be my friend and partner in covenant (*chaverti ve-eshet briti*¹), and I will cherish, respect and support you in the way of Jewish men, who cherish, respect and support their wives faithfully.”

The groom accepted a ring from the one that his heart has chosen, and the bride accepted a ring from the one that her heart has chosen, in order to sanctify their marriage and to symbolise their love.

The bride and groom took upon themselves all the responsibilities of this marriage covenant as prescribed by the Torah and the Sages of blessed memory. They also accepted the conditions of this *ketubah*, that all silver, gold, jewellery, clothing, furniture and all their possessions, shall be in joint ownership.

Accordingly they both entered into this covenant of love and companionship, a covenant of peace and friendship. They aim to achieve a shared fulfilment of their emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual needs, and to create a Jewish home filled with integrity (*bayit neeman be-Yisrael*), lit by the light of learning (*mu’ar bi-me’or Torah*²) and open wide to all (*ve-patuach lirvacha*³).

This has taken place in our presence and all is valid and binding.

Attested to _____ Witness

Attested to _____ Witness

1. ‘My friend and partner in covenant’—*chaveri ve-ish briti*, Syrian and Palestinian ketubot from the tenth and eleventh century (Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *Jewish marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Geniza study*).
2. Lit by the light of learning—*mu’ar bi-me’or Torah*, Talmud Brachot 17a.
3. A home open wide to all—*bayit patuach lirvacha*, Pirkei Avot 1:5.

5. Eighth Blessing

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מקור החיים, המדבקנו זה לזו וזו לזה בקדושה יתרה, בחיבה ובאמונה. זכנו לאהבת נפש כאהבת יהונתן ודוד ולאהבת חסד כרות ונעמי, ותעמוד לנו זכות אבות ואמהות שבנו את עולמך באהבה. פתח לבבנו וייפתחו שערינו לכל האוהבים באמת ונרווה כולנו מלוא הכוס שמחה וחדווה. ברוך אתה יי, המרבה אהבה בעולם.

You abound in blessing, Adonai our God, Source of Life, who makes us cleave to one another in great sanctity, in love and in trust. May we be devoted to each other like Jonathan and David. May we experience mutual loving-kindness like Ruth and Naomi. May we receive the merits of our ancestors, who built Your world with love. May our hearts and our gates be open to all true lovers, and may we all drink from the cup of joy and gladness. You abound in blessing, Adonai, who increases love in the world.

For more information and Hebrew sources: almandan.org/ceremony

6. Further reading

Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*

Rabbi Nancy H. Wiener, *Beyond Breaking the Glass*

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Guy Izhak Austrian: *The Choices of Marriage: One Couple's Attempt to Create an Egalitarian Jewish Wedding Ceremony within the Traditional Framework of Kiddushin*