



JOFA Journal

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From Our President

Modern Marriage, the Jewish Way

By Blu Greenberg



So this is our June bridal issue. And why not, for as Orthodox feminists we have a lot to say about marriage and all that it should signify: traditional values, *halakha*, ritual, equal dignity, covenantal relationships and new beginnings.

Judaism advocates marriage. Barely out of the womb, the child hears our wistful formula, "... may she [he] enter into Torah, the marriage canopy and good deeds...." Life confirms tradition: for most individuals, though perhaps not every last person, marriage is the optimal way to live, has the most integrity, is sexually appropriate to continuity of life, and is the unit best geared to raising children. No marriage is perfect, but imperfect marriage is still full of great joy, companionship, intimacy, caring, and love. And love.

Yet today we are offered new paradigms: that some people are happier single; that the demographics of monogamous cultures means that some won't find a mate; that not everyone was created with a hetero-

sexual impulse; that equality may be more just and fulfilling than the complementary models of yesteryear. We also know that marriage may be more difficult in a divorce culture, as per the droll New Yorker bridal salon cartoon: Mother, looking on, says dreamily to Seamstress fitting Daughter's gown, "Oh I want her first wedding to be so lovely...."

What then is our message as we navigate between old and new?

1. A long-term, faithful marriage remains a primary and overarching community value for the generations. Yet, we must find ways of articulating this value without being callous to those who live other models. This is difficult, especially on the college campus, but language needs to be developed to communicate this value, yet be fine tuned to the dignity of all.

2. The community should provide practical resources that shore up marriage (like the six-month marriage preparation course the Catholic Church offers), so that couples enter marriage with their eyes open, and with their techniques for speaking values and negotiating impasses in place.

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Something Old, Something New

By Beverly Gribetz and Ed Greenstein

Within the traditional *halakha* framework it is only the *chatan* who fulfills the active role of effectuating *kiddushin*, only men who serve as witnesses and, by custom, only men who speak aloud. For our wedding

thirteen years ago in New York, at which an Orthodox rabbi was our *mesader kiddushin*, we sought ways to give the *kalla* and women more active roles in the ceremony. For reasons of *halakha* these functions were to be of a more rhetorical nature, but their effect was to be significant.

After a lengthy process of study-

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My Wedding: The Choices I Made

By Idana Goldberg

"*Ani mekabelet tabaat zu, v'harei-ni mekudeshet lecha kedat moshe v'Yisrael*, I accept this ring and I am thereby sanctified to you according to the laws of Moses and Israel." With those words, I became an active participant in my wedding ceremony.

Moments before, Rabbi Saul Berman, our *mesader kiddushin*, had instructed the witnesses that they would be witnessing a two-step process performed by my husband, Michael, and me, the groom and the bride. Michael would offer me a ring as an indication of his offer of marriage and would accompany that with the traditional "*barei at mekudeshet li*." Rabbi Berman then continued, "Idana will receive the ring from him [and] her visible acceptance of the ring will be accompanied by her verbal indication of her acceptance of his offer of marriage."

Both Michael and I believe that the Jewish wedding should demonstrate the ways in which Jewish women are

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ing the sources and consulting scholars and rabbis, we discovered that some of what we found and which was approved by our *mesader kiddushin* - such as a *kalla's tish* and a pre-nuptial agreement - we were able to incorporate into the ceremony.

For the *kiddushin*, we wanted to

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enable the *kalla* to respond in a meaningful way to the act of *kinyan*, literally "acquisition," by which the *chatan* consecrates the *kalla* as his bride. Had we opted to make use of the traditional formula, whereby the *chatan* says to the *kalla* that she is consecrated - *mekudesbet* - to him by virtue of the ring that he gives her, there would have been no way for the *kalla* to echo the *chatan's* language. We did not want to modify in any way the *kiddushin* that is the *chatan's* prerogative and responsibility to enact.

We therefore chose to dust off an ancient rabbinic formula that would enable us to have the *chatan*, and then the *kalla*, say it - but with a critical reversal of the phrases. In the *Talmud Bavli, Masechet Kiddushin*, page 5b as well as in the major codes: Rambam's *Mishneh Torah, Nashim, Hilkhos Ishut* 3:6 and the *Shulkhan Arukh, Even Ha'ezer* 27:2, one finds the Aramaic formula, *barei at li le'entu*, "You are hereby my wife." Accordingly we had the *chatan* say (in Hebrew), *barei at li le'isha kedat Moshe v'Yisrael*. At this point the *chatan* presented the *kalla* with the ring that had belonged to him and effectuated the process of *kinyan* by which the *kiddushin* was made. For the sake of rhetorical reciprocity, we had the *chatan* add, *v'ani isbekh*, "and I am your husband," which reinforced the formula the *chatan* had said.

Following the *chatan's* act of *kiddushin*, the *kalla* responded, *ani ishtekba kedat Moshe v'Yisrael ve'at-ta li le'ish*, "I am your wife, by the laws of Moses and Israel, and you are my husband." The phrases are reversed so that the *kalla's* utterance cannot be interpreted as her acceptance of the *kiddushin* on condition - *al tenai* - i.e., that she would regard herself as *mekudesbet* only if the *chatan* were to agree to her proposal. By responding in the way that we arranged, the *kalla* only affirms the *kiddushin* that had taken place. But from a rhetorical perspective, she makes her voice heard on a par with that of the *chatan*.

The ring that the *chatan* gives the *kalla* represents the valuable by which the *chatan* effectuates *kiddushin*. But outside the *chuppa* ceremony itself, the ring symbolizes the commitment of a wife to her husband. The commitment is surely mutual and we chose to have the *kalla*, now a married woman, present the *chatan* with the gift of a ring, a representation of love and not an instrument of *kiddushin*. This occurred following the reading of the *ketuba* - by a woman - which marks the boundary between *kiddushin* and the marriage, *nissu'in*.

In presenting the ring, the *kalla* recited the famous verse from Hosea 2:21, which may be translated: "I betrothe you forever; I betrothe you in righteousness and justice, in devotion and love; I betrothe you in good faith." The fact that the Hebrew verse is framed as a male addressing a female makes it clear that the *kalla* is not performing an actual betrothal but is reciting the verse for rhetorical effect. We had the *chatan* respond by reciting the nearby verse, Hosea 2:18: "On that day, says Hashem, you will call out 'My man' and you will not call out 'My husband.'" We read this verse midrashically as an assertion that marriage is an equal partnership between a man and a woman and not a relationship in which one party is dominant.

We knew we were doing something different, but we were also confident and reassured that everything we were doing was within *halakha*. *Halakha* is much broader than traditional practice which tends to preserve things as they are. Our process of study and application only confirmed our sense that *halakha* provides for developing traditions in directions that speak ever more meaningfully to the heart and mind of the Jew. ■

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Women's Participation in Sheva Berakhot

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situation.

Thus the objection raised by Rabbi Moshe Halevi Steinberg to women saying *sheva berakhot* because of *kol isha* concerns is not convincing, especially when he compares it to a woman saying *kaddish* in the presence of a *minyan*, which is a well-established activity. Indeed, Rabbi Steinberg himself goes on to express his real concern:

If we allow women to say the *sheva berakhot*, it will be used as a precedent for other demands, including mixed seating in public prayer, as is done by Reform and Conservative [congregations].

But this logic can be argued for the opposite conclusion, as did Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik regarding *kaddish*:

"Nowadays, when there are Jews fighting for equality for men and women in matters such as *aliyyot*, if Orthodox rabbis prevent women from saying *kaddish* when there is a possibility for allowing it, it will strengthen the influence of Reform and Conservative rabbis. It is therefore forbidden to prevent daughters from saying *kaddish*."

This argument has obvious relevance to *sheva berakhot*. Indeed, women's full participation in the *sheva berakhot* is nothing but a natural extension of their increased participation in the full spectrum of Torah activities. ■

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Congratulations to JOFA's president, Blu Greenberg, for being honored by Drisha, the Manhattan-based institute for advanced Judaic studies for women, at its 20th anniversary dinner.