

Brett Weisman

Teaching Rabbinics

This four-part curriculum, which is designed for a Reform context, assumes that the Rabbi facilitating this course will likely encounter couples with a multitude of backgrounds, orientations, knowledge levels and ritual expectations. It is the expressed goal of this course, in this way, to be as inclusive as possible knowing well that a Jewish wedding can present in a multitude of authentic ways.

The preparation for this life cycle event requires careful planning in all areas. Certainly, the contracting of florists or caterers is a crucial part of a wedding, but weddings lead to marriages and it is the goal of this curriculum to prepare a wedding couple for a meaningful marriage. Wedding couples, in order to be fully prepared for the commitment that is marriage, must be willing to engage with the difficult conversations. The reality is, life only gets more complex and the goal of pre-marriage counseling should be, at its core, to understand the approach, philosophy and disposition of the other so as to learn more about the other, avoid painful discussions in the midst of difficult or trying moments, and to lift up one's partner to their full potential. While it is the responsibility of the wedding couple to commit to this work, it is the rabbi's job as spiritual leader to guide and prepare the couple through this process to so as to ensure a successful marriage from the start.

While the joyous process of Kiddushin (betrothal) and n'suin (marriage) is a marvelous and beautiful moment between the wedding couple and integral for a Jewish wedding, the process by which a wedding couple arrives at that moment is arguably just as important as the wedding itself. This is to say that the growth and preparation for

marriage does not happen under the chuppah, but in the preparation which occurs significantly before the wedding. Jewish tradition and rabbinic texts are rich with symbolism, history and ritual and it goes without saying that Jewish marriage is no different. It is thus the intention of this four-course curriculum to provide a means for rabbis to provide an educational and experiential platform for wedding couples to-be to ask themselves the difficult questions inherent in a relationship of this magnitude as well as provide an opportunity to become familiar with the rituals and symbolism of a Jewish wedding.

Through the use and study of Talmudic texts, guided conversations, and personal reflections, this curriculum takes an experiential approach to pre-marriage counseling that Rabbis offer. This course seeks to uncover the important elements of a marriage such as building a Jewish home, developing a sanctified relationship, raising a Jewish family, and navigating the various perspectives and relationships that a new marriage necessitates. This course asks the important questions about marriage such as building a Jewish home, developing a sanctified relationship, raising a Jewish family, and navigating the various perspectives and relationships that a new marriage necessitates. This course is framed by the following Enduring Understanding:

- Marriage, an institution steeped with meaning and ritual, presents and opportunity for the couple-to-be to learn, grow and plan along spiritual, familial and relational lines.

## **Lesson 1: Building a Jewish Home**

### **Essential Questions:**

- What are the elements of a Jewish marriage?
- What experiences from my upbringing do I want to incorporate into this new home?  
What experiences from my upbringing do I want to abandon?
- How can the wedding ceremony prepare the wedding couple for marriage?

### **Goals:**

- To encourage wedding couple to be vulnerable
- To encourage wedding couples to be appreciative about what worked in their upbringing and to notice what didn't work
- To facilitate meaningful discussion and reflection regarding the symbolism present throughout the wedding service

### **Objectives:**

- Wedding Couple (Learners) will be able to name and describe the basic components of a Jewish wedding
- Wedding couple will be able to articulate what they want to be included in their Ketubah
- Wedding Couple will create an 8<sup>th</sup> blessing to accompany the 7 blessings
- Wedding Couple will write a letter to their significant other regarding the provided prompt.

**To the Officiant:** While personal introductions and the process of getting to know each other are a necessarily crucial part of developing trust and having a meaningful wedding experience, this curriculum assumes that process will happen organically thus will focus primarily on the content and the learning as opposed to the pastoral aspects of being an officiant.

### **Set Induction: Make a Match**

*“Rabba bar bar Hana says that Rabbi Yoḥanan says: And it is as difficult to match a couple together as was the splitting of the Yam Suf!” (Sotah 2a:8)*

So now that the hard part is over, lets play a matching game! (Appendix 1.1)

Wedding couple will be given the wedding components work sheet (list of all of the components of a wedding and wedding couple should match each thing with its description/source text.

### **Activity 1: Ketubah Comparison**

Officiant will present the two texts of ketubot. One traditional (Appendix 1.2) and one egalitarian (Appendix 1.3). The wedding couple is asked to read the texts separately, underlining ideas/items that resonate with them in either text and circling things that are uncomfortable. When they have finished, the wedding couple will provide a rationale regarding a few things that they found meaningful and a few things they found to be uncomfortable.

### **Activity 2: Huppah Hevrutah**

The learners will be presented with two texts and the following guiding questions to be studied in Hevruta.

- What do we learn about a chuppah from this text? What does the chuppah represent according to these two texts?
- Why might the people of Beitar be so attached to the planted trees that they risked life and limb to avenge these trees?
- If these trees might represent each individual’s upbringing and the investment of their community, what elements of your up-bringing will you contribute to this marriage? What will you leave behind?

It was stated earlier that the city of Beitar was destroyed on account of a shaft from a carriage. The Gemara explains that it was customary in Beitar that when a boy was born they would plant a cedar tree and when a girl was born they would plant a cypress [*tornita*]. And when they would later marry each other they would cut down these trees and construct a wedding canopy for them with their branches. One day the emperor’s daughter passed by there and the shaft of the carriage in which she was riding broke. Her attendants chopped down a cedar from among those trees and brought it to her. Owing to the importance that they attached to their custom, the residents of Beitar came and fell upon them and beat them. The attendants came and said to the emperor: The

Jews have rebelled against you. The emperor then came against them in war. (Gittin 57a:21)

### **Activity 3: Sheva Brachot +1**

Officiant will present the text of the Sheva Brachot (Appendix 1.4) to the wedding couple along with the following guiding questions:

- What are the themes of each of the blessings?
- Why might they be in this order?

The Wedding Couple will be instructed to work together to write an 8<sup>th</sup> blessing based on their reflection of the themes of the Sheva Brachot and what they feel the seven blessings may have left out.

### **Conclusion:**

Building a home together takes a lot of work and communication and dedication and yet all of the symbolism in the wedding ceremony will not be what prepares you for your life together and all that may come from it.

Write your spouse-to-be a letter that describes your hopes and aspirations for your marriage letting the verse from Genesis 2:24 be your guiding prompt.

“Hence one leaves their father and mother and clings to their spouse, so that they become one flesh.”

(Appendix 1.1)

Aufruf \_\_\_\_\_

Fasting \_\_\_\_\_

Ketubah Signing \_\_\_\_\_

Bedecken \_\_\_\_\_

Chuppah \_\_\_\_\_

Circling \_\_\_\_\_

Ring Exchange \_\_\_\_\_

Sheva Brachot \_\_\_\_\_

Breaking the Glass \_\_\_\_\_

Yichud \_\_\_\_\_

1. The married couple's first meal. a sanctified, private moment of peace, quiet, reflection, and joy; the calm before the celebration. This word literally means togetherness.
2. The custom where the wedding couple is called for an Aliyah to bless the Torah on the Shabbat before their wedding.
3. In the final moments of the chuppah ceremony, the wedding couple does this act to demonstrate the dichotomy between joy and sorrow; that even in moments of bliss, there is a touch of grey.
4. An opportunity for wedding couple to partake in soul-searching reflection in preparation of building a new life together.
5. Harkening back to the story of Jacob, Laban, Rachel and Leah, this ceremony is when the wedding couple confirms the identity of their beloved before the ceremony, akin to what is colloquially known as a "first look."
6. The marriage canopy and, symbolically, the first home the wedding couple will build together. Here, the wedding couple will encircle each other, confirm their vows to each other, exchange their rings and be blessed according to the statutes of Moses and Israel.
7. These blessings represent the thematic gleanings of a wedding and are steeped in visual symbolism connecting the wedding to agriculture, several representations of joy, peace and Jerusalem.
8. The marriage contract that expresses, in writing, the responsibilities and expectations the wedding couple has for each other. The document requires the signatures of the wedding couple, two witnesses and the officiant of the wedding.
9. An Ashkenazi tradition where the wedding couple walk around each other a total of seven times. One can imagine the visual and spatial symbolism of protection, boundary, and even gravity/orbit.
10. This ritual represents the financial aspect of marriage, hearkening back to traditional systems of dowries.

Answer Key:

Aufruf – The custom where the wedding couple is called for an Aliyah to bless the Torah on the Shabbat before their wedding.

Fasting – an opportunity for wedding couple to partake in soul-searching reflection in preparation of building a new life together.

Ketubah Signing – The marriage contract that expresses, in writing, the responsibilities and expectations the wedding couple has for each other. The document requires the signatures of the wedding couple, two witnesses and the officiant of the wedding.

Bedecken – hearkening back to the story of Jacob, Laban, Rachel and Leah, this ceremony is when the wedding couple confirms the identity of their beloved before the ceremony, akin to what is colloquially known as a “first look.”

Chuppah – The marriage canopy and, symbolically, the first home the wedding couple will build together. Here, the wedding couple will encircle each other, confirm their vows to each other, exchange their rings and be blessed according to the statutes of Moses and Israel.

Circling – An Ashkenazi tradition where the wedding couple walk around each other a total of seven times. One can imagine the visual and spatial symbolism of protection, boundary, and even gravity/orbit.

Ring Exchange – This ritual represents the financial aspect of marriage, hearkening back to traditional systems of dowries.

Sheva Brachot – These blessings represent the thematic gleanings of a wedding and are steeped in visual symbolism connecting the wedding to agriculture, several representations of joy, peace and Jerusalem.

Breaking the glass – In the final moments of the chuppah ceremony, the wedding couple does this act to demonstrate the dichotomy between joy and sorrow; that even in moments of bliss, there is a touch of grey.

Yichud – The married couple’s first meal. a sanctified, private moment of peace, quiet, reflection, and joy; the calm before the celebration. This word literally means togetherness.

(Appendix 1.2)

Traditional Ketubah Text:

On the [...] day of the week, the [...] day of the [Hebrew] month of [...], the year [...] after the creation of the world, according to the manner in which we count [dates] here in [...], the bridegroom [...] son of [...] said to this [...] daughter of [...], “Be my wife according to the law of Moses and Israel. I will work honor, feed and support you in the custom of Jewish men, who work, honor, feed, and support their wives faithfully. I will give you the settlement of [...] silver *zuzim*, which is due you according to [...] law, as well as your food, clothing, necessities of life, and conjugal needs, according to the universal custom.”

Ms. [...] agreed, and became his wife. This dowry that she brought from her father’s house, whether in silver, gold, jewelry, clothing, home furnishings, or bedding, Mr. [...], our bridegroom, accepts as being worth [...] silver pieces (*zekukim*).

Our bridegroom, Mr. [...] agreed, and of his own accord, added an additional [...] silver pieces (*zekukim*) paralleling the above. The entire amount is then [...] silver pieces (*zekukim*).

Mr. [...] our bridegroom made this declaration: “The obligation of this marriage contract (*ketubah*), this dowry, and this additional amount, I accept upon myself and upon my heirs after me. It can be paid from the entire best part of the property and possessions that I own under all the heavens, whether I own [this property] already, or will own it in the future. [It includes] both mortgageable property and non-mortgageable property. All of it shall be mortgaged and bound as security to pay this marriage contract, this dowry, and this additional amount. [it can be taken] from me, even from the shirt on my back, during my lifetime, and after my lifetime, from this day and forever.”

And the surety for all the obligations of this marriage contract (*ketubah*), dowry and the additional sum has been assumed by [...] the said groom, with the full obligation dictated by all documents of *ketubot* and additional sums due every daughter of Israel, executed in accordance with the enactment of our Sages, of blessed memory. It is not to be regarded as an indecisive contractual obligation nor as a stereotyped form.

And we have completed the act of acquisition from Mr.[...] son of [...] our bridegroom, to Ms. [...] daughter of [...], regarding everything written and stated above, with an article that is fit for such a *kinyan*. And everything is valid and confirmed.

[...] son of [...] Witness

[...] son of [...] Witness

(Appendix 1.3)



Egalitarian Ketubah Text:

On the — day of the week, the — day of — in the year 57— , corresponding to the — day of — in the year 20— here in —, the groom — and the bride — joined together before family and friends to enter into the holy covenant of marriage.

The groom said to the bride: Be consecrated to me as my wife, and I shall always cherish you and care for you, I will sustain you and respect you forever. The bride agreed and became his wife.

The bride said to the groom: Be consecrated to me as my husband, and I shall always cherish you and care for you, I will sustain you and respect you forever. The groom agreed and became her husband.

The groom and the bride undertake this pledge of love: They choose each other as friends according to the teachings of our ancestors who said, "Acquire a friend with whom you will learn, next to whom you will sleep, and in whom you will confide." They consecrate themselves to each other and will always be true to one another. They take on all the duties and rights of family members toward each other. They promise to lead a life of justice and loving kindness in their family and community till the end, in accordance with the verse,

"Let me be a seal upon your heart, like the seal upon your arm."

The bride and the groom acknowledged the responsibilities of this covenant and solemnly accepted the obligations herein. This Ketubah is valid and binding.

Witness —

Witness —

Bride —

Groom —

Rabbi —

On \_\_\_\_\_ (day of week) the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ (month), 57\_\_\_, according to Jewish reckoning ( \_\_\_\_\_ month \_\_\_\_\_ day \_\_\_\_\_ year, according to secular reckoning), in the city

of \_\_\_\_\_ (state or region), \_\_\_\_\_ (country), \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrew name) daughter/son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ whose surname is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrew name) daughter/son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ whose surname is \_\_\_\_\_ confirm in the presence of witnesses a lovers' covenant between them and declare a partnership to establish a household among the people of Israel.

The agreement into which \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are entering is a holy covenant like the ancient covenants of our people, made in faithfulness and peace to stand forever. It is a covenant of protection and hope like the covenant God swore to Noah and his descendants, saying

When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. That," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh" (Gen. 9:16–17).

It is a covenant of distinction, like the covenant God made with Israel, saying

You shall be My people, and I shall be your God (Jer. 30:22).

It is a covenant of devotion, joining hearts like the covenant David and Jonathan made, as it is said,

And Jonathan's soul was bound up with the soul of David. Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself (1 Sam. 18:1-3).

It is a covenant of mutual lovingkindness like the wedding covenant between God and Zion, as it is said,

I will espouse you forever. I will espouse you with righteousness and justice and lovingkindness and compassion. I will espouse you in faithfulness and you shall know God (Hos. 2:21-22).

### **Provisions of the Covenant**

The following are the provisions of the lovers' covenant into which \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrew name) daughter/son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrew name) daughter/son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ now enter:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ declare that they have chosen each other as companions, as our rabbis teach:

Get yourself a companion. This teaches that a person should get a companion, to eat with, to drink with, to study Bible with, to study *Mishnah* with, to sleep with, to confide all one's secrets, secrets of *Torah* and secrets of worldly things. (Avot D'Rabbi Nat an 8)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ declare that they are setting themselves apart for each other and will take no other lover.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ hereby assume all the rights and obligations that apply to family members: to attend, care, and provide for one another [and for any children with which they may be blessed] [and for \_\_\_\_\_ child/children of \_\_\_\_\_]

4. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ commit themselves to a life of kindness and righteousness as a Jewish family and to work together toward the communal task of mending the world.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ pledge that one will help the other at the time of dying, by carrying out the last rational requests of the dying partner, protecting him/her from indignity or abandonment and by tender, faithful presence with the beloved until the end, fulfilling what has been written:

Set me as a seal upon your arm, for love is stronger than death. (Song of Songs 8:6)

To this covenant we affix our signatures.

The partners:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed this day the \_\_\_\_\_ day of Parashat \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrew date).

The witnesses:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Appendix 1.4)

1

Blessed is the Eternal, Sovereign of the Universe  
Producer of the fruit of the vine.

2

Blessed is the Eternal, Sovereign of the Universe  
Whose glory is revealed in all creation.

3

Blessed is the Eternal, sovereign of the Universe  
Creator of humanity.

4

Blessed is the Eternal, sovereign of the Universe  
Who created humanity in the Divine Image—  
Instilling within us the blessing  
of life's ongoing renewal  
Blessed is the Eternal, Creator of Humanity.

5

Rejoice! Tzion! Her children return in joy!  
Blessed is the Eternal,  
Allowing those who have sown in tears to reap in tears of joy.

6

May \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,  
rejoice as companions together  
May their happiness be a source of bliss—  
Blessed is the Eternal, who causes \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to rejoice.

7

Blessed is the Eternal, sovereign of the Universe  
Creator of joy & gladness, bride & groom,  
Love & kinship, Peace & Friendship!  
May the voice of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ be heard  
In the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem  
The voices of youth and the songs of children  
Blessed is the Eternal, sovereign of the Universe  
Who brings joy into the hearts of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Lesson 2: Developing a Sanctified Relationship**

### **Essential Questions:**

- What is a sanctified relationship?
- A criticism of Kiddushin is that it does not reflect the egalitarian, non-agrarian priorities of a modern society; how can we re-envision this ancient rite in a way that reflects our modern ethical values?

### **Goals:**

- To encourage the wedding couple to re-imagine their wedding in a way that reflects their values.
- To encourage the wedding couple to understand that the wedding is only the solidification of their holy relationship and that the work that is required of a successful marriage is persistent.

### **Objectives:**

- Wedding couple will create a list of things that their partner does that inspires them as well as a list of things that they wish their partner would improve upon.
- Wedding couple will develop a Relationship Brit with personal statements on Forgiveness, Humility, and Love.

## **Set Induction: Kiddushin Questions**

Officiant will present the text from Kiddushin 2a-b (Appendix 2.1) with these guiding questions:

- What are your initial reactions to this text?
- What surprises you about this text?
- What questions do you have about this text?
- Is there anyway we can understand this text or reimagine this text in a way that isn't problematic?
- What is the relationship between the word holy and the idea of setting something apart?

**To The Officiant:** With regard to the guiding questions, the couple will likely be troubled by the gendered language and the implied and explicit notions of ownership through acquisition. Ideally this will lead to a conversation of what Jewish marriage has meant in the past versus what it could be. The officiant must make clear that the fundamental idea of kiddushin is a deliberate statement of setting something apart. Traditionally, Kiddushin is the idea that a woman is "accounted for." The goal, in this session, is to reimagine the act of Kiddushin in an egalitarian way. The officiant and the wedding couple might explore the idea of setting each other apart for themselves, but this retains remnants of the ownership of the other. The other opportunity for exploration, and is perhaps more egalitarian while retaining the institution of Kiddushin as declaring something as set apart, is to declare the wedding couple's marriage set apart from all of their other relationships; a truly holy union.

### **Activity 1: A Sanctified Relationship Stands Upon Three Things**

Wedding couple will be instructed to fill out their own copy of the graphic organizer (Appendix 2.2) using the three texts below. After they have filled out the graphic organizer, the officiant will ask each to trade papers. Wedding couple should be prompted to share:

- Thoughts/epiphanies that came up
- Questions that came up

Forgiveness

- "If one says to another, 'lend me your spade,' and the other refuses, and the next day the other says to the one, 'lend me your scythe,' and the one replies, 'Here it is; I am not like you, who would not lend me your spade,' that is bearing a grudge, which is forbidden." (Sifra, Kedoshim Ch. 4:10-11)

Humility

- "Yield your will to the will of your friend: but let both their will and yours yield to the will of God." (Rabbinic Anthology, 463 [Derech Erez Zuta I, 8])

Love

- "It is he whom David said by the Ruach Hakodesh "Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)". Another interpretation: "Your rod": these are the struggles, and "Your staff": this is the Torah; "they comfort me": is this possible without struggles? The verse says: "only". Is it possible in this world? The verse says: "Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all

the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of Hashem for many long years (Psalm 23:6)". Song of Songs Rabbah 2:1:3

### **Activity 2: Harmony/Love in Marriage**

The wedding couple will be provided the following text (Appendix 2.3) and asked to write a letter to the other person describing in great detail the reason why the other is the thing they care about most in the world. The couple should be instructed to provide specific anecdotes, emotions, epiphanies and anything that might help to convey the underlying sentiment of this beautiful story. These letters can be shared, kept in secret or built upon over the course of the couple's engagement. The officiant should collect a copy of these letters to incorporate some of the themes and anecdotes into their wedding ceremony.

### **Activity 3: Hot Seat Tochecha**

In this activity, the officiant will guide the wedding couple through a series of questions intended on both modeling probing questions and providing a framework for couples to communicate the more serious questions that go into a marriage. This has the potential to be an uncomfortable situation and one must proceed with caution. The questions begin light and will oscillate between serious and probing. Comfort and growth are the most important underlying goals.

Recommended questions:

- If money were no object, what career would you pursue?
- If you could have dinner with any person, living or dead, who would it be and why? What would you ask that person?
- What three words would you use to describe yourself? To describe your partner?
- What are the greatest disappointments in your life?
- Where do you need the most amount of growth?
- What are your hopes for your marriage? For life?
- In what ways does your partner push you?
- In what ways does your partner hold you back?
- In what ways does your partner hold themselves back?
- What are your pet peeves?
- What do you admire most in your partner?
- What is one thing you want to change about yourself?
- What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?
- What makes you feel safe?
- How would you describe your love language?
- What are you worried about for the future?
- What are you excited about?

**Closure: Rabbinic Counseling/Creation of Relationship Brit.**

**To the Officiant:** This is a highly emotional lesson that intends on drawing out true feelings of the wedding couple. Things may come up that were unexpected, emotional, triggering, etc. The officiant should make sure that the wedding couple is prepared to leave the room; this section may require immediate rabbinic counseling and may require further meetings with the wedding couple to unpack the conversation.

Officiant, if/when emotions have settled, should propose the beginning of the creation of a relationship brit whereby the wedding couple can point to certain needs, expectations, guidelines and obligations (see lesson 3) for their relationship. The officiant should point out that this is essentially the precursor to their Ketubah, while not legally or halakhically binding, this brit expresses an important level of commitment to the other.



(Appendix 2.1)

Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 2a-b

A woman is acquired [by a man, as his betrothed] in one of three ways: A coin, a document, or intercourse...

“A woman is acquired” – Why does it say here “a woman is acquired” and elsewhere “a man betroths (lit. a man sanctifies)? Let it teach here, “A man acquires [a woman]... Why does it use the language of the rabbis [who use the word whose root means “to sanctify]”? Because in betrothing her, he forbids her to all other men, like something that has been sanctified.

Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 5b

How does a man betroth a woman with an object of value? He gives her a coin or something with the value of a coin, and says to her, “Behold, you are betrothed to me”... but if she gives something to him and says to him, “Behold I am betrothed to you,” she is not betrothed.

Text	What is the theme?	What does this text say about you?	What does this text say about your partner?
<p>If one says to another, 'lend me your spade,' and the other refuses, and the next day the other says to the one, 'lend me your scythe,' and the one replies, 'Here it is; I am not like you, who would not lend me your spade,' that is bearing a grudge, which is forbidden." (Sifra, Kedoshim Ch. 4:10-11)</p>			
<p>Yield your will to the will of your friend: but let both their will and yours yield to the will of God. (Rabbinic Anthology, 463 [Derech Erez Zuta I, 8])</p>			
<p>It is he whom David said by the Ruach Hakodesh "Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me. (<u>Psalm 23:4</u>)". Another interpretation: "Your rod": these are the struggles, and "Your staff": this is the Torah; "they comfort me": is this possible without struggles? The verse says: "only". Is it possible in this world? The verse says: "Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of Hashem for many long years (<u>Psalm 23:6</u>)". Song of Songs Rabbah 2:1:3</p>			

## Song of Songs Rabbah Section 1

There once was a couple that had been married ten years but had no children. They went to Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai seeking a divorce. He said to them, "Just as you celebrated your marriage with a feast, so too you must not separate from each other without a feast. They followed his advice and made a big party. The husband drank a great deal and felt very relaxed. He said to his wife, "My dear, take a look at all of the lovely things in the house, and take the thing you care about most when you leave. What did the woman do? When her husband fell asleep, she signaled to the servants, and said, "Pick him up and carry him to my parents' house." In the middle of the night, the husband woke up sober. He said to his wife, "My dear, where am I?" She said, "You are in my parents' house." He said to her, "Why am I here?" She said to him, "Didn't you say to me last night to take the thing I cared about most with me? There is nothing in the world more precious to me than you."

They went back to Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai; he prayed for them and their hopes were fulfilled.

## **Lesson 3: Raising a Jewish Family**

### **Essential Questions:**

- What is a Jewish family and how is this defined?
- What are your goals for raising a family? Kids? How many? Why or why not?
- What values are central to the wedding couple as individuals, how do those values blend as a couple, and how will those values guide their vision for a family?

### **Goals:**

- To encourage the wedding couple to imagine the family they want to have in the future.
- To engage in the difficult questions of what said family will look like and how they plan on achieving said goals.
- To encourage the wedding couple to define what it means to have a Jewish family

### **Objectives:**

- Wedding Couple will have an in-depth conversation about their intentions and goals for a family.

### **Materials:**

- A/V Capability
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viAv4KM4XUc>
- Paper and writing utensil

## **Set Induction: Jewish Family, You Say?**

Officiant should ask:

- In your own words, what does it mean to raise a Jewish family?
- What conversations have you already had about what it means to raise a Jewish family?
- Why is raising a Jewish family important?

**To the Officiant:** If the wedding couple explicitly says that they do not want children, this is to be honored and respected. Raising a Jewish family does not necessitate children and this lesson is designed in a way that it can be done if no children are desired. There is an activity included specifically for those who do desire to raise Jewish children, however it is the belief of this curriculum that the message espoused in the video and subsequent activity are of immense value whether or not a family wants children.

### **Activity 1: Obligation Conversation**

The officiant will present the following text (appendix 3.1) and ask the wedding couple to work together to create a list of obligations they believe they have to each other and in order to create a Jewish family. The officiant might ask why a particular item is Jewish as either a point of clarification or to help the wedding couple formally associate said obligation with a Jewish home. If the couple is struggling to think of things that are explicitly Jewish, the officiant should encourage the couple to name obligations that are not “explicitly Jewish” and help the wedding couple find ways to incorporate Judaism into each obligation.

### **Activity 2: Mastering The Pivot**

The officiant and wedding couple will watch the following video [Mastering the Pivot: The Art of Jewish Parenting](#) (link included in “Materials”). The officiant should instruct the wedding couple to take notes while they watch the video. Upon completion of the 10 minute video, the officiant will ask the wedding couple to reflect on their notes, ask any clarifying questions about the video, and to summarize the major points of the video in their own words. The officiant should ask how this video relates to marriage and, if applicable, how this video might help to shape their approach to raising children.

Notes on Message of Video:

- Families should take time to determine/name values
- Imagine who you want your child to be, not necessarily what.
- A child grows a family, doesn't not complete a family
- Parents tend to be reactive; they mimic or reject their own upbringing.
- Raise a family with intention—intention is essential
- What is more holy than raising little Jewish children

- Raising a family is like Talmud, there are rules and discussions challenging/revisiting the original rules.
- Intentional parenting allows us to form our own right way with our own values
- Focused on the who they would be
  - Isaiah 11:1-6
- Choices cannot/should not reflect the mood of the moment; consistency is key.
- Kavannah is like archery; ones feet are grounded allowing the body/soul to take aim and simultaneously to pivot
- Pivoting is a sign of strength
  - Genesis—flood story
    - God pivots and says I won't destroy the world again
  - Exodus—God wants to end the whole Israelite experiment, but Moses says, lets pivot
- We are all uniquely ill prepared for this extremely important job of raising a family
- If we can pivot, we will find the job more rewarding, less stressful and we will raise some pretty great people too.

### **Activity 3: Hevruta on Honor**

The officiant will present Appendix 3.2 for Hevruta text study. The officiant will ask the wedding couple to review the three texts asking:

- What are the theme(s) of these three texts?
- What do the Exodus and Leviticus text have in common? How are they different?
- How do the Exodus and Leviticus texts inform your understanding of the Talmud Kiddushin text?

The officiant will then present two commentaries, Rashi on Exodus 20:12 and Rashi on Leviticus 19:3 (Appendix 3.3) and ask:

- How do the introduction of these two texts change or bolster your understanding of the original texts?
- How do these new texts inform your sense of what it means to be a parent?
- How do these new texts inform your sense of what it means to honor one's parents?

### **Closure:**

The officiant will ask the wedding couple to spend 5-10 minutes reflecting and journaling on their learning while considering the following quote as a prompt:

*Do not set your eyes on beauty but set your eyes on the family. (Mishnah Taanit 4:8 משנה תענית ד':ח)*

(Appendix 3.1)

*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 29a*

*“A parent is obligated to do the following for a child: to circumcise a [male] child, to redeem a first-born [son], to teach the child Torah, to find the child a spouse, and to teach the child a trade. There are those who say: [the parent is also obligated] to teach the child to swim.”*

Together, come up with a list of “obligations” you believe you have for each other



(Appendix 3.2)

Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b-31a

It was taught: Rabbi [Judah HaNasi] said: It is known to the Holy Blessed One that a child tends to honor their mother more than their father, because the mother tends to talk things out – this is why the Torah mentions honoring fathers ahead of honoring mothers. It is known to the Holy Blessed One that a child tends to fear their father more than their mother, because the father teaches the child Torah -- this is why the Torah mentions fearing mothers ahead of fearing fathers.

Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your  
mother, that you may long  
endure on the land that the LORD  
your God is assigning to you.

Leviticus 19:3

You shall each revere  
his mother and his father,  
and keep My sabbaths:  
I the LORD am your God.

### Appendix 3.3

<p>THAT THY DAYS MAY BE LONG — If thou honourest them they will be long, and if not, they will be shortened — for the words of the Torah may be explained as concise statements: from what is included in a positive statement we may infer the negative and from what is included in a negative statement we may infer the positive (<u>Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:12:2</u>).</p>	<p>Rashi on Leviticus 19:3 EVERYBODY OF YOU SHALL FEAR HIS MOTHER AND HIS FATHER — Here Scripture mentions the mother before the father because it is manifest to Him that the child fears the father more than the mother and therefore by mentioning the mother first Scripture stresses the duty of fearing her. In the case of honoring one's parents, however, Scripture mentions the father before the mother because it is manifest to Him that the child honors the mother more than the father because she endeavors to win him over by kindly words. Therefore by mentioning the father first Scripture emphasizes the duty of honoring him (<u>Kiddushin 30b - Kiddushin 31a</u>).</p>
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## **Lesson 4: Navigating New Family Dynamics**

### **Essential Questions:**

- How will marriage change/affect family dynamics?
- What previously existing family systems will play a role in this new marriage?
- How does a new family member navigate a lifetime of relationships?

### **Goals:**

- To expound upon the realities of codependent, complicated family relationships.
- To encourage honesty about the reality of family dynamics.
- To develop tools for communicating one's needs and priorities regarding navigating family dynamics.

### **Objectives:**

- Wedding couple will complete their Relationship Brit.

### **Materials:**

- A/V Capability
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8tVYo7etPU>
- Paper and writing utensil

### **Set Induction: “Meeting The Fockers”**

The officiant will begin by showing a clip from Ben Stiller’s “Meet the Fockers.” (Link provided in Materials section above.) According to IMDB the synopsis of the movie is: “Having given permission to male nurse Greg Focker to marry his daughter, ex-CIA man Jack Byrnes and his wife travel to Miami to Greg’s parents, who this time around are Mr. and Mrs. Focker, who are as different from them as can be.”

In this clip, Ben Stiller’s character’s father meets his fiancé’s parents in a rather uncomfortable clash of two completely different family dynamics. There is clear discomfort for Ben Stiller, who does not feel like he can be himself between his upbringing and his desire to be who he believes his new in-laws want him to be.

After watching the clip, the officiant should ask the wedding couple:

- To reflect on what in the clip resonated for them OR what seemed patently absurd.
- To try and empathize with the engaged couple (Ben Stiller’s character and Dina Byrne’s character). How might you have responded had you been in either character’s position?
- Have your parents/families met? If so, what was that like? If not, what will that be like?

### **Activity 1: We’re Gonna Be Family**

The officiant should introduce the following text noting the obvious gendered nature of the list:

*These are the relatives [that cannot testify against an individual]: A person’s father, brother, paternal or maternal uncle, his sister’s husband, his paternal or maternal aunt’s husband, his step-father, father-in-law, and brother-in-law.... (Mishnah Sanhedrin 3:4)*

The officiant should say: this list from Mishna Sanhedrin quite clearly points out that one’s in-laws are family in a meaningful and legal sense. The officiant should ask the wedding couple:

- In what ways will your spouse’s family become your family?
- How will these new relationships alter the family dynamic for your new nuclear family?
- How will these new relationships alter the family dynamic of the nuclear family of your upbringing?

### **Activity 2: An Unexpected Change**

The officiant should remind the wedding couple that they reflected upon Genesis 2:24 at end of the first lesson and introduce the following:

*For three years after Sarah's death, Isaac mourned his mother. Then he married Rebecca and his mourning ceased. From this we learn that until a man marries, his love is directed toward his parents, but when he marries, his love is directed toward his wife. Thus it says, "So a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife" (Gen. 2:24) – does a man's responsibility to honor his parents end when he marries? No, but his love is now directed first toward his wife. (Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, chapter 31)*

The officiant should ask the wedding couple to reflect on:

- The possible reasons for this shift in obligation?
- How might one's mother or father or parent feel about this shift in obligation?
- What benefits might this new disposition have?
- What difficulties might arise from this particular disposition?

### **Activity 3: Becoming the Spouse We Want to Be**

The officiant should present the texts of Appendix 4.1 and ask the wedding couple to read the texts aloud. The officiant should ask the wedding couple to:

- Explain each text in their own words.
- Express the disposition they most relate with.
- Tell an anecdote in their relationship where they have been each of those people.
- Express the disposition they would like to strive for and why.
- Express the disposition they would like their spouse to strive for and why.

### **Closure:**

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The officiant will have compiled the notes and answers over the previous three lessons for the Relationship Brit. The three will review the Brit and, based on the conversation from this lesson, add any pertinent notes or obligations and conclude by signing the Brit.

## Appendix 4.1

*There are four kinds of people: 1) the one who says "what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours" -- that's a "typical disposition" . There are some who say that is the kind of people that were in Sodom... .2) A second type is one who says] "what is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine" -- that's an "am ha'aretz—a person of the land" ...3) A third type is one who says "what is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours" -- that's a "righteous person" ... 4) A final type is one who says "what is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine" --that's an evil disposition". (Pirkei Avot 5:10)*

*There are four kinds of temperments: 1) Easy to become angry, and easy to be appeased: his gain disappears in his loss; 2) Hard to become angry, and hard to be appeased: his loss disappears in his gain; 3) Hard to become angry and easy to be appeased: a pious person; 4) Easy to become angry and hard to be appeased: a wicked person. (Pirkei Avot 5:11)*

*There are four types of charity givers. He who wishes to give, but that others should not give: his eye is evil to that which belongs to others; He who wishes that others should give, but that he himself should not give: his eye is evil towards that which is his own; He who desires that he himself should give, and that others should give: he is a pious man; He who desires that he himself should not give and that others too should not give: he is a wicked man. (Pirkei Avot 5:13)*