

Your Jewish Wedding

A Guide to Your Sacred Celebration



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Welcome from Rabbi Amy Rader

Mazel Tov!

You're embarking on one of life's most sacred journeys.

A Jewish wedding is a profound spiritual moment where two souls unite under the chuppah, creating a new family bound by love, commitment, and ancient tradition.

At The Neshamah Institute, we believe your wedding should reflect who you are as a couple while honoring the beauty and depth of Jewish tradition. I am grateful to share this meaningful journey with a few select couples each year.

We will meet regularly to get acquainted and plan the perfect ceremony for you!

This guide is a general reference document, but rest assured we will discuss all this content - and more! in person during our meetings.

I'm here to help you craft a wedding that feels authentic, joyful, and spiritually resonant. We will honor where you come from and build a strong foundation for your new married life together.

I hope this process will be one of learning and expansion for you as individuals as well as together as a couple.

I'm deeply honored to share this meaningful milestone with you!

With love and blessings,

Rabbi Amy Rader

Timeline

General Outline For Your Jewish Wedding

6-12 Months Before

- Meet with Rabbi Amy to discuss your vision and values
- Choose your wedding date
- Select your venue
- Book your musicians/DJ

3-6 Months Before

- Start your monthly meetings with Rabbi Amy
- Discuss your ketubah text and artwork
- Choose your chuppah design
- Select readings, poems, or personal vows
- Invite friends/family to participate in ceremony rituals
- Order your wedding rings (plain bands without stones, traditionally)
- Plan your aufruf (pre-wedding blessing at Neshamah) if desired
- Discuss reception traditions (hora, chair dance, blessings)

1-3 Months Before

- Finalize ceremony script with Rabbi Amy
- Order kippot (head coverings) for guests if desired
- Confirm all ceremony participants and their roles
- Plan bedeken (veiling ceremony) if including
- Arrange for witnesses to sign ketubah and marriage license
- Plan your tish / bedeken (pre-ceremony celebrations) if desired

Final Weeks

- Attend your Family Meeting with Rabbi Amy - parents and grandparents welcome
- Review ceremony timing with all participants
- Enjoy every moment!

Before the Wedding

Pre-Marital Learning

Jewish tradition values preparation for marriage.

Your time with Rabbi Amy will include discussions about building a Jewish home, conflict resolution, communication, intimacy, and creating shared values and practices.

These conversations strengthen your foundation as a couple.

The Ketubah

The ketubah is a Jewish marriage contract, both a legal document and a work of art.

Dating back over 2,000 years, it outlines the couple's commitments to each other.

You'll work with Rabbi Amy to choose or customize text that reflects your values, and select artwork that speaks to you.

The ketubah is signed by two witnesses before or during the wedding ceremony and will hang in your home as a beautiful reminder of your vows.

Aufruf

The aufruf (literally "calling up") is a honor where the couple is called to the bima (stage) on a Shabbat before the wedding for a special pre-wedding blessing.

The congregation celebrates with singing and sometimes playful tossing of candy.

This joyful tradition allows your community to share in your simcha (celebration) before the wedding day.

Mikveh

Some couples choose to visit the mikveh (ritual bath) before their wedding as a spiritual preparation, marking the transition to married life. This ancient practice of immersion symbolizes renewal and new beginnings.

Rabbi Amy can help you understand this tradition and connect you with resources if you're interested.

Wedding Day Fasting

Many couples choose to fast on their wedding day until after the ceremony, treating the day like a personal Yom Kippur, a day of spiritual reflection, forgiveness, and new beginnings.

The fast is broken after the ceremony in the yichud room.

This practice is traditional but entirely optional; discuss with Rabbi Amy what feels right for you.

The Wedding Day

Ketubah Signing

Before the ceremony, the couple, rabbi, and two witnesses gather for the ketubah signing.

This intimate moment is often the first time the couple sees each other on the wedding day.

Witnesses must be Jewish adults (not immediate family and not related to each other) who observe the couple accept the terms of the ketubah.

This ancient document becomes legally binding in Jewish law and is a cherished keepsake for your home.

Bedeken (Veiling Ceremony)

In this traditional ceremony, the groom (or one partner) veils the bride (or other partner) before the wedding ceremony.

This recalls Rebecca veiling herself before meeting Isaac.

It's a tender moment affirming that inner beauty matters most.

Family and friends surround the couple with blessings, often singing and dancing.

Tisch (Optional)

Traditionally, the groom holds a tisch (literally "table") a pre-ceremony celebration with friends and family where he may attempt to share words of Torah amid jovial interruption.

Meanwhile, the bride holds a separate reception. Many modern couples adapt or skip this tradition, but it can be a joyful way to step into the wedding ceremony with smaller groups of people.

The Wedding Ceremony

A Jewish wedding ceremony is rich with symbolism, tradition, and meaning. While every ceremony is unique, here are the essential elements that make a wedding Jewish.

1. The Processional

Unlike secular weddings, Jewish tradition includes parents escorting the couple to the chuppah, symbolizing that marriage is a union of families. Grandparents, siblings, and the wedding party also process.

The order is flexible and can be customized to honor your family structure.

This procession is often accompanied by joyful music.

2. The Chuppah

The chuppah (wedding canopy) is the most recognizable symbol of a Jewish wedding.

Open on all sides, it represents the home you're building together, welcoming, open to guests, and rooted in hospitality like Abraham and Sarah's tent.

The chuppah can be a tallit (prayer shawl), decorated fabric, flowers, or a family heirloom.

Standing under the chuppah, the couple is surrounded by loved ones, literally held up by their community.

3. Words of Welcome

Rabbi Amy welcomes guests and sets the sacred tone for the ceremony. She may share words about marriage in Jewish tradition, the couple's journey, and the significance of gathering as a community to witness this covenant.

4. Birkat Erusin (Betrothal Blessings)

The first cup of wine is blessed, and two blessings are recited—one over wine and one consecrating the marriage. Wine symbolizes joy, abundance, and the sweetness of life.

The couple drinks from the same cup, symbolizing their shared life ahead. This moment sanctifies the betrothal.

5. Ring Exchange

The couple exchanges rings, the central legal act of a Jewish wedding. Traditionally, rings are simple, unadorned bands, a perfect circle representing endless love and commitment.

As the ring is placed on the partner's finger, each recites: "Behold, you are consecrated to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel" (or a modern adaptation). This declaration creates the marriage bond.

6. Reading of the Ketubah

The ketubah is read aloud, traditionally in Aramaic but often also in English translation.

This public declaration of the couple's commitments to each other transforms the private contract into a communal witness. The ketubah text may be traditional or personalized, expressing the couple's unique promises.

7. Sheva Brachot (Seven Blessings)

The heart of the Jewish wedding ceremony consists of seven ancient blessings that place the couple's love within the grand sweep of Jewish history.

These blessings celebrate creation, humanity, joy, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. They're often shared among honored family members and friends, a beautiful way to involve loved ones.

The blessings move from cosmic creation to the couple's intimate union, connecting personal love to universal themes.

1. Blessing over the second cup of wine
2. Blessing of creation
3. Blessing of humanity created in God's image
4. Blessing for the People Israel
5. Blessing for the couple's joy
6. Blessing of love and companionship
7. Blessing invoking the joy of Jerusalem

8. Personal Vows or Words (Optional)

Many couples choose to share personal vows, readings, or words of commitment. This can be a poem, a letter, promises you've written to each other, or reflections on your journey.

While not required by Jewish law, this moment allows you to speak from the heart in your own words.

Rabbi Amy can guide you in crafting meaningful words to share with each other under the chuppah.

9. Breaking of the Glass

The ceremony concludes with the groom (or one partner) breaking a glass wrapped in cloth under their foot.

This powerful moment has multiple meanings: remembering the destruction of the Temple even in our joy, acknowledging that life brings both celebration and sorrow, and symbolizing the fragility of relationships that must be handled with care.

The sound of shattering glass releases the ceremony's sacred tension into joyful celebration.

10. Mazel Tov!

As the glass breaks, guests shout "Mazel Tov!" (Congratulations!) and the celebration begins.

Music fills the air, and the couple recesses together as husband and wife, or as married partners.

The transformation is complete, two individuals have become a married couple, witnessed by community and consecrated by ancient tradition.

11. Yichud

Immediately after the ceremony, the couple spends a few minutes alone together in a private room (yichud means "togetherness").

This creates their first moments as a married couple away from the eyes of others.

Traditionally, couples break their wedding day fast here with light refreshments.

This pause allows you to absorb the magnitude of what just happened before rejoining your celebration.

Two witnesses stand outside to ensure privacy. (optional)

Jewish Reception Traditions

The Hora

The hora is the iconic circle dance often performed to "Hava Nagila" or other joyful Jewish music.

Guests hold hands and dance in concentric circles around the couple. At the climax, the couple is lifted on chairs and dance above the crowd, sometimes holding a napkin between them.

This exuberant tradition celebrates the couple's joy and brings everyone together in celebration.

Hamotzi

Before the meal, the blessing over bread (hamotzi) is recited, often over challah. This sanctifies the meal and reminds everyone that this celebration is infused with holiness.

Some couples honor grandparents or other special family members with this blessing.

Blessing After Meals (Birkat Hamazon)

After dinner, the Grace After Meals may be recited, followed by a shortened version of the Sheva Brachot (seven blessings).

This extends the wedding's sacredness throughout the celebration.

Different friends and family members can be honored by reciting these blessings.

Music and Dancing

Jewish celebrations emphasize music and dance as expressions of joy.

From traditional klezmer to contemporary Jewish music, from Israeli dancing to freestyle celebration, music brings people together.

Many couples include a mix of Jewish and secular music to reflect both their heritage and personal taste.

After the Wedding

Sheva Brachot Meals

Traditionally, the week following the wedding (sheva brachot week) includes seven festive meals where the seven wedding blessings are recited again in the presence of a minyan (prayer quorum) and at least one new guest.

Friends and family host these meals, continuing the celebration and supporting the couple as they begin married life.

While the full tradition is observed primarily in Orthodox communities, many couples enjoy at least one or two sheva brachot meals with loved ones.

Building a Jewish Home

Marriage marks the creation of your own bayit ne'eman b'yisrael—a faithful Jewish home.

Consider what Jewish practices and values you want to incorporate into your daily life:

Shabbat dinners, mezuzah on your doorposts, tzedakah (charity), hospitality, holiday observance, or creating your own meaningful rituals.

Rabbi Amy is available to help you explore ways to make your home a place of warmth, tradition, and spiritual growth.

Legal Considerations

The ketubah is a religious document.

You'll also need a civil marriage license from your state to be legally married.

Rabbi Amy will sign and file the legal marriage license along with officiating your Jewish ceremony, ensuring both your religious and civil marriage is complete.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if we're interfaith?

The Neshamah Institute warmly welcomes interfaith couples. Rabbi Amy works with couples to create ceremonies that honor both partners' backgrounds while maintaining Jewish integrity.

Many interfaith couples find meaningful ways to incorporate elements from both traditions or focus on universal values within Jewish ritual.

What if we're LGBTQ+?

Jewish tradition celebrates love in all its forms.

Rabbi Amy performs same-sex weddings with the same joy and reverence as any wedding, adapting traditional liturgy and rituals to honor all couples equally.

Your ceremony will be authentic to both Jewish tradition and your identity.

Do we both have to be Jewish?

While traditional Jewish law requires both partners to be Jewish, The Neshamah Institute takes an inclusive approach.

Rabbi Amy will discuss your backgrounds and help create a ceremony that feels right for you while respecting Jewish tradition.

Can we get married on Shabbat?

Traditional Jewish law prohibits weddings on Shabbat (Friday evening through Saturday evening) and major Jewish holidays.

It's also customary to avoid weddings during the Omer period between Passover and Shavuot (except Lag B'Omer) and the Three Weeks before Tisha B'Av.

Rabbi Amy will help you choose an appropriate date.

What if our families have different levels of observance?

This is very common!

Rabbi Amy specializes in creating ceremonies that honor different traditions within families. She can explain choices and help navigate family expectations with sensitivity and respect.

How long is a Jewish wedding ceremony?

Typically 20-30 minutes, though this varies based on how many readings, musical selections, and personal elements you include.

The ceremony is followed immediately by yichud (15 - 20 minutes alone).

What should guests wear?

Jewish weddings are joyful, festive occasions. Guests typically dress in cocktail to formal attire.

Can we write our own vows?

Absolutely!

Many couples include personal vows or statements in addition to the traditional ring exchange.

Rabbi Amy encourages you to express your love and commitment in your own words.

What does it cost?

Rabbi Amy's fee includes all pre-ceremony meetings, wedding blessing at Neshamah Shabbat, ceremony customization, and officiating.

Contact [The Neshamah Institute](#) for current pricing.

Glossary of Terms

Aufruf: Pre-wedding Torah honor on Shabbat before the wedding

Bedeken: Veiling ceremony before the wedding

Birkat Erusin: Betrothal blessings over the first cup of wine

Birkat Hamazon: Grace After Meals

Chuppah: Wedding canopy symbolizing the couple's new home

Hamotzi: Blessing over bread

Hora: Joyful circle dance performed at Jewish celebrations

Ketubah: Jewish marriage contract

Kiddushin: Betrothal or consecration of marriage

Kippah/Kippot: Head covering(s) worn as sign of reverence

Mazel Tov: Congratulations (literally 'good fortune')

Mezuzah: Scroll containing Torah verses affixed to doorposts

Mikveh: Ritual bath used for spiritual purification

Minyan: Quorum of ten Jewish adults for prayer

Sheva Brachot: Seven wedding blessings recited under the chuppah

Simcha: Joyful celebration

Tallit: Prayer shawl

Tisch: Pre-wedding celebration (literally 'table')

Tzedakah: Charitable giving; justice

Yichud: Private time together immediately after ceremony

Ready to Begin?

Your wedding is one of life's most meaningful transitions.

At The Neshamah Institute, we're honored to walk this journey with you, crafting a ceremony that reflects your love story, honors Jewish tradition, and creates a foundation for your married life together.

Rabbi Amy Rader brings over 25 years of experience creating personalized, meaningful Jewish weddings for couples of all backgrounds.

Whether you're deeply connected to tradition or just beginning to explore Jewish practice, she'll help you create a ceremony that feels authentic, joyful, and spiritually rich.

Contact

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*May your love continue to grow,
May your home be filled with joy and peace,
May you build a life of blessing together.*

Mazal Tov!