



## Chapter Two

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# Love, Dating and Marriage

## Dating to Find Your Soulmate—Tall Dark and Handsome Please!

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### Q) What does the word *shidduch* mean?

A) The word is derived from the Aramaic word *shadach*, meaning to rest, to settle down, to be at ease. Its popular usage nowadays means to be set up with someone for dating, with the intended purpose of them getting married. The connection between these two terms is that ultimately, a *shidduch* is meant to signify the process by which two people become involved in a process to enter a settled state and to find tranquility in marriage.

Of course, many people will go on numerous “shidduch dates” before finding the right person to marry. And there’s no imperative to meet people in this way if your social connections are in circles where appropriate (and willing!) marriage partners can be found. So if your best friend’s cousin’s sister-in-law just happens to have a friend who is just “perfect” for

you, there's no harm in finding out more about that individual and considering a date.

While a shidduch refers to the human aspect, which means the effort a person puts into finding their life partner, a zivug, which literally means a match, or partner, denotes the partner God has destined for a person.

**Q) I'm worried that I'll never find my soulmate. Is there anything I can do to find that person?**

A) Firstly, don't panic! No matter who you are, and where you are from, God wants you to find your soulmate and start your family. You should have faith in God that you will find the right person at the right time. For some people this process is slower than for others. Why some people find their soulmate early in life, and others much later, is in the realm of God knowing what you need, and when.

You should, however, not sit back complacently and wait for your future spouse to turn up at the right time. When Abraham wanted to find a wife for his son Isaac, he sent his faithful servant, Eliezer, to go and look for her; he didn't just wait for her to come knocking on his front door.

The first thing Eliezer did (from which we can learn), was to go to a place where many appropriate young women could be found. So too, if you are looking to marry, you need to determine the possible place your future husband or wife could be. Settling in a community or college where there are only a few Jews could reduce your chances of finding your soulmate anytime soon. You are expected to put effort into finding your spouse. Asking friends if they know someone, going to a singles Shabbaton, or signing up to a reputable singles website, are all examples of valid effort in finding your intended spouse.

Eliezer also prayed, and he prayed a lot! The longest prayer

that is mentioned in the Torah, where the prayer is recorded in its entirety, is the prayer Eliezer makes to God, in asking God to direct him in finding the right wife for Isaac. Prayer is considered the most important part of finding your soulmate.

The Talmud suggests a specific technique in having your prayers answered and may help you find your soulmate. Find someone who is in the exact same situation as you when it comes to getting married. They should be of a similar age, community, and background. If you pray for that person to get married, you get answered first. This may seem like a self-serving request, as you are only praying for them in order to find your own partner. It may be true, but it's a win-win situation, so why not pray for them as well? According to Kabbalah when you pray for someone else, you become a conduit for the other person's blessing from God. As the blessing flows down, it reaches you first.

Do a mitzvah, and have in mind that through the merit of this mitzvah, you should find the right one. For example, light Friday night candles before sunset, or give charity, so that you will merit the blessing of finding your soulmate.

**Q) Do I need to know 100% that the person I am going to marry is the right one for me?**

A) Many people feel they need to wait and marry the perfect person. At this point in your life, I hope you realize no one is perfect and the best you can do is to find someone who fits best with what you are looking for in life.

Here is a technique my wife advises people to do when they are trying to figure out whether the person they are dating is the right person to marry: Take a blank piece of paper, divide it into three columns, on top of one write "Must Have", on the middle column write "Nice to Have" and on the final one put "Bonus." Sit in a quiet room with no distractions and

put all the qualities you are looking for in a lifelong marriage into the respective column. You may have put “a college degree” in the first column, and “lawyer” in the “Nice to Have.” To some people “having nice parents” might be in the “Must Have” column, and to others, it’s a “Bonus!” You can move things from column to column. (As you change and mature, your expectations change.)

Here is an example of what such a list could look like:

Must Have	Important To Have	Bonus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Below a certain age</li> <li>• Ability to control anger</li> <li>• College degree</li> <li>• Ability to be good father</li> <li>• Desire to have children</li> <li>• Respect for parents</li> <li>• Spiritual side</li> <li>• Clean fingernails</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love of the outdoors</li> <li>• Control of TV intake</li> <li>• Tolerance of my mother</li> <li>• Control of bad language</li> <li>• Control of eating</li> <li>• Desire to visit Israel</li> <li>• Good job with prospects</li> <li>• Good sense of humor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loves my parents</li> <li>• From the east coast like me</li> <li>• Sings very well</li> <li>• Similar background</li> <li>• Love of horses</li> <li>• Enjoys skiing</li> <li>• Great wealth</li> <li>• Is a lawyer</li> </ul>

After you have done this exercise, you will end up with three full columns, and you will have clarified what you are really looking for. Many people will mention to a friend or online that they “must have a guy or girl who . . .” when they really mean it’s “nice to have” or just a “bonus.”

If you are dating someone, things are going relatively smoothly, and he/she has most, but not all of your “must haves,” you could probably marry that person and live a happy life.

**Q) I have been dating a guy for two years; how do I know if he is the right one?**

A) The purpose of dating is for you to get to know another person, to decide whether you want to spend the rest of your life together and build a Jewish family. Dating has now turned into de facto marriage. Rather than being a means to an end, dating has become the end in itself! This can be problematic. Especially if you eventually do get married, you expect some major change or revelation to hit you that this is “the one,” but in most cases (although not in the movies) that’s not the way it happens.

If you have been in a constant relationship with the same person for two years, you should know by now whether this is the person you would like to be your husband and the father of your children. A mature adult should probably know after six months to a year whether this person is right. Many young couples I meet date for two, three, five, even ten years, and are still not sure. The truth is that they have been acting as a married couple without realizing it.

**Q) I’ve been dating the same guy for over a year now, and I feel as though I still hardly know him. What should we be discussing on dates?**

A) Many people date, some for a very long time, and don’t really get to know each other well at all. One of the problems is that people do not discuss meaningful questions during the dating process! Another problem is that people are not really listening for the important things concerning the other person’s life. If you listen closely, you may find that many of the questions (particularly about values and self-image) are actually answered in remarks made by the other person. But if you are dating someone who reveals little about him/herself, or there are topics that are never discussed, here is a list of

meaningful questions you should be asking each other over the course of your dating.

The list is long, and is not meant for one date! It's also not a checklist to have in front of you over dinner, with a pencil in hand checking off each question as you both respond. These are suggested topics that you can put in your own words and discuss casually over your time dating each other:

### **Family Background**

What was your childhood like?

How does your family show affection?

What does your family do during the holidays? (i.e. would that be a problem for you as a couple?)

What values do you want to bring into our marriage?

What do you like about your family?

What do you like about my family?

What do you like about your parents' marriage?

What do you like about my parents' marriage?

### **Self Image**

How would you describe yourself?

How do you think others see you?

Are you a jealous person?

Do you have trust issues or feel insecure?

How important is affirmation to you?

Do you handle compliments well?

Do you think we listen to one another well?

Do you think it's important to know one another's physical and mental health histories?

### **Money**

Can we talk about money?

Are you a saver or spender?

Do you want to have a budget?  
Should a married couple have a joint checking account or separate accounts or both?  
Who is going to be responsible for making sure that bills are paid on time?  
Do you consider going to the movies and having a vacation every year a necessity or a luxury?  
Do you owe any major debts?  
Where does your money go?  
What are our financial goals?  
Do you plan on owning a home?

### **Household Chores**

How are we going to divide up the household chores?  
Do you consider cleaning help a luxury or a necessity?  
Can you deal with clutter?  
Who does the laundry?  
Who does the cooking?  
Will you clean the toilet?  
Are you willing to replace the toilet tissue roll? (You'll be surprised!)

### **Religion and Spirituality**

Does religion play an important part in your life?  
Do you think faith and spirituality are important in a marriage?  
What is your image of God?  
Would you want to give your children a religious education?

### **Parenting**

Do you want to have children?  
If we decide we do, how many children do you want to have?  
When would you like to start having children?  
What kind of parent do you think you will be?

What is your parenting philosophy?  
Will one of us stay home after we have children?  
What type of birth control should we use if we want to postpone or prevent parenthood?  
How do you feel about adoption?  
Do you have any children already?

### **Communication**

Do you handle conflict well?  
Do you think our differences will create problems in our marriage?  
Do you expect or want me to change?  
Can we both forgive?  
Are we both willing to work on our communication skills?

### **General Issues**

Why do you want to get married?  
What do you want from life?  
What do you think we'll be doing in thirty or forty years?  
How often do you drink?  
Are drugs part of your life?  
Have you ever hit anyone?  
Do you have a criminal record?  
Do you think it's important to be faithful to one another?

All these questions and the discussions they lead to should help you make an informed decision as to whether you take this relationship one step further.

### **Q) How do I know if the person I am dating is abusive?**

A) In her book *Head to Heart: What To Know before Dating and Marriage*, Gila Manolson provides a fairly comprehensive list of what signs abusive people reveal in a relationship, and



how normal, healthy people react to the same issues. I have adapted the points below from her book.

1. He/she is very controlling and possessive.

While dating, he/she:

- may keep tabs on where you go, how you spend your money, and how much time you spend with whom.
- may attempt to influence your behavior and thinking.
- may want you available constantly.
- may push the relationship forward rather than letting it progress naturally.

Healthy adults: Will want to spend time with you, but won't demand it. Though interested in your life, they will respect your privacy. They will recognize you as a person in your own right. They know where they end and you begin.

2. He/she has a Jekyll/Hyde (two sided) personality.

- In the beginning, you may see only their good side. Most of their goodness is too good to be true, and you may start to see through the image, especially in their treatment of others, e.g. a waiter at a restaurant

Healthy adults: Will be good and true. They may occasionally misbehave, but will acknowledge it.

3. He/she is power hungry and manipulative, and:

- may display great interest in how much money you or your parents have and how you are using your resources for your own end.
- may buy you expensive gifts to win you over or get something from you.

- may order others around and make statements like, “I’m the boss around here.”
- may pressure you to get physical when you are not interested.

Healthy adults: Will be interested in who you are, not what you can do for them, and they won’t want to rule you.

4. He/she can’t empathize, and:

- may be overly solicitous to cover what’s lacking inside.
- may claim their hurtful remark was only made in jest.
- may be inconsiderate and disrespectful.
- may withdraw when upset.
- may be cruel to animals.

Healthy adults: May sometimes lack sensitivity but will feel for others, treating them as they treat you. If they hurt your feelings, you’ll sense it is due to ignorance and not meanness, and they’ll be genuinely sorry.

5. He/she is compulsive and makes unrealistic demands, and:

- may obsess over what’s external, criticizing your appearance or fixating on some aspect of your character that he/she wants you to correct.
- may overreact negatively to anything unexpected.

Healthy adults: May be critical but will tolerate imperfections, including yours.

6. He/she is arrogant, self-centered and intolerant, and:

- may enjoy deriding or belittling others.
- may react poorly to losing an argument.

- may lack mentors, refuse help, and object to consulting an authority about anything important or personal.

Healthy adults: May well be judgmental and occasionally arrogant, but you will see humility as well. They look up to wiser people and seek their input. They regard other people's opinions. They respect their parents. While they may deride other people's beliefs or lifestyles, they will not ridicule fellow human beings.

7. He/she externalizes problems, and:

- may refuse to accept rebuke
- may hold others responsible for his/her problems or behavior.

Healthy adults: May be defensive, but will eventually look at themselves honestly, admit they are wrong, and take responsibility for their actions.

8. He/she is paranoid, and:

- may falsely accuse you.
- may fear others are taking advantage or going behind his or her back.
- may see themselves as the victim.

Healthy adults: May occasionally wonder if someone has something against them, but will dismiss unwarranted concerns and generally appraise reality accurately.

9. He/she lies, deceives, minimizes, denies and:

- may make excuses, including outright lies, for not being where or doing what he/she was supposed to do.

- will dismiss poor conduct as unimportant or as if it never happened.

Healthy adults: May try to excuse behavior they're ashamed of, but will essentially be honest.

10. He/she can't deal with anger, frustration or stress.

- Anger may be expressed with overreactions to everyday aggravations like traffic jams, spills, or tardiness.

Healthy adults: Will be impatient within normal bounds and lose their temper only occasionally and moderately, if at all.

11. He/she is physically or verbally aggressive, and:

- may be rude and combative towards others.
- drive extremely aggressively and competitively.
- call other drivers names.
- treat others roughly.
- use force against inanimate objects.

Healthy adults: May become contentious when provoked, but not often. They'll play sports for fun, not for violence.

12. He/she is self-deprecating and tends towards depression, and:

- may put himself/herself down
- appear pathetic
- make strong statements about what he/she will do if you do not marry him/her.

Healthy adults: Will display healthy self-esteem. Even a major setback won't destroy them, and they'll recover in a reasonable amount of time.

13. He/she has a history of violence, even if channeled acceptably.

- He/she may have undesirable friends or the kind of job sensitive people wouldn't want.

Healthy adults: Won't be violent. If their job entails toughness (as with some policemen) they'll relate to it as an unfortunate necessity, not with pleasure.

14. He/she has a history of substance abuse.

- She/he may mention how wild or crazy he/she is (or was) with friends and dismisses questions of dependency with statements like, "We were just having fun."

Healthy adults: May have occasionally indulged in drugs or alcohol, but either outgrew it or are in a program for treatment with lots of "clean time."

15. He/she witnessed or suffered parental abuse, deprivation or neglect, and:

- may volunteer information (or complaints) about their childhood.
- if asked, may admit resenting his/her parents.
- if they are closed, they may pretend that their parents are perfect and not want you to meet them.
- if the truth is revealed, may say that he/she will never repeat the parents' behavior and does not need professional help.

Healthy adults: Will come from, at the very least, non-dysfunctional homes. If not, they may have undergone therapy and would be willing to discuss their backgrounds and how they worked through their problems.

**Q) How do I know if I have found my soulmate?**

A) Unfortunately no major revelation occurs, no lights will start flashing over your head. But if you are in a good

relationship, with someone who fits your life goals, Jewish outlook on life and, most importantly, has good character traits, those are good signs that you have found the right person. You will want to spend the rest of your life with him or her and start a Jewish family. Also, if your dating was fairly smooth with no major bumps along the way, that's also a good sign. Finally, when you are standing under the chuppah with someone, you can be pretty sure that you've found your soulmate and the relationship can be worked on from that point!

**Q) Could I miss meeting my soulmate? Is it possible to divorce my soulmate?**

A) Yes, both are possible. If you are not careful, you could miss meeting your destined soulmate, but you would have to try pretty hard to do that. An example of someone not marrying his or her soulmate is found in the Torah. We know that Jacob was destined to marry Rachel, and his twin brother, Esau, was meant to marry Rachel's older sister Leah. However Esau turned into the kind of person who did not appreciate the fine qualities that Leah had, and he rejected her, opting to marry someone else. Incredibly, God decided that Jacob should marry both sisters, Leah and then Rachel. Jacob marrying two sisters was not the original plan. So yes, you could pass on your soulmate and marry someone who is not for you.

You could merit marrying your soulmate, but then divorce. This could happen because you do not put in enough effort in maintaining your marriage. Just because someone gives you a gift, like a car for example, that does not mean you get to drive it forever. The car needs to be taken care of and maintained in order to keep working. Marrying your soulmate does not mean you will live a life of constant tranquility

and peace. A good marriage takes incredible effort no matter whom you marry.

## Getting Married—But My Grandmother Said to Marry a Jew!

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### Q) Why should I get married?

A) People get married for a variety of reasons. Some people get married because they feel they should—that something will be missing from their lives if they don’t; some because they want children and only want them once they are married. Some people get married because they don’t want to be lonely in old age, and some people get married for financial reasons—they want to pay lower taxes or they want someone to pay for half their rent and help with the bills.

All of these may be considered good reasons for wanting to get married, but Judaism puts another reason above all others on why you should spend your life with a partner with whom you bring children into this world: you need to improve your character traits! Nothing you do in this world can improve your character more than being married and bringing up children.

Marriage is the first *mitzvah* in the Torah. Building a family creates a stronger nation and people. It also gives you a sense of purpose and fulfillment. It is also extremely hard work. You may think that all the frustrations in your marriage are distracting you from the supposed bliss of being married; but working on your anger issues, for example, may be the entire point of your getting married in the first place.

The Torah illustrates this clearly when it describes a marriage partner as an *ezer k’negdo* which translates as “your helper, opposing you.” This seems to be quite contradictory:

either you are helping your spouse, or you are opposing him. How can it be both?

The Torah means that you are looking for someone to help you become a better person, and the method for doing that entails opposing you, challenging you, in essence leading you to work on being a better person and spouse.

Look at your hand, the feature of your hand that allows you to pick things up easily is something that most animals don't have, an opposable thumb. Having a thumb that sits opposite your four fingers gives you a whole range of movement that you wouldn't have without it. Imagine going through your day without a thumb; even peeling a banana would be a tortuous task.

Your marriage partner is like the opposable thumb—as your sounding board, as your springboard to action and as an intelligent being who knows you well. He or she may disagree with you, but by doing so you can refine your thinking and hone your actions and attitudes for the better. And you do the same for your spouse. This doesn't mean you're supposed to disagree all the time—just recognize the potential benefits that thoughtful, respectful discussion can have as you work on your characters and become better people.

### **Q) What's the goal of marriage?**

A) I'm sure you have your own goals for a life of marriage. You probably want a long, lasting love between you and your spouse. You most likely also want health for you and your children, and you want financial security for your family's future. These are all very wonderful and important things.

The Torah mentions the goal of marriage in a fairly cryptic way when it says that you and your spouse should become *basar echad* (one flesh). One opinion is that this means the



goal is to have children, as your children are really basar echad, from both their mother and father.

Basar echad also means that you become the best of friends. You can't choose your family; your parents, your brother or your sister, but you can choose your spouse. By getting married you are making a commitment to create a new family, and your spouse becomes your closest confidant.

Another interpretation of basar echad can be explained with an analogy. Imagine you see someone cutting a piece of meat, and as he becomes distracted with something else he cuts into his own hand. Imagine that he then loses his temper and starts hitting the hand that cut him. Or you see someone walking down the street and her right foot trips on the sidewalk. Then you see her kick her right foot with her left, punishing it for its clumsiness! What would you think about these two individuals? They must be crazy! Why would you hit yourself? You know it was an accident. The other hand should be soothing the wound; not blaming the hand that caused it.

The goal of marriage is that a couple should see themselves literally as basar echad, one being. How could you become angry with your spouse? That's you! Just as your hand or foot is part of the same holistic body, so too in marriage, you and your spouse become one unified being working toward the same goals and purpose.

### **Q) How do I know I'm ready to get married?**

A) Having a successful marriage is more about knowing yourself than finding the right one! In the words of Harville Hendrix in *Getting the Love You Want*, "Whether or not you realize the full potential of an intimate, joyful, lifelong union, depends not on your ability to attract the perfect mate, but on your willingness to acquire knowledge about hidden parts of yourself."

In her book *Head to Heart*, Gila Manolson lists various questions you should ask yourself to assess whether you are ready to be in a life-long committed relationship. If you can answer all or most of these questions in the affirmative, or you are willing to work on them, you should be able to have a successful married relationship.

1. Am I honest?
  - Am I open to seeing myself as I am?
  - Can I accept criticism and admit when I am wrong?
2. Am I self-disciplined?
  - Am I patient?
  - Can I exercise self-control?
  - Can I delay gratification?
3. Do I put things in perspective?
  - Can I distinguish between what's more or less important in life?
  - Can I emphasize satisfactions over frustrations?
  - Do I have a sense of humor?
4. Am I responsible?
  - Can I persevere in order to achieve?
  - Am I dependable?
5. Am I realistic?
  - Am I prepared to not get everything I want?
6. Do I want to grow?
  - Am I committed to becoming a better person?
7. Am I a giver?
  - Can I put another's needs and desires before, or at least on par, with my own?
  - Can I share without "keeping score"?
8. Am I sensitive?

- Am I attentive and receptive to others?
  - Do I try to be aware of others' feelings?
  - Can I empathize and identify?
  - Can I nurture, comfort and support?
9. Am I respectful?
    - Can I tolerate differences and appreciate individuality?
    - Can I validate perspectives I disagree with?
    - Can I respect others' boundaries and privacy (including my spouse)?
  10. Can I communicate effectively?
    - Can I share positive feelings?
    - Can I communicate negative feelings without attacking?
  11. Am I flexible?
    - Can I resolve conflicts through discussion and negotiation?
    - Can I concede? (People always want to have the last word!)
  12. Can I love others despite their flaws?
    - Can I connect to someone even when angry at him or her?
    - Can I emphasize goodness amid faults?
    - Am I willing to stick with a relationship through good times and bad?

### **Q) Does Judaism talk about marrying for love?**

**A)** The Torah does talk about love, but not early on in the discussion of marriage. Love should develop while being married. It is a goal, not a requisite. In some ways it is similar to finding a job: you look for a job that seems suitable for your skill set, it pays well, and nice people work there. You don't take the job because you love the work. You take the job hoping

(and trying) to eventually love it. Until you start, how can you know whether you love it or not? You don't, until you begin.

The Hebrew word for love is *ahavah*. The root of that word is *hav* which means to give. The mistake many people make is they feel that if someone gives to them—whether gifts, friendship or time—they will love them. Imagine a child waiting eagerly for her birthday present. When she receives it, she screams out “Thank you! I love you, I love you!” She doesn't really love her parents for giving her the gift; what she loves is the gift itself.

But one second, didn't we just say that love is connected to giving? Yes, but it's the other way around. The person who does the giving will feel love for the recipient. So the love follows the giving, not the other way around.

Two examples of love:

A mother will love her child more than the child will love the mother because the mother is the giver and the child is the taker. Giving creates love, not taking. When the child learns to give, the child will develop the ability to love as well.

If Sarah gives a gift to Melanie, it's Sarah who feels love towards Melanie. Melanie is the receiver, and may or may not love Sarah back for giving her the gift. If Melanie is not a grateful person, she may even be resentful that she didn't receive a bigger or better gift. Sarah would then be hurt. Why? Sarah gave a gift to Melanie, in a sense she gave a part of herself, but Melanie did not reciprocate with gratitude. That hurts.

So love comes out of the giving itself. The more a couple give to each other, the more they will love each other. If all they do is take from each other, resentment replaces love. I don't believe a single divorce has ever occurred without at least one partner being a taker, if not both.

**Q) Why does Judaism make such a big deal about having children?**

A) Any parent can testify that the greatest blessing in life is having a child. Every parent can also tell you how the biggest challenge in life is raising that child. What's the purpose of having children and working so hard for so many years? Why can't we just be like animals that briefly bring up their offspring, and then quickly leave them as independent creatures? I don't know of any elephants that stress out about sending their kids to college, and I don't know of any cats that are concerned about their kids not earning enough money. But you will be concerned and involved in your child's life forever.

Judaism says that parents become partners with God by having children. The parents bring the physical body into the world and God puts in the child's soul to give it life. More than just the physical child, you can become partners with God by bringing that child up with a Jewish mission.

I know of a couple that refused to have children. They told me the reason was because this is a cruel world, with wars, poverty and over population, so it's better not to increase the numbers of people in this already overcrowded and terrible world. It would be immoral to bring children into such a world.

I heard their point, but it seems to me that's all the more reason to have children, because they are ones who will make the world into a better place. This world is only as good as the next generation can make it. If there is no next generation, then the world can't become a better place.

**Q) I see many Jewish families with four, five and many more children. How many children does Judaism require us to have?**

A) Having children is a very personal decision between a husband and wife. However, Judaism does encourage having children, and even discusses the minimum number. The answer is two children, one boy and one girl. This allows for the continuation of our people, by adding one child per gender. If you both feel you are able to have more children without stressing yourselves out too much, each additional child is a blessing and a mitzvah. That is up to both of you.

**Q) Is there a hole in the sheet?**

A) No, there is no hole in the sheet. This is a popular misconception. One possible reason for this mistaken idea may have come from seeing tzitzit hanging out to dry on clotheslines. Since adult sized tzitzit have a large hole in the middle to allow for the wearer's head, people may have assumed that this must be a sheet used by religious people during marital intimacy! Jewish tradition actually frowns upon any clothing or material interfering between husband and wife during physical intimacy.

**Q) Why are the divorce rates so high nowadays?**

A) Divorce rates are very high in the United States. Nearly one in two marriages ends in divorce. The chances of your marriage lasting longer are improved by a number of factors. You may not have control over some of them, but you do have control over others. For example, based on statistics, the fact is that people who live together prior to getting married are more likely to end their marriage in divorce.

I attended a rabbinical conference a number of years ago.

On the last day of the conference, a dais with experts in various fields answered questions thrown at them from the audience.

When asked, "Why does the panel think divorce rates are so high?" the psychiatrist spoke of lack of communication in marriage. The social worker talked about how more appreciation is needed in marriage. Others discussed the need for the spouses to have more private time away from the children.

One rabbi, who was also a psychiatrist, did a really unusual thing. He lifted up the plastic bottle in his hand and said out loud, "This is the reason for the high divorce rates!" and then he put the bottle down.

He explained that we have created a disposable culture. You have a phone in your pocket, what will you do in a couple of years when it breaks? Get a new one. No one fixes a phone after it's been used for a while. What about your car? If the brakes are worn down, your mechanic doesn't fix them; he throws them away and puts in new ones.

I started to consider what he was saying and thought back to my bar mitzvah. Someone gave me an expensive pen that I treasured for years. When I loaned it, I would hold onto the cap to be sure it was returned. Now I use plastic pens. When they break, I don't think twice about throwing them in the garbage.

So if your phone breaks, throw it away and get a new one; your pen breaks, throw it away and get a new one; when plastic bottles are finished, throw them away, and get a new one.

We have created a culture of disposability. We don't believe in putting in the effort to fix things anymore. So if a marriage breaks down, our impulse is to throw it away and get a new one!

Jews have a culture of permanence. The candlesticks your grandmother lit every Friday night are passed down from generation to generation. Maybe your grandfather's tallit is going to hang on your chuppah. The items, the rituals, the

prayers—the Torah itself—were passed down from your great grandmother to your grandmother, to your mother, to you and will someday reach your children and grandchildren.

Judaism is a relationship that moves slowly from one generation to the next as a precious necklace, each link holding the entire chain together.

So we put work into fixing things; we take pride in long term relationships. If something is valuable—and what is more valuable than a strong, loving marriage?—we take care of it and do our utmost to nurture it.

**Q) I have been dating a wonderful woman for the past two years and we are now talking about marriage. She is not Jewish. My parents didn't raise my brothers and me to be religious, but they are upset about it. Why shouldn't I marry someone I truly love, whether or not she happens to be Jewish?**

A) Love is an important part of any relationship, especially marriage, but it isn't the only reason to get married. Marriage is the ultimate expression of life. We understand why life is precious; so too the continuation of life is just as special. Marriage is the gateway to creating life, and for Jews it means building a Jewish family. Though you may have heard somewhere that Eve was made from Adam's rib, the fact is that Adam and Eve were created as one being. They actually existed as one being, with one soul, until God separated them and broke their one perfect soul into two parts. These two parts constantly yearn to be reunited. That is why we naturally feel the desire to connect to another soul—it is an expression of the soul's deep yearning to be reconnected to its soulmate. When two souls are connected through marriage, they are able to blossom into a new being who is whole, fulfilled, and capable of producing another life with spiritual purity. We are



all like Adam and Eve, wandering through the world, looking for the other half to our soul, our soulmate.

The Talmud says that forty days before a baby is conceived, a voice calls out from heaven and announces who is destined to be this baby's soulmate. Why? Aren't they going to get married many years from now? The reason is because this is the formation of their soul: a single soul is broken in two, to be united later. Whether you realize it or not, as a Jew, your soul has a Jewish source, and your soulmate—who shares the other half of that soul—is Jewish too. Your soul knows that its true Jewish soulmate is out there, and it will never rest until it finds its other half.

Marriage in Judaism is about creating a family that feels connected to being Jewish and identifies with the Jewish People. When two people from different faiths marry, this connection for most people is lost.

A glance at the Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project: A Portrait of Jewish Americans, released on Oct 1st 2013 confirms this sad fact. Currently, the intermarriage rate between Jews and non-Jews is at 58 %, up from 43% in 1990 and 17% in 1970.

The intermarriage rate among the non-Orthodox is 71%.

Among Jews married to other Jews, 96% are raising their children as Jews by religion (as opposed to ethnicity).

Among Jews who have intermarried, only 45% raise their children as Jews.

Working with young Jewish men and women in their 20s and 30s, and seeing how many single Jewish women are out there, I am going to assume that most of those intermarriages are Jewish men marrying non-Jewish women.

Here are some additional reasons why a Jew should marry someone Jewish:

Being Jewish is a privilege that brings with it much

responsibility. Throughout the Middle Ages, many Jews were given the choice of leaving their religion and leading very happy and pleasurable lives, or staying with their Judaism and suffering persecution, torture, or even death. Faced with these decisions, the vast majority of our ancestors chose to remain Jewish. In fact, we are here today as Jews only because they stood fast.

Why? That is a fundamental question. The answer is that our ancestors realized that there is something special about being Jewish. Something so special that it is not worth giving it up for anything this world has to offer. Even terrible suffering or death could not take away the eternal spiritual existence of the Jewish soul.

Marrying Jewish allows you to continue with this amazing gift we have been passed down from those heroes of our past, and to pass it down to all the wonderful children of the future. In Kabbalah, we are told about the mystical spark of life that you have in your soul—a spark that was passed down from Abraham our forefather and continues inside every Jewish soul until the end of time. When someone is in touch with that magical spark inside, and knows deep down that he or she is a child of Abraham, it is self-evident above and beyond any other reasons or rational arguments why they should marry Jewish and continue passing on this spark to their children and grandchildren.

You are one link in a long chain of Jewish People who have married Jewish for thousands of years. It took many of your ancestors marrying Jews, to end up with you being Jewish right now. Jewish tradition teaches us that at a Jewish wedding, deceased parents, grandparents and further ancestors of the Jewish couple leave their space in the World of Souls and travel down through the different dimensions to be present

at the wedding. Above all others, it is those souls that feel the most ecstasy and joy at their descendant's Jewish wedding.

In light of what we just said, this makes perfect sense. It is those brave and special people who sacrificed everything and gave up so much in order to pass down to us, their children, the special Jewish identity that they treasured. When they see that we, those who have made the conscious decision to marry Jewish, are continuing those traditions, it is the ultimate expression of their life's work and everything they believed in. One day our souls will dance at the weddings of our descendants if they continue the traditions of their ancestors. The Jewish soul that has been entrusted to you is your part in the great chain of God's plan. It is something so special and so awe-inspiring that anyone who understands their core Jewish identity knows how marrying someone who is Jewish is one of the most important things they can do as a Jew.

Intermarried couples have a higher rate of divorce. Among intermarried couples, the divorce rate is double the amount of same-faith Jewish marriages. Marriage is difficult enough without adding another element of difference between the spouses.

Counseling couples in interfaith relationships for over thirteen years, I have found that many differences exist between the interfaith spouses, even when the Jewish partner is not observant in any way. Such questions as yes or no to the Christmas tree; yes or no to the mezuzah; visiting Jewish/non Jewish in-laws for holidays; what kind of wedding ceremony; whether to give the baby a brit milah, ritual circumcision; making a bar or bat mitzvah for the kids; and in what religion to bring up the children. All these decisions add more strain to the marriage than most people realize.

Even if you do not lead a religious life in any way, you'd be surprised how much your Jewish identity means to you once it's challenged. Being a Jew goes to your core, whether

or not you understand it. And the last thing you want to do is fight with your spouse over stuff like this. She will rightfully point out that it was not a problem when you were dating. And it wasn't. It's only now, when you face spending the rest of your life together and raising your children together that these issues take on meaning.

Children of intermarried spouses have less chance of identifying as Jewish. Inter-dating couples tell me many times "We plan on bringing the kids up both Christian and Jewish." What invariably happens is that they bring the children up with neither. Children need to know who and what they are—"Am I Jewish or Christian?" They can't be both, and in most cases, they reject their Judaism completely. Statistics bear this out:

- 18% of intermarried children are being raised as "Jewish only."

- 65% of children of intermarriage go to church as teens, yet only 19% go to synagogue as teens.

- 14% of such children had a bar or bat mitzvah.

- 62% of children of intermarriage have a Christmas tree.

- 15% of mixed married families belong to a synagogue.

- 16% of mixed married families belong to any other Jewish organization.

- 18% of children of intermarriage agree with the statement, "Being Jewish is very important to me."

## Preparing for Your Jewish Wedding—I Found Her! Now What?

.....

**Q) My sister is getting married soon, and she told me that she is going to a mikveh the night before the wedding. What exactly is a mikveh, and why does she need to go to one?**

**A)** Your sister is preparing for the holiness of a Jewish marriage. She wants to sanctify it the way millions of Jewish women through the ages have infused their marriages with love, intimacy and spirituality.

The mitzvah of mikveh is probably the most misunderstood, and yet the most precious mitzvah we have. According to Jewish law, the mikveh is more important than the synagogue. If a town does not have a mikveh, it does not have the status of a Jewish community!

So what is a mikveh? A mikveh is a pool of water, not much larger than a very small swimming pool, with the water about chest high. In one wall of the mikveh, just below the waterline, is a small hole, and that hole connects the pool to smaller collection of natural rainwater. There must be forty measures of rainwater (each called a se'ah); in most communities today, the standard minimum is around 200 gallons.

There are three essential uses for a mikveh in our times:

1. After a woman has completed her monthly period, she and her husband may not be intimate until she immerses in the mikveh.
2. Before a convert is considered Jewish, he or she must immerse in a mikveh. Without immersion, the conversion is not valid.
3. Pots, dishes and other metal (or, by Rabbinic law, glass) eating utensils are immersed in a mikveh as they are also

“converted” for use by a Jewish person. This is its own law, and does not have anything to do with the laws of keeping kosher.

All three of these are Torah laws, and have been performed ever since the Torah was given.

The mitzvah of mikveh is considered a *chok* (see question “What Is a Mitzvah”) meaning it has no stated rationale. The *chok* mitzvot are based on faith, and demonstrate our inner security as Jews. Even though we may not be able to justify these commandments to the world, we feel secure as Jews to continue observing them. This may be one reason we ask the convert to immerse in the mikveh. The convert’s first step into Judaism involves a ritual whose explanation is not apparent and obvious, and he or she thereby reaffirms the initial acceptance that the Jews made at Mount Sinai, when they accepted all the mitzvot, without knowing the rationale and details of each of them.

You probably think of water on the body or hands as a cleaning agent. Yet the mikveh is used as a form of spiritual purification. Before a woman enters the mikveh water, she bathes thoroughly as a physical cleansing first, and only then is permitted to enter the mikveh. So the mikveh enables a spiritual purification of the body. And this is entirely fitting when you consider the Jewish concept of marriage: after she has immersed in a mikveh and achieved a higher level of holiness, a woman is ready to reunite with her husband. The aura of sanctity engulfs them both and their union is blessed.

But we find that the mikveh is even more than a spiritual purification. We know, for example, that before Aaron and his sons were permitted to function as Kohanim and fulfill their priestly duties, they needed to immerse in a mikveh. That immersion did not involve purification as much as a change in status, an elevation from one state to another.

Another example from the Torah of the use of the mikveh was the Holy Temple service of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) on Yom Kippur. The most intense part of the Yom Kippur worship was the entrance of the Kohen Gadol into the Holy of Holies, the special chamber in the Temple that held the ark containing the original stone tablets with the Ten Commandments brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses. This was the only time of the year that the Kohen Gadol was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. In the course of this service he was required to change his garments five times, and in the middle of each change, he would immerse in a mikveh.

The Kohen Gadol certainly was not impure on Yom Kippur; his immersion caused a change in spiritual status. Each time he entered the mikveh he became a “different” person, and this was symbolized by the multiple immersions into the mikveh.

The same holds true for conversion. The convert is by no means impure in any way. But the convert is about to go through a dramatic change of status, from non-Jew to full Jewish status. As the Talmud tells us, “as soon as the convert immerses and emerges from the mikveh, he/she is a Jew in every way.”

There are various customs among men pertaining to going to the mikveh. Many Jewish men customarily go to a mikveh before Rosh Hashanah and before Yom Kippur. Some men will go before every Shabbat, and a few go every morning!

Before you get the wrong idea, be assured that in most communities, men and women do not use the same mikveh. In addition, women immerse in a mikveh only at night; men go during the day.

### **Q) How does the mikveh change a person?**

A) The reason the mikveh has the power to change a person may be related to another Talmudic teaching, that a convert

who embraces Judaism is like a newborn child. So the mikveh, according to the Kabbalists, represents the womb. When you enter the mikveh, you are reentering the womb, and when you emerge, you are born as new. Since a baby in the womb is not touched by any impurity, it enters the world a completely pure and new creation.

The Hebrew for water is mayim. The root of that word is mah, meaning “what.” Interestingly the word for water in many languages is related to the word what, e.g. water, aqua, wasser. This may be because water is the universal solvent; when you immerse in water, in a sense you nullify your ego, as if asking, “What am I?”

Also, since you cannot live in water for more than a few moments without air, by immersing in a mikveh you are putting yourself into a state of non-existence, non-life so to speak. When you submerge, you are not breathing and you enter the world of non-breathing, nonliving beings, so when you emerge, you are reborn.

This may be why the mikveh must be in the ground and not a tub or other vessel, because in a sense, the mikveh also represents the grave, and as you emerge, you are resurrected into a new being!

**Q) Are any days better or worse to get married during the Jewish year?**

**Recommended:**

Tuesdays: In recounting the story of Creation, the third day, Tuesday, is the only day when the Torah says twice, “And God saw that it was good.” The sages interpreted this to mean that this day is doubly good—“Good for Heaven, and good for the creations.”

Thursdays: On the fifth day of Creation, fish were created



and received the blessing, “Be fruitful and multiply.” We pray that the same blessing will accrue to the young couple and help them in forming a new Jewish family.

**Rosh Chodesh:** The beginning of a Jewish month is an auspicious date for a couple to begin their married life together.

**First fifteen days of the Jewish (lunar) month:** The moon is a metaphor for the Jewish nation, and the days of the month when the moon is waxing are auspicious days for a Jewish couple to be married.

**Kislev:** Some say that the entire month of Kislev is auspicious, as evidenced by the holiday of Chanukah, which falls during the last days of this month. According to this, the “Holiday of Light” is a wonderful time to begin a marriage of light and happiness. If you are planning a Chanukah wedding, make sure that your wedding has a “Chanukah flavor”—doughnuts or latkes would be nice. And don’t forget to invite me.

**Tu B’Shevat (Shevat 15):** The New Year for Trees is certainly an auspicious date to start a “New Year of Marriage.”

**Adar:** The miracle of Purim happened in the month of Adar making it a good month to get married in.

**Tu B’Av (Av 15):** This semi-festive holiday has always been associated with Jewish marriage.

**Elul:** According to Kabbalah, God’s traits of mercy and benevolence are revealed and accessible during the entire month of Elul. This month is certainly an auspicious time to schedule weddings.

### **Not Recommended:**

**Friday:** Weddings are not held on Fridays. In times past, Jewish weddings were regularly held on Fridays. The chuppah ceremony was held before sunset, and the wedding reception,

which started after nightfall, was a grand Shabbat meal for all in attendance.

Today, Friday weddings pose too many problems to be feasible. No music, pictures or videography would be allowed in the evening; all the invited guests would have to walk home after dinner!

Saturday night: Technically, weddings can be held on Saturday night after the conclusion of Shabbat. No preparations for the wedding whatsoever may begin until nightfall. Logistically, this is very difficult. Saturday night weddings are possible, though challenging, during the winter; they are virtually impossible during the long days of the summer months.

The Days Preceding Biblical Jewish Holidays: Elul 29 (day before Rosh Hashanah), Tishrei 9 (day before Yom Kippur), Tishrei 14 (day before Sukkot), Nissan 14 (day before Passover), Sivan 5 (day before Shavuot)—all these dates pose potential problems, and therefore weddings are not held on them, similar to weddings on Friday.

Ten Days of Repentance (Tishrei 4-8): Due to the solemn nature of the Ten Days of Repentance, it is customary to refrain from scheduling weddings during these days.

Purim: The action-packed nature of the holiday of Purim, which also traditionally includes a family-oriented festive meal at the day's end, makes it an ill-suited day to schedule a wedding.

### **Fast Days:**

Fast of Gedaliah (Tishrei 3): A wedding scheduled for today must begin after nightfall following the fast.

Fast of Tevet (Tevet 10): A wedding scheduled for today must begin after nightfall following the fast.

The Fast of Esther (Adar 13): Nightfall ushers in the holiday of Purim and the obligation to hear the Megillah—making it quite impractical to schedule a wedding for today.

## **Forbidden:**

Shabbat: Wedding ceremonies are not performed on Shabbat, i.e. from sunset on Friday night to nightfall on Saturday night.

Major holidays, mandated days of rest:

Rosh Hashanah (Tishrei 1-2)

Yom Kippur (Tishrei 10)

Sukkot (Tishrei 15; outside the Land of Israel, also Tishrei 16)

Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah (Tishrei 22; outside the Land of Israel, also Tishrei 23)

Passover (Nissan 15 and 21; outside the Land of Israel, also Nissan 16 and 22)

Shavuot (Sivan 6; outside the Land of Israel, also Sivan 7)

Chol Hamoed: The joy of these semi-festive days requires a complete immersion in the spirit of the holiday. Dividing our attention between the joy of the holiday and the joy of a wedding celebration doesn't do justice to either one of them:

Sukkot (Tishrei 16-21; outside the Land of Israel, Tishrei 17-21)

Passover (Nissan 16-20; outside the Land of Israel, Nissan 17-20)

## **Differing Customs**

The Omer Period (Nissan 16-Sivan 5): During part of this period (there is a difference of opinion as to which days) we mourn the loss of thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students who died in a terrible plague nearly two thousand years ago. On these days, we do not get married; a competent rabbi can guide you regarding which opinion to follow.

Three Weeks (Tammuz 17-Av 9): The three weeks between the Fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av are a Jewish national period of mourning. Ashkenazi

Jews refrain from scheduling any weddings throughout this period. Sephardic Jews do schedule weddings until the onset of the month of Av, and then refrain for the last nine days of the Three Weeks.

## The Wedding Ceremony—The Big Day, Mazel Tov!

.....

### **Q) Why do I need a chuppah?**

A) You are about to begin Jewish married life together. Mazel Tov! It took you long enough! As you stand under the chuppah, with family, friends (and future in-laws!) you are beginning a whole new chapter of your life: as a married couple. For Jews, married life begins as a public ceremony, so they can witness that you are now exclusively dedicating yourselves to one another, and can celebrate this special occasion together with you.

The chuppah is a canopy representing the Jewish home that you and your spouse will now build together. It's made up of four posts holding up a covering (sometimes a talit—Jewish prayer shawl—is used) and it's open on all four sides. That's a little unusual though—how can a chuppah represent a home when it is open on all four sides? How many homes have you seen that are open on all four sides? I assume such a house would not be so effective in keeping out the rain or wind! Historically, however, one Jewish home was known to have been open on all four sides, and that was the home of the first Jewish couple, Abraham and Sarah. In that ancient, nomadic era, they always put up their tent open, so their home was inviting to guests from whichever direction they may come.

This is the kind of warm and welcoming home you, as a Jewish bride and groom, should try to emulate at your wedding and in your married life thereafter. It is a home that is

based upon the principles of your ancestors, open and ready to welcome guests and to be a place of mitzvot, family growth and blessing.

The groom precedes the bride, making his way to the chuppah first, symbolically establishing a home for his bride. We have two different customs for escorting the bride to the chuppah. One is to have her walk to the chuppah accompanied by her parents. Another custom, however, is to have the bride escorted near to the chuppah, but not to enter it right away. The groom walks out of the chuppah, and after her parents who escorted her to that point take leave of her, the groom escorts her under the chuppah. This signifies the idea that the bride and groom are now walking into the future home together.

The chuppah also signifies that God's presence is over them all the time, and will be for the duration of their married life together. Some people have the custom to be married outdoors or to have the chuppah placed under an open skylight, as a sign that their children should be as the stars of the sky.

**Q) Why does the bride circle the groom seven times under the chuppah?**

A) This popular custom may be connected to when the Jewish People entered Israel for the first time as a nation. Joshua took the people to Jericho that we are told had high and thick walls. At God's instruction, the people walked around these walls seven times, blowing shofars, and the "walls came tumbling down!"

Psychologists today would say that many men "build walls" around their hearts that block their ability to give and accept love. By circling her husband seven times, perhaps the bride is breaking down those walls so she can enter his heart.

Another possible explanation is that by walking around the groom, the bride is creating an invisible wall of protection around him, which will last their entire lives together.

**Q) Why does the bride stand to the right of the groom under the chuppah?**

A) The custom is to have the bride stand to the right of the groom under the chuppah. This is based on a verse in the book of Psalms where the “queen stands on the right.” Since the bride is considered a queen, and the groom a king, she stands to his right under the chuppah.

**Q) Why does the groom put a ring on a bride’s finger under the chuppah?**

A) You don’t actually need to put a ring on the bride’s finger! Giving the bride any item of reasonable value will do the job. The custom over the past couple of thousand years is to use a ring (some communities, even today, use gold coins instead). A ring is a round object that represents the circle of life. It also has a high point, and a low point, as life has it “ups and downs.” By using a ring you are saying that although the life we are about to embark upon will have incredibly happy times, it will also bring difficult challenges we must overcome. With every good time, a more challenging turn is right around the corner; but as we experience difficult times, we should remember that better times are sure to come.

Jewish lore relates that a certain wise man (in may even be King Solomon!) used to wear a ring on his finger with the words “gam zeh yaavor” engraved on it, which means, “this, too, shall pass”—to always be reminded of the transience of all life.

The wedding ring should not have any colored stones or diamonds embedded in it, but should be a plain band so that

its value is readily apparent. The general custom is that it be made of gold. Another reason for a perfectly smooth ring is in order to represent the perfectly smooth, untroubled cycle of life.

The giving of a ring under the chuppah is a gift from the groom to the bride. For this reason, according to Jewish tradition, we don't perform a double ring ceremony under the chuppah, as this would possibly constitute an exchange rather than a gift. It's fine if a man wants to wear a ring to signify he is married, but the ring should be placed on his finger after the conclusion of the ceremony and not during it.

### **Q) Why do we drink wine under the chuppah?**

A) People like wine, that's why! Drinking wine makes you happy, and adds joy to any occasion. We use wine at a number of joyous occasions. Even a baby at his circumcision is given a little wine to drink. When we welcome in the Shabbat, we drink wine. At every Jewish holiday, you make a blessing over a cup of wine. Under the chuppah, you pour a full cup of wine, and the bride and groom each take a sip (white wine can be used, in case some spills on the bride's dress!) and seven blessings are made over the cup of wine. These are all joyous occasions that warrant making a blessing, and wine is there to remind you that you should be grateful to God for allowing you to reach this moment of joy.

How are all the events for which we use wine related? They are all times of great transition. At a brit milah we welcome new life; on Shabbat, time transitions from the mundane weekday to the holy; and at a wedding, two separate people become one. Wine can make you drunk, but when it is used in sanctity, it can transition you to a new life of great blessing.

Wine also has a unique trait. Everything in the physical world deteriorates over time. Houses wear down, clothes

perish, foods rot, but wine is one of the few physical things that improve with age. So when you drink wine at your wedding, or any other of these happy occasions, it is symbolic of the life you are about to begin together which should also improve with age.

**Q) What is a Ketubah and why do I need one? Does it have to be expensive?**

A) Before the Torah was given to the Jewish People, the system of marriage was very different from today's process in Jewish law. A man would meet a woman, and if they decided to be together, they would move into a house together. That was it! Since then, things have evolved quite a bit.

In order for your wedding to be considered a marriage according to Jewish law, there are a few requirements. One of these is a marriage contract called a Ketubah. It is first and foremost a legal document, which belongs to the wife for the duration of her marriage, and must always remain in her ownership. According to some, the idea of a Ketubah goes back even to Biblical times.

The Ketubah is written in Aramaic. It contains all the obligations that a husband has towards his wife, including, food, clothing, dwelling, and intimacy. It also creates a lien on all his property to pay her a sum of money and support, should he divorce her. The document is signed by two witnesses; according to Jewish law, you should choose fine, upstanding and religious people to sign the Ketubah. Unless there is an English section on the Ketubah (which has no legal connection to the Hebrew, and is mainly there for decoration) the bride and groom do not sign the Ketubah. Two people, who are not family of the bride's, or of her future husband's, or of each other, will sign on her behalf.

The Ketubah has the standing of a legally binding



agreement. It is often written as an illuminated manuscript, and becomes a work of art in itself; many couples frame it and display it in their home. This is a nice thing to do, but is not in any way necessary. So you can buy an inexpensive one and use that if you wish.

**Q) Why does the groom break a glass at the conclusion of the ceremony?**

A) The intense joy you feel at a wedding is probably greater than any other occasion in Jewish lifecycle events. As the bride and groom make a commitment of love towards each other, and begin their new life together, every worry and concern is pushed out of their minds, and they are totally focused on each other.

The Talmud commends celebrating at weddings, but was concerned that people would be too focused on the moment and lose sight of the bigger picture. The truth is that the world is not perfect: our Holy Temple in Jerusalem is still destroyed and as a result we cannot express our natural affinity to God and we are distanced from Him. Because we are not in our natural spiritual state, anti-Semitism is still strong, wars still rage, and the world is not at peace. So at the peak of our joy, we take the edge off happiness by vowing never to forget Jerusalem and we break a glass. As it shatters, we reflect that the Third (and final) Holy Temple has yet to be built and that we are incomplete without it.

Maybe the reason that the chuppah was chosen as a time to remember the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the aftermath that we are still feeling, is because the solution is right there. The Talmud teaches us that the Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred that the people were feeling towards each other. The wedding of two people is the exact opposite; they are building a true love towards each other. So

we put the wedding next to the Temple destruction as if to say, we remember the destruction and its causes, but this marriage in which love will deepen and grow is the solution.

**Q) Someone told me that the expression Mazel Tov doesn't mean "good luck" or even "congratulations." Isn't that what you're supposed to say after the glass is broken?**

A) Mazel Tov does not mean good luck! The idea of "luck" doesn't exist in Judaism. Things don't happen because a person is "lucky" or "unlucky." Everything that happens to a person happens for a reason. We may not always know the reason for every small occurrence, but God does. Actually, wishing someone "good luck" on the birth of a baby or at his or her wedding is pretty offensive: "Oh, you're getting married? Good luck." "Having twins, yikes, good luck with that!"

You may find this hard to believe, but the word mazel, means astrology! You can find more about this concept in the chapter "Astrology and the Zodiac."

But in a nutshell, each Jewish month has a certain energy corresponding to the Jewish holiday that falls within it. The same is true for every day in the month and really every moment. When you say "Mazel Tov!" you are really blessing the person with a prayer that they should have all the blessings that moment in time can bring; and that all the planets should line up in a propitious manner for the wedding, circumcision, new business or whatever new undertaking the person is about to begin. That's a pretty nice thing to do for someone.

Others say the word mazel is related to another word, nozel, which means flow. In that context, when you wish people "Mazel Tov" you are bestowing a blessing that things should "flow well" for them, without obstacles on the way.