



The Hora

Traditions: The Jewish Wedding

A celebration of ancient traditions, religious devotion, friends, and family.

"Many of our Jewish couples begin incorporating their religious heritage even before their actual ceremony," says wedding planner Sojourner Auguste of Erganic Design, who received a Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University and spent several years in retail architecture before starting her own firm.

"They do it through their invitations, by adding their Hebrews names just below their English names. Others add the Hebrew 'Chai' symbol, which means 'living' and is related to the word 'life,' Chaim. The Hebrew letters that make up the word have a numeric value of 18, so giving money in multiples of \$18 is symbolic of giving 'chai' or life."

Throughout the week prior to the wedding, Orthodox couples do not see each other and are considered "royalty." They do not appear in public without a friend or relative, whose company ensures neither will be left alone during this exciting time.

On their wedding day they are viewed as being especially close to God, and take time for special prayers. These may include those requested by friends and family for others who are in need.

The Marriage Covenant ... "The ketubah is the Jewish wedding contract signed by the bride and groom, the rabbi, and two witnesses on the wedding day," says wedding planner **Nina Mercedes-Markiewicz of Events By Markz & Co.**, who was in the corporate event planning field for over 10 years before starting her own wedding planning company. "Ketubahs are available in Hebrew or English. The text depends upon a couple's degree of observance: orthodox, conservative, or reform, and the ketubah

A Crystal Plaza Wedding: Bride Rachel Tenenbaum, Sales Manager, North America ARZA World and Da't Educational Expeditions, and Groom Joseph Yuger, Manager, AT&T. Photos: Rick Helman Photography & Video, NJ-201.818.1514, NY-845.638.0221. www.rickhelmanphoto.com



The Bedeken

Photos: Rick Helman Photography & Video www.rickhelmanphoto.com

and designs."

A creative couple can design their own and have a calligrapher write the traditional contract. After the wedding, the ketubah is often framed and displayed proudly in the home.

"The ketubah sanctifies the rights and obligations of both the bride and the groom," adds Sojourner.

The signing of the ketubah is

Now the bride and groom see each other before the ceremony.

"Once the groom lowers the veil, the bride is given special blessings, usually by her father," continues Sojourner. "The groom, surrounded by enthusiastic friends, is escorted out of the room to prepare for the chuppah."

"For the ceremony, it's thoughtful to provide head-covering, yarmulkes, for the men to wear," says Nina, "and to

have them printed or embroidered with the couples' names and wedding date." To symbolize that their love provides all the wealth they need, the bride and groom do not wear jewelry to the ceremony. "Traditionally, only the bride receives a ring, but most couples today do exchange rings," says Nina.

The Chuppah ... The ceremony itself will take place under the chuppah, a special canopy on four poles. "The chuppah symbolizes that the bride and groom are creating a home together and that it will always be open to guests," says Sojourner. "This tradition originates from the biblical wedding between Abraham and his wife Sarah."

"Key family members often carry and hold the chuppah for the ceremony," says Nina. "The groom is then led to the chuppah by his father and father-in-law, followed by his bride with her mother and mother-in-law."

"Today, many couples enjoy the more modern tradition of having the groom led to the chuppah by his parents, while the bride is walked down the aisle by her parents. In both scenarios," adds Nina, "the parents will stand under the chuppah with the couple."



Under the Chuppah: Breaking the Glass

followed by the bedeken ceremony, the veiling of the bride. "The groom looks directly into her eyes, confirming she is his bride," says Sojourner. "Then he lowers the veil over her face."

"This represents the lesson learned from the story of Jacob," says Sojourner. "Instead of marrying Rachel, his true love, Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah, who covered her face with her veil so Jacob wouldn't know the truth until after the wedding."

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Under the Chuppah, with family

ish social and religious life for centuries, and the tragic deaths that occurred during that era. It also symbolizes the fact that the love and relationship of the couple is fragile, so it must be cared for and not broken.

Today, some couples may choose to have both the bride and groom break glasses together, to symbolize equality in their marriage.

When the groom smashes a glass with his foot and the guests shout "Mazel Tov!," offering congratulations and good luck, there is a specially decorated



The Hora, lifted high on the chairs

bag holding the glass. "It keeps all the glass pieces and is kept by the couple in their new home," says Sojourner.

"Sometimes the glass pieces are used in furniture or a garden, to become a permanent part of the home."

The Yichud is the time after the ceremony when the couple is alone for a short time as a married couple before joining their guests. "Some of our couples take as little as 15 minutes for their Yichud," says Sojourner, "while others have taken the entire cocktail hour!"

Traditional Wedding Dances ... "For the reception, the bride & groom often make a grand entrance in front of all their guests," says Sojourner. "Everyone immediately joins the dance floor for the Hora!"

The Hora is the circle dance or chair dance. "During the dance, the bride and groom are lifted above the shoulders of their guests," says Nina. "They're sitting on their chairs, waving handkerchiefs to each other or holding the ends of a single handkerchief, while a wide circle of guests dances around them."

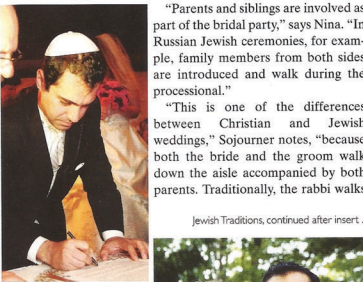
"A favorite Hora dance song is 'Hava Nagillah,'" says Sojourner. "Much of the dancing is done in large circles, or 'Simcha Dancing.' When the bride and groom are lifted onto chairs, they hold on for dear life, and everyone continues to dance and celebrate!"

At Orthodox Jewish weddings, it is considered a mitzvah, a good deed, to entertain the bride and groom. "Some guests may wear costumes, shake tambourines, do acrobatics, and even set their hats on fire," says Nina.

Mezike is a joyous dance towards the end of the simcha, the reception, which honors parents who have married off their last daughter or son. "The parents sit on chairs on the dance floor," says Nina, "while the guests dance in a circle around them. Sometimes the parents are crowned with a wreath of flowers, called the 'Krenzl.'"



Signing the Ketubah



"Parents and siblings are involved as part of the bridal party," says Nina. "In Russian Jewish ceremonies, for example, family members from both sides are introduced and walk during the processional."

"This is one of the differences between Christian and Jewish weddings," Sojourner notes, "because both the bride and the groom walk down the aisle accompanied by both parents. Traditionally, the rabbi walks

Jewish Traditions, continued after insert...



Blessing the Challah



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