

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

Click [here](#) to view an updated version of this shiur with additional features on the Deracheha website.

Did you know there's more to Deracheha than our shiurim? Sign up for our newsletter [here](#) and get all our content!

Have some feedback for us? Please click [here](#)!

\*\*\*\*\*  
Dedicated by the Wise and Etshalom families  
in memory of Rabbi Aaron M. Wise,  
whose yahrzeit is 21 Tamuz. Yehi zikhro barukh.  
\*\*\*\*\*

## **The Wedding Day**

WHAT ARE THE HALACHOT AND CUSTOMS OF THE WEDDING DAY? MAY A COUPLE SEE EACH OTHER PRIOR TO THE WEDDING?

BY LAURIE NOVICK  
RAV EZRA BICK, ILANA ELZUFON, AND SHAYNA GOLDBERG, EDS.

### **A Joyous Day**

A couple's wedding day is a momentous occasion in their lives, typically marked by intense emotions, including great joy. *Shir Ha-Shirim* describes King Shlomo's wedding day as "the day of his heart's rejoicing."

#### *Shir Ha-Shirim* 3:11

Go out and see, daughters of *Tziyon*, King Shlomo in the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding and on the day of his heart's rejoicing.

Our sages, in an allegorical interpretation, understand this verse as referring to two different days, marking two milestones in our journey as a people:

#### *Ta'anit* 26b

"On the day of his wedding"—this is the giving of the Torah, "and on the day of his heart's rejoicing"—this is the building of Beit Ha-mikdash, may it be built quickly in our day.

The giving of the Torah shaped our people's covenant with God, and the construction of Beit Ha-mikdash established a home base for the Divine service central to that covenant. Similarly, a wedding inaugurates a couple's covenant with each other and initiates their building a home together, with joy.

A variety of *halachot* and customs characterize the wedding day, corresponding to its great significance. Some practices are ancient and others of recent origin. Some are practiced among most Jewish communities, some in specific communities or locations, and some by Jews and non-Jews alike. Some are clear halachic requirements while others are simply folk customs. While we cannot address all of them, here is a sampling of those of particular significance to women, starting with the night before the wedding.

## Mikveh

We've seen that *chuppa* symbolically establishes the moment at which *chatan* and *kalla* begin to live together as a married couple and are permitted to have relations. There's another halachic prerequisite for relations. A *kalla* needs to exit the halachic status of *nidda* (associated with menstruation) and become *tehora* (ritually pure). The final stage in the process of becoming *tehora* is immersion in a mikveh (ritual bath). Learn more about this [here](#).

A *kalla* ideally immerses in the mikveh close to her wedding, often the night before. However, it is permissible to immerse earlier if necessary:

### Rema YD 192:2

Gloss: One should make the immersion as close to *be'ilat mitzva* (first marital relations) as possible...and the custom is for the *kalla* to immerse on Tuesday night, even though she will not have relations prior to *Motza'ei Shabbat*, but one should not distance the immersion from relations more than this.

Rema's example, of Tuesday night immersion where the wedding will be consummated on Saturday night,<sup>1</sup> establishes precedent for immersing up to four nights prior to the wedding:

### Sidrei Tahara 192:7

It seems that it is not specifically Tuesday night, but rather any time that is not more than four nights away from first marital relations is good.

In a pressing scenario, a *kalla* may be permitted to immerse even earlier, in consultation with a halachic authority.

Women normally immerse in the mikveh at night. In fact, daytime immersion is usually

---

<sup>1</sup> There are different ways of interpreting Rema's statement. Here are some possible factors: In Mishnaic times, a virgin bride would marry daytime Wednesday (Mishna *Ketubot* 1:1). That could explain taking as an example a Tuesday night immersion (Sidrei Tahara here). In medieval times, weddings on Friday afternoons were fairly common, enabling Shabbat meals to double as wedding feasts. Some might have been stringent not to have relations for the first time on Shabbat, though halacha permits it (Darchei Teshuva here). Some had a custom, which was debated, to delay relations after a wedding (Pitchei Teshuva here).

prohibited for married women, except in pressing situations. An exception is made for *kallot*, who certainly won't have relations prior to nightfall.<sup>2</sup>

#### Rema YD 197:3

Gloss: And the *kallot* immersing prior to the *chuppa* can immerse in the daytime, for they will not come to be [in private] with the *chatan* until the night, but [regarding immersion] after the *chuppa*, their law is like other women.

In some communities, it is common for *kallot* to immerse during the daytime a day or two before the wedding.

Given the unpredictability of the menstrual cycle and the possibility of unexpected bleeding, not every *kalla* will be able to complete the process of becoming *tehora* and immersing in the mikveh before the wedding. (Learn more about planning and scheduling [here](#).) This situation is called a *chuppat niddah*, a *chuppa* during ritual impurity, and entails some slight modifications to accommodate the couple (which we'll discuss in our piece on the wedding ceremony). In these cases, mikveh immersion takes place after the wedding, as soon as the *kalla* is halachically permitted to immerse.

Though not halachically obligatory, it is customary in many circles for a *chatan* to immerse on the morning of the wedding as well, for the purpose of *teshuva*.<sup>3</sup>

### **Mikveh Customs**

There are slight variations in mikveh practice across communities and even from family to family. A woman traditionally immerses in the mikveh according to her mother's custom, even though a woman generally adopts the customs of her husband's family when they get married. (See our Q&A on this [here](#).)

#### Rav Yekutiel Farkash, *Tahara Ke-halacha* II, 22:23

Women have the custom of additional dips. There are those who dip themselves three times, and those who dip even more than this, like nine times or the like. And every [woman] should practice in accordance with the received tradition in her family or community of origin...

Conversations about how to immerse can present an opportunity for a *kalla* and her mother to discuss other aspects of marriage and halachic observance together. In some cases, as when a *kalla* is a *ba'alat teshuva*, she may take on her mother-in-law's custom or choose a custom for herself.

In some communities, a *kalla* who wishes to be accompanied to the mikveh has a female mentor—often, but not necessarily, her mother—escort her to the mikveh and wait for her to complete her immersion, perhaps listening from outside to answer

---

<sup>2</sup> If a *kalla* needs to immerse on the wedding day itself, and the ceremony is planned for midday or earlier, then there are additional factors to take into account, in consultation with a halachic authority.

<sup>3</sup>Kaf Ha-Chayyim (Falaji) 27:18

The *chatan* should take care to immerse in a mikveh prior to entering the *chuppa*, for two reasons: either on account of *teshuva*, for one who marries a woman, his transgressions are atoned for, or in order that the first conjugal union be in sanctity and purity...

“amen” to her *beracha*. In some cases, the mother might even be present for the immersion itself. This can be a special opportunity to connect with a beloved person in one’s life, woman to woman.

In other communities, a *kalla* is typically accompanied by a group of female friends and family to the mikveh, and celebrates with them, or with the broader community, afterwards. These celebrations may be linked to a *chinna* ceremony, in which henna on the hands is meant to bring *beracha* to the new couple.

Israeli lawyer Sagit Peretz-Der’i describes her thoughts and feelings on the mikveh-oriented celebrations in her community of Israelis of Moroccan descent:<sup>4</sup>

Sagit Peretz Der’i, Esq. “Whoever has not seen a Moroccan Mikveh,” *De’ot* 66, Tammuz-Av 5774

I was born and raised in a *moshav* of immigrants to Israel from Morocco. As the oldest granddaughter in my mother’s and father’s families, families with ten children each, I had the privilege of participating in all of my aunts’ and uncles’ weddings, and in the special celebration that those of North African origin hold for a *kalla* on the evening of her first immersion. Escorted by female relatives, neighbors and friends, the *kalla* goes to the mikveh with song and dance, as the women carry platters laden with colorful cookies, jams, and candies. To the immersion they bring new towels, soft and fragrant, and the *chatan*’s mother bestows flowers, toiletries, and lingerie upon the *kalla*. The women sing and dance and wish the *kalla* a successful and happy married life. After the immersion, the *kalla* blesses the participants, and the women dry her hair, make her up and dress her, and escort her back home. The men wait at the *kalla*’s home, and she is greeted with song, dance, and a festive meal. Only women accompany the *kalla* to the mikveh, but this is not a secret or hidden event, but rather a public and well-attended celebration. Even I participated in my childhood in many celebrations like this.

Whatever her community’s custom, a *kalla*’s wishes should take precedence in planning her first immersion, though she should seek to be sensitive to the feelings of those who might wish to accompany her. Some *kallot*, regardless of community, prefer to go to the mikveh alone, beginning their independent relationship with this mitzva, and this choice should be respected. Though a Jewish woman should be present once the *kalla* is in the water to ensure that her hair is submerged when she dips,<sup>5</sup> the *kalla* can decide whether to have the regular mikveh attendant or a Jewish woman of her choice fulfill that function.

Even if accompanied by others, the *kalla*’s time in the water is hers to define.

---

<sup>4</sup> Available here: <https://gluya.org/moroccan-mikveh/>

<sup>5</sup> Shulchan Aruch presents this halacha, along with conditions under which a woman could immerse alone, if need be, unattended. See [here](#) for further discussion of why and when an attendant is needed at immersion.

Shulchan Aruch YD 198:40

A Jewish female over the age of twelve years and one day needs to stand over her as she immerses, to she see that no hair from her head remains floating on the surface of the water. And if she does not have someone to stand over her, or it is at night [in the dark, where hair could not be seen], she should gather her hair on her head with woolen threads or with a band on her head, as long as she loosens them. Or with chains of hollow strings, or she ties a loose cloth over her hair.

## Berachot and Prayer

Some early authorities maintain that one should recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* over one's first performance of an important and recurring mitzva.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps for this reason, a custom developed in some communities for a *kalla* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* upon her first immersion. Some authorities, including Chatam Sofer, justify observance of this custom where it is already established practice:

### Responsa Chatam Sofer OC 55

One can say that the custom of women in his city, that they recite *she-hechiyyanu* on the first immersion, a Rav taught them on initiation into all the mitzvot in which women are accustomed, which are specifically immersion, [separating] *challa* and lighting [candles], and she presumably encounters her obligatory immersion first...Therefore, she recites *she-hechiyyanu* over the first immersion for she is entering initiation into women's *mitzvot*, so one can justify [this practice] that it is not an unlearned and mistaken custom, and where it is not practiced, it is not practiced, and where it is practiced, it is practiced and befitting. And in my humble opinion there is no concern of a *beracha* in vain, as I wrote above.

Even in our era, while it is common for unmarried girls and women to separate *challa*, and in some cases to light candles, the first immersion in the mikveh remains a unique moment for a *kalla* that represents her undertaking new religious responsibilities as a married woman.

Others, including Chida, maintain that even those with this tradition should not persist in it:

### Shiyurei Beracha, YD 200:1

There is a place where it became known from these women that the *kalla* at her first immersion before the *chuppa* recites *she-hechiyyanu*. And they investigated the matter, and indeed it is true that they have had this custom since early times. But we know that in nearly all of the diaspora there is no such custom. And even in this city where they had this custom, it is unknown what sage instituted it. And it is known that later authorities agreed above (28) that one does not recite *she-hechiyyanu* upon the [first performance of the] mitzva of covering [blood, after ritual slaughter], see there at length. And this custom is not currently found written in any book...And so I say regarding this custom to let them know that one should not recite the *beracha* and to protest their [doing it].

Rav Ovadya Yosef rules that it is not correct for a *kalla* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* over her first immersion, and criticizes attempts to spread this custom:<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Sefer Roke'ach, Laws of Berachot 371

*She-hechiyyanu*: Our Rabbi Yehuda ben Yakar from Spierer of blessed memory: Any mitzva that its time is fixed, or any mitzva that it is incumbent upon a person to perform, and he has not performed it and is being initiated for the first time, one must recite *she-hechiyyanu*.

<sup>7</sup> One argument that he cites against this practice is that Rambam ruled against reciting a *she-hechiyyanu* over immersions.

Pe'er Ha-dor 49

...One who is impure who immerses does not recite *she-hechiyyanu* over this mitzva...

### Responsa Yabi'a Omer IV, OC 50

Therefore, what [happens] here in the Holy City, may it be rebuilt, that the women who supervise immersion (on behalf of the local religious council), who take for themselves the crown of showing off with new rulings, and instruct *kallot* to recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* at their first immersion...It is upon the rabbis to let these women know...that they should not trip up the masses with the very grave prohibition of a *beracha* in vain.

Regardless of custom, *kallot* do recite the usual *beracha* of “*al ha-tevila*”, upon immersion, and often choose to add a personal prayer for the occasion. There is no one, canonical prayer to recite. Here is a popular one, available on the Israeli website, Kipa:<sup>8</sup>

### Prayer for *Kalla* before her First Immersion, [kipa.co.il](http://kipa.co.il)

[Master of the world], here I am immersing and purifying myself toward my upcoming wedding. And I ask of You to help me to purify my entire self with full intent, my body and my self, my spirit and my soul. Help me to live my whole life in cleanliness and great purity. Help me to sanctify myself to always become sanctified through Your sanctity. Help my intended husband to also be holy and pure in all of his being. Help us to live in great sanctity. Help us to connect in great sanctity and to bring forth life through sanctity and love, peace and friendship. [Master of the world], behold I intend to stand tomorrow under the *chuppa* together with my partner and to fulfill Your intention at the creation and formation of the world. Help us to rejoice with all our hearts a true and complete rejoicing, so that all those who come to gladden us be like builders of a ruin among the ruins of Jerusalem. Help us to greet every person with joy and a shining countenance. Help us that nothing should go wrong at my wedding. That I not become angry, God forbid, and that I not anger any person. And even if, God forbid, something goes wrong, we should not become angry, not I and not my partner, and this should be an auspicious sign for us all of our lives. Help whoever comes to our wedding to be joyful, in order that our wedding be part of the building of the people and building of Jerusalem and bring forth more and more of the Dwelling of the Divine presence. [Please God], help all those who support, that they not fail in their tasks. Help the Rav Mesader of the *chuppa* to do this in purity and with the right intentions. Help the musicians to gladden and to bring forth the Dwelling of the Divine Presence, as it is written: “And it was when the musician would play and the spirit of God was upon him.” Help the cooks and caterers that nothing go wrong, God forbid, at their hands. Help my dear parents who worked so hard for this *simcha* that this *simcha* be for them only for a *beracha*, and fulfill all the wishes of their hearts for good, along with the rest of my brothers and sisters. Make this so for the sake of Your name, make it so for the sake of Your right hand, make it so for the sake of Your Torah, may Your right hand deliver and answer me. May the utterances of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be willed before you God, my Rock and my Redeemer.

This prayer is long, and a *kalla* could freely adapt it to suit her. Its length allows for shifts from a personal plea for purity, to a plea for the *chatan* and the marriage. Echoing the mikveh's mix of physical and spiritual, it then details many aspects of the wedding that often preoccupy a *kalla*, connecting them to the spiritual aspirations of the couple,

---

<sup>8</sup> Available [here](#).

family, and community.

Many *kallot* choose to write their own prayers for the occasion, or just to decide on a specific aspect of mikveh or marriage that they wish to think about when immersing. The immersion is part of the process permitting *chatan* and *kalla* to consummate their marriage, and it is a continuation of a mitzva kept and cherished by Jewish women from time immemorial. Even so, the broader narrative should not overshadow this moment between a woman and God as an opportunity to think about what that relationship does and can mean for her as she transitions to marriage.

*Tevila* as preparation for a transition to covenant is reminiscent of the Children of Israel, who were commanded to purify themselves through immersion prior to the covenantal moment of receiving the Torah.

#### Shemot 19:10

And God said to Moshe, "Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and they shall wash their clothing.

#### Mechilta of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai Shemot 19:14

Here, where they require washing of clothing, it is a logical inference that they [themselves] should require immersion.

### **A Personal Yom Kippur or Yom Tov**

Another wedding day custom with possible roots in the giving of the Torah is fasting on the wedding day.

#### Tashbetz Katan 465

Just as Israel fasted on it [the day of giving the Torah], so the *chatan* fasts. And at the giving of the *Torah* they were married, as it is written, "your bridal love" (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2).

Rav Eliezer of Worms provides one potential explanation for why fasting would precede a wedding (or the wedding-like experience of receiving the Torah), that we fast to focus our anticipation and prepare for performing *mitzvot*.

#### Sefer Roke'ach 353

That the *chatanim* fast until after the *beracha*, I found in a homiletic: Because the mitzva is beloved to them, much as the early pious ones would fast upon performance of a beloved mitzva, such as *lulav* and other things.

According to this view, part of why a groom fasts until *kiddushin* is to express that the upcoming wedding is precious to him. This idea jibes well with our understanding of the wedding day as a joyous one.

The Talmud Yerushalmi provides another reason for fasting, that a groom receives forgiveness upon marriage:

#### Talmud Yerushalmi Bikkurim 3:3

A *chatan*: "And Eisav went to Yishmael and took [as a wife] Machalat daughter of

Yishmael” (*Bereishit* 28:9). And was Machalat her name? Wasn’t Bosmat her name? Rather, all his transgressions were forgiven [*nimchelu*] him.

In the fifteenth century, Mahari Beruna builds on this Yerushalmi to suggest that a *chatan* fasts on his wedding day as an act of *teshuva* to prevent sin, lest the sin itself or its spiritual effects trip up the *chatan*’s progress toward the wedding or toward meriting the atonement it could provide. He suggests other potential rationales for a *chatan* to fast as well, beginning with the idea that fasting keeps the *chatan* from intoxication that could mar his judgment at *kiddushin*:

#### Responsa Mahari Beruna 93

...The custom has already spread through all of Israel that he [the *chatan*] not eat until he emerges from his chuppa, and I heard the reason is that he not get drunk, or that they not say that he was drunk at the time of *kiddushin* and they were erroneous [and thus invalid] *kiddushin*...And I heard further in accordance with that which they said in the Talmud (Yerushalmi) that one who is raised up, his transgressions are forgiven. And since he is ascending to importance [as one married], perhaps sin will cause [trouble] and it [the forgiveness] will be canceled. And he takes upon himself repentance and simple discomfort until after he finishes his chuppa, and then goes back and eats.

Some communities, such as Ben Ish Chai’s nineteenth-century Baghdad, connected the tradition for a *chatan* to fast with repentance, since repentance is usually considered a precursor for forgiveness.

#### Ben Ish Chai, First Year, *Shofetim* 13

It is customary that a *chatan* fasts on the day on which he enters the *chuppa*, because one who marries a woman, his transgressions are forgiven him. And the merit of the fast also needs to accompany this, and further, in order that through the fast he will have a broken heart for increased acceptance of *teshuva*. And here in our city many have this custom, and specifically the *chatan*. But *kallot* do not have this custom, and it has not occurred that any *kalla* fasts prior to the *chuppa* at all.

Since women are not explicitly mentioned in the Yerushalmi, Ben Ish Chai stipulates that a *kalla* does not fast. This approach contrasts with that of many Ashkenazi authorities, including Rema, who attest to a widely accepted practice for both *chatan* and *kalla* to fast:

#### Rema EH 61:1

It is customary that the *chatan* and *kalla* fast on the day of their *chuppa*.

Extending the concept of forgiveness and repentance, some authorities characterize the wedding day as a personal Yom Kippur for both *chatan* and *kalla*, on which they both fast. <sup>9</sup> Maharam Mintz adds to this mention of the rationale of preventing

---

<sup>9</sup> Rav Ovadya Yosef suggests that some early authorities may have had a different text of the Yerushalmi, that included or singled out women:

#### Responsa Yabia Omer III EH 9

In any case, I have seen a textual variation in Yalkut Shemuel (117) that reads “**their** sins were forgiven,” in accordance with the words of Maharam Mintz above, and so I have seen in some printed editions of Rashi Parashat *Vayishlach* (36:3), where the textual version is “**her** sins.” And so I found

intoxication, which logically applies to both parties as well:

#### Responsa Maharam Mintz 109

The *chatan* and the *kalla* are accustomed to fast on the wedding day until after the *beracha* [*birkat eirusin*], there are those who say the reason is that it is a day of forgiveness, for it is known that **their** transgressions are forgiven, and it is their Yom Kippur, as we expound on that which is written (*Bereishit* 28) “and he took Machalat [as his wife].” And there are those who say the reason that they need to fast is lest they become intoxicated and would not be in a settled state of mind at the time of *kiddushin*...

Unlike Yom Kippur, the fast is considered an individual fast, so it does not begin before dawn or go past nightfall.<sup>10</sup> Typically, as we’ve seen in a few of the above sources, it ends with the couple drinking from the wine at *kiddushin* and at *nissuin*. It also cannot take place on certain days of the year on which fasting is prohibited—Rosh Chodesh (with the possible exception of Rosh Chodesh Nissan),<sup>11</sup> Issru Chag, Tu Be-Av, Chanuka, Tu Bi-Shvat, Purim or Purim Katan.

#### **Not Fasting**

In many communities, though, especially among Sefaradim, fasting on the wedding day is not accepted custom, out of conviction that it does not befit the joyous tone of a personal Yom Tov. Rav Ovadya Yosef prominently advocated this position:

#### Responsa Yabi’a Omer III EH 9

In my humble opinion, those who wish to be stringent in this are not acting properly, for it is a leniency that leads to a stringency, to push aside his Yom Tov for this...And how much more so nowadays, when great weakness has descended upon the world. And how much more so the *kallot*, who need not fast on their wedding day...And don’t answer me with some sages who said that *chatanim* need to fast even here in Eretz Yisrael, for the words of all of the later authorities among the great Rabbis of the Sefaradim and the eastern lands, who testified in their greatness that we don’t have this custom, doubtless eluded their eyes...And only the Ashkenazim who are accustomed to fast here should maintain their custom.

Even for those whose communities have the custom to fast, the wedding day can be very taxing, regardless of its tone. If *chatan* or *kalla* feel weak from the fast, they should not hesitate to break it:

---

in Sefer Tashbetz (465) and in Mateh Moshe (*Hachnasat Kalla* 2), who cited this variant...“**her** sins,” see there. And in any case, it seems that both of them [*chatan* and *kalla*] are included in the forgiveness.

<sup>10</sup> Chochmat Adam *Sha’ar Beit Ha-nashim* 129:2

It seems to me that if the *chuppa* is delayed an hour or two into the night, one can rely on the first reason [intoxication] and there is no need to fast except until nightfall, for since this fast isn’t mentioned at all in the gemara, one can say that from the outset they never took upon them to be more stringent than with other fasts, which is until nightfall. Nevertheless, even so, one should be careful not to drink an intoxicating beverage prior to the *chuppa*.

<sup>11</sup> Rema *Shulchan Aruch* OC 573:1

But if he has a wedding in Nissan he fasts on the day of his *chuppa*, even on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, because it is one of the days on which we [have the custom to] fast.

### Aruch Ha-shulchan EH 61:21

If the fast is very difficult for them, they should not fast and simply be careful not to drink intoxicating beverages and not to pursue excess in food and drink on that day.

Given that there may be less textual basis for a *kalla* fasting, Eshel Avraham suggests that there is extra reason to be lenient with her fast:

### Eshel Avraham (Butschatsch) 573

She also has forgiveness, for if not so, it would be enough to warn her against an intoxicating drink or any drink and not that she fast at all, and this requires investigating further. In any case, one can be lenient with her [a *kalla*] a little more than with a *chatan*...

In our day, Rav Eliezer Melamed has taken a much more lenient approach to a *chatan* and *kalla* fasting, permitting them to eat even where they are simply concerned in advance about fasting:<sup>12</sup>

### Rav Eliezer Melamed, *Peninei Halacha, Taharat HaMishpacha* 8:7

A *chatan* or *kalla* who are concerned that the fast will exhaust them or cause them headaches, are not required to fast. Indeed, in the past only a few were lenient with this; however today, after we have become accustomed to lives of plenty and indulgence, the fasts have become more difficult emotionally, and therefore when the fast causes distress – we are lenient, because this fast is intended to awaken repentance and not for atonement or purification by accepting suffering... Therefore, those who are concerned about the fast are not obligated to fast, and they may eat and drink as necessary, and refrain from alcoholic beverages, and awaken repentance through setting aside time for [Torah] study on the wedding day and giving charity. And if they have strength, it is preferable for them to fast until noon.

## **Prayer**

Those who fast on the wedding day recite the *aneinu* prayer in *mincha* before the *chuppa*.<sup>13</sup> In keeping with the Yom Kippur theme, it is also common in many communities for *chatan* and *kalla* to recite *viduy* in *mincha*, creating an additional opportunity for *teshuva* and to start marriage on a spiritual clean slate:

### Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 146:4

The *chatan* and *kalla* need to sanctify themselves very much as they enter the *chuppa*, and should do *teshuva* on this day and scrutinize their deeds from the day of their birth to this day, and confess and seek forgiveness and expiation and atonement from God, and confess and leave behind [sin], and regret fully with a broken heart and make a strong resolve from that day and onward to serve God in

---

<sup>12</sup> Available here:

[https://ph.yhb.org.il/18-08-07/#\\_te01ftn8\\_7](https://ph.yhb.org.il/18-08-07/#_te01ftn8_7)

<sup>13</sup> Terumat Ha-deshen 157

It seems that it is fitting that he recite mincha prior to entering the *chuppa* and that he pray *aneninu*, for we maintain that 'there is a fast for hours [and not a full day], and one recites the prayer of the fast' (*Ta'anit* 11b).

Shulchan Aruch OC 562:2

So a *chatan* should recite *aneinu* prior to entering the *chuppa* and then he can drink from the cup of *beracha* [at *kiddushin*]

truth and simplicity and to be holy and pure, and afterwards they should enter the *chuppa* and pray that God cause the *Shechina* to dwell between them...and it is customary for them to say the *viduy* at *mincha* as on *erev* Yom Kippur.

Fasting on the wedding day is an example of how non-obligatory customs can take on a significant role in shaping the experience of the day. Some authorities, and couples, embrace the potential for meaningful experience that it creates, while others are more concerned about overshadowing the fundamental, joyous aspect of the day, or undermining *chatan* and *kalla*'s physical readiness for it.

## **Crowns and Gowns**

The question of fasting focuses on the couple's internal experience of the wedding day. Externals also play an important role in establishing the day's significance, and are often an area of emphasis for the *kalla*. Attention to a *kalla*'s appearance is considered so fundamental to her wedding preparations that the midrash describes God as adorning Chava as a *kalla* prior to uniting her with Adam:

### Bereishit Rabba 18:1

He taught it in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: He [God] adorned her [Chava] like a *kalla* and afterwards brought her to him [Adam]...When He had adorned her with 24 types of ornament, afterwards He brought her to him.

Although this midrash does not provide any details of **how** Chava or a *kalla* would be adorned, a mishna gives some indication. It describes an early practice of *chatan* and *kalla* donning crowns. This was discontinued as part of a series of decrees toning down wedding celebrations during the period of strife that culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple:

### Mishna Sota 9:14

In the war of Vespasian, they [the sages] decreed against the crowns of *chatanim*...In the war of Titus they [the sages] decreed against the crowns of *kallot*...

The Talmud provides more details about the *kalla*'s crown:

### Sota 49b

What are "the crowns of *kallot*"? Rabba son of Bar Chana said Rabbi Yochanan [said]: A city of gold.

### Shabbat 59a

What is "with a city of gold"? Rabba son of bar Chana said Rabbi Yochanan said: Yerushalayim of gold.

It is striking that a bride's crown would include an ornament highlighting Yerushalayim, thus concretizing the statement that one should undertake to place Yerushalayim "at the head of my joy" (*Tehillim* 137:6). Another passage clarifies that other articles that gather the hair, like a decorative band, are not considered crowns:

### Shabbat 57b-58a

What is an *istema* [band]?...Abbaye said Rav [said]: A trap for [hair] flyaways...In the name of Rabbi Shimon they said: There is also no halachic concern with it on account of “the crowns of *kallot*.”

(For a discussion of head-covering for a bride at her wedding, see [here](#). We discuss the veil in our upcoming piece on the wedding ceremony, when we explore the *bedecken*, veiling).

The initial passage that we saw about not wearing crowns concludes by describing an alternative that remains permissible:

#### Sota 49a-49b

...But she makes her a cap of wool.

Based on these passages,<sup>14</sup> Ramban maintains that a fabric crown inlaid with gold is not subject to the decree, while a metal crown would be:

#### Ramban *Torat Ha-Adam*, Gate of Mourning, the Matter of Delayed Mourning

It [the Talmud] implies that because of its lesser status as being of fabric they said that it [a wool cap] is not subject to the [decree against] crowns of *kallot*, but one can say that any crown made of metal is prohibited because of the [decree against] crowns of *kallot*, and not only a city of gold. And an *istema* has gold adornments and since it's primarily fabric they did not decree [against it].

Rambam similarly explains that this means that the decree applies to metal crowns, but not to fabric.<sup>15</sup>

#### Rambam Laws of Fasts 5:15

They decreed against the crowns of *kallot* if they were made of silver or gold, but of twisted threads are permitted to a *kalla*.

Mishna Berura adds that it logically follows that a *kalla* can wear a crown made of cloth, but is not permitted to wear crowns made of real pearls or precious stones, either:

#### Mishna Berura 560:17

If it is of silver—Such is the law with [crowns of] pearls and precious stones.

Some prefer to avoid tiara-style head ornaments for the *kalla* at a wedding altogether.

---

<sup>14</sup> Another Talmudic passage distinguishes between fabric crowns inset with precious metals, and crowns made primarily of such metals:

#### Shabbat 59b

Rav Ashi taught to be lenient [regarding what items may be worn in the public domain on Shabbat], that no one disagrees that woven crowns are permissible. Where they disagree is regarding metal crowns.

<sup>15</sup> Rav Yosef Karo notes that his text of Rambam could lead to a different conclusion, but he rules in accordance with the version quoted *infra*:

#### Beit Yosef OC 560 s.v. *Ve-aseru*

But in our textual variant in the works of Rambam, it is written “if there was silver there,” and this variant implies that even if it's primarily of twisted threads, if silver or gold ornaments are set in it, it is prohibited.

Others find room to wear them because they are not made of real precious metals or stones, but are typically fabric headdresses with metal thread.

## White Gown

In his description of the woolen cap mentioned by the Talmud as permissible, Rashi adds another description, that it might be white:

### Rashi Sota 49b

Cap - like a cap of white wool...

The mention of a white cap resonates with the current practice for brides to wear white. Now, a quick look at this [selection of wedding dresses](#) from the collection of the Israel museum reveals that even in recent centuries, Jewish brides wore a wide range of styles and colors to their weddings. In medieval Ashkenaz, however, *chatanim* developed the practice of marrying wrapped in a white *tallit*, as noted by Kolbo:

### Kolbo 75

We wrap him [the *chatan*] in a white *tallit* in order to fulfill [the verse] “At all times, your clothes shall be white” (*Kohelet* 9:8)...

Our sages interpret the verse from *Kohelet* in two ways—as a reference to *tzitzit*, and as a figurative way of encouraging stainless behavior at all times.<sup>16</sup> Along these lines, in some communities, a *chatan* wears a *kittel*.

### Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 147:4

The groomsmen dress the *chatan* in a *kittel*, in order that he remember the day of death and be aroused to do *teshuva*.

As we have seen, the idea of prompting *teshuva* could also apply to a *kalla*. Though by no means obligatory, a *kalla* wearing white also harkens back to how the daughters of Israel would dress on Yom Kippur and on Tu Be’Av—days of joy, *teshuva*, forgiveness, and love:

### Mishna Ta’anit 4:8

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were no happier days for Israel than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur, for on them the daughters of Yerushalayim would go out in white raiments, borrowed, so as not to embarrass whoever does not have.

Since wearing white has nothing to do with marital or sexual history, any *kalla* who wishes to can wear white regardless of her past.

Another mark of the joy was that the clothing the women wore was borrowed, so as to erode class divisions. Many women perpetuate this legacy today by borrowing their

---

<sup>16</sup>Shabbat 153a

We learned in a mishna there: Rabbi Eliezer says: Repent one day before your death. His students asked Rabbi Eliezer: Does a person know on which day he will die? He said to them: And how much more so a person should repent today, lest he die on the morrow, and [then] all of his days are in repentance. And even Shlomo said in his wisdom: ‘At all times your clothes shall be white’...Another tradition: “At all times your clothes shall be white,” these are *tzitzit*...

bridal gear from a *gemach* or by donating them to one. (A *gemach*—the term is an abbreviation for “*gemilut chassadim*,” doing kindness—is a sort of community library for items other than books.) A recent bride in the Philadelphia area explains why this matters:<sup>17</sup>

Shayna Edney, Quoted in Rachel Kurland, “Something Borrowed—Literally,” *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*, November 3, 2017

“A person getting a [modest] dress from a *gemach* is not so different than a person getting a regular dress from a store... The only difference is that the *gemach* dresses have been worn before — but you would never be able to tell... Acts of kindness and giving are not just for the Orthodox — it is a mitzvah and a quality that binds the entire Jewish nation... Dress *gemachs* should be for everyone of every religion and every social status. There is no reason for every single bride to spend \$1,000-plus on a wedding dress when they can borrow from a *gemach*, and then alter it as they please. I wish that more people would donate their wedding dresses to *gemachs*,” she continued, “instead of leaving them in a box for 30 years...”

### **Not seeing Each Other**

In his comments on Rivka covering herself upon first encountering Yitzchak, Radak tells us that a betrothed couple should not meet prior to the wedding:

Radak *Bereishit* 24:64

For it is fitting for a woman to be shy of her fiancé and that she not be seen by him until she becomes married to him.

According to a sixteenth century report by Rav Shmuel de Medina, Ashkenazi custom was for a couple not to see each other once the wedding was agreed upon, even if long before *eirusin*:

Responsa Maharashdam EH 31

An Ashkenazi woman, that their [Ashkenazim’s] manner and custom is that an engaged man does not see his fiancée.

On the other hand, there was a custom dating back to Geonic times for *chatan* and *kalla* to meet the night before the wedding—a custom which may have been a precursor to the *chinna* celebrations:

Geonic Responsa Harkavi 65

When the day arrives for her entry into the *chuppa*, the *chatan* comes on the night [before] that day, he and his groomsmen, to her father’s home, and they escort her, together with her female and male relatives, with words of rejoicing and praise, and walk her to a different courtyard, of her relatives or his relatives or of one unrelated, until the next day [of the wedding].

Nowadays, in some communities (mostly Ashkenazi), it is customary for *chatan* and *kalla* not to see each other for the week prior to the wedding, or during the week of the wedding (starting with Motzaei Shabbat), or on the day of the wedding. Though these

---

<sup>17</sup> Available here: <http://www.jewishexponent.com/something-borrowed-literally/>

customs have become well-entrenched in some communities, they don't appear in early halachic works.

The *chatan* and *kalla* not seeing each other prior to the preliminaries to the ceremony can add drama and meaning to the wedding day. Still, there is no strict prohibition on their seeing each other, even in communities with this custom. Rav Mordechai Eliyahu details the custom, connecting it to a concern that intense anticipation might lead a woman to experience bleeding, known as *dam chimud*, that could make her ritually impure.<sup>18</sup> (Though he would not call this a mere custom if he considered the risk of *dam chimud* in seeing each other before the wedding to be halachically significant.)

Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, *Darchei Tahara Ha-shalem*, Laws of a *Kalla*, 13 (p. 147)

There are those who have the custom for the *chatan* and *kalla* not to see each other for seven days prior to the chuppa, in order that the *kalla* not experience *dam chimud* ("blood of desire") during those days. And there are those whose custom is for them not to see each other only during the week of the wedding. And according to both customs, it is permissible for them to speak on the phone. There are those who do not practice these stringencies at all. And each couple should follow their forefathers' customs. And in time of need one can be lenient with the matter, for in law this is not an absolute requirement.

Some couples find this custom emotionally beneficial, while for others it is more challenging. As Rav Eliyahu notes, there is flexibility for the couple to decide how to stay in contact, the phone is not an integral part of this custom, and the entire custom can be set aside in times of need.

## Photographs

Since there's flexibility around the custom of not seeing each other, there's room for *chatan* and *kalla* to take photographs together prior to the wedding, especially if that will make the wedding less elongated and burdensome for guests. Rav Dr. Ari Zivotofsky shares reports that this was the position of Rav Moshe Feinstein, who did not personally have this custom to start with:<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Dr. Ari Zivotofsky, *Before the Wedding*, OUTorah.org

Rabbi Ephraim Greenblatt, a close student of Rav Moshe Feinstein, reports that a few days before his oldest son was to be married, he went with his wife, the *chatan* and the *kallah's* parents to see Rav Moshe. The rav gave them his blessing and asked about the whereabouts of the *kallah*. Rabbi Greenblatt responded that since it was during the week before the wedding, the *chatan* and *kallah* were not seeing each other, to which Rav Moshe responded that there is no basis for such a custom...Rav Moshe saw no reason why the custom should inconvenience people. In particular, he believed that it should not prevent the bride and groom from taking pictures together before the wedding.

---

<sup>18</sup>Shulchan Aruch YD 192:1

He asked her to marry him and she consented, she must sit seven clean days...lest on account of desire she saw a drop of blood the size of a mustard seed and didn't realize it.

Learn more here: <https://www.yoatzot.org/weddings/639/>

<sup>19</sup> Available here: <https://outorah.org/p/5678>

Especially for couples who have been observing the custom, breaking it before the wedding to take photos can seem anticlimactic. In practice, taking photos together on the wedding day, before the wedding, is sometimes done in the United States, but less common and less accepted in Israel.

#### Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein, Letter to Har Etzion Rabbinic Alumni

...I have heard about *poskim* in the USA who permit photography of *chatan* and *kallah* prior to the *chuppah* (for pictures without physical contact). I have serious reservations if this is wise from various perspectives, but certainly believe that it should not be done in contemporary Tzioni-Dati society in Eretz Yisrael, because of the local *minhag* that prohibits it, as well as concerns about the messaging to the Tzioni-Dati community regarding *hilkhot tzniut* at large.

Some couples who seek to reduce time spent taking family pictures during the wedding have taken advantage of technology to address the issue. The *chatan* and *kalla* can take photographs separately with each family before the wedding, and the final photos can be digitally altered to include both of them.

A question that may arise if *chatan* and *kalla* are photographed together prior to the wedding is whether they are permitted to have physical contact, such as holding hands or having hands around each other's backs or shoulders, in the photos. Indeed, as we will explore further in our upcoming piece on the physical relationship between a couple, a main bar to physical contact between an unmarried couple that could marry is the prohibition of *nidda* (menstrual impurity), a limitation removed by the *kalla's* immersion in the mikveh.

On the other hand, as we have learned, relations between *chatan* and *kalla* remain prohibited prior to *nissuin*, a prohibition that is compared to that of a couple during *nidda*.

#### Minor Tractate Kalla 1:1

A *kalla* without a *beracha* is prohibited to her husband like a *nidda*, just as a *nidda* who has not immersed is prohibited to her husband, so a *kalla* without a *beracha* is prohibited to her husband.

Whether this prohibition extends to any physical contact before the wedding likely hinges on the debate regarding to what extent this prohibition is akin to the prohibition of *nidda*, or *arayot* (prohibited relationships). (We plan to discuss touch between men and women in a future piece.)

In the early thirteenth century, Roke'ach reports on an Ashkenazi ritual of holding a sort of preliminary chuppa on the morning of the wedding. As part of that public ritual, the custom was for *chatan* to take the *kalla's* hand when she arrived:<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Learn more here:

[https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%97%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%AA\\_%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9F](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%97%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%AA_%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9F)

Over a century later, Maharil records a similar custom:

Sefer Maharil (Minhagim), Laws of Nissuin

When [the *kalla*] comes to the entrance of the synagogue courtyard, the rabbi and important people would go escort the *chatan* to greet the *kalla*. And the *chatan* clasps her in his hand.

### Sefer Ha-roke'ach Laws of *Eirusin* and *Nissuin* 352

When the *kalla* enters to come into the gate of the home [for the wedding], then the *chatan* goes there to meet her and takes her hand and brings her over the threshold...

Even so, this ceremony was part of the extended wedding itself. One can argue that the special limitations on the *chatan* and *kalla* prior to the completion of the wedding extend to physical contact. Chida suggests this in his commentary to *Masechet Kalla*:

### Chida, *Kisei Rachamim*, Commentary to Tractate *Kalla* 1

"A *kalla* without a *beracha* is prohibited": That is to say, even to embrace or to touch her, like a *nidda*...

Indeed, couples commonly hold off on touching, and on any pictures of them touching, until after the wedding ceremony and, where applicable, *yichud*. Aside from the halachic argument, couples who have been careful not to touch throughout their courtship and engagement often wish for that first touch to take place in a more meaningful framework than a photo session.

Those seeking photographs incorporating touch between them might take them before coming out onto the dance floor, or might schedule a photo session a few weeks after the wedding. Others are more creative, as those experiencing a *chuppah nidda* must be: A hand around a chair back can look like a hand around a shoulder, two hands not touching can be hidden behind a bouquet, the couple can look lovingly at each other, and so on.

Though photographs record moments of joy, the true joy of the wedding day is in the experience.

### How can a *kalla* balance the spiritual and the practical on her wedding day?

*The wedding day is a joyous personal Yom Tov. It is also a personal Yom Kippur, on which the couple should strive to remain clear-headed and make time for prayer and teshuva.*

*And yet, the wedding day can also be extraordinarily busy and hectic. Ideally, a *kalla* will be able to delegate the myriad practical tasks, like picking up a bouquet, to family members or bridal attendants. But she will still be caught up in a whirlwind of material preparations, often including, hours devoted to hair, makeup, and photos.*

*A *kalla* can work to maintain awareness of the spiritual significance of the customs that we've described here and incorporate them into her day. Before she immerses, she can take her moment of inspecting herself as a time for self-acceptance and recognition before she moves toward the water. When she is able to immerse, a *kalla* can take time in the water to think of her personal connection to God and daven for it to grow throughout her marriage. When she beautifies herself, she can remember that this is built upon a foundation of purity.*

*Sara Esther Crispe describes the external and internal experience of her wedding*

day:<sup>21</sup>

Sara Esther Crispe, "The Merging of Two Souls," Chabad.org

It is the day of our wedding and I wake early to prepare. Externally I am having my hair done, my nails, my makeup. But within I am in a completely different world. I recite psalms, trying to infuse every moment with holiness. I fast, as it is my personal Yom Kippur, my Day of Atonement, and I ask forgiveness for my past while cleansing and preparing for our new future.

*Regardless of whether a kalla is able to immerse before the wedding, or whether chatan and kalla are fasting or seeing each other, the wedding day is a significant time to be engaged in meaningful acts that further enhance this milestone. These can include acts of teshuva, like giving tzedaka and davening. It can also mean rejoicing in gratitude for God in a way that includes one's community. The couple can make a special effort, no matter what stresses arise over the course of the day, to try to spread joy—especially to those who might have a harder time accessing joy. In this way, the wedding day is not only a day where chatan and kallah are focused on their own relationship, but also a time in which they connect both to God and to others.*

### Further Reading

- Rav Binyamin Adler, *Ha-nissu'in Ke-hilchetam*  
Rav David Brofsky, Lifecycle Series VBM
- Rav Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven* Moznaim: New York, 1983.

---

<sup>21</sup> Available here: [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/143865/jewish/The-Merging-of-Two-Souls.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/143865/jewish/The-Merging-of-Two-Souls.htm)