***A Look at Orthodox Jewish Weddings***

*From the book*

**Growing Together: *Cultivating Warm Relationships with Baal Teshuvas and Converts***

A guide to understanding, getting along with and caring for newly observant Jews

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**Chapter 10**

Weddings

by Aliza

Weddings are both an exciting and stressful time in almost all families. Having an Orthodox wedding can both add to and alleviate the stress. It can add to the stress as the non-Orthodox family ventures into territory unknown, but if they are open to it, the stress can be alleviated by discovering that there is a fairly standard road map that is almost universally used. This, of course, does not address the other aspects of wedding related stress such as finances, in-laws, letting go of a child, gaining a new family member, trying to get everyone to cooperate, making it all happen, etc. but, at least it is a starting point for shared discussion. But most meaningful is that the *mechutanim* are gaining a son-in-law and daughter in law who, God willing, will bring them family continuity, a greater appreciation for Jewish life and much joy!

**A Typical Orthodox Wedding Road Map**

First, let’s go step by step through an Orthodox wedding. Afterward, we will describe the events preliminary to and surrounding the wedding. The following description is typical of an American wedding; in Eretz Yisrael some things may be different.

**Kabbalat Panim: The Preliminary Reception**

The wedding begins with parallel receptions, in separate rooms, one for the *chatan/chosson* (the groom), and one for the *kallah* (the bride). The groom’s reception is called the “*chosson’s tisch,*” a Yiddish term for “the groom’s table.” Mostly men will visit the groom. Usually liquor and some cake are provided for the guests, and the wedding documents are reviewed and finalized by the rabbis who will officiate at the wedding ceremony.

The bride will be in a separate room. Usually she sits in an elegant chair flanked by a few chairs for her mothers and grandmothers. There are refreshments or even a smorgasbord provided for all the guests. The bride is greeted by guests, with primarily women lining up to greet her and receive her blessing.

The greeting period lasts for close to an hour. It closes with the two mothers leaving the bride, going to the *chosson’s tisch*, witnessing the signing of the *tenayim*, the official, legal engagement document, and then breaking a plate together. Some say that the breaking of the plate symbolizes the sentiment that “just as breaking this plate is permanent, so should the couple’s commitment to each other be permanent.”

Some have the custom to break the plate at the engagement celebration rather than at the wedding, following the practice of former times. In those times, breaking the plate served a similar function to breaking a glass under the chuppah (see below for more on that). Some also sign the *tenayim* at the engagement celebration.

Some break a pretty plate and then make a necklace or a brooch for the bride out of one of the pieces. Some give pieces to singles attending the wedding as a wish that a plate should be broken in their honor soon. After this ceremony, the mothers return to the bride and the next event begins.

**Bedeken: The Veiling**

When the biblical Jacob married, he thought he was marrying Rachel, when in fact Leah had been substituted instead. Since then, it has been a custom for the groom to personally veil his bride so he knows for certain whom he is marrying.

This is often a very emotional ceremony. Anyone who knows the bride will want to get a good view. The groom will be danced with music and joyous shouts into the bride’s room from his *chosson’s tisch*. When the men part and give the groom access to the bride, it will be the first time he is seeing her as a bride. In many cases, it is the first time the bride and groom have seen each other in a week.

He approaches her, and perhaps whispers something to her as he lifts her veil to cover her face. Then he steps back and the two fathers, and perhaps the rabbi, step forward, one at a time to give the bride a blessing. This is an emotional and teary moment for the bride’s father as he blesses her as she starts a new life as her husband’s wife. Mothers and others tend to cry at this point, so bring tissues!

Then the men dance the groom away and all prepare for the chuppah, the wedding ceremony. The guests go to the area with the chuppah. The bride and groom have a chance to freshen up.

**The Chuppah: The Wedding Ceremony**

The guests now move to and take seats in the chuppah area, as the band sets up behind them. There is a little table with wine and a Kiddush cup, to hold the wine for the blessing, under the chuppah. The band starts to play, all conversation ceases (hopefully), and the groom’s family begins to walk down the aisle. Then the groom enters, his parents at his side. The parents carry candles, since candles and light are always associated with joy. Light and joy were also present at Mount Sinai, which is viewed as the wedding between the Jewish people and God. The candles signify that the couple’s life together will be filled with light and joy.

When they arrive at the chuppah, someone takes the candles from the parents, and they stand to the groom’s side while a singer sings a welcome to the groom. If the groom plans to wear a *kittel*, a special ceremonial white garment, or an overcoat, he may put it on at this time. Some have the custom to put ashes on groom’s head in remembrance of the destruction of the Holy Temple.

The music begins again, and the bride’s family begins to walk down the aisle. Finally, the bride enters with her parents at her side. In some cases the parents accompany the bride all the way to the chuppah, and in others, they leave her half way and the groom comes to escort her the rest of the way.

Wedding customs vary, and the band might be replaced by one or more people singing, or a single instrument, such as a clarinet. Similarly, there are different customs as to who escorts the bride and groom. Sometimes both parents do this. Other times, both fathers escort the groom, and both mothers escort the bride. This is explained in more detail later.

Some brides wear a thicker veil in front to allow them privacy during the walking and ceremony. They may want to pray or cry without thinking about what others see. The bride then circles the groom seven times. Usually the two mothers walk with her, holding her hands, as well as her dress if she needs help managing it. After the seventh circle, the bride takes her place next to her groom and the parents step to the side.

The seven circles represent the seven days and the seven mystical spheres through which the world was created. Seven is the number that represents wholeness and completion. As the bride circles the groom, she is saying, in effect, that she will create the new world in which the couple will live, and they will have access to a wholeness together that they could not have achieved alone.

Two initial blessings are said for the betrothal by the officiating rabbi over a cup of wine, and a sip of wine is taken by both bride and groom. The groom then gives the ring to the bride. The *ketubah*, marriage contract, is then read out loud and handed to the groom. He gives it to the bride, who then hands it to a trusted individual for safe keeping until after the wedding. Then seven more blessings are said over the marriage and another sip of wine is taken. Often different rabbis or close family members are called upon to say each of these blessings, thereby bestowing honor upon as many people as possible. This also engages as many important scholars and role models as possible in the wedding of the couple.

The couple is now officially married, but at our hour of greatest joy, we are enjoined to remember that G-d’s Presence, so to speak, is still in exile. So we sing “If I forget thee O Jerusalem,” and the groom breaks a glass. Breaking the glass is supposed to cause a small amount of sadness as a perfectly good glass is ruined. It is hard to feel sad at this moment of peak joy. To engender a feeling of sadness, we destroy something of value, even if the value of that thing is small. The sound of the glass breaking is the signal to all the guests to shout “Mazel tov!” “Congratulations,” and for the band to begin playing as the couple leaves the chuppah area.

**Cheder Yichud: The Privacy Room**

After the ceremony, the couple is entitled, and required, to have some time alone. They are ushered into a private room, and two guards are posted at the door to ensure that the couple is secluded for a certain period of time, usually about eighteen minutes. This is seen as part of the wedding. In most cases, the couple shares a few private words, a first kiss, and a snack as they may have been fasting all day. Often the groom gives the bride an additional gift of jewelry.

Privacy ends (usually before the couple is ready!), with the photographer rapping on the door, waiting to take the couple’s picture. Since many couples do not see each other before the ceremony, pictures of the couple and families are often taken at this time, before the dancing. This can take a little too long for the guests, but if the couple takes all those pictures after the dancing, they are no longer fresh for their photographs.

**The Meal and Dancing**

There is a gap of about forty-five minutes to an hour between when the ceremony ends and when the bride and groom are ready to greet their guests in the dining hall. During this time, the guests usually go from the chuppah area into the dining hall, chatting along the way, since they know they have plenty of time. Often a minyan, a gathering of at least ten men for the prayer service, is organized for the afternoon or evening services during this break. Guests find their seats, wash their hands for bread, and begin their meal by eating the first course, which is usually on the table when they enter the hall. The band plays background music.

When the bride and groom are ready, the young female guests of the bride jump up and create an entrance archway with decorated pool “noodles” or something similar, that they have prepared in advance. The band sounds the “here they come” notes, announces the couple, “Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome, for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_!” Then the couple enters, the music gets loud, and everyone pours onto the dance floor.

There is usually a *mechitzah*, some type of divider, on the dance floor to keep the genders separate for dancing, due to reasons of modesty. Sometimes the divider is a row of potted trees, sometime it is large enough that the women’s area is completely obscured from the men’s area. This enables the women and girls to rejoice and dance while maintaining the laws of modesty. Each side dances with its own particular flavor and energy. So, after the couple emerges from the arches, the groom goes to his side of the dance floor and the bride to hers.

The two sides dance separately for a while and then the bride is usually brought to the men’s side for a break, to sit next to her husband and watch the antics performed by the men. The women then steal the bride back to their side for more fun.

It is a special mitzvahto “gladden the hearts of the bride and groom.” Much of this is accomplished by the wedding itself and the attendance of guests who love the bride and groom, but special care is usually given to this mitzvah by the couple’s close friends. They prepare “*shtick*” or special tricks, costumes, props, and games to entertain the bride and groom during the dancing. The *shtick* usually begins with the decorated arches and continues based on the creativity and energy of the friends.

*Shitck* may include: decorated drinking cups for the bride and groom (many fast during the day before the ceremony, so between the adrenaline and the fast, they need water,) costumes representing the home city of the “foreign” member of the couple, costumes representing interests of the bride or groom, just plain wacky costumes, coordinated hats, big sunglasses, flower leis, maracas or castanets, mazel tov tee shirts, big hands or signs with the letters of mazel tov written on each one, balloons with sparkles in them and a special pin to pop them, jumping “rope” with the cloth napkins of the dining tables tied together, a scarf dance, lighting a hat on fire and dancing with it, balancing bottles and dancing, acrobatics, and any kind of wild or crazy dancing that is appropriate for an Orthodox wedding, of course. In Orthodox circles, a wedding provides the opportunity to go really crazy for a kosher reason, to delight the bride and groom. Many teens and young adults relish this chance, so the dancing is often quite lively.

The first dance, meaning the first set of dances, lasts for about an hour, depending on the crowd. The main course of the meal is then served, and the guests have a chance to rest and chat, while the bride and groom have a chance to eat a bit and move around the room to greet their guests. Many guests leave after the meal, but closer, and more energetic friends stay for the second dance.

The second dance is usually before dessert and lasts for about thirty to forty-five minutes, again, depending on the energy level of the guests. Dessert follows, with the special wedding *bentching*, Grace after Meals, being the official end of the festivities for the evening. The regular grace is recited, with a special beginning, and then followed by the same seven blessings that were recited under the chuppah, repeated by seven different men.

The last close guests linger, the couple leaves, the inner circle chats and reflects a little while longer, and then everyone goes home for some much needed rest. If you are the parent of the bride or groom, you will likely be especially tired. There is a special tiredness, a combination of physical and emotional exhaustion on the day after the wedding. It is far different from being tired after attending someone else’s wedding, and its intensity can be quite surprising as it settles in fully on the day after. If you can, try to keep your calendar clear for the day after the wedding, and plan a day of rest.

**Events Prior to the Wedding and Other Important Information**

**The L’chaim: Gathering to Celebrate the Engagement**

Traditionally, a couple becomes engaged in the presence of their parents, with all agreeing to the match and possibly even making a financial arrangement of how the couple will be supported until they can support themselves. A *l’chaim*, an alcoholic drink: schnapps, wine, or hard liquor, would then be shared to “seal the deal.”

Today, the *L’chaim* is the term used for an informal, impromptu celebration attended by family, or family and close friends, celebrating the engagement. It often takes place immediately as the couple returns from the date on which he proposed.

**The Vort: Engagement Reception**

After the engagement, the couple wants to proclaim their exciting news to the world. This is accomplished through the *vort*, which literally means “word” in Yiddish, but here is used as “engagement reception.” Depending on the families’ finances and community expectations, the *vort* can be anywhere on the scale of fanciness. The purpose of the *vort* is for community members to wish the couple mazel tov. When a match is made between people from different cities, there may be a *vort* in each city. It then serves the added function of introducing the fiancé to the other’s community.

In “out of town” communities, anywhere outside the NY area, the *vort* is usually a homemade affair with baked goods, fruit trays, and vegetable platters contributed by members of the community, as well as made by the family. It is usually an open house, in the parents’ home, for two to three hours. People are invited by phone calls, e-mail, and word of mouth. The couple and the parents usually wear dressy attire. The guests usually dress one level down from that. Guests arrive, greet the engaged couple, have a snack, and chat with others. This is not an engagement party (there usually isn’t one) and gifts are rarely brought to the *vort*.

In the New York area, and in wealthier communities, the *vort* may be catered, it may be in a hall, a photographer may be hired, and there may even be a band. This can be expensive and for that reason, the *vort* as such is rabbinically frowned upon. In the wedding “guidelines,” published by a group of rabbis attempting to lower community expectations for fancy affairs, one of the directives is that the *vort* is to be discontinued. For this reason, some refer to the “out of town” version of the *vort* as a *l’chaim* rather than as a *vort*.

Here are links to two articles about the wedding guidelines:

nytimes.com/2002/05/25/us/religion-journal-a-big-wedding-with-a-smaller-bill.html

[jweekly.com/article/full/18004/orthodox-rabbis-are-putting-harness-on-opulent-weddings/](http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/18004/orthodox-rabbis-are-putting-harness-on-opulent-weddings/)

In Israel, the *l’chaim* is also called a *vort*, and what is called the *vort* in America is called an *eirusin* (betrothal/engagement)*.* Some have the custom to sign a contract called *tena’im* (conditions) at the *eirusin.* These “conditions” delineate the obligations, including financial ones, of both sides toward the wedding, as well as setting a date for when the wedding will take place. The *tena’im* are binding. For this reason, some prefer to make the *tena’im* prior to the wedding ceremony during the reception held immediately beforehand.

**The Shower**

Friends, family members, and community members may wish to make a shower for the bride. In some communities, most of the guests contribute to a “group gift,” which is a sum of money to be spent on kitchen appliances and bedding necessities to get the bride started with her new home. The bride usually chooses what this money will be spent on, and the items are displayed at the shower. Others give whatever they choose, or whatever is in keeping with the theme of the shower, if there is one.

It is important to be aware that at Orthodox showers, there are NO embarrassing gifts. Nothing is given that intimates the couple will soon be sexual, no lingerie, or anything else like that. The bride will likely buy lingerie or pretty pajamas and under things, but that is done privately and is part of her process of transition from sexually inactive, or in the case of some *baalei teshuvah* girls, sexually active, to married life. It is a process best left to the bride and those she chooses to share her thoughts with, and is not something to be made public.

**Aufruf: TheGroom’s Celebration**

The Yiddish word *Aufruf* or *Ufruf* refers to the groom’s celebration on the Shabbat immediately preceding the wedding. It is sometimes made a week earlier, if a Sunday wedding requires the groom to travel. The groom is called to the Torah for an *aliyah* and makes the attendant blessing, and often he will *lein* (read/chant) the *haftarah,* as well. After the blessing at the close of his reading, there is a custom in many congregations to shower the groom with candy, as an expression of hope for a sweet wedded life. The candy is provided by the groom’s family, and is often distributed by young children using baskets to hold it. Commonly used are individually wrapped candies such as laffy taffies, kisses, Sunkist fruit jems, or little bags filled with candy of many different varieties. According to a family’s means, they may also sponsor a Kiddush, light buffet, after the services.

In the Sephardic custom, this celebration is called the *Shabbat Chatan* and is held the week following the wedding.

**Shabbat Kallah: The Bride’s Last Shabbat at Home**

For the bride, the Shabbat before the wedding is known as the *Shabbat* *Kallah*. It is a special time as she spends her last Shabbat as a single girl with her family. Her family and friends are already beginning to gather for her wedding. The Shabbat meals are particularly festive, and any out of town guests would be included. Often there is an afternoon reception for the women and girls of the community to celebrate together. In many communities, neighbors and friends will bring over baked goods and other food to help make this reception. Often the reception is at another’s home so that the bride’s family does not have to be in charge of it.

**The Giving of Gifts**

It is traditional to exchange gifts during the engagement period. The purpose of giving gifts is to show appreciation and love toward the new member of the family and is a step in creating a positive relationship between the parents-in-law and the child-in-law to be. Each family will exchange gifts according to their means and traditions.

It is customary for the parents of the groomto give the bride a piece of jewelry, apart from an engagement ring and wedding band, as well as a pair of silver Shabbat candlesticks. It is customary for the parents of the brideto give the groom a watch and/or Kiddush cup, as well as a set of *Shas* (a full set of the Talmud), if appropriate. The groom or her family might also give the bridea *siddur* (prayer book), a *sefer Tehillim* (book of Psalms), and set of *machzorim* (prayer books for the festivals). Similarly, the bride or her family might also give the grooma tallit (prayer shawl) and tallit bag, as well as a *kittel* (ceremonial white garment) to wear under the chuppah.

Usually,the groom gives the bride a piece of jewelry in the *cheder yichud*. This can be one of the pieces of jewelry mentioned above, which has been saved for the occasion, or something extra.

**The Prayer List**

Tradition teaches that people directly involved in an important celebration are able to confer a blessing on others. For this reason, some may ask the parents of the bride and groom for a blessing, especially if they are trying to match up one of their own children.

More significantly however, the bride and groom themselves are often appreciated for their enhanced ability to offer a blessing on their wedding day. Because the wedding is a new start in life, the wedding day is viewed as a private Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement, when G-d forgives all the sins of the bride and the groom as a wedding gift, so to speak, so that they can start their new life together with a clean slate.

This understanding explains an important tradition. Both the bride and the groom create a prayer list before their wedding. They gather the names of people who need or desire prayers. The Hebrew matronymic names are used, such as Sarah *bat* (daughter of) Malka, or Abraham *ben* (son of) Sarah, or in the absence of a Hebrew name, Susan *bat* Annette or Bob *ben* Alice. The names are often listed by category, for example: those who need a *shidduch*, those who wish to conceive, those who need healing, those who need a job or increased income, those who need marital harmony, and those who need help rearing their children. They then pray for these people by name on their wedding day, and some even pray for them during the entire first year.

**Clothing for the Wedding**

Orthodox weddings are usually very formal, even if they are not black tie. Men in the wedding party usually wear suits, usually dark suits with white shirts. Women in the wedding party usually wear gowns. For Orthodox girls who do not have proms, this is their chance to really dress up.

It is a challenge to find gowns for women that meet the Orthodox standards of modest dress (see chapter on Jewish dress for more information on this). Most off the rack gowns are strapless or backless, have plunging necklines, are very formfitting, have long slits, or all of the above. It is possible to buy or rent ready-made gowns in the NY area that meet Orthodox standards. And, in NY and some other large communities, there are *gemachim*, free-loan organizations, that lend dresses, including wedding dresses, or rent them out for a very small fee.

Alternatively, you can have a dress made or altered to specifications, or wear a form-fitting shirt underneath. Two helpful brands of shirts for this purpose are Linda Leal and Kikky Rikky, both made for the Orthodox community and available online. If you find gowns at a discount, it pays to buy two, in order to have the matching fabric to fix up the first.

Many brides wear sneakers under their full skirts so that dancing will be more comfortable. Others, including members of the wedding party, wear fancy shoes for greeting people, walking down the aisle and pictures, and switch to pretty sneakers, or other more comfortable shoes, for the dancing.

**Bridesmaids, Groomsmen, and Attendants**

Most Orthodox weddings do not have bridesmaids or groomsmen. Usually the siblings, parents, and grandparents of the bride and groom form the wedding party. Occasionally, a good friend may dress as part of the party, to show their closeness, but usually that person has no official role.

A role that a close friend may fill is that of *shomer*, guard. A bride and a groom are considered like royalty on the day before (some say the week before) and day of their wedding. They therefore should have an attendant. In addition, because the potential for the spiritual power of their union is so great, there is a concept that bride and groom should be guarded before the wedding. A *shomer* serves both the practical and mystical dimensions of this guardianship. The job of the *shomer* is to attend the bride or groom for the entire day and night before the wedding, making sure they eat, drink, and rest appropriately, as well as fending off excessive phone calls and unwanted attention. Since they are with the bride or groom all of the time, they should be a close friend.

**Walking Down the Aisle**

In most Orthodox weddings, even if there are bridesmaids or a best man, it is only the family that walks down the aisle. In many cases it is just the bride, groom, and their parents. Sometimes the grandparents and siblings are also part of the processional.

In some cases, a bride or a groom may feel strongly about who walks them to the chuppah. There are some who feel that those accompanying the bride and groom to the threshold of their new life should be married to each other, and some feel that it should be a couple who is still in their first marriage. If you are not married to your child’s other parent, this may be a concern. In such cases, sometimes the parents walk the child part way down and then a “first match” couple walks the child the rest of the way. Other times, a first match couple, possibly the child’s rabbi and his wife, walk the child all the way to the chuppah. Still other times, even when divorced, the parents walk the child themselves. In cases where the parents do not get along with each other, it may be possible for the fathers to walk the groom and the mothers to walk the bride, so that the couple does not have to walk together. Many families use this custom in the first place, as explained earlier. Alternatively, the groom and bride can each walk down the aisle alone, with no one taking them. The main thing is to arrive at the chuppah happy and ready.

**Sheva Brachot: Seven Blessings**

For seven days following the wedding, festive meals are prepared by family and friends to continue the celebration of the addition of a new family to the Jewish nation. At the close of each of these meals, the same Grace that was said at the wedding, including the seven marriage blessings, is recited. These festive meals are named after those seven blessings and are therefore called *sheva brachot*, literally, “seven blessings.” The guest list for the meals can be on the longer side, because in order to recite the seven blessings, a minyan must be present. Therefore, a minimum of ten men, and, if they are married, their wives, are invited to each meal. It is also fine to have a small number of guests for the meal itself and invite additional men for dessert to be able to recite the *sheva brachot*.

An important feature of these meals is the community support that is displayed. The message is, “We are happy for you and we support you, and now that you are married, you are one of us.”

While many newly married couples plan to retreat to a honeymoon immediately after the wedding, observant couples usually do not go on a honeymoon, at least not right away, so that they can participate in *sheva brachot*. Important to note here is the subtle message that this drives home to the new couple: “We’re all fawning over you, but you should know, it’s not all about you. We love you, and we have great expectations of you. So, right now, while you’re reveling in your new selves and you’d rather be alone and apart, be a part of us, and a part of the community. You have new joy and with that, new responsibilities that take precedence to your preferences.”

At the end of the week, the couple, fully celebrated, is ready to start their new life together, surrounded and bolstered by the good wishes of all.

**Further reading:**

*Made in Heaven: A Jewish Wedding Guide*, by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Moznaim 1983

*Guide to the Jewish Wedding*, by Chaplain Shlomo Shulman, aish.com/jl/l/m/48969841.html

*The Dating Guy: The Wedding Day* (3 of 3), by Richard Rabkin, Torah.org

*Giving Joy to the Bride and Groom*, by Yehonasan Gefen, Jewish-History.com

Look around for Jewish wedding clips, you’ll find a lot to watch.

# Oralee’s Reflections on Weddings

The mother of the bride – that was my role in the very first Orthodox wedding I ever attended. I had no experience as a mother of the bride, or with Orthodox weddings. I was out of my element. The mother of my new son-in-law was experienced with both. She was a knowledgeable and compassionate guide. She told me where to be and what to do. I was mesmerized by all the food available, even before the ceremony began. I didn’t know people would come to greet the bride before the wedding and that I should sit with her. I had no idea how joyous and festive the entire ceremony and celebration would be. I was unprepared for all the dancing; women with women, and men with men. I knew nothing about the antics performed to entertain the bride and groom. Everything was new to me.

One of the most difficult aspects we faced was the very different expectations about the cost of the wedding. Most Protestant weddings that we were familiar with, our own and the weddings made by friends, were very modest events compared to what happens in the Jewish community. We were definitely in a clash of cultures. We had to do some painful and very embarrassing negotiations with the groom’s family. I know it was hard for the bride to have a family with no clue about the culture she was embracing, what a wedding in that culture meant, and how it was treated. It was not an easy time. We had to face into it and talk it through with all concerned.

The wedding itself was the most joyous marriage event I had ever attended. I was sorry more of my extended family did not get to experience it. If I had known how incredible it would be, I would have strongly encouraged them to come.

Part of the poignancy of any wedding is the release of your child into an adult life of her own. It is harder when it is also the release of your child into another culture with different expectations, standards, and values. It is akin to seeing them off to another country and not understanding the implications of it, and wondering if they do.

Today there are more articles, books, and movies about different kinds of weddings available. I recommend reading and viewing what you can before getting into the planning stages. You need to know the context of what happens in order to understand the decisions that are made and the amount of money that is spent. If this is what you are facing, connect with other parents on both sides of the fence, if you can.

By the time of my grandson’s New York wedding, I had attended several Orthodox ceremonies. I could look forward to it and encourage my family to come. I knew we would be in for a wonderful cultural experience, and I was ready for it. Aliza prepared her non-Jewish uncles and aunts, cousins and friends for the wedding experience in a conference phone call a month before the wedding. She talked about what to wear, customs to expect, what to watch for, which hands to not shake, where hugs were acceptable, and what the order of the day would be like. This was very helpful to all of them and made them feel much more at ease by being “in the know.”

We had a grand time at a glorious wedding, and all the non-Jewish relatives were so glad they had been there. It was an experience of a lifetime for them. We have had glorious weddings in Denver for two of my granddaughters. Now I know what to expect and anticipate. I love to share the incredible joy and energy of these celebrations with my Jewish family, as well as my non-Jewish family and friends.