

Weddings

“I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.”

— Song of Solomon 6:3

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The Modern Jewish Wedding

By Michele Schwartz, CLCEP

Among the most memorable Jewish wedding traditions, “breaking the glass” ranks near the top. At the end of the ceremony, the happy groom stomps a shrouded wine glass with a satisfying crunch (or as I recommend, an easy-to-smash lightbulb), and cheers of “mazel tov” fill the air. But Jewish weddings, from Orthodox to interfaith, present many additional opportunities to honor our heritage and faith. Here are five of my favorite Jewish traditions with contemporary twists for you and your groom – before, during and after your ceremony.

Before the Ceremony

Kabbalat Panim (Greeting Faces): Every bride wants to be Queen for a Day. Did you know that the concept is a Jewish one? In ancient ceremonies, the bride sat upon a throne-like chair, and friends and family of the bride came and greeted her. A modern update is a little pre-wedding celebration and beautification (mani-pedi? updo’s?) for the bride and her gals. Toast the bride with a little bubbly to make it special.

During the Ceremony

Hakafot is a little like “Ring Around the Rosy.” This tradition symbolizes the creation of a new sacred family circuit. The bride circles her groom seven times as she enters the chuppah. In modern weddings, the bride and groom circle one another, creating a sacred space around each other in front of the symbol of their new home, the chuppah.

Chuppah, which means covering in Hebrew, is the most recognizable symbol of a Jewish wedding. Designing a chuppah with your fiancé will be a special way for you both to create something symbolic and beautiful together. Unlike many other Jewish ritual objects like a tallit or mezuzah, there are few legal requirements for the chuppah. It just has to be open on all four sides. In other words, it can be symbolic or fun, adorned or simple. Most importantly it can represent who you are, or aspire to be, as a couple. You can make your chuppah just wide enough to hold the two of you and your officiant, or you can make it roomy and invite your entire wedding party to join you underneath the canopy. You can have a freestanding chuppah or invite honored family and friends to hold it over you.

After the Ceremony

Yihud means seclusion. Traditionally, it is inappropriate for unmarried men and women to be alone together; so, as soon as the bride and groom exited the chuppah, they would go immediately into a room of seclusion, symbolizing their new status as a married couple. No photographers, videographers or mothers allowed! Look into