

WEDDING CEREMONY IDEAS FOR INTERFAITH COUPLES

FROM THE READERS OF
INTERFAITHFAMILY.COM

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Acknowledgments

At InterfaithFamily.com we receive many requests for help with weddings, from people looking for sample inclusive wedding ceremonies, and for rabbis who officiate or co-officiate at intermarriages.

In April 2005 we asked our readers to help us respond to these requests by sharing with us their own wedding ceremonies, or ceremonies they had attended or at which they had officiated. We said we were interested in weddings of every kind of interfaith couple--Jewish and any other religion (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.), Jewish and any other ethnic or cultural tradition, straight or gay.

We compiled ***Wedding Ceremony Ideas for Interfaith Couples*** from our readers' submissions and are pleased to make this resource available. We hope it will be helpful to interfaith couples and their relatives, and to clergy who officiate at their weddings.

This resource is not meant to be authoritative or comprehensive about the requirements of traditional wedding ceremonies of any religion. We urge readers to consult with clergy, and have also included a short list of excellent books and pamphlets on the subject.

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We would be glad to update this resource with your ceremony, and welcome your suggestions on ways to make the resource even more useful. Contact us at editor@interfaithfamily.com.

Edmund Case, President Heather Martin, Vice President Ronnie Friedland, Editor

Poems, Prayers and Readings

Sonnet XLII, Sonnets from the Portuguese, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Song Of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a

I hear my Beloved.
See how he comes
leaping on the mountains,
bounding over the hills,
My beloved is like a gazelle,
like a young stag.

See where he stands
behind our wall. He looks in at the window,
He peers through the lattice.

My beloved lifts up his voice,
he says to me,
"Come then, my love,
my lovely one, come.

My dove hiding in the clefts of the rock,

In covert of the cliff,
show me your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet
and your face is beautiful."

My beloved is mine and I am his.
He said to me:
"Set me like a seal on your heart
Like a seal on your arm.
For love is strong as death,
Jealousy relentless as Sheol.
The flash of it is a flash of fire,
A flame of the Lord himself."
Love no flood can quench
no torrent drown

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
when there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Sonnet XVII from Cien sonetos de amor, by Pablo Neruda

I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms
but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you, so close that your hand on my chest is my hand, so close
that your eyes close as I fall asleep.

Reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (two versions)

I Corinthians 12:31-13:8a

1. Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I am going to show you a way that is better than any of them.

If I have all the eloquence of men and women or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing.

If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all mysteries and knowing everything, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but am without love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I possess, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but am without love, I gain nothing.

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous or selfish, it does not take offense and is not resentful.

Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins, but delights in the truth. It is always ready to excuse, to trust and to endure whatever comes. Love does not end.

There are in the end three things that last; Faith, Hope and Love; and the greatest of these is Love.

2. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Responsorial Psalm

Based on Jeremiah 29:11 and 31:3, Isaiah 54:10, Micah 6:8, and I John 4:12

Reader: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

Response: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

Reader: It is God who speaks: The mountains may depart, the hills may be shaken, but my love for you will never leave you and my covenant of peace with you will never be destroyed.

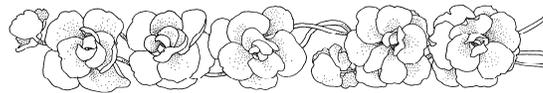
Response: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

Reader: I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you.

Response: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.

Reader: What is good has been explained to you. This is what God asks of you – only this: to act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with your God.

Response: I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you and you are Mine.



Apache Marriage Poem

Now you will feel no rain,
for each of you will be shelter for the other.
Now you feel no cold,
for each of you will be warmth to the other.
Now there is no more loneliness,
for each of you will be companion to the other.
Now you are two persons,
but there is only one life before you.
Go now to your dwelling to enter into
the days of your togetherness.
And may your days be good
and long upon the earth.

From Al-Fatiha (The Opening), the Holy Qur'an

In the name of God, the infinitely Compassionate and Merciful.
Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds.
The Compassionate, the Merciful. Ruler on the Day of Reckoning.
You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help.
Guide us on the straight path,
the path of those who have received your grace;
not the path of those who have brought down wrath, nor of those who wander astray.
Amen.

Psalm 128

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in God's ways.
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well
with you.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive
shoots around your table.

Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.
The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of
your life.

May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

From The Little Prince, by Antoine de Saint Exupery

The little prince saw a rose garden. "You are not at all like my rose," he said to the flowers. "No one
has tended you and you have tended no one."

"You are beautiful, but you are empty," he explained. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think
that my rose looked just like you. But in herself alone my rose is more important than all the
hundreds of other roses: because it is she that I have watered . . . because it is she that I have
sheltered . . . because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even
sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is my rose."

The little Prince understood that it is his commitment to his rose that makes it so important. You
become responsible, forever, for what you have tended.

Nuptial Blessing

Let us ask God for his continued blessing on the bride and the groom: Lord, may your fullest
blessing come upon them so that they may together rejoice in your gift of married love. May they be
noted for their good lives and be parents filled with virtue. May they be glad that you help them in
their work and know that you are with them in their need. May they reach old age in the company of
friends and family.

Always Love Each Other, by Larry S. Chengges

If you can always be as close and happy as today,
Yet be secure enough to grow and change along the way.
If you keep for you alone your love as husband and wife,
Yet find the time to share your joy with others in your life.
If you can be as one and walk through marriage hand in hand,
Yet still support the goals and dreams that each of you have planned.
If you dare to always go your separate ways together,
Then all the wonder of today will stay with you forever.



Shehechyanu

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam shecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are You, O God, for giving us life, sustaining us and allowing us to reach this joyous time.

Birth is a Beginning, by Rabbi Alvin Fine

Birth is a beginning, and death a destination.
And life is a journey, from youth to age,
From foolishness to discretion, and then perhaps to wisdom.
From health to sickness, and back, we pray, to health again.
From offense to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion, and grief to understanding
From defeat to defeat to defeat.
Until, looking backward or ahead, we see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey, stage by stage, a sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning, and death a destination.
And life is a journey, a sacred pilgrimage--
To life everlasting.

Acknowledgement of Different Faiths

Today, [bride] and [groom] have chosen to marry. Their love unites two different lives, families, and faiths. While appreciating the differences between their traditions, [bride] and [groom] believe that being together is far better than being apart. Because of their commitment to each other, I have asked them to remember that although their faiths have different histories, it was not always so. I have asked the bride to remember that Yeshua (whom Christians call Jesus) was a Jew, who interpreted his Jewish traditions in a particular historical moment. And I have asked the groom to remember that many Christian traditions have their roots in Jewish traditions, but that the traditions have been interpreted differently in particular historical moments. Out of these two distinct traditions, [bride] and [groom] have come together to honor the best of both, and to focus on their similarities rather than their differences.



The bride and groom have created this ceremony. They have drawn on elements of both their faiths and traditions to create something that is meaningful to them. We begin with two readings that are particularly meaningful to the bride and groom.



This ceremony is a tribute to the bride and groom's creativity and mutual respect. It joins their cultural traditions and memories and symbolizes their wonderful commitment to honoring their very different roots. It testifies to their eagerness to share with one another the wealth of their individual heritages and, at the same time, to build together a unique partnership based on sharing, on joy, on learning, and on celebration.



[Bride] and [groom] have created this ceremony. They have woven from threads of two traditions a fabric that represents who they are together. Out of two different and distinct traditions, they have come together to learn the best of what each has to offer, appreciating their differences, and confirming that being together is far better than being apart from each other. As we bless this marriage under the chuppah, the Jewish symbol of the new home being consummated here, we will later light the unity candle, the Christian symbol of two people becoming one in marriage.

Blessing Over the Wine

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share this cup of wine, you undertake to share all the future may bring. May you find life's joys doubly gladdened, its bitterness sweetened, and all things hallowed by true companionship and love.

Two cups are before you. By your choice, only one of the cups is reserved for the two of you alone. You decided to share the first cup with those who have been partners in your lives thus far, the ones who have helped to make you the individuals you are.

This cup of wine symbolizes the gratitude [bride] and [groom] have for the loving care and teaching of parents, the ties of heart and mind and memory that link brothers and sisters, and for the friendships that fill this cup to overflowing.

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the fruit of the vine.



Although you are two distinct persons, both respecting the dignity of the other, you have chosen to unite your lives and to seek your happiness together. Your individual joy will be all the greater because it is shared. Your individual fulfillment will be all the stronger because it rests in the fulfillment of the other.

We have come to the moment of the service when you will share a cup of wine – not just once, but twice, to honor both of your heritages.

In the culture of the Jewish people, wine is the symbol of happiness. Take this goblet and drink the wine as an affirmation of your hope for the future, a future that welcomes your dreams and makes them real.

Ashray hehatan v'hakalla sheyimtzo ahava b'nee-soo-eeen.

Happy are the man and woman who find love in marriage.

Drink from the cup.

We also honor the ancient Chinese wedding tradition of tuan yuan [twen yu-wen], or “completing the circle.” The wine cups are tied together with a red string. Reminiscent of the weddings of the Sung dynasty, the partners sip the wine, then cross arms to exchange the cups and drink again. The sharing and mingling of the wine symbolizes a harmonious married life.

Drink from the cup, cross arms and drink again.

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share the cup of wine, you undertake to share all that the future may bring. All the sweetness life's cup may hold for you should be sweeter because you drink it together; whatever drops of bitterness it may contain should be less bitter because you share them.

Two thoughts are suggested by this cup of wine. The first is that wine is a symbol of the sweetness we wish for your life. There will be times when you drink from other cups, from bitter ones; but life offers opportunity to savor the sweetness. The awareness of the possibility of a life filled with true meaning is what we toast: the good that is life. The second is that wine is a symbol of sharing. You have shared many years together, and out of this time has grown the love which brought you to this day. As you continue to share in each other's life, you will, as a symbol of this enduring cooperation, share this cup of wine. As you share this cup of wine, you share all that the future may bring.



Ring Exchange and Vows

The groom's giving and the bride's acceptance of a ring is the central act of the ceremony. The Hebrew declaration that they'll say in English - called "ha-ray aht" – "With this ring you are sanctified to me as my (spouse)" - contains thirty-two letters. In Hebrew, the number thirty-two is written with letters that spell the word "heart." The groom and bride are thus giving their heart to each other as they recite these words.

[Editor's Note: The traditional formulation of the "ha-ray aht" begins with "Ha-ray aht m'ku-de-shet lee, b'ta-ba-at zo," which means "By this ring, you are consecrated to me," and ends with "k'dat Moshe v'Yisrael," which means "in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel." Formulations of the "ha-ray aht" used by rabbis who officiate at intermarriages include the following alternative endings:

- "l'fee emunataynu," "in the eyes of God"
- "be-aynyi Elohim v'adam," "in the eyes of God and humankind"
- "k'dat Elohim oo-v'nay adam" "in accordance with Divine and human law"
- "k'dat yisrael v'ahava," "in love and equality" (literally "in accordance with the religion of Israel and in love"
- "k'derech no-ha-gey yisrael b'a-ha-va u-v'ka-vod," "according to the traditions of the people of Israel in love and in respect"

Some rabbis who officiate at intermarriages, instead of using the "ha-ray aht," use "Ani L'dodi v'dodi lee," which means "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."]



Bride and Groom:

I promise to love you, to respect you, to laugh with you, and to soothe your tears. I promise to share my life openly and honestly with you and to encourage and nurture your growth. Together, we continue this journey of exploration, trust, and communication. I promise to savor each day, reveling in our loving relationship and in pursuit of our happiness.

These rings in their unbroken wholeness are tokens of your union and of your love. They represent the enduring trust and affection that you bring to one another, and are the outward and visible symbols of an inner spiritual bond.

[Bride] and [Groom], please repeat after me:

With this ring, I join my life with yours in loving kindness, compassion, and faithfulness.

[Place the ring]

You are my beloved and you are my friend.



Bride: Garlands of unity

Groom: and all our closest and dearest surround us

Bride: blessings like these come once in life
Groom: good fortune smiles upon us
Bride: we are honored by the presence
Groom: of family, friends and the divine spirit
Bride: let all your smiling eyes bear witness
Groom: I present to you my heart and soul as your husband and friend
Bride: I present to you my heart and soul as your wife and friend



As by these rings you symbolize your marriage bond, may their meaning sink into your hearts and bind your lives together by dedication and faithfulness to each other. Truly, then, will these rings celebrate the words of the Song of Songs (8:6-7):

Wear me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
(For love is infinitely strong ...)
Many waters cannot quench love;
No flood can sweep it away ...

(Groom)
I give you this ring as a sign for all to see of the commitment I have made to you.

Ha-ray aht m'ku-de-shet lee, b'ta-ba-at zo, l'fee emunataynu.

Be consecrated to me as my wife in the eyes of God.
With this ring I join my life with yours.

(Bride)
I give you this ring as a sign for all to see of the commitment I have made to you.

Ha-ray atah m'ku-de-shet lee, b'ta-ba-at zo, l'fee emunataynu.

Be consecrated to me as my husband in the eyes of God.
With this ring I join my life with yours.



I, [Bride], take you, [Groom], to be my loving husband.
And I promise you, before God and these witnesses, that I will be to you a true and loving wife;
true to you in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and adversity;
and that forsaking all others I will keep myself for you, and to you only, all the days of my life.

I, [Groom], take you, [Bride], to be my loving wife;
And I promise you, before God and these witnesses, that I will be to you a true and loving husband;
true to you in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and adversity;
and that forsaking all others I will keep myself for you, and to you only, all the days of my life.

The wedding rings are symbols of attachment and fidelity in Jewish tradition. The ring represents the cycle of life and a link in the chain of generations.

These rings are tokens of your union and of your love. Wedding rings are regarded as fitting symbols of marriage because they are fashioned to have neither a beginning nor an end. They represent the enduring trust and affection that you bring to one another and are the outward and visible symbols of your inner spiritual bond.



Groom: In the presence of God and before our family and friends I, [Groom] choose you, [Bride] to be my wife, to have and hold from this day forward, secure in the knowledge that you will be my constant friend, my faithful partner in life, and my one true love. I promise to share with you in times of joy as in times of trouble; to talk and to listen; to honor and appreciate you; to promise for and support you in trust and in love.

Bride: In the presence of God and before our family and friends I, [Bride] choose you, [Groom] to be my husband, to have and hold from this day forward, secure in the knowledge that you will be my constant friend, my faithful partner in life, and my one true love. I promise to share with you in times of joy as in times of trouble; to talk and to listen; to honor and appreciate you; to promise for and support you in trust and in love.

Rabbi: We have all witnessed your exchange of vows. Now is the time to affirm your love and commitment by exchanging your rings. Wedding rings are enduring symbols of affection and trust

that you share for one another. The wedding rings are the outward and visible symbols of an inward and spiritual bond, signifying the uniting of this man and this woman in marriage. The rings are made of precious metals, indicating the preciousness and abiding value of the love, which they symbolize. They are made in the form of a circle; they have neither beginning nor end, signifying the eternal and infinite nature of the bride and groom's love for each other. In wearing these rings, you proclaim your intent to reflect this loving relationship with one another.

(Rabbi with bride and groom repeating short phrases after him)

As you, [Groom], place this ring on [Bride]'s finger, say to her these words:

Groom: With this ring, I thee wed. I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and respect, forsaking all others. I promise to love you and care for you, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, from this day forward.

As you, [Bride], place this ring on [Groom]'s finger, say to him these words:

Bride: With this ring, I thee wed. I take you to be my husband, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and respect, forsaking all others. I promise to love you and care for you, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, from this day forward.

In keeping with the declaration you have made, you have given and received these rings. They are a token of your union, a symbol of enduring love. May they remind you that your lives are to be bound together by devotion and faithfulness.



(To the Groom)

The woman who stands by your side is about to become your wife. She will look to you for gentleness, for support, for understanding, for encouragement, and for protection. You must never take [Bride] for granted, but be continually sensitive to her needs. Your life and love will be [Bride]'s greatest source of joy.

[Groom], will you take [Bride] to be your wife? Will you love and respect her? Will you be honest with her always? Will you stand by her through whatever may come? Will you make whatever adjustments are necessary so that you can genuinely share your life with her?

(To the Bride)

The man who stands by your side is about to become your husband. He will look to you for gentleness, for support, for understanding, for encouragement, and for protection. You must never take [Groom] for granted, but be continually sensitive to his needs. Your life and love will be [Groom]'s greatest source of joy.



[Bride], will you take [Groom] to be your husband? Will you love and respect him? Will you be honest with him always? Will you stand by him through whatever may come? Will you make whatever adjustments are necessary so that you can genuinely share your life with him?

Marriage Vows

I, [Groom], take you, [Bride], to be my wife, my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion; to share my life with yours. To build our dreams together, while allowing you to grow with your dreams; to support you through times of trouble, and rejoice with you in times of happiness; to treat you with respect, love, and loyalty through all the trials and triumphs of our lives together: and to give you all the love I can give my whole life long.

I, [Bride], take you, [Groom], to be my husband, my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion; to share my life with yours. To build our dreams together, while allowing you to grow with your dreams; to support you through times of trouble, and rejoice with you in times of happiness; to treat you with respect, love, and loyalty through all the trials and triumphs of our lives together: and to give you all the love I can give my whole life long.

Candle Lighting

Out of two different and distinct traditions, the bride and groom have come together to learn the best of what each has to offer, appreciating their differences, and confirming that being together is far better than being apart from each other. As we bless this marriage under a chuppah (wedding canopy), this Jewish symbol signifies that the bride and groom are joining together under one roof.

A marriage brings together two individuals, with separate lives, to perform the lifelong pledge of uniting as one. The lighting of a unity candle is a Christian symbol of two people becoming one in marriage. These candles before us symbolize the union of your marriage. The two outer candles represent the two of you as individuals. The center candle, which you will kindle together, represents the unity which will continue to develop as you are married. The external candles will remain lit, to show that, even in your unity, you may also remain as individuals.

[Mothers light the individual candles, Bride and Groom light the unity candle while music is played.]



Candlelight symbolizes the commitment of love these two people are declaring today. Before you, you see three special candles. The two smaller candles, lighted prior to the ceremonies by their mothers, symbolize the lives of the bride and groom as individuals. In marriage, they do not lose their individuality, yet are united in so close a bond that they become one. They will now light the large center candle from the smaller candles to symbolize this new reality.

A famous mystical rabbi, Baal Shem Tov, who lived centuries ago, said:

From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. And when two souls are destined to find each other, their two streams of light flow together and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being.



To begin this wonderful ceremony, I would like to invite the two mothers to light the unity candle. In lighting these candles the two mothers honor the lives of their children, the lives they brought into this world. To the bride and the groom, the lighting of these candles symbolize the joining of two families. The two side candles represent the young couple's individual lives and how each is unique and special. The center candle represents the new oneness they are choosing in marriage. In mutual up building, they give to one another: light, warmth, guidance, and love. But in marriage, the self is not extinguished. The side candles remain lit because wholeness and fullness of life depend upon the balance of individuality and togetherness. As the two mothers light their candle, they offer their love, respect, and support for this marriage.



The tradition of the Unity Candles are meant to symbolize the stages of your lives. The two lit candles represent your lives to this moment. They are two distinct lights, each capable of going its separate way. To bring joy and radiance into your home, there must be a merging of these two flames into one.

As you each take a candle and together light the center one, you will extinguish your own candles, thus having the center candle represent the union of your two lives into one flesh. You begin to light the center candle as I say: “As this center light cannot be divided, let not your lives be divided. From this time onward may your thoughts be for each other rather than on your individual selves; may your plans be mutual, your joys and your sorrows shared.”



Before you are three candles. The two smaller candles symbolize the individual lives of the Bride and Groom. As they reflect on their lives, the Bride and Groom wish to express their gratitude to their parents.

Bride and Groom read:

The Fifth Commandment is to honor thy mother and father. We thank our parents for the many sacrifices they made on our behalf, the guidance they give us, and the wonderful role models they have been. The parents, have experienced the challenges and joys of marriage, but through it all they have stayed together and passed on their values to their children. We hope and pray that we will be as successful in marriage as our parents.

The third candle symbolizes the combination of these two strong families. Today, the bride’s parents acquire a son, and groom’s parents acquire a daughter, a new experience for each couple. We invite them to come forward and light the large candle to symbolize the joined families.

Bride and Groom each light a small candle. Then our parents use those candles to light the larger candle.



For this ceremony we used a seven-branched candelabra. What made it poignant was that the bride and groom recited in each other’s languages the names of those their partner chose to memorialize.

Standing before us are candles waiting to be lit. Once kindled, light shows us the way. Endowed with love, light gives renewed strength. Light, that beacon of hope, kindles warmth within our hearts, wisdom in our minds, and passion in our souls.

Candle lighting has been traditionally used in a variety of ways in Jewish tradition. The bride and groom have chosen to use candlelight during their wedding ceremony to remember those that are especially missed on this day. The bride and groom have benefited from the love, devotion and



guidance of those who have come before them and in whose memory they will now light these candles.

The Seven Blessings

In the Jewish tradition, brides and grooms are blessed with seven wedding blessings. Six of these blessings thank God for creating the world, man and woman, peace and harmony, and the joy of the bride and groom. The seventh, the blessing over the wine, symbolically sanctifies this day and this marriage.

[Bride] and [Groom] I now bless you with these traditional blessings.

(Hebrew before English for each blessing)

Blessed are you, God, who created life.

Blessed are you, God, who created man and woman.

Blessed are you, God, who unites man and woman.

Bless these two who stand before you as you blessed the first couple in the Garden of Eden.

Blessed are you, God, who grants the joy of marriage.

May we all see the day when the world will echo with the sounds of feasting and singing. Praised is love, blessed be this union.

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share this cup of wine, you promise to share all that the future may bring. As you drink from this cup, so may you draw contentment, comfort, and happiness from your own cup of life. May you find life's joys heightened, its bitterness sweetened, and all things hallowed by true respect, companionship and love.



The First Blessing is "Kiddush" – sanctification of God's name over the wine.

The Second and Third Blessings celebrate the theme of creation in a sequence that builds to the blessing of marriage.

The Fourth Blessing is a challenge to fulfill the potential for creativity, blessing, and peace.

The Fifth Blessing affirms that the bride and groom's marriage is made up of both passion and friendship.

The Sixth Blessing blesses the bride and groom separately. Their relationship as beloved companions requires that each be able to stand alone even as they come together, bringing individual gifts to the marriage.

The Seventh Blessing brings the bride and groom to rejoice together, united in gladness, surrounded by ten shades of joy and a chorus of jubilant voices.



May you be generous and giving with each other.

May your sense of humor and playful spirit always continue to enliven your relationship.

May you always respect the diversity of humankind.

May you act with compassion to those less fortunate and with responsibility to the communities of which you are a part.

May you appreciate and complement each other's differences.



May you always share yourselves openly with your friends and family.
May your home be a haven of blessing and peace.

Blessed are You God, Source of the world, who creates the fruit of the vine.
Blessed are You God, Light of Life, who created everything for your glory.
Blessed are You God, Spirit of all things, who has created the human being.
Blessed are You God, Foundation of every life, who fashioned humanity in Your likeness, and prepared for us a shape and form in your image, from one generation to the next and for all eternity.
Blessed are You God, who has created human beings.
Zion will surely celebrate and exult in the coming together of her children. Blessed are You God, who brings joy to Zion through her children.
Give pleasure to these beloved companions as you did to your creation in the Garden of Eden so long ago. Blessed are you God, who makes the hearts of this couple rejoice.
Blessed are You God, Source of the universe, who has created each of these two people, their delight and their happiness, their rejoicing and singing and dancing and festivity, love and friendship, peace and pleasure. Oh God, may the voices of this celebration be heard in the streets of our cities and the hills of our countryside. May the words of this couple go out with gladness from their wedding chuppah, and may the music of their friends and guests surround them. Blessed are You God, who brings joy to the hearts of this couple.



Blessed are thou, creator of a universe splendid in its integrity.
Blessed are thou, creator of man and woman.
Blessed are thou, who has fashioned us in your image and has established marriage for the fulfillment and perpetuation of life.
Blessed are thou, who art the source of all gladness and joy. Through you we attain affection, companionship and peace.
Grant, O Eternal, that the love which united this bridegroom and bride may grow in abiding happiness.
May we all see the day when the world will echo with the sounds of feasting and singing. Praised is love; blessed be this union.

Ending the Ceremony

Concluding Prayer

You have now affirmed before God, your families, and your friends your bond of love and commitment. You have come from different backgrounds. You have walked different paths. You are different individuals. Your love has transcended these differences. In the years before you, may the richness of the traditions that have nurtured you enhance and brighten your lives and others' as you help to create and shape the future.

May the spirit of love be ever a part of your lives, so that the union we here celebrate this day be worthy of continued celebration tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Yivarechecha Adonai v'yismerecha.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

Ya-er Adonai panav aleilcha vichuneka.

May God's countenance be lifted upon you and may God be gracious to you.

Yisa Adonai panav aleichca v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May God's countenance be upon you, and may God give you peace.

Pronouncement of Marriage

You have both joined voluntarily in this ceremony of marriage, and have been formally united as husband and wife in the presence of your family and friends. As you have declared openly your clear intentions to be considered before all the world as a married couple, and have exchanged rings and vows attesting thereto, it is my pleasure and honor to pronounce you husband and wife.

Breaking of the Glass

We conclude the ceremony with the traditional breaking of the glass. The breaking of the glass, like the commitment you make today, is irrevocable and permanent. As the groom breaks the glass, I invite everyone to shout, "Mazel Tov" which means "Congratulations and Good Luck!"



We have come to the final act of this service, which will actually be observed with two final scenes each a link to your different heritages.

First, you will enact an age-old Chinese ritual of bowing, first to your ancestors, then to your parents and friends, and finally to yourselves.

[Bow to candles, parents, each other.]

Now, in keeping with the Jewish custom, we will end the service with the ritual breaking of the glass. This ceremony seems to have as many explanations as there are rabbis officiating at weddings.

For some, the glass is supposed to remind us of all the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people over the centuries, starting principally with the destruction of the temple.

For others, it is a reminder of the fragility of life and all human relationships.

For the romantics among us, and surely there are still a few left, it is supposed to be as difficult to put the glass back together as it is to break the newly married couple apart.

Anthropologists offer the appealing idea that the sound of the breaking glass is intended to scare away the evil spirits which prey on couples and try to wreak havoc in their relationship. Since we're inclined to look for the repressed, core explanation underlying our modern rituals, this answer is appealing, but since the only demons we're afraid of reside deep within us, we doubt the loud noise will do much to scare them away.

The bride and groom also think the ritual is just plain fun, and that is reason enough to perpetuate it. Fun is good. Breaking the tension is also good. Breaking things and not getting punished for it, is good too.

So now, if for nothing more than the sake of tradition, the groom will break the glass. Let it signify, once and for all, that he and the bride are husband and wife and that it is time to begin the celebration of their marriage.

[The glass is stepped on.]



Since this is an interfaith couple, let us, with this symbol, be particularly mindful of the needless barriers that people erect between one another, and try to think, with the breaking of the glass, of breaking down those barriers and helping to build a world of respect, unity and peace.

Sample Program Definitions

Ketubah

- Marriage contract with spiritual significance but not legally binding.
- A Jewish legal marriage document with a legacy spanning two thousand years. It is typically signed before the wedding ceremony by the bride and groom and at least two witnesses. The original formulation was written by Shimon ben Shetach, head of the ancient rabbinical court 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 ketubot 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. Many couples frame it and display it in their home.

Chuppah

- Wedding canopy that signifies a home or shelter.
- Surrounded by loved ones whose joy and prayers are with you, you stand at this chuppah, a symbol of your new home. Its four sides are open, symbolizing the importance of community and of participation in each other's lives. Friends and family fill the home. May your home be a shelter against the storms, a haven of peace, a stronghold of faith and love.
- A Jewish wedding canopy that usually consists of four poles with a tallis (Jewish prayer shawl) suspended between them. At one time, the chuppah was the marriage tent or room in which the bride and groom consummated their marriage; today it has many meanings. Primarily it symbolizes God's presence and the new home the couple will create together. The sides of the canopy remain open to symbolize the importance of the couple's involvement in their general community and with their family and friends.
- The bride and groom are brought to the chuppah (wedding canopy) by both parents. It is a symbol of the home to be built and shared by the couple. It is open on all sides, just as Abraham and Sarah had their tent open all sides to welcome their friends and family. Four friends and family members will hold up the poles of our chuppah, symbolizing the importance of family and friendship in supporting and strengthening our home.

Unity Candle

- The lighting of the unity candle symbolizes the merging of two families into one.
- A visual symbol of two individual lives joining together as one in the new union of marriage
- Two candles symbolize the bride and groom's individual lives, the third their life together. Lighting the center candle symbolizes that henceforth their light will shine together for each other, for their families, and for their community.



Circling

- In Jewish tradition, the bride circles the groom seven times, symbolizing the creation of a new family circle and forming a “wall” of protection for the groom. We are adapting this ritual for our ceremony by each circling the other three times and then we will circle once together. This circling symbolizes the creation of a new and protective home and the intertwining of our lives.

Breaking of the Glass

- This symbolizes the breaking down of barriers between people of different cultures and faiths. After the glass is broken everyone yells “Mazel Tov,” which means good luck.
- The fragility of the glass suggests the frailty of human relationships. The glass is broken to protect this marriage with the implied prayer: “As this glass shatters, so may your marriage never break.”
- Shattered glass symbolizes the fragility of our relationship and reminds us that we must treat our relationship with special care. This custom was also incorporated into the ceremony to remind everyone that even at the height of personal joy, we must, nevertheless, remember the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. On a lighter note, thought by some to be the last time the groom ever gets to put his foot down.
- It teaches us that in times of joy we must also realize life brings sadness and sorrow. The sound of the breaking glass is said to frighten away evil spirits who might spoil this joyous occasion with their mischief. It also warns us that love, like glass, is fragile and must be protected. The promises made by the bride and groom, like the broken glass, are irrevocable. The breaking of the glass also serves as a reminder of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and all subsequent sufferings of the Jewish people. Even in a moment of such great joy, we are asked to remember that there is still pain and suffering in the world and that we have a responsibility to help relieve some of that suffering.
- It reminds us that love, like glass, is fragile and must be protected. The glass is broken to protect the marriage with an implied prayer: “May your marriage last as long as it would take to repair this glass.” The shattering of the glass concludes the ceremony on a high note.
- At the conclusion of the ceremony, we are breaking the glass together – as a reminder that working through the challenges and celebrating the successes of life is best done together. One interpretation of the custom is that even in the happiest times, we must remember there is still much suffering in the world. For the bride and the groom, the shattering of this glass also symbolizes the breaking down of barriers between people of different cultures and faiths.

Hora - A traditional Jewish dance of celebration performed at the beginning of the reception.

Mezinke - Dance to honor parents who have married their last daughter. This will take place towards the end of the reception.

Yichud - Means union in Hebrew. A Jewish custom where the Bride and Groom spend a few moments alone together immediately following the ceremony. It gives the couple an opportunity to share, privately, the power and importance of this moment in their lives. They will greet you at your tables during the reception.

Giving of the Rings - For many Jews, the giving of the ring has come to represent the “kinyan,” that the bride be given – and that she accept – something of nominal value from the groom. The double-ring ceremony that is the custom in modern times has come to symbolize for some the endless love between a husband and wife. Others see the circle as representing a link to the past and a commitment to the future.

Shehecheyanu - A joyous blessing that is recited at the arrival of any long awaited occasion is a joyous blessing that is recited at the arrival of any long awaited occasion

Kiddush Cup/Wine

- Symbolic of the cup of life. It is used in the Jewish tradition when saying the prayer for the sanctification of the wine on the Sabbath and on holidays. As we share the cup of wine, we undertake the sharing of all that the future may bring. The sweetness of the wine represents the joy of the occasion.
- In the Christian tradition the wine is significant for several reasons. Most importantly to Christians, the wine is symbolic of the blood of Jesus’ sacrifice. Before he died, Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples. During their celebration, Jesus exhorted his disciples to remember his sacrifice in the bread and the wine of their Passover meal. Passover is the celebration of the angel of death “passing over” the homes of the Jews in Egypt who marked their doors with the blood of a sacrificed lamb prior to the Exodus. Similarly, Christians often refer to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb because of his sacrifice. So it is in the celebration of a Jewish tradition, Passover, that symbols of our two faiths merge and that wine becomes a significant symbol to Christians. In the context of a wedding, wine is important to Christians for another reason. It was at a wedding feast in Cana where Jesus’ first recorded miracle occurred; turning water into wine.

Seven Blessings, or “sheva b’rachot”

- Traditionally recited during a Jewish wedding. The words that are spoken are meant to link the bride and groom to faith in God as Creator of the world, Bestower of joy and love, and the ultimate Redeemer.
- Seven blessings are recited with themes that include the creation of the world and humankind, the importance of marriage, and the hope for harmony in the world.

Samples of Ceremony Order

Seating of Grandparents
Processional
Rabbi's Opening Remarks & Blessing
Explanation of the Chuppah
Remembering Loved Ones
Circling
Exchange of Vows
Exchange of Rings
Lighting the Unity Candle
Seven Blessings
Blessing over wine
Breaking the Glass
Concluding Benediction
Recessional



Processional
Opening Remarks
Readings
Remarks by Judge
Unity Candle
Prayers
Vows and Exchange of Rings
Pronouncement
Closing Prayer
Breaking the Glass
Recessional



Processional
Greetings
Invocation
Blessing for the First Cup
Birkat Erusin: The Betrothal Blessings
The Ring Ceremony
Reading the Ketubah
The Seven Blessings
Pronouncement of Marriage
Breaking the Glass
Recessional



Yichud

The Chuppah
Circling
Havdalah
Rabbi's greetings
First cup of wine
Remembrance
Group blesses the wedding
Vows
Rings
Reading of the Ketubah
Seven Blessings
Second cup of wine
Breaking of glass
Yichud

Reading and Signing of the Ketubah
Processional
Opening Statement
Candle Lighting
Readings
The Seven Blessings
Explanation of the Seven Blessings
Reading of the Ketubah and Homily
Declaration of Intentions
Marriage Vows
Blessing for the Marriage
Exchange of Rings
Kiddush (Sharing of Wine)
Breaking of the Glass
Declaration of Marriage
Introduction
Recessional

Processional
Opening Poem
Opening Remarks by Rabbi
Welcoming Remarks and Opening Prayer by Father
Readings
Marriage Blessing and Introduction to the Seven Blessings by Rabbi
Seven Blessings

Blessing over the wine by Rabbi
Lighting of the Unity Candle
Readings
Exchange of Vows by Father
Reading of the Ketubah Text by Bride and Groom
Exchange of Rings by Rabbi
Pronouncement by Father
Breaking of the Glass



Welcome
Explanation of Chuppah
Remembering Loved Ones who have died or are sick
Acknowledging Different Traditions
Prayers and Readings
First Cup of Wine – Blessing over the wine
Vows & Ring Exchange
Unity Candle Lighting
Reading of the Wedding Contract
Remarks by Rabbi
General Marriage Prayer & Blessing
Seven Blessings & Second Cup of Wine
Closing
Explanation of Yichud
Presentation of Couple
Breaking of the Glass



Processional
Opening Statement
Explanation of the Chuppah
Prayer/Shehecheyanu
Blessing of the Wine
Reading of the Seven Blessings
New Testament Reading
Marriage Vows
Blessing and Exchanging of Rings
Prayers
Pronouncement
Benediction
Breaking of the Glass



Processional



Supporting Interfaith Families Exploring Jewish Life

Lighting of the Unity Candle
Opening Remarks and Blessings
Ketubah
Exchange of Vows
Exchange of Rings
Lighting of the unity candle by bride and groom
Seven wedding blessings and Blessing over the wine
Concluding Prayer
Pronouncement of Marriage
Breaking of the Glass
Nuptial Embrace
Introduction of the couple
Recessional

Additional Resources

What Makes a Wedding Jewish, by Project Welcome, a program of the Union for Reform Judaism funded by the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund and the Walter & Elise Haas Fund. Downloadable .pdf available at www.projectwelcome.org.

Beyond Breaking the Glass: A Spiritual Guide to Your Jewish Wedding, by Rabbi Nancy H. Wiener. Central Conference of American Rabbis Press, 2001. Includes a chapter on interfaith marriage ceremonies.

Celebrating Interfaith Marriages: Creating Your Jewish/Christian Ceremony, by Rabbi Devon Lerner. Holt, 1999.

The New Jewish Wedding, by Anita Diamant. Fireside (revised edition), 2001.