



Practical Preparations for the Wedding Ceremony

A Halachic Overview

YUConnects has compiled the following overview, as well as a brief checklist, to help a soon-to-be-married couple best prepare for their wedding. Several YU Roshei Yeshiva were consulted in the creation of this document. This document is not intended to be authoritative or comprehensive; rather, it serves as a shorthand and convenient summary of points worth looking through to ensure one's wedding runs as smoothly as possible.

A competent Rav should be consulted for further clarification of any of the contents below.

The Prenuptial Agreement

It is **highly recommended** that a *Chosson* (groom) and *Kallah* (bride) sign the Beth Din of America *Halachic* prenuptial agreement (commonly referred to as a “prenup”) authored by Rav Mordechai Willig. There are two main components to a *Halachic* prenup:¹

A) Each spouse agrees to appear before a panel of Jewish law judges (*dayanim*) arranged by the Beth Din of America, if the other spouse demands it, and to abide by the decision of the Beth Din with respect to the get.

B) If the couple separates, the Jewish law obligation of the husband to support his wife is formalized.

For more information about the prenup and easy access to all of the relevant forms, please visit the Beth Din of America's prenup website at <http://theprenup.org/index.html>.

Nowadays, many Rabbis will not officiate a wedding unless this *Halachic* prenup has been signed.

When should the couple sign the prenup?

The couple is advised to sign the *Halachic* prenup during engagement, best before the last minute busy time of wedding preparations. However, it is still permissible to sign the prenup at the wedding. If a couple does not sign a prenup prior to their wedding ceremony, postnuptial agreements are also available and recommended.

The Marriage License

The *Chosson* and *Kallah* must obtain a marriage license from the state they are to be married in prior to their wedding. Forms can be obtained from the couple's local County Clerk and they should inquire as to the requisite identification documents, timing and proper procedure. The couple should give the paperwork to the *Mesader Kiddushin* (officiating Rabbi) at the wedding. The forms are filled out by the *Mesader Kiddushin* **immediately** after the *Chuppah*, and mailed

¹ Paragraphs “A” and “B” in this section are directly quoted from the Beth Din of America's official prenup website.

back to the county clerk as soon as possible. The couple should expect to receive the license in the mail within a few weeks of the wedding.

The Wedding Ring

It is essential that the ring given under the *Chuppah* be **fully owned** by the *Chosson*. The *Chosson* should purchase the ring himself. He should not borrow a ring, nor should he use a family heirloom.

What type of ring should be used?

The ring must be worth at least a *prutah* (which is only valued at a few cents, so this is not a concern nowadays). The centuries old practice is to use a plain, simple ring, without any fancy adornments or jewels.

The Kesubah (legal wedding agreement)

It is of utmost importance that a valid *Kesubah* be prepared before the wedding ceremony. Without a valid *Kesubah*, the new husband and wife are unable to live together.

A standard *Kesubah* can be purchased at a local Judaica bookstore. If a customized *Kesubah* is being prepared, extra care should be taken to verify the spelling and wording with the *Mesader Kiddushin*, as errors in these types of *Kesubot* are challenging to fix afterwards.

Sephardim should be aware that the wording of their *Kesubah* differs somewhat from the *Ashkenazi* version. There are also slight variations between the *Kesubot* of different *Sephardic* communities, and couples should therefore consult with their *Mesader Kiddushin* about which *Kesubah* to use.

Filling out the Kesubah

All full Hebrew names of the bride and groom and location of wedding (city and state, also spelled in Hebrew) should be reviewed and verified by the *Mesader Kiddushin* prior to writing them onto the *Kesubah*. There are different opinions regarding the inclusion of last names on the *Kesubah*, and each couple should follow their *Mesader Kiddushin's* guidance.

Similarly, before setting the time of the *Chuppah*, the *Mesader Kiddushin* should be notified to ensure the right Hebrew date is filled in on the *Kesubah*. When a *Chuppah* is scheduled close to nightfall, the precise timing can affect the date and signing of the *Kesubah*.

Many *Mesadrei Kiddushin* prefer to fill out the *Kesubah* before the wedding day (to save time and avoid any last minute errors), although it is not necessary to do so.

All of the above should be discussed before the wedding, so as not to cause a delay on the wedding day itself. It is wise for the couple to bring a backup copy of a *Kesubah* to the wedding, in case of any error in completion.

The Tenaim (Engagement contract)

It is customary in many communities to sign *Tenaim* at the wedding. In non-Hasidic communities the *Tenaim* written by Rav Moshe Feinstein are used. This is simply a document which states that both sides will go through with the wedding.

The *Tenaim* can be obtained at a local Judaica bookstore. When purchasing, the couple should ask for a copy of Rav Moshe's *Tenaim*. It is advisable for the couple to have a second copy of the *Tenaim*, in case of error in completion. Some *Mesadrei Kiddushin* prefer to fill in the *Tenaim* before the wedding, and only the actual signing occurs at the *Chosson's Tisch*, while other *Mesadrei Kiddushin* both fill in and have the *Tenaim* signed at the *Chosson's Tisch*.

There are several kibbudim (honors) to be given at a wedding:

Eidim (witnesses)

Two *Eidim* - witnesses - are required for each of the following:

Eidei Kiddushin - are designated at the *Chuppah* to witness the *Kiddushin*, when the *Chosson* gives the *Kallah* the ring. This is the most important part of the *Chuppah*.

Eidei Kesubah - sign the *Kesubah* during the *Chosson's Tisch*. In certain instances, some *Mesadrei Kiddushin* prefer to have the *Kesubah* signed under the *Chuppah*.

Eidei Tenaim - sign the *Tenaim* at the *Chosson's Tisch*.

Eidei Yichud - verify that the newly married couple remains in the *Yichud* room for the allotted time.

Additionally, some *Mesadrei Kiddushin* insist on having *Eidei Badekin*, since some authorities maintain that the *Badekin* is an integral part of the marriage ceremony.

Who can serve as the Eidim?

There is no need for the *Eidim* to be different people each time. Nonetheless, to maximize the number of *kibbudim* distributed, different individuals are often selected.

The *Eidim* must be men. They cannot be immediate relatives of the *Chosson* or *Kallah*; in fact, it is strongly advised that they not be any sort of relatives at all. Additionally, the *Eidim* should not be related to each other.

The *Eidim* should also be people who are known to be *Torah* observant. They cannot be *Halachically* disqualified (for example, someone who is not a Sabbath observer, or someone who is involved in dishonest business practices).

Additional Kibbudim (honors)

The following *kibbudim* – honors – can be given to family members.

The highest honor at a wedding is to preside as the *Mesader Kiddushin*. The couple should select a rabbi who is well-versed with the *halachot* of *Siddur Kiddushin*.

While the writing and signing of the *Kesubah* is absolutely necessary, **the reading of the *Kesubah*** is only customary, albeit considered a great honor. The *Kesubah* is written in Aramaic and without vowels, so it is important to make sure the individual called upon will feel comfortable reading it aloud.

Similarly, although the **reading of the *Tenaim at the Tisch*** is not *Halachically* necessary, it is still considered to be a *kibbud*. Care should be taken to invite a person who will be comfortable reading the *Tenaim* aloud at the *Chosson's Tisch*.

The first two ***brachot* under the *Chuppah*** are recited by the *Mesader Kiddushin*. The remaining seven *brachot* under the *Chuppah* are usually divided to give out as many *Kibbudim* as possible. Of all the *brachot*, the final *bracha* is considered to be the most significant honor.

Leading the *birchat hamazon* and the *sheva brachot* after the meal are also *Kibbudim* to be given out.

Who can recite the *brachot*?

For all of the *brachot* and for the *birchat hamazon*, the *Chosson* and *Kallah* should try and select people who can both read the words and are *Torah* observant. The *Mesader Kiddushin* should be consulted if there are any specific questions.

There is typically a family member or close friend who serves as an MC under the *Chuppah* and calls up the individuals for the *Kibbudim*. It is advisable for the couple or their parents to prepare a written list of names (for the MC) of the people who will serve as *Eidim* and be receiving *Kibbudim* (as well as their respective positions or titles). It is wise to prepare a few additional names of individuals available for a *Kibbud* in case those originally chosen for the *Kibbudim* are delayed or not present.

Furthermore, it is helpful and courteous to call in advance all those selected to receive *kibbudim* to let them know you plan to honor them at the wedding- **and the specific kavod you intend to give**. This way, they will make an effort to arrive on time for their *kibud*, select an appropriate seat (eg., near the front of the *chuppah*) and will notify you of any delay in their arrival.

Finally, please refer to the *Mesader Kiddushin* for all *Halachic* questions. The couple should make every effort to meet and review the above *Halachic* guidelines with the *Mesader Kiddushin* prior to the wedding. If the *Mesader Kiddushin* is arriving from out of town, it is advisable that a local Rabbi assist in the preliminary steps to ensure seamless preparations for the ceremony.

Checklist of Kibbudim (Honors) for a Wedding

May be Relatives

1 Mesader Kiddushin

1 MC - or Announcer

1 to read the Tenaim

1 to read the *Kesubah*

7 to recite Sheva Brachos under Chupah:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

1 to lead Birchas HaMazon

6 to recite Sheva Brachos after meal

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

6. _____

May not be Relatives

2 Eidei Kiddushin

1. _____
2. _____

2 Eidei *Kesubah*

1. _____
2. _____

2 Eidei Tenaim

1. _____
2. _____

2 Eidei Yichud

1. _____
2. _____

(Some require 2 Eidei Badeken)

Additional People you may wish to honor in case the ones designated above, are late or absent-

May the newly married couple be blessed with much bracha, happiness and shalom bayis!

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