# Jewish Wedding Traditions

A traditional Jewish wedding is full of meaningful rituals symbolizing the beauty and relationship between husband and wife, as well as their obligations to each other and to the greater community. The following is a guide to the law and customs we will perform at our wedding.

## Bashert

Bashert is a Yiddish word that means “destiny.” In Jewish life, this expression is taken quite seriously, since no one is considered to be a complete entity, and every person has a potential spouse who will fulfill their identity. According to the Talmud, even before a child is born, Hashem has already made his or her “match,” and, when the time is right, he or she will go in search of their “bashert” or soul mate. Kerri & John believe that they have found theirs in each other.

## Ketubah

The Ketubah is the Jewish marriage contract, with a legacy spanning two thousand years. It is typically signed by the couple and at least two witnesses. The original formulation was written at the end of the first century CE. It was a legal document that detailed some of the rights and obligations of the bride and groom. It offered some protection, in this case for the bride, in the event of divorce. Given the era in which it was written it was quite extraordinary, giving some legal rights to women in an age when they had few. Modern ketubah are typically spiritual, not legal, covenants that the bride and groom make with one another, and use egalitarian language. The ketubah is often written as an illuminated manuscript and becomes a work of art in itself. Kerri and John will frame theirs and display it in their home.

## Bedeken

This is the ritual veiling of the bride by the groom. The custom was developed from the biblical story o Jacob, who married Leah by mistake instead of Rachel, the woman he loved. John will lower Kerri's veil over her face as a special prayer is recited.

## Chuppah

The Chuppah, or marriage canopy, represents the home that Kerri and John will build together. The Chuppah has no walls to represent that marriage begins with just a roof. Kerri and John will build the walls with love and friendship, based on a foundation of love and respect. The Chuppah is open on all four sides, symbolizing a home that is open to family and friends.

## Circling

Circling is an old symbolic custom meant to represent the seven wedding blessings, the seven Torah verses that begin “when a man takes a wife,” and the seven days of creation. Although in ancient times the bride circled the groom seven times, Kerri and John will circle each other three times each, and then complete a circle together to represent their protection of and for each other.

## Birkat Erusin

The rabbi begins the ceremony with greetings to all present and to the bride and groom. He then recites the Birkat Erusin, the engagement blessing, over a cup of wine. The cup is filled to overflowing, as we hope that the lives of the bride and groom will overflow with blessings. John and Kerri will share a sip from the same cup to symbolize the life they will share together from this day forth.

## Ring Ceremony

The exchange of rings is the central act of the Jewish marriage ceremony. Under Jewish law, a verbal declaration of marriage is not legally binding; there must be an act of formal physical acquisition of some object of value. The continuous circle of the wedding rings represent the unity and harmony of marriage, which like the rings, have no end. The rings are placed first on the forefinger of the right hand, based on the ancient belief that this forefinger is directly connected to the heart. They are then moved to the fourth finger of the left hand in a nod to contemporary culture.

## Sheva Brachot

The Sheva Brachot, or seven traditional blessings, is the most ancient of the Jewish wedding traditions and the heart of the ceremony. Taken from the pages of the Talmud, the blessings recited by the Rabbi in Hebrew begin with the kiddush over wine and then give praise to God, pray for peace in the Holy Land, and wish joy and good luck to the bride and groom. Instead of a literal English translation of the blessings, Kerri and John have chosen a modern interpretation of the seven blessings to share on their wedding day, embodying the essence of the blessings, which are meant to convey a sense of joy and project happiness upon the new couple.

## Breaking of the Glass

The ceremony concludes with John stepping on a glass and breaking it. Traditionally this custom is a reminder of the destruction of the first temple and the may losses that have been suffered by the Jewish people. It is also a reminder that relationships are as fragile as glass, and must always be treated with care and love. A more contemporary interpretation is that the sound of the breaking glass travels through time and space to share the couples’ joy with all who have loved them, including those separated by time and distance. The sound signals all assembled to join together and joyously wish the new couple “mazel tov!” – congratulations!

## Yichud

Historically, yichud was the time when the bride and groom were left alone to consummate their marriage. Today, couples retreat for a few moments of private time at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony to share the first few moments of their marriage privately.

## Seduat Mitzvah

In Judaism, it is a mitzvah, or religious obligation, to rejoice with Kerri and John after the ceremony. The seudah shel mitzvah, or wedding reception, is itself a mitzvah to attend, since to celebrate joyfully will gladden the hearts of the newly married couple.