

Wedding Reception: Jewish Reception Rituals

By- Robin Beth Schaer

Mazel Tov! You've stomped on the glass -- but wait, the wedding's not over yet! We'll tell you what comes next.

You signed the *ketubah*, raised the *huppah*, exchanged rings, and stomped on the glass -- but wait, the wedding's not over yet! There are a few more rituals left to make your reception a true *simcha* (joyous celebration).

Blessing The Challah

The wedding meal begins with a blessing over the challah, an elaborately braided bread. The couple's parents or another honored guest can make the *hamotzi*, or blessing.

S'eudah Mitzvah

This is the food portion of the reception -- chicken and fish, both fertility symbols, are ever-present dishes at Jewish weddings. The first course at Sephardic weddings is called *Sutlach*, a sweet rice pudding made with coconut milk, honey, and almonds -- all symbols of a sweet and prosperous life. If you're wondering whether or not to serve a kosher meal at your wedding, take it from us -- kosher doesn't mean unappetizing. Dry brisket and lead latkes aren't your only options -- there are plenty of yummy kosher treats to satisfy the crowd. Imagine seared salmon and sundried tomato and artichoke penne. Or rosemary chicken and roasted veggie couscous. How about garlic marinated Romanian tenderloin, or even spicy tuna sushi? Decide whether you want a meat or a dairy meal. (Remember, fish and eggs are parve, which means they go both ways.) Find a glatt-kosher caterer: if that's too hard-core, ask your caterer to devise a "kosher-style" menu that adheres to kosher rules but isn't cooked in a kosher kitchen. Eliminate treyf no-nos like pork and shellfish. No lobster salad or oysters Rockefeller? Who cares? Hey, you might even save a few shekels.

The Hora

No Jewish wedding is complete without the *Hora*, or chair dance, most likely derived from the tradition of carrying royalty on chairs. A few strong and brave guests hoist the bride and groom high above the crowd on chairs to the infectious sounds of "Hava Nagila". Friends and family dance around in an ecstatic circle as the elevated couple tries not to look (or fall) down.

Mitzvah Dances

Entertaining the bride and groom on their wedding day is not only a *mitzvah* (good deed) but also an obligation. At traditional Jewish weddings, the couple is seated on chairs and guests dance before them with masks, silly costumes, and props.

Mezinke Tanz OR Krenzel

The *Mezinke Tanz* is one of the concluding dances of the night and honors parents who have married off their last child. The dance is also known as *Krenzel* (Yiddish for "crown") in reference to the crown

of flowers often placed in the mother's hair during the dance. The proud parents are seated on chairs in the middle of the dance floor while friends and family dance around, kissing them as they pass in front.

Birkat Hamazon

The traditional way to end the festive meal is with the *birkat hamazon*, the blessings after the meal. Booklets of prayers, called *benchers*, can be handed out to guests. After the prayers, the seven wedding blessings are repeated, giving friends yet another opportunity to participate. Finally, the blessing over the wine is recited as two glasses of wine are poured together into a third, symbolizing the creation of a new life together with a new marriage.

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