

The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School  
Section: Rhythms of Jewish Living  
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## Topic: Marriage

**Key idea:** The various rituals related to the life cycle event of marriage attest to the four levels of interpretation of ritual observance often cited by this instructor, all of which may be found in wedding traditions: practical; *halakhic*; spiritual; and anti-demonic. On a practical level, the rituals relating to marriage publicly affirm the groom acquiring the exclusive rights to the bride's sexuality and reproductive capacity, in exchange for which he agrees to maintain her and provide for her in case of his death or divorce by means of her *ketubah*. On a *halakhic* level, the marriage rituals are divided into *erusin* (betrothal) and *nissuin* (consummation), in the performance of which the bride is a largely passive partner, although since Talmudic times her consent has been required, and the bride price (*mohar*) has been paid to her, rather than to her father. On a spiritual level, the *sheva berakhot* (seven blessings) celebrate universal aspirations, nationalist yearnings, and personal fulfillment. On the anti-demonic level, numerous customs including the bride and groom fasting before the wedding feast, their wearing white, the bride circling the groom seven times, and the breaking of the glass had—at one level—their origins in keeping the demons engendered by the jealous *ayin harah* (“evil eye”) away from the happy couple.

### *Our discussion of the texts :*

**Text 1: Genesis 1:18-24.** Marriage as an institution established by God at the time of creation.

**Text 2: Mishna, Kiddushin 1:1.** Marriage is a legal transaction changing a woman's person status, effected in one of three ways: transfer of money or item of value; transfer of a written document; and/or sexual relations.

**Text 3: Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 7b.** The *erusin* (betrothal) blessing.

**Text 4: Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Marriage 10:1.** The *chuppah*.

**Text 5: Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Even HaEzer 55:1.** Evolution of the meaning and use of the term *chuppah*.

**Text 6: Formal Declaration of Betrothal (*erusin*).** The groom gives the bride a ring.

**Text 7: Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 7b, 8a. The *sheva berakhot* (seven blessings) of *nissuin* (consummation of the marriage).** Harvey Goldberg notes a progression from the blessing over wine (first blessing) to universal observations applicable to all of humanity (blessings 2, 3, 4), followed by a blessing for the ingathering of the Jewish people to Jerusalem, and finally two blessings specifically highlighting the rejoicing of the bride and groom.

**Text 8: Anita Diamant. Nuptials: The Seven Marriage Blessings.** A modern interpretation of the *sheva berakhot* as a metaphor for harmony in human existence.

**Text 9: Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 60b.** Remembering Jerusalem at a Jewish wedding.

**Text 10: Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 30b-31a.** Anecdotal origin of the broken glass.

**Text 11: Kol Bo, Laws of the Ninth of Av (15<sup>th</sup> century).** The evolution of wedding customs: In the absence of the observance of putting on *tefillin*, an ancient custom of putting ashes on the groom's head where his *tefillin* would go was discontinued, replaced by the placing a black cloth on the heads of the bride and groom and the breaking of a glass after the seven blessings. (This is one of the first known texts to relate the breaking of the glass to remember Jerusalem.)

**Text 12: Harvey Goldberg, *Marriage*.** Explanations of glass-breaking in more recent centuries, and its emergence as the hallmark of a “Jewish wedding.”