

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot

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The Wedding Ceremony III: After Kiddushin

By Laurie Novick, with research by Hannah Vorcheimer

Rav Ezra Bick, Ilana Elzufon, and Shayna Goldberg, eds.

How do the later stages of the wedding, from reading the *ketuba* to *yichud*, work in practice?
How do we remember Yerushalayim? What are potential roles for women?

Reading the Ketuba

Our [previous piece](#) focused on *kiddushin*, the first stage of the ceremony under the *chuppa*. [Nissuin](#), which follows, is halachically distinct from *kiddushin*. Thus, Rashi stipulated that separate cups of wine should be used for [birkat eirusin](#) (recited over *kiddushin*) and for the [sheva berachot](#) of *nissuin* (*birkat chatanim*):

Sefer Ha-ora 2:11

They asked Rebbe [Rashi]: In a place where they perform *eirusin* and *nissuin* together, what is the halacha of reciting *birkat eirusin* and *nissuin* with a single cup. And Rebbe answered: One who wishes to do so, one says to him "drink what's left in the cup," and pours a second cup over which to recite *birkat nissuin*, because "we don't recite two *kedushot* [matters of sanctity] over one cup," for we don't perform *mitzvot* in bundles...

The Tosafot, continuing this line of thinking, note that it is customary to make a break between the *berachot*, and the stages that they represent, through a reading of the *ketuba*:

Tosafot Pesachim 102b

They were accustomed to recite the *beracha* of *eirusin* and of *nissuin* over two cups...and furthermore, they were accustomed to read the *ketuba* between them as a break...

Rema rules accordingly:

Rema EH 62:9

Birkat eirusin and *birkat chatanim*, we say it over two cups, even when he performs *kiddushin* at the time of the *chuppa*. (And we are accustomed to make a break between them by reading the *ketuba*.)

In some communities, the *ketuba* is signed at this juncture. In others, a *devar Torah* is given rather than reading the *ketuba*, a translation is read or the reader substitutes a summary for much of the text.

The question of who reads the *ketuba* is not addressed extensively in early halachic literature.¹ In recent years, there has been some discussion about a woman reading the *ketuba*. This reflects a drive to include more women's voices in the wedding ceremony and to find opportunities to honor female Torah scholars or mentors. At the same time, a woman reading the *ketuba* represents a change from common practice, so it has met with debate. Some halachic authorities, including Rav Yehuda Henkin,² permit a woman to read the *ketuba*:

Responsa Benei Banim 3:27

You can honor a woman with reading the *ketuba*, for it does not entail a [*davar she-bi[kedusha]* or *beracha*]; rather, it is merely reading contract of obligation in order to make a break between *kiddushin* and *nissuin*... a woman can also read. Even though in a place where women do not customarily speak before a male audience, it would not be *tzanua* for her to read the *ketuba* before them, but in a community where in any case women lecture or report in public regarding communal matters etc., a woman can also read the *ketuba*.

Others, including Rav Herschel Shachter³ and Rav Yaakov Ariel,⁴ have acknowledged that there is no formal prohibition against women reading the *ketuba*, but have come out strongly against it, for reasons of *tzeniut*.

¹ Ra'aviyah writes that a community's sages would read over the *ketuba* before it was signed:

Ra'aviyah 4:919

The witnesses aren't concerned about reading the *ketuba* before they sign. And the reason is that the sages of the community have read it.

This does not clearly establish that they would read it aloud during the ceremony.

² Available here: https://www.sefaria.org.il/Responsa_Benei_Banim%2C_Volume_III.27.5

³ http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2004/parsha/rsch_dvorim2.html

Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Can Women Be Rabbis?

A new trend is emerging...A scholarly woman is called upon at a wedding ceremony to read the *kesuba*. They say that "*halachically* there is nothing wrong with this!" In a certain sense this statement is correct. If one only judges the issue from the perspective of the laws of *siddur kiddushin* there's nothing wrong. Yes, even if a parrot or a monkey would read the *kesuba*, the marriage would be one hundred percent valid. Strictly speaking, the reading of the *kesuba* is not at all a part of the marriage ceremony...But when a *shailah* is researched one must look through the entire Shulchan Aruch, and consider all the various aspects of that *shailah*. Just because there is an issue that does not appear in *Even Hoezer Hilchos Kiddushin* or *Hilchos Nissuin*, it doesn't mean that the issue is "non-*halachic*".... We only require and demand of men that they compromise on their *tznius* and observe certain *mitzvos* in a *farhesia* (public) fashion. We do not require this of women....[I]t is a violation of *kvod hatzibur* to have a woman surrender her privacy to read the *kesuba* in public. Were there no men present who were able to read this Aramaic document?

⁴ <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/ask/14775>

Ha-Rav Yaakov Ariel, “Ketuba Reading by a Woman,” yeshiva.org, 20 Elul, 5765

Question: Is it permissible for a woman who is a *talmida chachama* to read the *ketuba* under the *chuppa*? Response: The question is not one of formal halacha but of general policy. It is accepted in Yisrael that at public events women preserve their *tzeniut* and do not make themselves unnecessarily conspicuous. The *chuppa* is also included in this.... This is a slippery slope that is liable to reach synagogue practices....If this woman is indeed a *talmida chachama*, it is incumbent upon her to follow the truly wise women who knew their place, and who merited wide public appreciation specifically on account of their *tzeniut*...

Apart from the *tzeniut* question, some rabbinic figures are comfortable with women speaking at other junctures in the wedding ceremony, but still hesitate with regard to women reading the *ketuba* because it is such a well-entrenched custom and has more ritual overtones. Rabbanit Esti Rosenberg shares her perspective on women reading the *ketuba*, in light of this type of distinction:

Rabbanit Esti Rosenberg, from a discussion forum, approved edit

In many quarters of the religious community, numerous requests are received by every *mesader kiddushin* for changes and innovations. Some of the requests are reasonable and halachically possible, and some position the realm of tradition regarding the *chuppa* as more challenging than it was a generation ago. I have no doubt that couples' desire to include women in the wedding is honest and sincere. I also share it. For years, I have been happy to say words of blessing under the *chuppa*, and the *tefilla* of Rav Amram Gaon. There is no doubt that it is permissible for a woman to read the *ketuba*. Over a decade ago, my father and teacher [Rav Aharon Lichtenstein] said to me that it is permissible but that I should not do it under any circumstances. I feel that in a certain sense, the discussion revolves around the question – in our religious world, is there a concept of “permissible but not right now”? In practice, many rabbis and major Torah figures draw a boundary between a woman reading the *ketuba* and a woman speaking [at the *chuppa*] or reading the *tefilla* of Rav Amram Gaon. While they refuse to [permit] reading the *ketuba*, they are happy to involve women in other possibilities. Right now, I abstain from reading the *ketuba* although I happily agree to other possibilities. I feel that one must balance between changes and innovations, and applying brakes. I know that it is permissible to read the *ketuba*, and I have no criticism of a woman who chooses to do this. Much depends on those assembled and on the community. Will I feel differently in a few years? It's hard to predict. It is important to me to preserve gradual progress and not to reach an extreme.

There isn't a clear halachic distinction between who can read the *ketuba* and who can, for example, announce the names of those invited to recite *berachot* or give a speech under the *chuppa*. Nevertheless, there is a sense that these roles are different. (We discuss the *tefilla* of Rav Amram Ga'on at the end of this piece.)

Tallit

Once the *ketuba* has been read, it's time to move to the second stage of the wedding, *nissuin*, when the couple become fully married. As we've [seen](#), this point of

transition is known as *chuppa*.

In many communities, especially in Israel, the *chatan* dons a *tallit*, and covers himself and the *kalla* with it, at the beginning of *nissuin*. (In some others, he arrives at the *chuppa* wearing a *tallit*.) Some early halachic authorities consider the act of covering the *chatan* and *kalla* with a cloth (not necessarily a *tallit* with *tzitzit*) to be a form of *chuppa*.⁵

In the late twelfth century, Ra'avan invokes several ancient sources for this practice. A Talmudic passage describes the spreading of a *tallit* over a maidservant as establishing a marital bond to the family that she serves.⁶ In Tanach, Rut comes to Boaz at night on the threshing floor and beseeches him to “spread the edges” of his garment over her, to shelter and protect her, hinting that he should marry her. Yechezkel uses similar language in the context of an allegorical marriage.

Ra'avan, Sefer Ha-manhig, Eirusin and Nissuin, p. 540

It is called “*chuppa*” because he covers [*chofeh*] her with his *tallit*, as it is said in *Ha-isha Nikneit* [the first chapter of *Kiddushin*, 18b]... “once he [a master] has spread his *tallit* over her [a Jewish maidservant] for the purpose of *nissuin*, he [her father] is not permitted to indenture her,” and so is the meaning of “and spread the ends of your garment over your maidservant, for you are a redeemer” [*Rut* 3:9], this is spreading the *tallit*, and so testifies the prophet [*Yechezkel* 16:8], “And I will spread the ends of my garment over you,” ... Therefore, the custom of France and Provence is to place a colored cloth over both of their heads as a reminder of spreading the end, for he spreads the end of his garment over her.

The term “*kanaf*” used in *Rut* and *Yechezkel* to convey shelter and protection also connotes the corners of a garment where we place *tzitzit*.⁷ A *tallit* with *tzitzit* may have come into use for weddings because the Torah juxtaposes the *mitzvot* of marriage and *tzitzit*, leading to a tradition in some communities for a *chatan* to wear a *tallit* at his wedding.⁸

⁵ Some dissented from viewing this as *chuppa*:

Sefer Ha-Itur, Sha'ar 2 63a

The one who says that *chuppa* is the cloth with which they cover their heads during the *beracha*, that is incorrect.

⁶ Sefer Kolbo 75

After the *eirusin*, they make them a *chuppa*, that they cover them with a *tallit* or a cloth or something similar, and this is called *nissuin*, and the hint to this is “when a man takes a woman” and adjacent to it “fringes shall you make for yourself” (*Devarim* 22:12-13), and so they [the Sages] said regarding designation [*ye'ud*, akin to *kiddushin*], once the master has spread his *tallit* over her [a maidservant], he has fulfilled the mitzva of *ye'ud*.

Rema, Shulchan Aruch EH 55:1

There are those who say that the *chuppa* is that they spread a cloth over their heads at the time of the *beracha*.

⁷ *Bemidbar* 15:38, *Devarim* 22:12. Another meaning of *kanaf* is the wing of a bird, under which the young can take shelter.

⁸ Sefer Ha-manhig, Eirusin and Nissuin, p. 539

That they had the practice in France and Provence that all *chatanim* would wrap themselves in *tzitzit* upon entering the *chuppa* has a basis in the midrash: “Why is the portion of *tzitzit* adjacent to marrying a woman, for it is written ‘make yourselves fringes’ and adjacent to it is ‘when a man takes a woman etc.’? To tell you that a *chatan* is obligated in *tzitzit*.” Ra'avan.

In some communities, a man does not begin to wear a *tallit gadol* until married:

Sefer Maharil (Minhagim), Laws of Nissuin

The *chatan* putting on a *tallit* at his wedding and wrapping the *kalla* in it has also been practiced in Sefardi communities for centuries.⁹ It can be especially meaningful for a *tallit* to play a role in the *chuppa* because there is a widespread practice for a *kalla* to purchase a *tallit* for her *chatan*.¹⁰

Sedei Chemed, *Chatan and Kalla* 11

...I saw a custom...that the *kalla* would send to the *chatan*, as a gift, a four-cornered *tallit* as part of the dowry that she would bring to him, and they are particular about this...

By providing the *tallit* that will be spread over her and her *chatan*, the *kalla* contributes to the building of their symbolic new home.

What of a *chuppat nidda*? In discussing a related custom to cover *chatan* and *kalla* together with a cloth in advance of *kiddushin*, Maharil mentions that this is done even when the *kalla* is in *nidda*, though the cloth is removed more quickly than otherwise.¹¹

Maharil (*Minhagim*), Laws of *Nissuin*

Indeed, Maharil at the wedding of his daughter took the edge of the scarf, which is called *Ende*, and placed it upon them as a *chuppa*...and if the *kalla* is not *tehora* for her husband, they remove it from over her head immediately after *birkat eirusin*.

This would seem to provide a basis in the case of a *chuppat nidda* for *chatan* and *kalla* to still be wrapped together in a *tallit*, taking care not to touch, though perhaps earlier in the ceremony. Alternatively, the *tallit* might just be held over the two of them, without their being wrapped together.

She-hechiyyanu

Rambam writes that one recites the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* over *mitzvot* that are

...In the Rhineland, where the custom is that even older boys don't wrap themselves in *tzitzit* until they marry a woman, and they connected it to that which is written: "make yourselves fringes" and adjacent to it "when a man takes a woman"...

⁹ In the seventeenth century, Rav Chaim Benvenisti takes the custom for granted, and records a debate over whether a *beracha* should be recited over the *tzitzit*:

Shayarei Keneset Ha-gedola, Glosses to Beit Yosef OC 8

I was asked if we recite the *beracha* over *tzitzit* when we cast the *tallit* over the *chatanim* and *kallot* on their wedding day. For the Chacham the pious honorable Rav Shlomo Avraham Hakohen z"l was accustomed to tell *chatanim* to recite the *beracha* of *tzitzit*. And I responded that I did not see in Constantinople that they would recite the *beracha*.

¹⁰ Available here: <https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=53079&st=&pgnum=37&hilit=>

¹¹ Approximately five hundred years later, Rav Yaakov Ettlinger writes that this was the custom in the Germany of his youth, and this provides a basis for a later ruling by Rav Chayyim Falaji:

Responsa Binyan Tzion 139

So I saw in my youth in the land in which I was born [Germany] (for here where we keep the custom of Poland they do not have this practice) and it is already known to the attendants that if the *kalla* is not *tehora* we remove [the *tallit*] right after *kiddushin*....

Ruach Chayyim YD 195:4

A *kalla* who is *nidda*, how should they spread a *tallit* over them, and how should he place the *kiddushin* in her hand? See regarding this Binyan Tzion 139

performed rarely, such as a baby's *berit mila* or *pidyon ha-ben*.¹² We might imagine that this would include a wedding. However, as early as the fifteenth century, Maharik takes it as a given that *she-hechiyyanu* is not recited upon *kiddushin* and *nissuin* in and of themselves, and acknowledges that this requires explanation.

Responsa Maharik 128

One needs also to reconcile the custom of not reciting the *beracha* [of *she-hechiyyanu*] over betrothing or marrying a woman.

As Maharik's comment suggests, much of the halachic discussion about reciting *she-hechiyyanu* over marriage seeks to justify the *chatan* **not** reciting it.¹³

Even setting the mitzva element aside, as we discussed [here](#), a feeling of great joy at a given occasion can warrant recitation of *she-hechiyyanu*. On this count, Aruch Ha-shulchan expresses surprise that the joy of the wedding should not lead to *she-hechiyyanu*. However, he concludes that not reciting *she-hechiyyanu* over the wedding is a firm custom that should not be abrogated.

Aruch Ha-shulchan OC 223:4

It is puzzling why they shouldn't recite *she-hechiyyanu*, for the *simcha* is great ...they did not have the practice of reciting the *beracha*, and since they [in the past] did not, we also do not recite the *beracha*.

Rav Yaakov Emden is an exception to the general tendency towards halachic caution regarding *she-hechiyyanu* at a wedding. He rules that the *chatan* recites *she-hechiyyanu* over *kiddushin* and even over engagement and that the *kalla* should recite the *beracha* as well—as long as they are happy with each other.

Mor U-ktzi'a 223

It requires study, when a man marries a woman if he has an obligation to recite these *berachot* [*she-hechiyyanu* or *ha-tov ve-ha meitiv*]...it seems that if she is a good woman he should certainly recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu*, whether for fulfilling the mitzva, especially if she is the first [wife], or because it is no worse than seeing just a friend who is dear to him [over whom one recites *she-hechiyyanu* after not seeing them for thirty days]...as long as she is fitting and dear to him...and it further seems to me in this matter that even over contracting a suitable engagement (and how much more so on the *eirusin*) it is fitting to recite *she-hechiyyanu*...and I have a basis from the Torah [*Bereishit* 24:27] from Eliezer servant of Avraham who gave thanks and *beracha* to God even just for encountering Rivka, even though there was still no promise....Also the woman

¹² Rambam, Laws of Berachot 11:9

... and similarly a mitzva that is uncommon and not always available... such as a *berit mila* for his son, or *pidyon ha-ben*, one recites over it *she-hechiyyanu* at the time of performing it...

¹³ See, for example, Shach, who explains that *kiddushin* do not have an established time:

Shach YD 28:5

But it requires study, according to this why don't we recite the *beracha* [of *she-hechiyyanu*] over *tzitzit* and *tefillin* and other *mitzvot* when we first perform them? And similarly, we don't recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* over *kiddushin* or marriage to a woman, as Maharik wrote (128), and similarly over *mezuza* (below, beginning of *siman* 289), therefore we think that perforce even when we first perform a mitzva we do not recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* whenever its time is not fixed...

should recite a *beracha*...

Though Rav Emden alludes to *kiddushin* as a mitzva act towards fulfillment of the Torah's first mitzva, procreation, his argument for reciting *she-hechiyyanu* focuses on the joy of the occasion.

Chida agrees, but rules that it should be recited without mention of God's name or kingship, out of concern for a *beracha* in vain:¹⁴

Chida Machazikei Beracha OC 223:5

Over [marrying] a woman if she is good and dear to him, he should recite *she-hechiyyanu*, and even when the engagement is concluded it is fitting to recite *she-hechiyyanu*. *Mor uktzi'a*. And to me it seems that he should recite the *beracha* without [mentioning] God's name or kingship...Certainly one must give thanks and praise, nevertheless he should recite the *beracha* without God's name and kingship.

A tried-and-true halachic mechanism to allow for reciting *she-hechiyyanu* even when there are questions about whether it is halachically warranted is to invoke the halacha of reciting *she-hechiyyanu* over a new article of clothing when one really has in mind the way that article encapsulates one's broader sense of joy at the occasion. So, for example, in our piece on bat mitzva, we discussed Ben Ish Chai's suggestion that the bat mitzva girl recite *she-hechiyyanu* when first putting on her new clothes. A *kalla* can certainly recite a *she-hechiyyanu* upon donning her wedding dress or another significant piece of her wedding ensemble, or perhaps, as we've discussed, over her ring. In doing so, she has in mind her joy over the wedding itself.

When one wears a new *tallit* for the first time, it is customary to recite *she-hechiyyanu* because it is a significant new garment.¹⁵

In communities in which the *chatan* would first don his *tallit* after the wedding, his *she-hechiyyanu* was meant to include all gifts received by the couple from the engagement onwards:

Eshel Avraham EH 223 s.v. *odot*

It seems that the fundamental halacha is that they [*chatan* and *kalla*] rely on the *tallit* that they send to the *chatan*, and when he first wears the *tallit* he certainly recites *she-hechiyyanu*...Through the *beracha* over the *tallit*, all the gifts that they [people] give are resolved, and this entails a large and significant sum, and everything is included in the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* over the *tallit*, and we are already accustomed to delay the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* from [the time of] acquisition to [the time of] wearing.

It has become common in many circles for the *chatan* to wear his *tallit* for the first time at his wedding, and to include the wedding as a whole in his intention when reciting

¹⁴ Available here: <https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=9191&st=&pgnum=80&hilite=>

¹⁵ Shulchan Aruch OC 22:1

One who bought a *tallit* and made *tzitzit* for it, recites the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu*, for it is no worse than new articles. Rema: And if he did not recite the *beracha* when he made it, he recites the *beracha* at the first wrapping [himself in it].

she-hechiyyanu over it:

Sha'ar Ha-mefaked OC Tzitzit 1 s.v. ve-da

During the *chuppa*, at the time of *kiddushin*, they bring a new *tallit* to the *chatan*. And the *chatan* recites the *berachot le-hitatef* and *she-hechiyyanu* and stands [wrapped] in it... and afterwards he lowers the *tallit*, and they also cover with it the head of the *kalla*, who stands to his right, and they also spread it over those standing near them to their right and left...And all the more so for the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu*, that it gives me great pleasure for this pleasant custom to include also the mitzva of *nissuin*, which doesn't have a *she-hechiyyanu*, as is known from the words of halachic authorities of blessed memory. How good and seemly is this custom!

The *she-hechiyyanu* over the *tallit* has come to represent the *chatan's* joy at the wedding itself.¹⁶

The *tallit* enables the *chatan* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* with God's name and kingship with confidence and without going against the custom, even when his primary joy and reason for arranging to say *she-hechiyyanu* is the wedding itself. A *kalla* might do something similar over her ring or ask the *chatan* to have her in mind when he recites *she-hechiyyanu*. But there is also room for both *chatan* and *kalla* to make a simple *she-hechiyyanu*, even if without God's name and kingship, over the wedding.

Sheva Berachot

The next phase of the wedding is reciting the *sheva berachot (birkat chatanim)*, which we discuss at length [here](#). The Talmud implies that one person would recite all seven of the *berachot*.¹⁷ Rambam reportedly also maintained that one honored guest would recite all of the *berachot*:

Ma'aseh Rokeach (On Rambam) I, Novellae from Rambam that were written by his son Rav Avraham

The widespread custom is that the greatest of those present [at the wedding] recites these seven *berachot*.

Nowadays, however, there is a widespread practice to honor a number of different participants in the wedding with the recitation of one or two of the *berachot*.

¹⁶ Responsa Aseh Lecha Rav 6, brief responsa 80

You should practice at the time of your wedding in the matter of the *chuppa* like the original custom that the Sefaradim have always practiced, which has a clear source in the words of our sages in the gemara and is hinted in the Tanach...You should wrap yourself in a *tallit* before the *chuppa*, and if it is new, you should recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* (and don't recite the *beracha* of wrapping in *tzitzit* if the *chuppa* takes place at night), and you should intend to discharge through this *beracha* also the joy of your wedding...and afterwards you should spread the *tallit* also over the shoulders of the *kalla*, and so the two of you will be wrapped in the same *tallit*, and if you wish you can afterwards spread it above your heads even though there is a *chuppa* without this.

¹⁷ Ketubot 8a

Rav Ashi happened to come to the home of Rav Kahana. On the first day, he recited all of them [the *berachot*].

Interruptions

This raises new questions about interrupting the series of *berachot*. Halachic authorities discuss two potential issues with deliberate interruption: first, the fifth and sixth *berachot* lack the opening “*Baruch ata Hashem*,” which might make them more dependent on their predecessors in the series in order to count as *berachot*. Second, the *beracha* over wine is recited first, but the *chatan* and *kalla* drink the wine only at the end.

Rav Moshe Feinstein considers each of these issues. He maintains that the fifth and sixth *beracha* do not depend on the *berachot* before them. However, he is concerned about interruption between the *beracha* over wine and the drinking following *sheva berachot*. He thus both allows for splitting the *berachot* up as necessary and emphasizes that the *berachot* should remain a continuous series without deliberate interruptions.

Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 1:94

That which many have the practice, when honored relatives and Rabbanim are present during the *chuppa*, to divide the *sheva berachot* among them, even though the *berachot* of *sos tasis* and *same'ach tesamach* don't have an opening *Baruch [ata Hashem]*, if they act properly from the perspective of a *beracha* [without an opening] adjacent to another....In my humble opinion there is room to assess this leniently as we see that many have this practice...In any case, there is no issue of [separating] a *beracha* that is adjacent to another for it is considered a[n independent] *beracha* even though its beginning does not include God's name and kingship...There is no halachic concern even to divide them among many people even for a small need, for this does not entail a deferral or leniency with prohibitions, but without a need one should not do this and change what has been arranged to be directly adjacent. And when [the same some]one says them, it is considered more adjacent.... The halacha of an interruption applies only regarding drinking the wine, which the ones who recite the *berachot* are not accustomed to drink, but rather only the *chatan* and *kalla* [drink].

While some authorities prefer that the same person recite both of the first two *berachot*, to make it clear that *borei peri hagafen* is attached to the other *berachot*, this is not absolutely obligatory.¹⁸ Rambam even mentions a custom to recite the *beracha* over spices at this point in the wedding.¹⁹ Some Sefardi communities have preserved this custom.²⁰

As we've seen, there is a preference to minimize interruptions between the *berachot*. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach reportedly accepted a chazan singing wordlessly **within** a *beracha* as a part of the *beracha*, but objected to his singing **between**

¹⁸ <https://asif.co.il/wpfb-file/zhr-12-4-pdf/>

¹⁹ Rambam Laws of *Ishut* 10:4

If there was wine there, they bring a cup of wine and he recites the *beracha* over the wine first and recites all of them over the cup, and he ends up reciting seven *berachot*, and there are places where they have the custom to bring a myrtle [branch] with the wine, and he recites the *beracha* over the myrtle after the wine, and afterwards he recites the six *berachot*.

²⁰ Aruch Ha-shulchan EH 62:8

We do not have the custom that Rambam wrote to bring a myrtle...

berachot.

Halichot Shlomo, Tefilla 9:9

A prayer leader who sang prolonged tunes in the middle of a *beracha*, even though this is not praiseworthy, in any case it is not an interruption. Marginal Note 13: And so is the law with *sheva berachot*, where we sing prolonged tunes in the middle of the *beracha*, for since the intention is to beautify the *beracha*, it is not an interruption (and specifically in the middle of a *beracha*, for it is in honor of the *beracha*, but between *berachot* one should not sing tunes.) Footnote 29: And similarly for any long interruption our Rabbi [Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach] was particular that they not do it...

More recently, in many circles, it has become increasingly common for the band to play musical interludes between *berachot* as honorees are called up, especially since this may counteract a tendency for chatter between *berachot*.

Rav Ya'akov Ariel, "An Interruption between Sheva Berachot," Techumin 38 (5778): 164

Since the custom of dividing the *berachot* among different honorees has already become widespread, it is good that they have recently become accustomed to play music and sing in the pause between one *beracha* and another, since the alternative of waiting until the reciters of the *berachot* arrive caused the community to chatter, and this custom came to rectify the situation that was created...in order to prevent chatter, my suggestion is have all the reciters stand, or sit, next to the *chuppa* and to have them come up one after the other without pause.

Honoring Women

As we have discussed [here](#), current halachic rulings do not generally support women reciting *sheva berachot* under the *chuppa*. Recently, some couples getting married have begun calling a man and a woman up for each *beracha*, with the man reciting the *beracha* and the woman reciting a translation, a personal blessing to *chatan* and *kalla*, or a selection from a *piyyut* (liturgical poem) originally formulated to be recited around *sheva berachot*.²¹

Rav Yuval Cherlow, Chuppa Ve-chiddushim 12.8.20

Because a minyan is required for *sheva berachot*, my halachic position is that women are not able to recite the *beracha* under the *chuppa*, and the *berachot* would be *berachot* in vain.... But I like the custom today that a couple go up together, the man says the *beracha*, and the woman offers a *beracha* in her own words to the *chatan* and *kalla*. There are halachic authorities who say that this is an interruption, but in my opinion the *halacha* of interruption does not apply here, as long as the *chatan* and *kalla* do not interrupt by speaking between the first *beracha* and drinking the wine.

A translation might not be considered an interruption where needed, because it simply makes the meaning of the *beracha* plain. But personal *berachot* or additional *piyyutim*

²¹See here: <https://www.ypt.co.il/3139>

are more complex and have met with strong halachic opposition.

Rav Ya'akov Ariel, "An Interruption between *Sheva Berachot*," *Techumin* 38 (5778): 164

The brief interruption for calling up the one reciting the *beracha*, and the space of time that is used to play a very brief musical interlude as he arrives, are not similar to *divrei Torah*, which "have no measure," which also tend to be drawn out for a long time, during which it would be possible to complete all of the *sheva berachot*. And this is a full-fledged interruption.

In order to minimize interruptions between *berachot* and to prevent confusion about what is part of the series of *berachot* and what is not, it may be preferable to recite the series of *sheva berachot* as a complete unit. In communities where women take on more public roles, it would be appropriate to call up women before or after *sheva berachot* to share personal thoughts or blessings for *chatan* and *kalla*. It has become popular to honor a woman by having her say the prayer of Rav Amram Gaon after *sheva berachot*.

Seder Rav Amram Gaon, *Seder Eirusin* and *Nissuin*

Like this day in Yerushalayim, may joyous occasions increase in Yisrael, and may sorrows depart from Yisrael. May good tidings increase in Yisrael, may salvations increase in Yisrael, may consolations increase in Yisrael. May love increase in Yisrael, may *beracha* increase in Yisrael, may joy increase in Yisrael, may jubilation increase in Yisrael. May glory increase in Yisrael, may convocation increase in Yisrael. May merit increase in Yisrael, may *chatanim* increase in Yisrael, may festive days increase in Yisrael. May Eliyahu ha-Navi quickly come to us, may the anointed king emerge in our day. May *chatan* and *kalla* succeed, may the two of them take joy in each other and exult with each other and may they have children and have long lives among those who return to Yehuda, children who succeed and are all blessed. May *chatan* rejoice in *kalla* and may *kalla* rejoice in *chatan*, with sons and daughters, with riches and property, with children occupied with Torah and keeping *mitzvot* in Yisrael.

This is the original and authentic text, dating back to geonic times. Sometimes colloquially described as the eighth *beracha*, it is not actually a *beracha* but rather a *tefilla* for the joy of the wedding to extend to the entire Jewish people, and for happiness and blessing for the couple and the family they hope to build. Fully integrating the personal and the communal, it can be a beautiful and fitting conclusion to a wedding ceremony.

Remembering Yerushalayim

In many communities, the wedding ceremony concludes with the *chatan* breaking a glass, while in others this takes place between *kiddushin* and *nissuin*. The Talmud provides precedent for breaking a glass at a wedding to dampen overly exuberant celebration:

Berachot 31a

Rav Ashi made a wedding for his son. He saw that the rabbis were celebrating with great levity. He brought a cup of white glass and broke it before them, and

they became more somber.

Tosafot note that this is the origin of the current practice of breaking a glass at every wedding:

Tosafot ad loc.

He brought a cup of white glass —From here they are accustomed to break glass at a wedding.

In neither case is the *chatan* specified as breaking the glass, nor is any connection drawn to Yerushalayim.

A different wedding practice, however, specifically demonstrates mourning. Following the destruction of the Second Temple, no joy or celebration can be complete. This is expressed halachically in a variety of rabbinic decrees, among them:

Bava Batra 60b

A woman does all her adornments and leaves a little something out. What is it? Rav said: [Removing hair from] her temple, for it is said, “If I forget you, Yerushalayim, may my right hand forget, may my tongue cling to my palate...” [Tehillim 137:5-6], what is “atop [lit. over the head of] my joy” [Tehillim 137: 6]? Rav Yitzchak said: this is ashes that are on the heads of *chatanim*. Rav Papa said to Abbaye: Where do you put it? In the place of *tefillin*, for it is said, “to put for the mourners of Yerushalayim to put glory [*pe’er*, understood as representing *tefillin*] in place of ashes” [Yeshayahu 61:3]. And whoever mourns Yerushalayim merits and sees its joy, for it is said: gladden Yerushalayim [Yeshayahu 66:10].

In a decree that has fallen out of practice, women, presumably including *kallot*, would leave off a bit of their cosmetic preparation, or omit an item of jewelry. Ashes would be placed on a *chatan*’s forehead. Mourning for Yerushalayim and Beit Ha-mikdash tempers the joy of the wedding.

Kolbo suggests that ashes would be placed on the *kalla*’s forehead as well:

Kolbo 75

We place wood-ashes on their heads out of mourning for Yerushalayim.

Toward the end of the *chuppa*, or in some communities, before it begins, ashes may be placed on the *chatan*’s forehead. Nowadays, placing ashes on the forehead is rare for a *kalla*, though permissible. Even for the *chatan* this is not universally practiced and is less common in Sefardi communities.²²

Elsewhere in his work, Kolbo explains that in communities in which laying *tefillin* was not [common](#), the practice of placing ashes on the *chatan*’s forehead was discontinued. Breaking the glass took its place, with added meaning as a remembrance of Jerusalem:

²² Kaf Ha-chayyim 560:21

He takes wood-ashes... Nowadays, we are not accustomed to do even one of these ([practices] mentioned here), but to break the glass...

Kolbo 62

A person must remember at all of his joyous occasions the mourning of Yerushalayim...And there is a place where they refrained from placing wood-ashes on the heads of the *chatanim* because the people were not accustomed to lay *tefillin* at all, and for them the ashes would not be in the place of glory [*tefillin*], and they were concerned as well lest it not come to pass [for Jerusalem] glory in place of ashes. And they were accustomed to make a different remembrance instead, of placing a black cloth on the head of the *chatan* and *kalla*, and for this reason the custom spread of breaking a glass after *sheva berachot*....

Kolbo mentions the *kalla* here, as well, in connection to an alternative custom, and he does not specify that the *chatan* breaks the glass, which leaves room for other possibilities. The modern-day practice of the *chatan* reciting the verse about raising Yerushalayim above our joy is a new one. This leaves room for a *kalla* to participate, as by reciting the verse together with him.

Today, although the city of Yerushalayim is no longer in ruins, we continue to remember and mourn its destruction. Our intentions in reciting the verse generally shift towards the difficulties we still face as a people, and to longing for the rebuilding of Beit Ha-mikdash.

Yichud

As we learned in our piece on [nissuin](#), *chuppa*—a stage that represents the couple establishing their new home—completes the marriage process. We’ve seen that there are numerous perspectives as to what counts as *chuppa* and whether *yichud* (seclusion together) is a necessary aspect of it.

Maharil describes an early custom in Ashkenaz for *chatan* and *kalla* to repair to a private space after the public wedding ceremony:

Maharil (Minhagim), Laws of Nissuin

Maharil said that it is a custom after the *beracha* [*sheva berachot*] that the *chatan* and *kalla* eat an egg and a chicken together. And there was an early custom to seclude them in one room during this meal, and all the people would leave. And they did this so that he would feel familiar with her. And only one of her female relatives would be there, serving them, and afterwards all the relatives and whoever wants would come in and eat with them also, to gladden them. And nowadays this custom has been forgotten and everyone comes in at first and there is no seclusion there, and this is not correct. And at that meal they also recite *sheva berachot*.

Though this seems to be a forerunner of today’s “*yichud* room,” Maharil’s description leaves room for another’s presence, and does not suggest that the custom is necessary to complete the requirements of *chuppa*. Rema mentions a private room as well, without stipulating how private it needs to be:

Rema EH 55:1

And the common custom now is to call a *chuppa* a place where we bring in a

curtain spread atop poles, and we bring the *chatan* and *kalla* under it in public, and he betroths her there [*kiddushin*], and they recite the *berachot* of *eirusin* and of *nissuin* there, and afterwards we bring them to a house and they eat together in a private place and this is the *chuppa* that is practiced now...

Other authorities specify that the *yichud* should be held in total privacy, in a context that would theoretically allow for the couple to engage in relations:

Beit Shemuel 55:5

...Behold we require a *yichud* that would be fitting for sexual relations. If so one should prevent any person from entering there in order that it be full *yichud*.

The question of whether this *yichud* needs to be theoretically fit for relations also affects whether a minimum amount of time needs to be allocated for seclusion. (Whether witnesses are necessary depends on whether one considers *yichud* to be *chuppa*.) In practice, the couple do not consummate their marriage in the *yichud* room. It provides an opportunity for some initial physical contact, a little alone time together, and a chance to eat if they've been [fasting](#).

When the *kalla* is in *nidda* at the ceremony, full-fledged *yichud* is prohibited:

Shulchan Aruch YD 192:4

A *chatan* whose *kalla* became *nidda* prior to their having relations should not be secluded with her, but rather he sleeps among the men and she sleeps among the women. Rema...And the custom is to take a minor boy with the *chatan* and a minor girl with the *kalla*, and for them not to be secluded in the daytime without a minor boy or girl.

For a *chuppat nidda*, a second door to the *yichud* room is typically kept open, or a child from the wedding party remains with the couple in the space.

A *yichud* room is not universally practiced among Sefardi communities. Rav Ovadia Yosef suggests two primary reasons. First, perhaps they rely on the opinion that *yichud* is not a necessary component of *chuppa*, and standing together under the *tallit* or canopy suffices. Second, perhaps *sheva berachot* are *berachot* of praise and not *berachot* over a mitzva. In that case, even if *yichud* is essential to *chuppa*, it doesn't need to happen immediately after the *berachot*, but can wait until the couple goes off for the night:

Responsa Yabi'a Omer EH 5:8

...Why do we Sefaradim not practice having *yichud* for the *chatan* with the *kalla* immediately after *sheva berachot*, but rather *yichud* is done only after the first meal [at the wedding] which typically ends at a late hour at night, so that there is a long interruption between the *beracha* of *nissuin* [*sheva berachot*] and *chuppa* [*yichud*]. And this makes sense according to the view of the authorities who think that *chuppa* is not *yichud*, but rather spreading the *tallit* over the head of the *chatan* and *kalla* at the time of *birkat nissuin* [*sheva berachot*], that makes sense...Many later authorities from among Sefardi Rabbanim write that the custom is to call spreading the *tallit* over the head of *chatan* and *kalla* the *chuppa*. In any case it still does not resolve the weakness, for why are we not concerned

to be stringent in accordance with the view of Rambam and Tur and Shulchan Aruch who view *chuppa* as *yichud*, and have *yichud* immediately after *sheva berachot*, for there is no extra burden and no loss [in this]...It emerges that there is no need for *chuppa* to be adjacent to *birkat nissuin*, since it is a *beracha* of praise as Ran wrote [*Pesachim*], for *berachot* of praise that are discussed in the final chapter of *Berachot*, one does not need to recite them immediately prior to performing an action...

The rejoicing of *chatan* and *kalla* takes place on many levels, some public, some more private, creating a bond that forms the basic unit of Jewish community. The significance of *yichud*, both as establishing a home together and setting the stage for the sexual bond between the couple, reminds us of the centrality of physical intimacy to Jewish marriage, the topic of our next piece.

Is there room for self-expression at a wedding?

At a wedding, two individuals with a relationship that reflects their unique personalities assume archetypal roles. The woman becomes a kalla and the man a chatan. Embodying these archetypes, from dressing the part to acting the part, can be a source of great excitement for everyone involved.

These archetypal roles are well defined. Halachically, there are clear requirements for kiddushin, and nissuin must be completed in a way that the community recognizes. Liturgically, we express our understanding that each Jewish couple is a microcosm of our community, their covenant symbolizing our relationship with God.

By subsuming themselves into the roles of chatan and kalla, a couple demonstrates their commitment to joining the covenantal community. At the same time, chatan and kalla might struggle to find themselves or their relationship within the prescribed ceremonies.

Our articles on the wedding have been an attempt to explain as clearly as possible what the various halachot and customs are and what purposes they serve. This is important so that, rather than just going through the motions, chatan and kalla can thoroughly embody their roles. Once chatan and kalla understand what elements need to be in place, they can also explore ways to personalize their wedding that will not compromise its expression of community, covenant, and continuity.

Further Reading

- Rav Binyamin Adler, *Ha-nissuin Ke-hilchetam*.
- Rav Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven*, New York: Moznaim, 1983.