



The Manual
for your
Jewish Wedding

INTRODUCTION

"MAZEL TOV!"

Congratulations on your engagement. We hope your happiness will continue to grow and that you will lay the foundations for a beautiful home and family life.

Getting married is exciting, but at same time can make us nervous. The purpose of this manual is, firstly, to relieve as many anxieties as possible concerning the routine mechanics of the wedding. It will also outline the reasons for the Jewish marriage traditions and discuss the symbolism of each. The more you are aware of these, **the more meaningful and spiritually significant your wedding will be.**

By reading and following these guidelines carefully, the time you spend with your Rabbi will be quality time devoted to the more meaningful aspects of your marriage and your future. Should you have any queries, the Rabbi will be pleased to assist.

It is our humble hope that this Marriage Manual will contribute to the physical and spiritual enhancement of your wedding. May you merit to build a beautiful everlasting Jewish Home together.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Menachem M. & Rebbetzin Rochel Matusof

Rabbi: mmatusof@chabadalberta.org

Rebbetzin: rmatusof@chabadalberta.org

MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Too many couples spend months preparing for a wedding and precious little time preparing for marriage. We at Chabad Lubavitch of Alberta are very proud of the system that has been instituted for marriage preparation. A few months before the wedding date the Rabbi & Rebbetzin will personally meet with the couple getting married, at which time he will share valuable insights into marriage in general, family life, setting up a Jewish Home and the mechanics of a Jewish marriage.

The bride and groom will be expected to attend a few meetings and learning sessions. Some will be joined and some will be one on one, where Rabbi Matusof will meet privately with the groom and the bride will meet with Rebbetzin Rochel Matusof who will share with her the unique system of Jewish marital life with special emphasis on the *Mikvah*. The *Mikvah* is today acknowledged as a beautiful, spiritual experience and a way of drawing G-d into your marriage, by making Him an integral part of it. Increasingly, young women are discovering that the *Mikvah* system also enhances the physical relationship and helps create a strong husband-wife relationship that is in a state of continuous renewal.

The amount of meetings will vary based on previous knowledge and other considerations.

Couples wishing to avail themselves of other preparation programs are warmly encouraged to do so. Much useful reading material is also available. In general, the better prepared you are, the easier things will be later.

REGISTRATION AND DOCUMENTATION

There are several legal requirements for the Civil Marriage. Please supply the following information and documentation to the Chabad Office as soon as possible. These should be left for the Rabbi to review. Once reviewed The Rabbi or office will contact you to confirm that all is in order or that further action is required.

- a) Registration Package that includes the Brides info, Grooms info & one that is for both to complete together.
 - b) Copy of parents' *Ketuba* (Marriage Certificate). If this is unavailable, letters of confirmation can be obtained, on request, from the *Shul* where the marriage took place.
 - c) The venue of the proposed reception following the marriage service and the name of the caterer. As the reception is a continuation of the religious ceremony it is assumed that this reception will be **Kosher** under proper supervision.
 - d) If further details not covered in the registration form are available, please make note of them on a separate paper.
 - e) Divorced persons must produce proof of divorce from the *Beth Din* (Jewish Ecclesiastical Court) in addition to a certificate from the Civil Court.
 - f) Widows and widowers must present proof of death of the previous spouse.
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INVITATIONS

Most printers can help you with the wording and selection of your English copy. A Jewish wedding invitation should also have some Hebrew calligraphy. There are many options, all quite pleasing to the eye. Before printing the invitations, it is highly recommended to have them also approved by Rabbi Matusof, so we're all on the same page.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographers and video cameras are welcome (and encouraged) to film the wedding ceremony. Of course they must be aware not to interfere etc. The Rabbi will be happy to answer their questions and give them a quick rundown of the ceremony.

PURCHASING THE RING

The ring that the groom gives the bride is the most important object under the *Chuppah*. The groom makes the official proposal of marriage when he offers it to the bride. Her acceptance of the ring indicates her agreement to accept his offer of marriage.

Observed by two *Torah*-observant witnesses, this transaction makes the marriage legally binding according to Jewish law. It is therefore imperative that the ring be purchased by the groom and be entirely in his possession (of course he may delegate his best man to hold it for him). Under the *Chuppah*, he gives it to his wife to become hers permanently.

When purchasing the ring, make sure it is a plain round gold band without any settings or engravings. Creative designs to fit in with an engagement ring may be made after the wedding. Alternatively, a less expensive plain band may be purchased and fitted for the right forefinger, which is the finger actually used under the *Chuppah*.

DRESS & FASHIONS

One must be mindful of the fact that the wedding is a religious occasion. Quite a few blessings invoking the sacred name of G-d are recited. A wedding taking place in a Shul is additionally graced by the sanctity of the Synagogue and particularly the Holy Ark which is immediately in front of the Chuppah. It is therefore imperative that the fashion choices for the bride and her retinue be made with this in mind.

The bride or any ladies in the retinue should not contemplate low cut, sleeveless, backless, transparent garments or mini-skirts. Remember, what is fashionable on the dance floor is not necessarily fashionable at a traditional Jewish wedding.

Designers should be informed of a Jewish wedding's requirements. Do not be misled by designers who assure you that "everything is in order", when it is not. Rebbetzin Matusof will be available to advise you.

RETINUE MEMBERS

In a Jewish religious ceremony it is important that all participants be members of the Jewish faith. Should you wish to honour a non-Jewish person, you are encouraged to discuss it with the Rabbi. With some creativity, it can be done.

THE COUNTDOWN

There is a Jewish custom that bride and groom separate from each other's company one week before the wedding. Essentially, this is for religious, spiritual reasons. It also allows the individual some necessary solitude for personal introspection so important at this juncture of one's life. Furthermore, there are some sound psychological benefits. Firstly, in this final week we tend to be nervous and possibly even irritable. We might just say something we would regret afterwards. "Out of sight" helps keep things on an even keel.

Secondly the sense of anticipation is heightened when bride and groom have been apart for a while and the reunion at the *Chuppah* is that much more special. (when following this custom, if, for pressing practical reasons you must communicate, you may use the telephone).

THE SHABBAT BEFORE

Shabbat morning is when the traditional *Ufruf* takes place. This means that the groom is called up to the *Torah* for an *Aliyah*. (Don't worry it is not another *Bar Mitzvah*; all you need do is recite the blessings before and after.)

This *Aliyah* provides a dose of spiritual strength for the formidable task ahead. In the Holy Zohar (the classic of Jewish mysticism) it is written that before G-d created the world he looked into the *Torah* for inspiration. Likewise, before we build our own little world, we seek out the *Torah* and look to it for guidance and direction in life. Afterwards, the ladies in the family, may shower the groom with sweets. All Shull attendees join in this shower of sweets, and the children go for a candy hunt around the Bima! Aside for the traditional blessings this is said to bring, it also brings a smile to an otherwise somber occasion. The only obligatory *Aliyah* is the groom's; fathers and other family members are not mandatory honorees.

The *Rabbi* will endeavor to distribute appropriate honors to those present. It should be understood though, that these are optional and availabilities of honors will depend on how many other occasions are being celebrated at the Chabad Center on that day. After the service, there will be a congregational *Kiddush* which the families may wish to sponsor in honor of the *Simcha*. This should be arranged with the office and booked in advance.

THE WEDDING DAY

Besides being a very special day, this is a very sacred day. It is more than a twinning of bodies; two souls are being united. The wedding day is considered a personal Yom Kippur for bride and groom. The "good news" is that all your sins are forgiven and one is able to begin a new life unburdened by any failings of the past. The "bad news" is that it is customary to fast. Actually, this is not as difficult as it may sound. Rare indeed, are the bride and groom who have an appetite for food on this day. Nerves and a hectic schedule really do keep food off their minds. The fast begins at daybreak on the wedding and ends immediately after the *Chuppah*. One may brush teeth, gargle, shower, blow dry etc; only eating and drinking are forbidden. If there is a medical problem which necessitates some food, try and do with the absolute minimum, after discussing it with the Rabbi.

The purpose of fasting though, is not merely to squeeze into a tight dress (or tuxedo), but rather to be less in touch with the mundane so that the bride and groom can be more spiritual and better attuned to the sanctity of the day.

A DAY OF ATONEMENT

On *Yom Kippur* proper, we mention three main themes: *Teshuvah*, *Tefillah* and *Tzedakah* - repentance, prayer and charity. It is therefore recommended that bride and groom incorporate these three observances as a spiritual preparation for the wedding.

REPENTANCE

Fasting is associated with repentance. It puts us in the frame of mind for introspection and soul searching. On this day both bride and groom ought to spend a few private moments reflecting and meditating on ways in which they can enhance their own relationship as well as their relationship to G-d. A wedding is a new beginning and provides a wonderful opportunity to begin observing a new *Mitzva*. Undertaking a good firm resolution for the future is what *Teshuvah* is all about.

PRAYER

Bride and groom are encouraged to each put a "do not disturb" sign on their doors for a significant period during this day. Your prayers are very powerful on your wedding day. Use this gift wisely to pray to G-d for a happy, healthy marriage with happy, healthy children amidst abundant prosperity and *nachas*. Use your *siddur* and add your own personal prayer as well. If there was ever a day for a man to put on *Tefillin*, this is it. (One is, of course, encouraged to put on *Tefillin* every weekday). Traditionally, the afternoon prayer for *Erev Yom Kippur* is recited. This contains the *Al Chet* confessional.

CHARITY

Each of you should perform the *Mitzva* of *Tzedakah* by putting an amount of money (Whatever amount your heart desires, while taking the extra step...) into an envelope on the wedding day and earmarking it for the Jewish charity of your choice.

Additionally resolve to attempt to be more charitable in the future.

Doing what is right means putting the money where it belongs. That is the true definition of giving *Tzedaka*. Doing this in general and on your wedding day in particular is highly appropriate. Try to make it the foundation upon which your home is built.

The above three observances will prepare you for the solemn service which is to follow and will bring you blessings for your future married life.

THE WEDDING

KETUBAH SIGNING AND KABOLAS PONIM

Before the *Chuppah* is scheduled to begin, the *Keubah* is to be signed. The *Ketubah* is the authentic, traditional Jewish marriage contract and in it the groom pledges to support his wife. Long before the era of modern feminism and ante nuptial contracts, the *Ketubah* was protecting the rights of Jewish wives. The Rabbi will ask the groom to indicate his acceptance of this pledge by accepting from him an object and raising it up in his right hand in the presence of two witnesses. The two witnesses will affix their signatures. (Photographers are usually present at this point).

The Kabbalat Panim & Ketubah Signing is many times part of a small ceremony with Hors D'oeuvres, L'chayim & Songs.

BADEKEN (VEILING THE BRIDE)

The Rabbi will then lead the groom and fathers, followed by the male guests to the room or section where the bride is waiting with both mothers and female guests. As the groom approaches the bride, he will confirm that the bride is indeed the right woman. (This positive ID goes back to the biblical story of Jacob who mistakenly married the wrong sister. Ever since then, we've been double checking). He will then bring the veil forward to cover the bride's face. There is important symbolism here: the bride is demonstrating traditional Jewish modesty in covering her face. The groom hereby indicates that he is marrying this woman not only for her external charms, which are now veiled from view, but for her inner qualities. What he is essentially saying is that this relationship is not merely skin deep; it is profound and real. At this point the bride's parents (and grandparents) are offering their blessings to the bride followed by the grooms parents (and grandparents). We are then ready to get into position for the procession. Before we discuss the procession, a word about *Unterfihrrers*.

UNTERFIHRERS (CHAPERONES)

The notion that someone must "give the bride away" is actually not of Jewish origin at all. Once a girl becomes *Bat Mitzvah*, no one may give her away. Under the *Chuppah*, she will be giving herself to the man of her choice. It is traditional, however, for both bride and groom to be escorted to the *Chuppah* by *Unterfihrrers* (Chaperones). Bride and groom are king and queen and should not walk down the road unescorted.

In most cases, the parents of bride and groom meet these traditional requirements perfectly. Father and mother of the groom will therefore accompany him to the *Chuppah* and remain there. They will, almost immediately, be followed by the bride accompanied by her father and mother.

You may be assured that this system works smoothly and adds to the spiritual and aesthetic beauty of the *Chuppah* ceremony. If there are any problems regarding these arrangements, feel free to discuss it with the Rabbi.

THE PROCESSION

The order of the procession should be discussed with Rabbi Matusof. This following order is generally what the Rabbi recommends. This order follows the motion that it is more honorable for the king and queen to come in last!

- ◆ Best man and pole-holders (if any)
- ◆ Grandparents of the groom (if present)
- ◆ Flower girls, page boy (optional)
- ◆ Maid or matron of honor (optional)
- ◆ Grandparents of the bride (if present)
- ◆ Bridesmaids (optional)
- ◆ Groom, accompanied by his parents on either side, arm in arm
- ◆ The bride accompanied by her parents on either side, arm in arm

If there is a single grandparent, a grandchild from the retinue may wish to accompany him/her up the aisle.

Generally speaking, for the guests to appreciate and have a better view of the Chupah Ceremony and for better photos and video, the less people around the Chupah, the better. Based on who is standing under the Chupah, the Rabbi will guide as where everyone should stand. (The two appointed witnesses will need to be standing right by the Chuppah).

THE MUSIC

The music for the procession and Chuppah of your choice should be discussed with the Rabbi.

THE CHUPPAH

The Chuppah (canopy) symbolizes the Jewish home. The groom comes under the Chuppah first, designating this as his home. Once he has acquired a "roof over his head", his bride joins him in this new family venture. However, before she stands at his side, she wants to ensure that her home will be safe, secure and well protected from any harmful, outside elements. She therefore circles her groom and home, symbolically casting a protective aura and building a spiritual fortress around it. The parents of the bride and groom are encouraged to join her in the circling. The circle is repeated to a total of seven times, as seven represents the cycle of life and all areas of life are thereby protected. There is no need to rush. If the bride has a long train, the Maid of Honor should lift it at the steps and give it to the bride to hold over her arm before she begins circling.

Rabbi Matusof encourages the bride and groom to be standing facing the guests, while he stands on the side of the groom facing half way the bride and groom, and also the crowd. Remember, this is your day not the Rabbis'!

THE BLESSINGS

The Rabbi recites two blessings - one over the wine and the other on the consecration of the marriage. It is vital that bride and groom answer "*amen*" to each of these blessings as well as to the seven blessings (*sheva brachot*) soon to be recited by friends and relatives. "*Amen*" means "I believe in that" and it is an endorsement of the blessings just recited. Although whoever hears a blessing should always respond with "*amen*", it is bride and groom who will be doing the drinking and therefore the blessings are being recited especially for you. Your "*amen*" is therefore most important.

Bride and groom will then be given to drink from the cup, the groom by his father (or Unterfihrer) and the bride by her mother (or Unterfihrer).

THE RING

As mentioned previously, this is the single most important item in the *Chuppah* service. The best man gives the Rabbi the ring. The bride hands her flowers to her mother or maid of honor. She should not be wearing any jewelry as we must focus all our attention on the ring. Gloves, if worn, should be removed at this point. The groom places the ring on the bride's right forefinger. The "pointer" is used so that the two witnesses may have a clear view of her acceptance.

The groom recites the traditional words, which are actually his proposal of marriage. He places the ring on her finger loosely at first, then says: "*Harei At Mekudeshet Li B'tabaat Zu K'dat Moshe V'yisrael*" "Behold thou art betrothed to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel."

He then puts the ring on more securely. The bride's acceptance of the ring indicates her acceptance of the marriage proposal and as "action speaks louder than words," she need not recite anything. Accepting the ring is a most eloquent "I Do." From this point on, you are officially married.

THE KETUBAH

The Rabbi will then read the *Ketubah* in the original Aramaic.

THE ADDRESS

Sometime during the Chuppah Ceremony, the Rabbi will address the bride and groom with a short but hopefully a life lasting message. This is a personal message for you and can help set the tone for a secure future.

SHEVA BRACHOT

Thereafter, those chosen by the bride and groom (and confirmed with the Rabbi) will sing the *Sheva Brachot*. Again, remember to respond to each blessing with Amen. After the conclusion of the *Sheva Brachot*, bride and groom will again be given to drink from the cup of blessing by the other parents (or *Unterfihrrers*).

BREAKING THE GLASS

The glass will be placed at the groom's feet. The Rabbi gives a concluding blessing to bride and groom, their families and all present and will then explain that we break the glass in order to remember Jerusalem.

The fact that the Temple is still not rebuilt and Jerusalem not yet restored to all her former glory leaves us with a touch of sadness, even during our *Simcha*. It is appropriate that we recall the absence of our national joy during this time of our personal joy. Breaking the glass is our way of praying for *Moshiach*, the rebuilding of the Temple and an end to Exile and national insecurity. The glass is broken, the *Chuppah* ceremony is completed. Everyone exclaims "*Mazel Tov*". The Music and singing of *Mazel Tov* is now taking place, while everyone smiles to each other and some even wipe their tears of JOY!

MAZEL TOV!

Good wishes and embraces are exchanged by the family members under the *Chuppah*. What about the proverbial "first kiss"?

Regardless of whether the *Chuppah* is held in a ballroom or in a synagogue, Jewish law advises us that kissing in public is not recommended for bride and groom or husband and wife. A synagogue has an additional measure of sanctity being that it is built exclusively to express our love for G-d. Kissing people is considered mildly unfaithful to G-d and is therefore not correct *Shul* protocol. Certainly, for newlyweds to start "smooching" is inappropriate, especially if it is in front of the *Aron Kodesh* (the Holy Ark). And yet, some gesture of affection seems to be called for - so what do we do? The following is an excellent solution.

Seeing as the groom was the one who veiled the bride at the beginning of the *Chuppah*, let him now be the one to unveil her. As soon as the glass is broken, bride and groom should come closer to one another and he should remove the veil. Do this slowly and tenderly and look into each other's eyes meaningfully (this will make a very pretty picture indeed.) Make certain that the bride has informed the maid of honor that the groom will be removing the veil at the end of the ceremony. Bride and groom then lead the retinue down the aisle.

THE CIVIL MARRIAGE

Back in the bridal room, in the presence of the retinue, both bride and groom will sign the marriage register making the wedding civilly legal as well. In addition, there is a final document to sign in which both bride and groom state that should the marriage, G-d forbid, ever have to be dissolved, they both agree to do so by means of a *Get* - a Jewish Divorce. All signatures of the bride are to be in her maiden name. These documents

also allow us the opportunity of inviting the four parents or *Unterfihrrers* to be signatories as witnesses (unless bride and groom specifically wish to honor others).

YICHUD

All the documentation having been concluded, everyone is asked to leave the room and bride and groom have five minutes of privacy. This is known as *Yichud* - togetherness and it puts the finishing touch on the *Halachic* side of the wedding. It indicates that this couple is married; for prior to marriage a couple is not allowed to be closeted alone.

These few minutes are very special - an island in time. You have just been married, the nerves of the *Chuppah* are over, the tumult of the reception has not yet begun. It is therefore a natural and ideal time for the first expressions of marital love and affection. Surely a "first kiss" will be much more meaningful in the privacy of the bridal room than in front of crowds and cameras. This is also the perfect time for that special gift. Traditionally the groom would present the bride with her first set of silver candlesticks for *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* and the bride would present the groom with a big new *Tallis*. It is also customary to give one another a meaningful blessing for your upcoming life together.

Food will be set for you to break your fast (make sure to confirm this arrangement with your caterer in advance.) After the allotted time is up, the appointed witnesses will knock on the door, and leave. While this is the moment of your life, please also not to take too long, your guests are awaiting you at your reception venue.

THE RECEPTION

This is really a continuation of the religious ceremony. One should try to make the reception a *Yiddishe Simcha*. Jewish music and *hora* dancing create a unique atmosphere, which makes your wedding a special occasion.

If one is intent on having conventional, mixed dancing, this should be reserved until after the *Bentching* and *Sheva Brachot*, which officially conclude the religious celebrations.

Please feel free to discuss your reservations and plans with Rabbi and Rebbetzin Matusof.

It should also be mentioned that a woman vocalist presents a problem for Rabbis and other male guests who may be present. If this is being planned, again, please discuss this with the Rabbi or Rebbetzin.

HAMOTZI

Although it is often customary to invite Rabbis to recite the *Hamotzi* blessing over the bread at the beginning of the meal, it is actually more traditionally correct to honor the groom with this blessing. Rabbi Matusof will not be offended.

SPEECHES

Speeches at the wedding reception should, ideally, contain a concept about marriage from Jewish thought and Tradition. At least one speech should be of this nature, delivered either by a family member or the Rabbi.

SHEVA BRACHOT

Bentching and *Sheva Brachot* may be undertaken by any capable, knowledgeable individual. There is no requirement that it be performed by a "professional".

A WORD ABOUT NEW BEGINNINGS

My dear bride and groom,

As mentioned earlier, the Wedding day is your own personal *Yom Kippur* and therefore, gives you the rare opportunity of starting fresh with a new life, a new beginning.

I have seen too many young people commit a serious error of judgment. "Let's get organized first," they say. "Unpack the boxes, curtains, furniture etc. and then we will have time to think about loftier issues."

The trouble is, we are all creatures of habit. Change is a difficult thing. Once we get set into a routine, it is not easy to undo it. It is therefore very important to set into motion whatever new resolutions you aspire to for your home right from the very beginning of marriage. This is an ideal time for new beginnings because there are so many new things going on in your life anyway. One or two more will not unsettle you. Later, however, it becomes a major hassle.

I am referring specifically, now, to Jewish issues. Let's face it. Although you were told that you became a man and a woman at your *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvahs*, the truth is, that we don't really become independent until we get married and move out of our parental homes.

Therefore, it is vital that during your engagement period, you do more than just "go out". Sit and talk. Discuss your hopes, your dreams, your aspirations, what kind of family values you consider important. Discuss how Jewish you want your home to be. How about the kitchen? What will happen on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*? How does *Shul* feature in your lives? Would you like it to be a bigger factor than it currently might be? Also be sure to discuss setting aside time regularly to study *Torah*.

As independent young people you now need to start making some serious choices. No longer should you rely on Mom and Dad to make these decisions. It is yours to think about and to decide, together. If bride and groom come from very different families of origin, there may be some initial conflict over how things are done. You must sort these out before the wedding, or at least make a start.

As an independent family, the community will now look to you to help bolster its ranks. The Jewish community needs you to become active members and participate on all levels, whether religiously, socially or financially. It is important that you join a *Shul* in your own right.

When choosing a home, make sure to consider its proximity to the Synagogue of your choice. The children you will be bringing into the world, please G-d, need to see from the very beginning that they are part of a larger community, too. This strengthens their own Jewish identity. And speaking of children, some people are afraid to start a family until they are absolutely 100% certain that the marriage is right. That's a pretty defensive attitude. It does not exactly breed trust and confidence. The truth is that children cement a relationship. Have them sooner than later. (P.S. Your parents can't wait to become *Bubbies* and *Zaidies*).

So, use this wonderful time in your lives to grow together, to learn more about Jewish life together, and together may you be blessed to build an everlasting home in the House of Israel. G-d bless you!

Rabbi Menachem & Rebbetzin Rachel Matusof



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