



Educator's Guide

What Is a Jewish Wedding?

What actually happens during a Jewish wedding ceremony? It's more than just smashing glasses and a fantastic dance party after the ceremony under the chuppah. Stephanie Horwitz also explores the significance of the *ketubah*, what exactly the *bedekken* is all about, and why Jewish couples attend the *sheva brachot* - seven days of feasting with family and friends after the wedding.

By uncovering the meaning and symbolism behind five ancient Jewish wedding traditions, Stephanie reveals how these rituals actually serve to bind new couples together in a marriage grounded in love, commitment, and respect.

Link to video: <https://unpacked.education/video/what-is-a-jewish-wedding/>

Resources compiled by Doug Berkowitz

Big Ideas

1. Jewish wedding traditions help tie the newlyweds to the long ark of Jewish history.
2. Jewish weddings celebrate not only the newlyweds, but also their loved ones.
3. Though Jewish weddings have much in common, each is as unique as the couple it unites.

Essential Questions

1. How did Jewish wedding traditions originate and evolve over time?
2. What symbolism is included in Jewish wedding rituals?
3. What is required in a Jewish wedding?

Review Questions

1. A *ketubah* is a...
 - a. Wedding photo



- b. Veil for a wedding dress
 - c. Marriage contract**
 - d. Rabbi for a wedding
- 2.** Where do a bride and groom often put their *ketubah*?
 - a. In a locked safe
 - b. In a desk drawer
 - c. In the house of the bride's parents
 - d. On display in their home**
- 3.** *Bedeken* means "to check" in which language?
 - a. Yiddish**
 - b. Hebrew
 - c. Arabic
 - d. Latin
- 4.** A *bedeken* is a ritual that has ties to the wedding of which biblical figures?
 - a. Abraham and Sarah
 - b. Jacob and Leah**
 - c. Adam and Eve
 - d. Ruth and Boaz
- 5.** Having a chuppah is a requirement at a wedding according to Jewish law.
 - a. True**
 - b. False
- 6.** How many special blessings are said during a Jewish wedding?
 - a. Five
 - b. Seven**
 - c. Ten
 - d. Thirteen
- 7.** *Sheva Brachot* is also the name of what wedding tradition?
 - a. Reciting of the seven clauses in the *ketubah*
 - b. The bride dancing with seven of her closest friends
 - c. Friends and family hosting the newlyweds for a week of meals**



- d. The newlyweds immediately going on a seven-day vacation
- 8.** Which of the following is *not* an explanation for the breaking of the glass during a Jewish wedding?
 - a. It commemorates the destruction of the Temples
 - b. It confuses any evil at the wedding
 - c. It symbolizes the concept that nothing lasts forever
 - d. It reminds guests not to drink too much at the party**

Discussion Questions

1. Wedding tradition recap

Which aspects of Jewish weddings mentioned in the video were you familiar with previously? Which were brand new to you?

Which tradition was the most surprising to you? Which one would you definitely want to include at your wedding? Explain your answers.

2. Is it really you?

The purpose of a *bedeken* is for the groom to ensure that the bride is indeed the woman he intends to marry before he puts the veil over her face. This practice is inspired by the story of Jacob in the Bible, who married Leah instead of the woman he had intended to marry, Rachel.

What was your reaction to learning about this practice? Do you think it's possible that a groom could marry the wrong bride as Jacob did in the Torah? What other symbolism could the *bedeken* ceremony hold?

The *bedeken* is a joyous event that is accompanied by singing, dancing and praying. Do you think you would like a *bedeken* at your wedding? Why or why not?

3. Setting up for failure?



Some might say that a *ketubah*, a pre-marriage agreement on terms for what will occur in the case of a divorce, is in essence dooming a marriage to fail. (i.e., Why focus on the bad, when you should be focusing on the good?) Do you agree with this sentiment? What are potential benefits of having a prearranged plan? Explain your answers.

4. Celebrating as a community

How do the Jewish wedding rituals you learned about incorporate the bride and groom's family, friends and community? Why do you think the focus of this special day isn't solely on the bride and groom, but also their loved ones?

Learning Activities

1. Lesson Plans

Use our ready-made lesson plan on Jewish weddings [HERE](#).

2. Let's celebrate!

Divide students into groups and assign them to create a skit of a wedding that incorporates the wedding rituals they learned about. You can also allow groups to incorporate some Ashkenazi and Sephardi wedding traditions that are mentioned in this Unpacked [video](#).

Each group should perform their wedding skit for the class. If they'd like, the group presenting can ask the audience to participate in the mock wedding when appropriate. Afterward, ask the audience to identify which Jewish wedding rituals they saw portrayed in the skit.

3. The *ketubah* - lesson plan

Use [this additional lesson plan](#) to teach your students all about the *ketubah*.



4. Family traditions

In advance of the lesson, or as a take-home assignment, have students interview a family member about their Jewish wedding. What rituals did they incorporate into their wedding? How did these rituals reflect their heritage and family traditions? Which were their favorites and why? Then, ask students to reflect on what rituals they might want to include in their future weddings.

5. Create your own *ketubah*

In pairs or small groups, ask students to create and decorate a *ketubah* which lists some obligations that a married couple should have to one another. Additions to the *ketubah* should be appropriate and can also include wisdom/guidelines for how newlyweds can live and interact with one another in harmony (helping to create [shalom bayit](#)).

Each pair/group should present their *ketubah* to the class, explaining the decoration of their *ketubah* and why they chose the wisdom and obligations they included.

6. Give your students our Kahoot on [Jewish weddings](#)!

Reflection Questions

1. What's this about a contract?

The *ketubah* is a legal document that establishes terms of a marriage and lays out what would occur in case of a divorce. This practice goes back to biblical times and began in order to protect the bride, who was most likely to be financially dependent on her husband.

Putting yourself in an ancient mindset, can you understand why Jewish law would require such a document? How could a *ketubah* help a bride in the case of a divorce? Can you think of an alternative way to help protect women from the hardships of divorce or death of a husband (Optional: See [here](#) for information about the *Halakhic* prenuptial agreement)? Explain your answers.



Using a modern frame of reference, what do you think of this practice? Do you think *ketubot* should continue to be a part of Jewish marriages even though women are able to become financially independent? Why or why not?

2. Blessing the newlyweds

The *Sheva Brachot* that are said at a Jewish wedding ceremony praise God and bestow blessings upon the newlywed couple. Imagine a close friend or family member of yours was getting married - what are seven meaningful blessings you would want to bestow upon the newlyweds? Bonus points if you can reference Jewish tradition or scripture in your blessings (e.g., the wisdom of Solomon in settling disputes; having faith in each other as Abraham had faith in God).

3. Caution: broken glass

One of the most well-known parts of a Jewish wedding is the breaking of the glass. Were you familiar with this tradition before watching the video? After learning or learning more about it, what are your thoughts on this practice?

There are multiple explanations of this tradition of breaking the glass, including:

- It commemorates the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem.
- It replaces any trouble that could have happened during the wedding.
- The loud crash confuses any evil that might come to haunt the wedding.
- It symbolizes the idea that nothing lasts forever and reminds us that relationships are fragile.

What do you think about each of the explanations for the ritual of breaking the glass? Does one of them make more sense to you than the others? Do you think any of them sound strange to you? Explain your answers.

The Gemara says that we must serve God with fear and trembling, even during joyous occasions. Why do you think this is the case? Do you think the breaking of the glass fulfills this mandate? Why or why not?

Further Learning



1. Unpacked for Educators:
 - [Why Are Sephardi & Ashkenazi Weddings So Unique?](#) (video)
 - [Your ultimate guide to Jewish wedding traditions - Unpacked](#) (article)
 - [5 surprising differences between Israeli and American weddings - Unpacked](#) (article)
 - [Jewish Dances From Around The World](#) (video)
2. BimBam, [Ketubah: The Jewish Wedding Contract](#) (video)
This video gives a brief description of the *ketubah*.
3. My Jewish Learning, [The Ketubah, or Jewish Marriage Contract](#) (article)
This article provides background information on the *ketubah* and describes what is written in the document.
4. My Jewish Learning, [Before the Jewish Wedding Ceremony](#) (article)
This article describes what occurs before the start of a Jewish wedding ceremony, including the bride's reception, the groom's *tisch*, and the *bedeken*.
5. My Jewish Learning, [The Huppah \(Chuppah\): What You Need to Know | My Jewish Learning](#) (article)
This article provides a description of the types *chuppahs*, gives a history of the *chuppah*, and explains how you can make your own *chuppah*.
6. My Jewish Learning, [The Seven Blessings \(Sheva Brachot\) for a Jewish Wedding](#) (article)
This article describes the many aspects of the *sheva brachot*.
7. My Jewish Learning, [Breaking the Glass at a Jewish Wedding](#) (article)
This article provides an explanation of the ritual breaking of the glass at Jewish weddings.
8. Beit Din of America, [The Halakhic Prenup](#)
This website gives information about the *Halakhic* prenup and how it can help to avoid cases of *get* (divorce) refusal