

## PROCEDURAL STEPS OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT & WEDDING

This chart shows procedural steps for a typical Jewish orthodox wedding.

The first step is SHIDUCHIN, Aramaic for negotiating an association, in which a boy and girl agree to marry. According to Jewish law, whether a boy and girl will or will not become engaged to each other is up to them -- not their parents. For example, when an engagement is arranged by parents (which is common in Hasidic circles), the engagement may not be finalized without consent of the boy and girl. Conversely, the parents are not permitted to stop an engagement when the boy and girl want to marry each other. This is based on the rationale that (1) marrying the person you believe is right for you is a mitzvah, and (2) it is wrong to allow yourself to be dissuaded by anyone (even your parents) from performing the mitzvah. The great Jewish rabbinical authority Maharik wrote in the 1400s that "When parents object to a marriage, it is tantamount to their demanding that a commandment be violated. In such cases, there is no obligation to obey the parent." Apparently, In the 10 commandments, the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, to obey your parents, does not apply to your decision to marry.

Then the boy gives an ENGAGEMENT GIFT (savlon in Aramaic) to the girl. In ancient times, the gift was a gemstone. But now-a-days the gift is a gemstone mounted on a ring, so that it is more convenient for the girl to carry it around.

Next, the FAMILIES MEET. This is only fair, since the upcoming marriage will force the 2 families to be related to each other whether they agree to the marriage or not. So each family is entitled to see who it will soon be related to.

Then an ENGAGEMENT PARTY is held. The party is called a VORT, which in Yiddish means "word", because a "word of Torah" (dvar Torah) is said by the engaged boy at the party.

The week before the marriage is called the GOLDEN WEEK. It is customary for the 2 fiancées not to see each other this entire week before the wedding. Also during this week before the marriage, it is also customary for the 2 fiancées to visit graves of their deceased parents or grandparents to invite the deceased parents or grandparents to the wedding.

On the Shabbat before the wedding, an UFRUF is held in synagogue on Shabbat morning. At the UFRUF (which means "call up" in Yiddish), the groom is called up to the Torah to get an aliyah.

A few hours after the UFRUF, in the afternoon of that Shabbat, the groom attends a FORSHPIEL

party with his friends, and the bride attends a SHABBAS KALLAH party with her friends.

Before the wedding, the bride immerses herself in a mikvah.

The day of the wedding, most Jews have a custom for the bride and groom to fast from the time they awaken until the wedding ceremony, as though it were Yom Kippur, and for the bride and groom to recite certain Yom Kippur prayers

As the guests arrive at the wedding hall, while hors d'oeuvre are being served, the bride attends a festive music-filled reception of only women.

Concurrently, the groom attends a reception of only men. The men's reception is more subdued, with no music. In the men's reception room, 2 contracts are signed.

The first contract is a TANA'IM contract. It is executed (accepted) by the fathers of the bride and groom. The TANA'IM contract specifies when and where the upcoming wedding will be held. Now-a-days, fathers of the bride and groom execute the TANA'IM by grasping a cloth that the rabbi is holding (instead of signing it). Then 2 witnesses sign the TANA'IM contract to testify that the 2 fathers agreed to the terms of the TANA'IM contract. Then the mothers of the bride/groom break a china dish.

You may ask: What is the purpose of a contract that guarantees the bride/groom will show up for the wedding (at the agreed-upon date and place) if the contract is executed when the bride/groom are already at the wedding. The answer is that the TANA'IM contract as it is performed now-a-days has little practical purpose; it is vestige of an earlier form of TANA'IM contract that did have a practical purpose. Long ago, the TANA'IM contract was signed during the VORT party, when the boy and girl were initially engaged, which might be a year before the wedding. And the fathers of the boy and girl showed acceptance by actually SIGNING the contract, to guarantee that the boy and girl will show up for the wedding on the specified date and place. However, due to experiences of pogroms and WWII, the rabbis determined that, due to events beyond a father's control, it is unwise for a father of the boy or girl to guarantee that his child will be at the wedding next year, since the father does not know where his family will be next year or whether he will be able to find the other family (that he signed the contract with) the next year. So the rabbis changed the custom from executing the TANA'IM contract at the time of engagement to executing the TANA'IM contract at the

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time of the wedding. This was based on a principle in life that was articulated to me by a wise man Jeffrey Pickholtz who once told me "Never assume you know what will happen next year. Gd has his own plans."

The second contract signed in the men's reception room is a KTUBAH. The groom executes the KTUBAH by grasping a cloth held by the rabbi. Then 2 witnesses sign the ktubah, as testimony that the groom accepted the terms of the KTUBAH contract. The KTUBAH is a prenuptial agreement that specifies (1) what obligations the groom will carry out as a husband during the marriage and (2) how much he will pay his wife in alimony if/when they divorce. For specifically, the Ktubah specifies that the groom will provide his wife with food, clothing and marital relations during the marriage. The KTUBAH also specifies that, in case of divorce, the groom (1) will give the bride \$300 lump-sum alimony and (2) stipulates that the bride brought \$3K into the marriage (called naden in Yiddish and nedunia in Aramaic) that the groom will return to her upon divorce and (3) an \$3K extra alimony (called tosefta in Aramaic) that he will give to her upon divorce.

After executing the TANA'IM contract and KTUBAH contract, the groom and male guests leave the men's reception room, and walk down the hall to the bride's reception room. The groom walks over the bride and covers her face with her veil.

The groom, wearing a white kittel, walks down the aisle to the chupah, escorted by 2 friends or by his 2 parents or by the 2 fathers of the bride and groom.

The groom stands under the chupah (canopy).

Then the bride, wearing white dress, walks down the aisle to the chupah (canopy), escorted by 2 friends or by her 2 parents or by the 2 mothers of the bride and groom.

The bride circles around the groom 3 times or 7 times (depending on custom).

The ERUSIN=KIDUSHIN stage of the wedding (which reserves the bride exclusively to the groom) is the following:

The rabbi recites 2 brachas: (1) a bracha on a cup of wine and (2) a bracha thanking Gd for giving us the laws of marriage

The bride and groom sip wine from the cup.

2 witnesses observe the groom give the bride a ring as he recites "behold you are reserved to me with this ring according to the doctrine of Moses and Israel".

The gift the groom gives the bride under the chupah does not have to be a ring. It can be anything that (1) the groom owns outright and (2) is worth at least a couple cents and (3) does not misleadingly appear to be worth more than it really is (so it cannot be gold-plated or include a gemstone, either of which might make it appear worth more than it really is). Any gift that meets these 3 criteria may be used under the chupah, even a vegetable or a pencil. In Syria, it was a coin. In ancient Iraq, it was a cup. An advantage of it being a ring (vs a coin or cup) is that the bride can wear the ring the rest of her life as a memento of the marriage.

That concludes the KUDUSHIN phase of the chupah ceremony, which reserves the bride exclusively to the groom.

Then the rabbi reads the ktubah contract aloud.

Next is the NESUIN stage of the chupah ceremony, which weds the bride to the groom, as follows

(1) The rabbi, or different guests, read 7 brachas (called SHEVA BROSHOS), consisting of a bracha on wine, and 6 other brachas thanking Gd for creating man and creating the bride and groom happy with each other.

(2) The groom breaks a glass.

(2) 2 witnesses observe the couple seclude themselves (YICHUD) in a closed room for at least 8 minutes.

The couple are now married.

In this chart, the 2 steps that are printed in bold -- the steps of (1) witnesses seeing the groom give a gift to the bride while reciting "behold you are reserved to me..." and (2) witnesses seeing the bride and groom secluded in a room -- are all that is necessary for the wedding to be valid according to Jewish law. All the other steps are extraneous.

To illustrate this point: Most weddings cost over \$20K and take 5 hours. But a marriage that is equally valid under Jewish law can be done for 10 cents and in 10 minutes, by the bride/groom performing these 2 steps (using say an apple in place of a ring) in front of 2 witnesses. More specifically, 2 specially-designated witnesses would see the boy give the apple to the girl while saying "behold you are...and Israel" and then see the boy and girl seclude themselves in a closed room for at least 8 minutes .

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### SEQUENCE OF EVENTS OF JEWISH WEDDING

#### **BEFORE WEDDING DAY**

SHIDUCHIN=engagement  
GIFT TO BRIDE  
FAMILIES MEET  
VORT=ENGAGEMENT PARTY  
VISIT GRAVES  
UFRUF  
FORSHPIEL PARTY  
MIKVAH

#### **ON WEDDING DAY**

FAST  
WOMEN RECEPTION  
MEN RECEPTION  
TANA'IM contract (fathers)  
KTUBA contract (by groom)  
ERUSIN=KIDUSHIN  
walk down aisle  
stand under chupah  
bride circles groom  
2 brachas,  
**witnesses see groom give ring to bride while reciting "behold you are reserved..."**)

READ KTUBAH

#### **NISUIN**

7 brachas  
**witnesses see bride/groom seclude themselves in closed room**  
break glass