

Adapted Wedding Ceremony During COVID-19

By Rabbi Miriam Liebman



When we began planning a wedding during the summer of 2019, we told each other that our priorities for the wedding were the music and dancing and celebrating with all of our friends and family. What we failed to mention in that conversation was that our true priority was to marry each other. Ten days before our scheduled mid-March 2020 wedding date, it became clear that neither music and dancing nor getting married in front of our whole community was a safe or responsible option due to COVID-19. Though we had hoped to simply put off the wedding for a short time, it became clear that postponing meant putting the wedding on indefinite hold. We therefore decided to get married in a small ceremony with our parents, siblings, and grandparents. Our goal was to be legally married according to Jewish law while preserving rituals for a larger communal celebration when it is safe to gather in large groups.

Ours was an egalitarian, heterosexual wedding ceremony. We used Gordon Tucker's [ketubah](#) and ring ceremony with words added in

from Rachel Adler's [Brit Ahuvim](#) as well as words of our own and the Lieberman clause.

During the Ketubah signing before the ceremony, the *eidim* (witnesses) who signed our ketubah signed an additional document, a *t'nai* (conditional statement) that read:

"This *t'nai* stipulates that when conditions are safe to do so, we will gather with our families and communities to circle each other seven times, recite the *sheva brakhot*, break a glass, sing, dance, and eat."

We then had a [bedeken](#) and were walked down the aisle by our parents. (As noted above, we did *not* circle each other, recite *sheva brakhot*, or break a glass under the [huppah](#). Those are all rituals we chose to save for our larger, communal celebration. Some were replaced by rituals listed below.) All aspects of the ceremony were recited by our parents and siblings under the *huppah*:

1. *Barukh haba, brukhah haba'ah, mi adir*

2. *Boreh pri hagafen, birkat eirusin*

3. Exchanging of rings

4. Read ketubah

5. 3 *brakhot**

6. Read *t'nai*

7. Parents break plate**

* Though there are various options for [Kiddushin](#), the betrothal ceremony (and valid reasons to forego Kiddushin), [Nissuin](#), the marriage ceremony, is less clearly defined by our sages. Today, Nissuin is traditionally enacted by reciting the *sheva brakhot*. Different interpretations, however, allow for Nissuin to be enacted through a variety of means including the *bedeken*, walking under the *huppah*, the groom entering the bride's father's home, and sexual intercourse.

Rather than let Nissuin happen on its own, we wanted to be able to mark Nissuin under the *huppah*. However, because we view the nature

of the *sheva brakhot* to be communal, it was important to us that we recite the *sheva brakhot* before our whole community during our communal celebration. Therefore, instead of the *sheva brakhot*, our siblings recited three blessings from Eretz [Yisrael](#) that pre-date the *sheva brakhot* but follow a similar formulation.

Note the subtle differences between these blessings and the traditional *sheva brakhot*. They read:

ברוך אתה ה' אמ"ה אשר יצר את האדם בצלמו, בצלם דמות תבניתו, והתקין ממנו בנין עדי עד. ברוך אתה ה' יוצר האדם

Blessed are you, God, Ruler of the Universe, who created the human in God's image, in the image of God's likeness God fashioned human's form, and established from God an everlasting edifice. Blessed are you, God, creator of the human.

שמח תשמח רעים אהובים, כשמחך יצירך בגן עדן מקדם. בא"ה משמח עמו ובונה ירושלים (או "משמח עמו ועירו").

Grant full joy to these loving companions, as you did your creations in the Garden of Eden. Blessed are you God who gives joy to your nation (and builds [Jerusalem](#) (or, who gives joy to your nation and your city

בא"ה אמ"ה אשר ברא ששון ושמחה, חתן וכלה, גילה ורנה, דיצה וחדווה, אהבה ואחוה, שלום ורעות. בא"ה מצליח חתן עם הכלה

Blessed are you God, creator of the universe who created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, happiness and jubilation, cheer and delight, love, fellowship, peace, and friendship. Blessed are you God who grants success to the bridegroom and bride.

** Though *t'naim*, conditional statements, are not halachically mandated, it is traditional for parents of a couple to write or recite *t'naim* when a couple becomes engaged. To symbolize the binding nature of the *t'naim*, parents (traditionally the mothers) of the couple break a plate. Breaking a plate has a similar symbolic significance to breaking a glass under the *huppah*. It serves as a reminder that even in our most joyous moments, we must keep in mind the pain and suffering that exists around us. To close the ceremony, rather than break a glass, our parents broke a plate.

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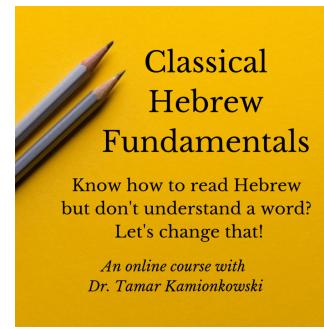
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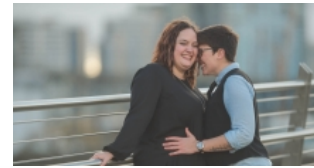
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