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ANI L'DODI: RESOURCES TO INSPIRE  
DEEPER CONNECTION WITH THE  
KETUBAH

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# ANI L'DODI

Resources to Inspire Deeper  
Connection with the Ketubah

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# Introduction

Getting married can be a pivotal moment for a couple for many reasons and can surface questions about their connection to Judaism: Will we have a rabbi officiate? What role will God and Hebrew play in our ceremony? Which traditions are important to us? What values do we hold dearest as a couple?

As two individuals plan for a wedding, they make many decisions and have conversations about the life they hope to create together moving forward. Elements of wedding preparation and the ceremony reflect these decisions and values. One of the core elements of a Jewish wedding today is the ketubah. The ketubah, which comes from the Hebrew root “to write,” has deep roots in Jewish tradition and has evolved over time. In liberal Jewish communities today it most commonly comprises text articulating the couple’s commitment and values, beautiful artwork, and signatures from the couple, witnesses, and officiant. Within a traditional halachic (Jewish legal) framework, the ketubah is a legal document effectuating a marriage.

The ketubah represents a particular opportunity because it far outlasts the wedding day itself. The ketubah is like a metaphorical thread that weaves through time, accompanying a couple during the wedding planning process, on their big day, and throughout their marriage. Unlike other wedding symbols such as the *chuppah*, a ketubah is hung in the home and serves as an ongoing symbol of a couple’s commitment to one another and to exploring the role of Judaism in their life together. Because of this, the ketubah deserves more attention from couples and officiants. Additionally, it is worth understanding the function that the ketubah currently plays – outside of a traditional halachic framework – in meaning making in the Jewish marriage process and as an expression of a couple’s Jewish identity.

As a recent bride, I am acutely aware of the joys, challenges, and overwhelming number of decisions involved in wedding planning. As a future rabbi, I have a deep commitment to Jewish tradition and to accompanying couples through this significant milestone which touches on issues of identity, family, and transition.

For these reasons, I felt compelled to explore how the ketubah might serve as a meaningful tool in this important work. The core questions guiding this project were: How are couples being taught about the concept of a ketubah? How do couples interpret the function and significance of their ketubah? How do couples experience the ketubah selection and design process? What opportunity is there to infuse this with deeper meaning? What resources are needed in order to support this process?

To explore these questions, I conducted interviews with three groups of people: recently married couples, clergy and non-clergy officiants, and ketubah vendors/artists. I conducted a total of 19 interviews: 10 with recently married couples, 5 with officiants, and 4 with ketubah vendors/artists. These interviews amounted to 23 hours. The interviews aimed to capture the perspectives of liberal, progressive couples who are not primarily concerned with the ketubah as a halachic document. The couples interviewed represent the diversity within the American non-Orthodox Jewish population to the fullest extent possible given the sample size, including affiliated and non-affiliated couples, frequent and infrequent synagogue attendees, interfaith and intrafaith couples, People of Color, individuals identifying as LGBTQ+, couples who were married by clergy, and couples who were not married by clergy. The officiants interviewed included 2 rabbis ordained in the Conservative movement, 1 rabbi ordained in the Reform movement, 1 rabbi ordained through ALEPH, and 1 non-clergy officiant.

The interviews revealed several interesting findings. Most participants did not report actively deciding to have a ketubah, as it was simply seen as a typical aspect of a Jewish wedding. Any conclusion from this finding is inherently limited because of the sample size, while also acknowledging that no interviews were held with couples who chose *not* to have a ketubah. Nine out of ten couples, including individuals with strong Jewish identities and knowledge bases, expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed by the process of choosing or designing a ketubah. Seven out of ten couples reported receiving little to no support from officiants in the process of selecting a ketubah. At least three participants mentioned the salient mental image of their parents' ketubah hanging on the wall throughout their life, and half of the couples spoke about the excitement of receiving their ketubah in the mail. Throughout interviews, couples described the ketubah using phrases such as “a spiritual contract,” “the vision statement for a marriage,” “a symbol of commitment,” and “a declaration of shared values.” This by and large demonstrates that rather than playing a legal function, the ketubah plays a spiritual, symbolic, or emotional function. Finally, the opportunity for couples to sit together and reflect on their ketubah – even if they were initially skeptical towards the detailed interview questions – was overwhelmingly positive. Couples reported finding deep meaning in the interview, often appreciating the chance to reflect on their journey and consider how they might continue to connect with their ketubah in the future.

Using the information gathered through interviews, the next step was to identify key opportunities across time for greater depth of connection and meaning making between a couple and their ketubah and, then, to create tangible resources to support those moments.

This compilation of resources is the product of the findings, anecdotes and themes that emerged during interviews, and it was created with the entire Jewish wedding ecosystem in mind. The ecosystem includes couples, officiants (both clergy and non-clergy), wedding planners, close family and friends, ketubah artists, and ketubah vendors. The “Rationale” pages before each resource are helpful for navigating the booklet because they outline who the resource is intended for, what the resource is, and why it was created. Several of the “Rationale” pages also include suggestions for how other subsets of the ecosystem might alternatively use the content.

Each resource was created with the desire to make the tradition of the ketubah accessible to *all* couples – whether they’re planning a traditional Jewish wedding, aiming for a Jew-*ish* wedding, or considering ways to weave traditions from multiple faiths and cultures together into one celebration. The resources compiled in this booklet will hopefully inspire others – artists, couples, and officiants – to get creative with additional future opportunities for more deeply engaging with the tradition of the ketubah.





*“[Our ketubah] is definitely something that keeps us grounded over the course of our marriage – the good days, bad days. It’s a reminder of what we’ve created together.”*

*-Noah (Boston, MA)*



# A History of the Ketubah

A ketubah (pl. ketubot), which comes from the Hebrew root “to write,” is in its most basic definition a Jewish marriage document that effectuates a Jewish marriage. The practice has deep roots in Jewish tradition and has evolved over time. Today, there is vast variation in the ketubah’s form and content, so it is worth asking – particularly in liberal, progressive Jewish communities – how do couples think about the function and meaning of their ketubah? In order to study this question and others regarding the ketubah today, it is critical to understand these roots and explore the changes over time. This essay aims to summarize key aspects of a history of ketubot and trace broad trends over time in its use, form, and content.

Beginning in our biblical text, one finds narrative examples of marriage and the practices surrounding new unions. In Genesis 24, Abraham’s servant travels to find a suitable wife for Isaac. He finds the characteristics of generosity and hospitality that he is looking for in Rebekah and speaks with her brother to arrange the marriage. Genesis 24:53 reads, “The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; and he gave presents to her brother and her mother”.<sup>1</sup> While the exact function of the gifts is not explained by the text, it shows financial exchange marking the agreement for marriage. Several chapters later, Jacob negotiates with Laban in order to take Rachel and Leah as his wives. Rather than goods or money, Jacob makes a financial commitment in the form of seven years of labor for each Rachel and Leah’s hands in marriage.<sup>2</sup> While these narrative examples might not actually serve as a precedent for ketubot, they uncover a universal reality of marriage that Jewish tradition must reconcile with, which is that the creation of a new marriage necessitates shifts in financial arrangements and familial ties. While a written document of divorce *is* mentioned,<sup>3</sup> there is no mention of ketubot or written marriage contracts in the Torah.<sup>4</sup> The biblical text does, however, establish the basic obligations of husband to wife,<sup>5</sup> which would later be reflected in the traditional ketubah text. Exodus 21:10 reads, “If he takes another to wife, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.”<sup>6</sup> These biblical texts undoubtedly influenced developments in ketubot and marriage practices.

The ketubah is commonly regarded as a progressive document in its ancient time because it was created as a protective document for the woman. In a societal context where a woman’s livelihood largely depended on either her father or husband, the ketubah served to ensure financial safety for the woman in the case of the marriage ending. In Moses Gaster’s book *The Ketubah*, he traces the beginning of the ketubah to the period of return from Babylonian exile. Gaster supports his argument by explaining that the Babylonians had an extensive practice of drafting legal documents for any number of lifecycle moments.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 24:53 (Revised Jewish Publication Society 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 29:18 (RJPS).

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 24:1 (RJPS).

<sup>4</sup> Art Gallery of Ontario, *Ketubah: The Jewish Marriage Contract*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> This essay will primarily speak of ketubot in heteronormative terms. This language is not reflective of my own beliefs about legitimate and sanctified marriages but rather reflects the heteronormative reality of the majority of Jewish history.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 21:10 (RJPS).

He argues that the Jews learned from this practice and found it useful because as “the Jews began to travel far and wide... the women left behind had to be provided with some means of protecting the property they held in the name of the husband.”<sup>7</sup> The oldest surviving ketubah dates from circa 440 BCE, was found in Egypt, and was written in Aramaic on papyrus.<sup>8</sup> And while ketubot are not mentioned in the Torah, mention of a written contract of marriage can be found in the Apocrypha. Tobit 7:6, which was composed between 250-150 BCE, is the first narrative or textual mention of the practice of having a ketubah.<sup>9</sup> The apocryphal text reads, “Then Reuel took Sarah his daughter, and gave her to Tobiyah to wife, and he blessed them, and bade Ednah his wife bring him a tablet, and he wrote thereon the deed of marriage, and he sealed it before witnesses. And they ate and drank and were merry.”<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that in this case, the marriage document was written and given by the bride’s father, as opposed to by the groom. These sources show that the practice of writing marriage contracts existed far before rabbinic tradition standardized the text and legislated the practice.

Around the first or second century BCE, the rabbis formalized the Aramaic text of the traditional ketubah.<sup>11</sup> It is not clear who was responsible for formalizing the text, but Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah is often credited.<sup>12</sup> The traditional ketubah text includes a) the date and location of the wedding; b) the woman’s status as a virgin, widow, or divorcee; c) the value the groom and his family paid; d) property and things of value that the bride is bringing into the marriage; e) obligations of the husband to his wife for her livelihood; and f) payment the bride will receive in the case of divorce.<sup>13</sup> These components are discussed and legislated extensively by the rabbis, including in Mishnaic and Talmudic texts on determining a woman’s status, how a woman’s status dictates her value, how property is dealt with in the case of death or divorce, and the husband’s obligations. Rambam compiles these laws in *Mishneh Torah*, including his summary of a husband’s ten obligations to his wife outlined by *Hilkhot Ishut* 12:2. Rambam writes:

“With regard to his ten responsibilities: three stem from the Torah. They include *sha'arah*, *kesutah* v'*onatah*. *Sha'arah* means providing her with subsistence. *Kesutah* means supplying her with garments, and *onatah* refers to conjugal rights. The seven responsibilities ordained by the Rabbis are all conditions [of the marriage contract] established by the court. The first is the fundamental requirement of the marriage contract. The others are referred to as *t'na'ei ketubah*, the conditions of the marriage contract. They are: a) to provide medical treatment if she becomes sick; b) to redeem her if she is held captive; c) to bury her if she dies; d) to provide for her from his possessions; e) the right for her to continue living in his home after his death as long as she remains a widow; f) the right for her daughters to receive their subsistence from his estate after his death until they become consecrated; g) the right for her sons to inherit her ketubah in addition to their share in her husband's estate together with their brothers [borne by other wives, if she dies before her husband does].”

<sup>7</sup> Moses Gaster, *The Ketubah*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Zsafia Buda, “From Calcutta to Tarcento: Jewish marriage contracts from the collections.”

<sup>9</sup> Art Gallery of Ontario, *Ketubah: The Jewish Marriage Contract*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> The Book of Tobit 7:6 (translation by A. Neubauer 1878).

<sup>11</sup> Moses Gaster, *The Ketubah*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Aliyah Guttman, “What Is A Ketubah and Where Did It Come From?”

<sup>13</sup> Nancy Wiener, “The Ketubah,” 189.

These Jewish legal codes continue to guide marriage practice in halachically bound communities, and serve as the backdrop against which liberal Jewish communities respond by modifying and reforming marriage customs. In her book *The Jewish Wedding Now*, Anita Diamant points out that, “the document used in Orthodox circles today remains very much the same as ketubot written in the second century CE.”<sup>14</sup>

While the text of the ketubah has remained relatively consistent, artwork (or the absence of artwork) has varied widely. The concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, or “beautifying the commandment,” is commonly cited as a reason ketubot are also often gorgeous works of art. The earliest known decorated ketubot date from the tenth century.<sup>15</sup> In her post-doctoral research for the University of Manchester Centre for Jewish Studies, Dr. Stefania Silvestri explains that, “among Jews in Islamic lands it became customary to read the ketubah aloud at the wedding ceremony and then display it, and this encouraged the practice of making it an eye-catching document. The custom of illuminating the contract spread across Europe.”<sup>16</sup> As with all traditions, the artwork on ketubot was reflective of geographical differences and cultural norms. For example, one will not find human forms on ketubot from the Medieval Period in Muslim countries, reflecting the prohibition of human figures in Islamic religious art. As a result, designs instead feature plants, animals, geometric shapes, and architectural features.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that in certain communities today and throughout history, ketubot have been viewed as ordinary legal documents and were therefore undecorated.

Changes made by Reform rabbis in the early nineteenth century marked a drastic shift in Jewish marriage practices. In her essay for Rabbi Peter Knobel’s book *Navigating the Journey: The Essential Guide to the Jewish Lifecycle*, Rabbi Nancy Wiener explains, “...finding the economic aspects of this signed agreement objectionable, the first Reform rabbis began to perform Jewish weddings without requiring this type of ketubah. They introduced a ketubah written in the vernacular, so that both members of the couple and all those in attendance could understand it.”<sup>18</sup> Additional changes were made by Reform rabbis such as removing reference to the bride’s virginity or prior marital status and removing references to money. These changes were made for the sake of egalitarianism.<sup>19</sup> Anita Diamant adds to this history, sharing that “among liberal Jews for much of the twentieth century, ketubot were either not used at all or were a vestigial practice, with a printed form provided by the rabbi.”<sup>20</sup> According to Rabbi Wiener, it seems that civil marriage documentation influenced liberal Jews’ decisions about whether to have a ketubah in the mid-twentieth century. Many Reform Jews didn’t include any specifically Jewish document in their wedding ceremony because “they reasoned that since in modern nations Jews needed to register their marriages with the state, the civil license was sufficient evidence that a valid marriage had taken place.”<sup>21</sup> The Jewish Catalog, published in 1973, reflects this reality. In its section about Jewish weddings, it outlines the differences between the Orthodox and Conservative ketubah text and reports that “Reform rabbis do not generally use a ketubah, though they are usually very willing to use one if the couple requests it.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Anita Diamant, *The Jewish Wedding Now*, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>16</sup> Zsafia Buda, “From Calcutta to Tarcento: Jewish marriage contracts from the collections.”

<sup>17</sup> Art Gallery of Ontario, *Ketubah: The Jewish Marriage Contract*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Wiener, “The Ketubah,” 190.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Anita Diamant, *The Jewish Wedding Now*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Wiener, “The Ketubah,” 190.

<sup>22</sup> Michael and Sharon Strassfeld, *The Jewish Catalog*, 195.

The early 1970s marked a sort of renaissance for the ketubah, particularly the art ketubah. An artist named David Moss is commonly credited as the one responsible for this revival.<sup>23</sup> An article in the Jerusalem Post writes of Moss, “his pioneering efforts prompted a whole new industry, and today there are many calligraphers and artists who offer these illustrated ketubot.”<sup>24</sup> The success of this revival is evident in Rabbi Wiener’s conclusion that by the late-twentieth century, it was again common practice to include a ketubah at Jewish weddings. She notes that the texts chosen or written by non-Orthodox couples for these revived ketubot focused on spiritual and religious commitments, rather than economic aspects of the marriage.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the Central Conference of American Rabbis Responsa Committee published seven Reform Responsa between 1984-1991 addressing specific questions about the ketubah. These seven responsa share common material, including the explanation of the ketubah as one of three traditional methods for effecting a Jewish marriage<sup>26</sup> and an articulation of the ketubah as primarily symbolic rather than primarily legal.<sup>27</sup> Using the rationale that broader engagement with a custom may lead to more questions about that custom, these responsa perhaps reflect the increased use of ketubot in Reform spaces by the late 1980s.

The fifty years following David Moss’ revival of the art ketubah have seen incredible growth in the ketubah industry and acceptance of ketubot as one of the core elements of a Jewish wedding. Couples getting married today are often the second generation in their family to have an illustrated ketubah hanging in their home – both generations are beneficiaries of David Moss’ revival. The impact of technology on the accessibility of ketubot cannot be overstated, both because of the intersection of art and technology and the rise of online sellers such as ketubah.com. Artists today can use technology to create beautifully intricate giclee prints or save time on production by digitizing their calligraphy to produce the ketubah text with greater ease. In addition to the vast variety in ketubah artwork, there are also many options for the ketubah text. Ketubah artists and sellers offer texts for every couple, labeling texts as “Reform,” “Conservative,” “Orthodox,” “Egalitarian,” “Interfaith,” “LGBTQ+,” or “Secular.” There is no American Reform official ketubah text, but it seems that most websites use the label “reform” simply to designate that a text does not include the traditional Aramaic text. For example, ketubah.com’s “Conservative” texts all include a description that reads, “this text is offered with an English portion that is not a translation of the Conservative Aramaic text. Rather, the English portion is a reform text, consisting of modern, poetic vows between the bride and the groom.”<sup>28</sup> All of these options with both text and artwork mean that couples have many choices to make in order to create a document that authentically represents them.

<sup>23</sup>The name “David Moss” came up in all four interviews with ketubah artists/sellers during research for this capstone, and each person spoke about his role in reviving the art ketubah. Additionally cited are two sources that confirm this and attribute the revival to David Moss: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/culture/article-737479> <https://judaica-exhibits.library.yale.edu/exhibits/ketubah/moss.html>

<sup>24</sup>Mordechai Beck, “David Moss: The Jerusalemite artist with magical work.”

<sup>25</sup>Nancy Wiener, “The Ketubah,” 191.

<sup>26</sup>The other two methods being a transfer of an item of value and sexual intercourse.

<sup>27</sup>One example of a responsum that reflects these ideas is titled “Signature on a Ketubah,” written by Walter Jacob in February 1989 and published in a 1992 collection called *New American Reform Responsa*. The responsum addresses whether or not it is appropriate for witnesses to sign their Hebrew names by copying from a paper prepared by the rabbi, in a case where they do not remember how to write their Hebrew names on their own. The full responsum can be found at: <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/narr-364-365/>

<sup>28</sup>“Conservative/Lieberman Ketubah Texts,” ketubah.com.

With accessibility comes new challenges, such as market saturation, a feeling of overwhelm by couples starting their search for a ketubah, or a feeling that a ketubah is just another item on a wedding preparation checklist. Resources and creative brain power have been poured into the revival of the ketubah, accessibility and customizability, and shifting communal perception of the ketubah as a core element of the Jewish wedding. As such, it is now the responsibility of Jewish leaders and the ketubah industry to develop infrastructure to ensure the ketubah remains relevant to contemporary couples in the decades to come. The ketubah has the potential to be a powerful tool for engaging couples in conversation about their Jewish identities and vision for a Jewish home, thereby imbuing the wedding day and beyond with deeper Jewish meaning. It is not enough to offer couples the open-ended opportunity to create a ketubah that reflects their relationship and values. We must offer couples resources that facilitate the process and highlight opportunities for connection and meaning at each step. Doing so will strengthen the institution of Jewish marriage, deepen couples' commitment to their Jewish identity as a family, and continuously reassert and renew the value of this ancient Jewish marriage custom.

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*“The design itself highlights the diverse pasts that brought us to the present and honors what brought us together – both in terms of what each of us brought independently that attracted us to one another, but also the values we share... In a way, the design is also the text.”*

*-Michael (Detroit, MI)*



# Rationale: A Guide for Starting Your Ketubah Search

**WHO:** This resource is intended for any couple beginning the process of acquiring a ketubah or looking for guidance in selecting a vendor, design, or text.

**WHAT:** A guide that breaks down and explicates several considerations for selecting a ketubah, thereby helping couples to understand the questions they might need to explore and answer for themselves. This resource not only includes logistical advice, but also provides couples with a framework for approaching the process that centers who they are as a couple.

**WHY:** Finding the right ketubah requires couples to balance decisions in three main realms: the logistics of the vendor, the design of the artwork, and the meaning of the text. For example, say a couple finds a design they love through a reputable vendor, only to realize the vendor has limited options for the text – none of which speak to them – and no option to customize. Without a text that resonates, this couple might feel the need to go back to the drawing board and seek out a different vendor. The vast majority of couples report that selecting a ketubah is overwhelming because a) there are so many options on the market, b) there is no clear starting point for decision making, and c) many couples (rightfully) perceive their ketubah as a “forever choice.” This resource aims to address this overwhelmed feeling.



# A Guide For Starting Your Ketubah Search

With deep roots in Jewish tradition and history, the ketubah is one of the core elements of a Jewish wedding. The ketubah itself has evolved over time but today most commonly comprises text articulating the couple's commitment and values, beautiful artwork, and signatures from the couple, witnesses, and officiant.

Whether you're planning a traditional Jewish wedding, aiming for a *Jew-ish* wedding, or considering ways to weave traditions from multiple faiths and cultures together into one celebration – choosing to sign a ketubah can be a source of deep meaning. As an act of creation and collaboration between two partners, the ketubah truly represents you two.

Beginning the search for your ketubah can feel overwhelming! There are so many options, and it is difficult to know where to start. Ultimately, finding the right ketubah requires balancing decisions in three main realms: the logistics of the vendor/artist, the meaning of the text, and the design of the artwork. In addition to sharing tips, this guide aims to map out questions in each of those realms that you might need to explore and answer in order to choose a ketubah.

## Before Getting Started:

Because there are so many options, it can be helpful to connect with your partner before diving deep into online ketubah sites. Take a moment to center your hopes and expectations for this process:

- What do you hope your ketubah might represent for you and your partner?
- Are there any specific features or qualities you're really hoping for in your ketubah?
- How much are you comfortable spending?
  - Note: The cost of a ketubah can vary widely depending on design, artist, and customization. A quality print might cost \$150 – 450, with custom pieces ranging \$1,500 – 3,000+.
- What do you care most about?
  - Choosing a ketubah can often feel like a circular decision-making process. For instance, you may fall in love with a design from a trusted vendor, only to discover that the text options don't resonate with you, and customization isn't available. Without a text that truly speaks to you, you may find yourself searching for another vendor. In other situations, you might feel comfortable compromising. This is why it's essential to identify which aspect of the decision-making process is most important to you.

# Logistics of the Vendor/Artist:

When deciding on a vendor/artist to purchase your ketubah from, consider these five main factors:

- 1** Budget - Do the options available on this site fit within your agreed-upon budget? What fees does this vendor/artist charge for options such as custom text or translation of custom text into Hebrew?
- 2** Timeline - How quickly do you need your ketubah in hand? Can this vendor/artist accommodate that?
- 3** Style - Does the artist's style positively capture your attention?
- 4** Flexibility on Text - Does this vendor/artist offer a variety of text options and/or accept custom texts?
- 5** Communication and Customer Service - Does this vendor/artist clearly communicate the process for ordering a ketubah and make contact information available?

Here are a few wonderful vendors/artists to begin your search:

## ketubah.com

- Works with dozens of artists to curate a diverse selection of ketubah designs
- Best for quick turnaround & rush orders
- Accessible customer support
- Most affordable options



## Ink with Intent

- Best for designs including landscapes in nature, cityscapes, & papercut art
- Offers a variety of customizable design elements on prints



## The Delicate Brush

- Best for a watercolor aesthetic
- Opportunity to support an artist in Israel



## Tallulah Ketubah

- Best for intricate designs & vibrant colors
- Established a partnership with SimplyFramed for framing after your wedding



## The Ketubah

- Best for a modern, clean look
- Artist has a unique calligraphy style
- Note that there is a sizeable fee for custom texts



great for interfaith couples



Offers 10 or more text options



commissions custom artwork



LGBTQ+ texts available



accepts custom texts

A note about Etsy: You can find a wide range of beautiful ketubot from various artists. Some artists just use Etsy as their payment platform, so check to make sure you understand the artist's ordering process, text options, and lines of communication before purchasing.

## The Meaning of the Text:

The text of your ketubah is one of the most explicit opportunities to make your ketubah sound and feel like you as a couple. All ketubah vendors/artists have a set of text options available, and most allow for customization (albeit to varying degrees). If you're working with a rabbi or cantor as your officiant, it is important to check in with them before selecting a ketubah text. Your officiant can provide support with this step and may also have preferences or requirements that they'll ask you to keep in mind.

Decide with your partner whether you would like to select a pre-existing text or write your own. Writing your own doesn't have to mean starting with a blank page – this booklet includes resources to support this process: a “Mad Libs” ketubah texts and a guide to writing your ketubah text with AI. Keep in mind that a custom text can sometimes incur fees, either for the text itself or if you want translation into Hebrew.

If you're planning to select a pre-existing text, start by going to the text bank on your vendor/artist's website. Scroll through the various options, opening the texts whose titles catch your eye in another tab. Read the texts one at a time, using these questions as a guide for unpacking each one and making a decision:

- What words or phrases resonate with you?
- How does this text talk about partnership? Does this feel true for you?
- What role does religion (e.g., Judaism and God) play in this text? Does this feel right for you?
- How does this text balance legalese and poetic language? Does this balance feel right?

If there are particular words or phrases that don't feel quite right in your chosen text, reach out to the vendor/artist to see whether minor edits are possible. In many cases, vendors/artists are willing to accommodate this!

# The Design of the Artwork:

Consider these four questions to determine your style and aesthetic.

- 1 What colors do you typically feel most drawn to when decorating or choosing items for your home?
- 2 How would you describe those colors (e.g., bold, neutral, pastel)?
- 3 Are there any specific styles of art (e.g., watercolor, line drawings, minimalist, modern, eclectic) that you tend to gravitate toward?
- 4 Do you prefer simple, clean lines or more intricate, detailed designs?

Write down your answers on a piece of paper and keep it next to you while searching through designs. Trust your gut and don't be afraid to rule options out based on your answers to the above questions – or change your answers as you encounter new designs! A ketubah can be beautiful but still not the right fit for you and your partner. It's okay if this decision takes time – step away and come back to your options later with clear heads.

One final tip: try not to keep more than 6 design options “in the running” at one time. If you find a design you love but already have 6 tabs open, choose 1 tab to close and eliminate that design from consideration.



Your ketubah is like a metaphorical thread that weaves through time, accompanying you during the wedding planning process, on your big day, and throughout your marriage. Many couples feel pressure over trying to choose a timeless or “forever document,” so if you're feeling that, you're not alone. Focus on choosing a ketubah that truthfully reflects you and your partner as you are now, and you'll always cherish your ketubah for the way it connects you to these foundational moments in your marriage. Your partnership will change and evolve, so it's okay if your tastes do too. We hope this guide helps you to navigate the process of selecting a ketubah with a bit more confidence, leading you towards the ketubah that feels right.

*"For the ketubah text that we landed on, it just really encapsulated our relationship up until that point, but also what we wanted to continue to be and become. For whatever reason, it just felt right because it seemed so aligned with us."*

*-Ray (Los Angeles, CA)*



# Rationale: “Mad Libs” Ketubah Text

**WHO:** This resource is intended for engaged couples who are looking for more structure in the process of customizing their ketubah text.

**WHAT:** A fill-in-the-blank style ketubah text that helps to create a middle ground option between selecting a pre-written text and writing your own. This guide includes both technical information about filling in the details of a ketubah and reflection questions aimed at distilling which shared values and aspects of their partnership a couple would like to highlight in their ketubah text.

**WHY:** While there are a multitude of beautifully written ketubah texts available, many couples desire a text that feels personal and uniquely reflects their relationship. That being said, not everyone feels they have the time or creative writing chops to fully write their own text. This resource empowers couples to explore the values that are most core for them and reflect those values in their ketubah. Additionally, it presents couples with opportunities for informed choice, ultimately, helping couples feel a deeper connection and sense of identification with their ketubah.

**ALTERNATIVE USES:** This resource could be adapted for use during a premarital counseling session or as “homework” before a session to facilitate conversation about the couple’s ketubah. It could also be used as a teaching tool to explore the question, “What information is generally included in a liberal ketubah? What themes might it cover?” Finally, the collection of verses chosen as possible conclusions to the ketubah could be repurposed as a text study to explore biblical visions of partnership.

# “Mad Libs” Ketubah Text

The process of putting together a ketubah can be a lot, and there are so many different texts to choose from. Wishing your text felt a little bit more like you, but not feeling up to writing your own text from scratch? This ketubah text was designed to be edited with the hopes that couples like you will use it to give voice to the values and aspects of your relationship that you hold most dear. Keep reading to get started!

1

Copy and paste the two paragraphs on the next page into a new document that you can edit.

2

Use the information below to fill out spaces 1-9 with basic information about you, your partner, and your wedding.

3

Settle in with your partner for conversation and reflection in order to fill out spaces 10-13, which focus on weaving your values and relationship into the text.

4

Feel empowered to change and edit the language in any way that feels most authentic to you and your partner! Whether that includes adding a few details or changing words that don't sit quite right with you – it's most important that the text represents you two. Just be conscious of how long your text gets – the artist needs to be able to integrate the text into the overall design.

5

After your ketubah text reads the way you'd like it to, share it with your officiant. If you want, ask for their help in navigating the next steps, and share how the process of creating this text was for you both.

6

Submit your text to your ketubah artist or vendor. Most sellers have the option for couples to submit a custom text, and that's what you've just created! Please note that most sellers charge a fee to translate your custom text into modern Hebrew. Alternatively, you might decide to include just your English text on your ketubah.



# Raw Materials for Your Ketubah

On the [number]<sup>1</sup> day of the week, the [number]<sup>2</sup> day of the month of [Hebrew month],<sup>2</sup> in the year five thousand seven hundred and [Hebrew year],<sup>2</sup> which corresponds to the [number]<sup>3</sup> day of [Gregorian month],<sup>3</sup> two thousand and [Gregorian year],<sup>3</sup> in [City],<sup>4</sup> [State],<sup>4</sup> [the bride/the groom/the beloveds/leave blank],<sup>5</sup> [Partner 1 First Name]<sup>6</sup> [daughter/son/child]<sup>6</sup> of [Partner 1's Parent(s) First Name(s)]<sup>6</sup> and [the bride/the groom/leave blank]<sup>7</sup> , [Partner 2 First Name]<sup>8</sup> [daughter/son/child]<sup>8</sup> of [Partner 2's Parent(s) First Name(s)],<sup>8</sup> joined together in the covenant of marriage.

We, [Partner 1's first name and Partner 2's first name],<sup>9</sup> commit to this journey with full hearts, embracing each moment and change, knowing that our love is a reflection of the infinite possibilities before us. We promise to treat each other as equals, to heed one another's [\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_],<sup>10</sup> and to earnestly support both individual and collective growth. We will embrace one another through all of life's joys and challenges, standing together with [\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_].<sup>11</sup> We will honor and respect the families and communities that have shaped us, building our own unique traditions as we continue to celebrate our connection to each other and the world around us. As life partners, we strive to build a home of [\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_].<sup>12</sup> We affirm our commitment to one another now and forevermore – [conclusion].<sup>13</sup>

*"Sometimes I think about what it would look like if we didn't have a ketubah. Obviously, we said our vows on our wedding day, but how often would we actually go back and look at our vows? To see our promises in writing is important and it lets us have that reminder."*

*-Colin (Cleveland,OH)*

Names changed to protect the anonymity of those interviewed.

# The Guide to Filling It Out

## Details of Your Wedding Date and Place

- 1** Fill this in with the day of the week that your wedding falls on. Figuring out the Hebrew date can be tricky because a “day” in Jewish time begins at sundown.

Timing of Your Wedding	Hebrew Day of the Week in English	Hebrew Day of the Week in Hebrew
Saturday sundown through Sunday afternoon	First	באחד בשבת
Sunday sundown through Monday afternoon	Second	בשני בשבת
Monday sundown through Tuesday afternoon	Third	בשלישי בשבת
Tuesday sundown through Wednesday afternoon	Fourth	ברביעי בשבת
Wednesday sundown through Thursday afternoon	Fifth	בחמישי בשבת
Thursday sundown through Friday afternoon	Sixth	בששי בשבת
Friday sundown through Saturday afternoon	Seventh	בשביעי בשבת

- 2** Use the Hebrew Date Converter at [hebcad.com](http://hebcad.com) to figure out the corresponding Hebrew day, month, and year of your wedding. Because the ketubah is a more formal document, all numbers are generally written out using words. For example, instead of the ketubah saying: “The 13th day of the month of Shevat in the year 5785,” it would say: “The thirteenth day of the month of Shevat in the year five thousand seven hundred and eighty five.”

- 3 You definitely know this one without even having to think about it!! Fill in your wedding date according to the Gregorian calendar, again spelling out all numbers with words.
- 4 Fill in the city and state where your wedding ceremony will be! It is recommended not to use abbreviations, so spell out state names and elements like “Saint Louis” or “North Valley.”

## Details of Your Name

5 You get to make a decision about how you would like to be referred to in your ketubah. Some folks choose to include the designation “bride” or “groom” for each respective partner, while others opt for a gender neutral title like “the beloveds,” referring to both partners in the collective. Others choose to leave these designations off, to just be addressed by name. Make a decision about what’s best for you two, and fill this blank in with whatever designation is correct for Partner 1. Note that this will also influence how you fill in the blank for (7).

6 In modern Western tradition, individuals are generally called by (at least) two names – a first name and a surname. In Jewish tradition, individuals are most commonly called by names that follow the formula – [first name] child of [father’s first name] – for example: “Isaac son of Abraham.” This way of naming individuals highlights our connections to the generations before us and reflects an ancient reality with smaller communities where “Rachel daughter of David” gave you all the context you needed to identify another individual. All that being said, the inclusion of parent(s)’ names can elicit different feelings and reactions from each of us because of life circumstances and the complexity of family. You should make a decision that most authentically and comfortably reflects you, whether that means including the names of multiple parents, one parent, or simply using your first name. Fill in this blank with Partner 1’s name.

7 Referring back to (5), fill this blank in with whatever designation is correct for Partner 2. If you selected “the beloveds” for (5) or chose to leave it blank, leave this space blank too.

8 Using the same considerations as (6), fill in this blank with Partner 2’s name.

9 Fill in this blank with both Partner 1 and Partner 2’s first names only.

# Weaving Your Values and Relationship into the Ketubah Text

10

## Mental and Emotional Safety

Think of a time when you felt seen, understood, or loved by your partner. What were the circumstances? What did your partner do or say? What impact did it have on you?

With these moments as your foundation, aim to fill in these two or three blanks with words representing psychological and mental states – what in one another do you promise to be most attuned to?

Examples might include: dreams, fears, ideas, ambitions, concerns, desires, needs

*“We promise to treat each other as equals, to heed one another’s dreams, fears, and desires...”*

11

## The Ties that Bind Us

Reflecting on the experiences you’ve had over the course of your relationship – either as a couple or as individuals – think of a moment of celebration and a moment of challenge. What united you and your partner in each of those moments? How did you show up for each other? What values sit at the core of this connection?

Aim to fill in these two blanks with words representing values. For a list of values to reference while you talk, see page 30, but you can also feel empowered to include values that aren’t found on this list.

Examples might include: love, respect, steadiness, devotion, honesty, trust

*“We will embrace one another through all of life’s joys and challenges, standing together with respect and devotion.”*

12

## Building a Home

What scents, sounds, memories, or feelings do you associate with home? What personal touches or objects in your home make you feel most connected to it? What does your home say about the way you live and the things you care about?

With these ideas as your foundation, aim to fill in these three blanks with words representing values. For a list of values to reference while you talk, see page 30, but you can also feel empowered to include values that aren’t found on this list.

Examples might include: love, laughter, Torah, tolerance, creativity, harmony

*“As life partners, we strive to build a home of balance, fun, and inclusivity.”*

# 13

## Conclusion

Ketubah texts often end with a statement of commitment, partnership, and/or unity. Some couples choose to use a text from Jewish tradition, while others take a different route. As you read through the several suggestions below, consider which resonates with you the most.

Source	Quote
If you don't want a quote for the conclusion of your ketubah text, here is an alternative ending to the final sentence.	...with hearts full of love, hands ready for the work ahead, and spirits open to the unknown chapters of our story.
Song of Songs 2:16	"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."
Song of Songs 3:4	"I found whom my soul loves."
Song of Songs 8:7	"Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away."
Ruth 1:16	"For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."
Isaiah 62:5	"As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."
Unattributed	"With my beloved by my side, every day is good to awaken to, and every moment is a gift."
Excerpt of the Sixth Blessing of the Sheva Brachot	"The loving partners shall rejoice as You caused your creatures to delight in the Garden of Eden of old."
Ecclesiastes 4:9	The Hebrew literally translates to: "Two [together] is better than one [alone]." But it is often poetically translated as: "May we be better together."

*“The ketubah is an opportunity to really question as a couple and then affirm as a couple, our commitment to Judaism, not just as a religion, but as a community, as a set of spiritual practices and values, as a commitment to our history and our legacy.”*

*-Liana (Los Angeles, CA)*





# Rationale: Creating an AI Ketubah Text

**WHO:** This resource is intended for engaged couples who are looking for more structure in the process of customizing their ketubah text.

**WHAT:** An activity and reflection guide designed to help couples distill which shared values and aspects of their partnership they would like to highlight in their ketubah text.

**WHY:** Ultimately, this resource aims to help couples feel a deeper connection and sense of identification with their ketubah. While there are a multitude of beautifully written ketubah texts available, many couples desire a text that feels personal and uniquely reflects their relationship. That being said, not everyone feels they have the time or creative writing chops to fully write their own text. AI can be a powerful tool to help address this gap. Ketubah.com recently introduced an AI-Powered Ketubah Text Assistant, and other AI tools (such as ChatGPT) are readily available. Paired with inputs from the couple, AI can help empower couples by giving them a uniquely generated text that truly reflects their relationship. This resource prepares couples to prompt AI with intention.

**ALTERNATIVE USES:** This same activity and reflection guide could be used by a couple to prepare to write their own ketubah text without assistance from AI. Parts 1 and 2 could also be adapted to function as meaningful activities/conversations for a premarital counseling session, allowing the officiant to moderate the process and help couples reflect.



# Creating an AI Ketubah Text

The ketubah is a Jewish document that affirms a couple's commitment to one another, articulating your expectations, hopes for the future, values, and connection. It marks and ritualizes the creation of a marriage, serving as both a foundation for your partnership and a visible memory of your promises.

While there are a multitude of beautifully written ketubah texts available, AI technology has created new opportunities for you and your partner if you're looking to customize a ketubah text. AI can generate unique texts, but you and your partner are still the experts on your relationship and vision for your future. This conversation guide was created to help couples like you give voice to the values and aspects of your relationship that you hold most dear, in order to prompt these AI tools with intention and generate a text that truly reflects your relationship.

Before you dive in, you might want to have:

- Two copies of “Values that Shape Our Lives” - printed or digital copies you can mark up, located on the next page
- Pens or pencils
- A computer
- A snack/food/beverage that has some meaning to you as a couple – whether it's a shared favorite, something that reminds you of your first date, or something that's part of a family tradition!

## Part 1 - Core Connection

Settle in with your partner, making sure to each have a copy of or access to “Values that Shape Our Lives.” First, set a timer for 5 minutes, working individually to **choose 10 values that feel most important to you personally**. Mark those 10 values by underlining them on your paper.

After you've both chosen 10 values, take a moment to share with one another. As you share the 10 values you picked, highlight 3-4 of your values by explaining a little of why you chose them. You might decide to highlight values that your partner did *not* choose, or perhaps you'll take the opportunity to notice one another's reasoning for choosing values you both marked on your pages.

# Values That Shape Our Lives

Authenticity <i>Shleimut</i>	שלמות	Influence <i>Hashpa'ah</i>	השפעה	Spirituality <i>Ruhaniut</i>	רוחניות	Compassionate Criticism <i>Tochecha</i>	רוחניות אחריות
Adventure <i>Ma'aseh Noo'az</i>	מעשה נועז	Intention <i>Kavannah</i>	כוונה	Wisdom <i>Hochma</i>	חכמה	Social Responsibility <i>Achrayut</i>	אחריות
Authority <i>Reshut</i>	רשות	Harmony <i>Achdut</i>	אחדות	Understanding <i>Bina</i>	בינה	Righteousness <i>Tzedek</i>	צדק
Balance <i>Hitaznut</i>	התאזנות	Listening <i>Hak'sheva</i>	הקשבה	Sensibility <i>Daat</i>	דעת	Patience <i>Savlanut</i>	סבלנות
Beauty <i>Yofi</i>	יופי	Learning <i>Talmut Torah</i>	תלמוד תורה	Creativity <i>Yetzirah</i>	יצירה	Forgiveness <i>Mechilah</i>	מחילה
Boldness <i>Oz Nefesh</i>	עז נפש	Loyalty <i>Ne'emanut</i>	נאמנות	Appreciation of Opposition <i>Machloket</i>	מחלוקת	Humility <i>Anavah</i>	ענוה
Challenge <i>Kavedut</i>	כבדות	Openness <i>Petichut</i>	פתיחות	Curiosity <i>Sakranut</i>	סקרנות	Modesty <i>Tzniut</i>	צניעות
Determination <i>Nechishut</i>	נחישות	Optimism <i>Optimi'ut</i>	אופטימיות	Courage <i>Ometz Lev</i>	אומץ לב	Organization/Order <i>Seder</i>	סדר
Fairness <i>Haginit</i>	הגינות	Pleasure <i>Ta'anug</i>	תענוג	Integrity <i>Yosher</i>	יושר	Contentment <i>Histapkut</i>	הסתפקות
Faith <i>Emunah</i>	אמונה	Respect <i>Kavod</i>	כבוד	Responsibility <i>Aruyvut</i>	ערכות	Calm & Composure <i>Roga'ut</i>	רוגעות
Friendship <i>Haverut</i>	חברות	Independence <i>Atzmaut</i>	עצמאות	Will Power <i>Gevurah</i>	גבורה	Foresight <i>Roeh et HaNolad</i>	רואה את הנולד
Fun <i>Kef</i>	כיף	Reputation <i>Shem</i>	שם	Civility <i>Derech Eretz</i>	דרך ארץ	Wonder <i>Malchut</i>	מלכות
Generosity <i>Nedivut</i>	נדיבות	Safety <i>Bitachon</i>	בטחון	Compassion <i>Rachamim</i>	רחמים	Love <i>Ahava</i>	אהבה
Grace <i>Hein</i>	חן	Service <i>Shairut</i>	שרות	Kindness <i>Chesed</i>	חסד	Joy <i>Sameach</i>	שמח
Growth <i>Tzmicha</i>	צמיחה	Truth <i>Emet</i>	אמת	Pursuit of Peace <i>Rodef Shalom</i>	רודף שלום	Gratitude <i>Hakarat HaTov</i>	הכרת הטוב
Honesty <i>Kaynut</i>	כנות	Trustworthiness <i>Aminut</i>	אמינות	Leadership <i>Manhigut</i>	מנהיגות	Groundedness <i>Yesod</i>	יסוד
Humor <i>Matzhik</i>	מצחיק	Success <i>Hatz'lacha</i>	הצלחה	Justice <i>Din</i>	דין	Stability <i>K'viut</i>	קביעות

Below are several questions for consideration in giving voice to why a value is important to you. These questions can help you and your partner through the next two steps, in the process of narrowing down:

- What values show up on your list *and* your partner's list? What values did each of you uniquely pick out?
- How has this value shown up in your life? How might you define it?
- Where or who did you learn this value from? What specific memories or experiences from your life illustrate how this value became important to you?
- Are there fundamental ideas that you both agree on but are expressing using different value terms?
- Which values, if left out, would create the biggest gap in how you two connect with one another and/or show up in the world?

Guided by your own conversation and the questions above, work together to narrow down the list of values to the **10 that feel most important to you as a couple**. Mark your shared list of 10 values by circling them on your paper. Feel free to spend as much time as you'd like diving into these values, but if it's helpful for you and your partner to have a deadline of sorts, consider setting a timer for 20 minutes.

Finally, work together to narrow down the list a little further. Aim to agree on the **3 values that feel most core to you as a couple** and the life you hope to continue to build. Mark these 3 shared, core values with a star on your paper.

## Part 2 - Reflection of Us

Use the reflection questions below to guide your conversation, either all at once or over the course of a few days. As you and your partner explore these prompts together, write down words that come up repeatedly or ideas that resonate with both of you on scrap paper or the back of your papers from Part 1.

Reflection questions:

- Tell the story of a memory or moment early in your relationship that still makes you smile.
- What does marriage mean to you? Why do you want to be married to your partner?
- What would an ideal day spent together look like? What would you prioritize?
- What do you need in order to continue to feel safe and secure in your relationship?
- What have you learned about yourself or relationships from your partner?
- In moments of challenge or conflict, what reminders will you want to give yourself? How do you hope you'll handle conflict with one another? How do you hope you'll face external challenges?
- What are your hopes for each other in the future?

Now that you've spent some time with each of these questions, take a look at the words and ideas you noted as you two talked. Work together to articulate the 3-5 ideas that feel most central.

## Part 3 - Creating the Text

If using ketubah.com's  
AI Text Assistant:

Visit <https://ketubah.com/ai-ketubah-text-assistant/> to get started. In the text box with the question, "How is your love unlike any other?" – type the 3-5 central ideas you and your partner came to in Part 2 of the conversation guide. In the text box with the question, "What values matter most to you as a couple?" – type the 3 (or more) values you and your partner identified in Part 1 of the conversation guide. For the remaining questions on the site, select an option from the drop-down menus that feels right. Click "Write It!" and see what the text assistant produces!

If using ChatGPT:

Prompt the AI by typing –  
"Write a ketubah for [two partners // a bride and a bride // a groom and a groom // a bride and a groom] that highlights the values of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. Make sure the ketubah also includes these ideas: [list out the 3-5 ideas you discussed earlier]."

You may want to edit the format/structure of the AI response slightly. Also feel empowered to change and edit the language in any way that feels most authentic to you and your partner! Whether that includes adding names and wedding day specifics or changing words that don't sit quite right with you – it's most important that the text represents you two.

After your ketubah text reads the way you'd like it to, share it with your officiant. Ask for their help in navigating the next steps, and if you want, share how the process of creating this text was for you both.

Most ketubah vendors and artists have the option for couples to submit a custom text. That's what you've just created! Please note that most vendors and artists charge a fee to translate your custom text into modern Hebrew. Alternatively, you might also decide to include just your English text on your ketubah.



*“[Our ketubah] is the concrete promises that we’re making to each other about the life that we expect to have and that we want to have together. It’s very much a declaration, not just of love, but of our future life together.”*

*-Anna (Rochester, NY)*

# Rationale: A Ritual for Receiving Your Ketubah in the Mail

**WHO:** This resource is intended for engaged couples on the occasion of receiving their ketubah in the mail or seeing it finished for the first time.

**WHAT:** A ritual that weaves together blessing, poetry, and the opportunity to reflect.

**WHY:** Receiving the ketubah in the mail or seeing it finished for the first time can be a powerful moment for couples, marking a realization that their wedding is becoming a reality. Wedding planning is often filled with so many details that, while anticipated for months, can be difficult to fully imagine or picture until everything comes together on the big day. Many couples describe the moment they receive their ketubah as a “woah” moment — when they see their names on the document and realize just how real everything has become. This ritual was created to slow that moment down, add intention, and offer a special opportunity for the couple to connect over their ketubah amidst the sometimes chaotic wedding planning process.

**ALTERNATIVE USES:** There are a few pieces of this ritual that could be applicable in other moments. The four part reflection that is outlined in the ritual could be used by a couple as a consistent/periodic check-in through the marriage preparation process. Additionally, the English blessing included with the Shehecheyanu could be included in a ketubah ceremony itself, simply by replacing the last few words to read, “...the strength of the vows we *make today*.”

# A Ritual for Receiving Your Ketubah in the Mail

“I can’t believe it’s finally here!” Your ketubah has arrived in the mail or you’re seeing it finished for the first time. While it’s tempting to open the box immediately, consider taking this opportunity to connect with your partner and experience the unboxing together. One way to think about your ketubah is like a metaphorical thread that weaves through time, accompanying you during the wedding planning process, on your big day, and throughout your marriage. Seeing it for the first time marks a milestone along that journey, and can stir up a range of emotions for both you and your partner especially if your wedding day is nearing. In the midst of the (sometimes chaotic) wedding planning process, use this ritual to slow down and celebrate with your partner.

*Each cardboard layer peeled away,  
A story yet untold,  
The gift, the joy, the spark,  
Unwrapped, its essence bold.*

*We pause to take it in,  
The feeling soft, serene,  
For in this quiet moment,  
The wait was worth the dream.*

by Hannah Lybik

Open the packaging and take a few moments to look over your ketubah. Notice the colors, shapes, and textures. Allow your eyes to gently wander over the piece, without rushing. What draws your attention first? What details do you find yourself coming back to?

Take a moment to observe the emotions that arise within you as you gaze at the design. How does it make you feel? Is there a particular memory, thought, or feeling that surfaces?



When you're ready, read the text of your ketubah together. What are the 1-2 words or phrases that resonate most with you in this moment? Why?

Together, offer the Shehecheyanu blessing in Hebrew or through this creative English interpretation.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהֵחַיְנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam,  
shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.*

Blessed are You, Creator of the universe,  
who has sustained us and brought this sacred moment to fruition.

As we hold in our hands this ketubah, a symbol of the love, commitment, and sacred bond that will unite us forever, we are filled with gratitude. This beautiful document, a work of art and a testament to our promises, reflects the journey we are about to embark on together. May this ketubah be a constant reminder of our shared dreams, our devotion, and the strength of the vows we will make under the *chuppah*.

Safely wrap your ketubah in its packaging, and store it flat in a cool, dry place. Grab a favorite celebratory drink and find a comfy spot with your partner. Together, take a moment to reflect and check-in using these four questions:

- What do you feel is going well in preparation for your wedding day?
- What is one thing your partner can do to support you in the coming days?
- What about the wedding and/or marriage is bringing you feelings of nervousness?
- What about the wedding and/or marriage is bringing you feelings of excitement or joy?

*“[Our ketubah] helps to center Judaism in our marriage. This is not just a marriage, this is a Jewish marriage, and it’s a conversation piece hung up on the wall. I hope that all our friends see it, because people ask about it and we get to share this beautiful tradition with them.”*

*-Jason (Washington, D.C.)*



# Rationale: A Ritual for Hanging Your Ketubah

**WHO:** This resource is intended for newly married couples who intend to hang their ketubah in their home.

**WHAT:** A ritual that weaves together blessing, poetry, and the opportunity to celebrate.

**WHY:** Traditionally, the signed ketubah belonged to the bride, but most modern couples view it as a shared document that reflects their partnership. The process of designing or purchasing the ketubah is often a collaborative effort, symbolizing the couple's joint creation of something meaningful together. It also represents their commitment to one another, making it a visible connection to the wedding day, their promises in marriage, and their intentions for a shared life. This ritual for hanging the ketubah in the home builds on the tradition of hanging a mezuzah, with both ritual objects serving as visible reminders and symbols of a covenant. Ritualizing this moment provides the couple an additional opportunity for connection with their ketubah after their wedding day.

# A Ritual for Hanging Your Ketubah

Whether framing your ketubah was at the top of your post-wedding to-do list or you're just now getting around to it, hanging your ketubah in your home is a meaningful milestone! Think of your ketubah as a metaphorical thread, one that has followed you through the wedding planning process, your big day, and now into your marriage. It serves as a visible reminder of the promises you've made to each other and your intentions for a shared future. Displaying your ketubah can serve as a daily affirmation of your commitment as a couple, making a statement that the values and promises it represents are central to your home and relationship. Use this ritual to guide you in hanging your ketubah and celebrating this moment.

Before you start, collect the things you'll need: the framed ketubah itself, 20-30 small sticky notes, this ritual, a pencil, a hammer, and the appropriate frame hanging hook kit.

## Step One: Find the Perfect Spot

Queue up your first dance song or a song you both love to sing, and make sure that each of you have a small stack of sticky notes ready to go. When the music starts, move around your home marking **any spot on a wall large enough** to fit your ketubah. For example, whether or not it would actually make a good ketubah hanging spot, the shower wall is probably big enough! Work collaboratively or turn it into a competition – but make sure you cover every room!

After your song is over and you've identified all the potential spots (both serious contenders and ridiculous ideas), wander around your space together looking at all the sticky notes. Pick out a few of the sticky notes and consider:

- What role does this area of your home play in your lives?
- Where might it feel most special to hang this ketubah?
- Where might you need the visual reminder of this ketubah most?

Use your conversation to decide on a room in your home to hang your ketubah, and from there, pick a wall spot. Once you've decided, use the appropriate frame hanging hook kit and the necessary tools to securely fasten the hardware in the wall. Don't hang the ketubah itself on the hook just yet.

## Step Two: Reconnect with the Ketubah Text

Read your ketubah silently or aloud together. Afterwards, share with your partner:

- A moment from your wedding day that makes you smile.
- An element of your ketubah text that reflects one of your partner's strengths.
- An aspect of your future as a couple that you're excited for.

## Step Three: Offer the Blessings

Hold your ketubah together as a couple and recite these blessings in English, Hebrew, or both languages:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
מְשַׁמֵּחַ רַעִים אֲהוּבִים וּמְקַדֵּשׁ קִבִּיעַת הַכֶּתוּבָה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam,  
m'sameach rayim ahuvim u'mikadesh k'viat ha'ketubah.*

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe,  
who inspires rejoicing between beloveds and sanctifies the hanging of the ketubah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam,  
shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.*

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe,  
who has enlivened us, sustained us, and brought us to this moment.

## Step Four: Place Your Ketubah on the Wall

Let's be honest, hanging things on the wall can be clunky. Do what you gotta do!

## Step Five: Wrap Up Your Ritual

These words of poetry are here for you to close out your ritual. Read them aloud or silently, and then celebrate with your partner in whatever way (big or small) that feels most authentic to you two – cooking a meal, curling up on the couch for a favorite TV show, going for ice cream, or enjoying a fun activity!

### Beyond the Picture Frame

By Hannah Lybik

*Within the four edges  
of the wooden picture frame  
a canvas unfolds –  
folds of paper,  
layers of color,  
Old new words  
of promise,  
Inked with intention  
and sealed with careful signatures.  
But the hope,  
the love,  
the commitment,  
pours forth from the picture frame.  
A whole world unfolds –  
uncontained and expansive,  
Filling our home  
with joy  
with devotion,  
Guiding us forward  
together  
towards the infinite possibilities  
before us.*



*"I think of our ketubah almost as a candle. We've just lit a candle that is representative of our relationship and it'll continue to go on. And eventually the candle will be done, hopefully not for a long long time. But it's a light in our home that we've turned on."*

*-Hunter (Los Angeles, CA)*



# Rationale: Suggestions for Officiants

**WHO:** This resource is intended for ketubah ceremony officiants and/or clergy involved in premarital counseling sessions.

**WHAT:** A compilation of suggestions offering officiants a starting point for meaningfully engaging couples around their ketubah, aiming to deepen their connection, help couples feel supported, and make the document feel relevant to the broader experience of preparing for a wedding and marriage.

**WHY:** The ketubah has the potential to be a powerful tool for engaging couples in conversation about their Jewish identities, expectations in marriage, values, and visions for the future. Many of these conversations are already facilitated through premarital counseling. However, explicitly linking these conversations with the ketubah increases their salience because the ketubah remains visible in the home far beyond the end of counseling sessions and the wedding day. As such, officiants should embrace these opportunities and place greater emphasis on the ketubah throughout their time working with wedding couples. Doing so will strengthen the institution of Jewish marriage, deepen couples' commitment to their Jewish identity as a family, and continuously reassert and renew the value of this ancient Jewish marriage custom.

# Suggestions for Officiants

In the midst of wedding planning—especially in an era where the ketubah has become a standard part of the Jewish wedding—it's important to pause and consider the deeper value of the ketubah. While most things on a couple's wedding checklist fall into the category of “pre-wedding work,” the ketubah is “pre-marriage work.” How might officiants encourage couples to view the ketubah not just as another item on their wedding checklist, but as a meaningful component of their marriage to invest in?

The majority of couples interviewed in the research stage of this capstone reported receiving very little or no assistance from their officiant in selecting a ketubah. Additionally, the vast majority of liberal Jewish couples do not see the ketubah as having a legal function, but rather a spiritual, symbolic, or emotional one. In a Judaism where the ketubah is a technical, legal document – the rabbi's role in acquiring the ketubah is primarily technical. The shifted perception of the ketubah's function demands that officiants step into a pastoral role in relation to the ketubah. In premarital counseling and ceremony preparation sessions, officiants are almost always running against the clock. However, investing time in the ketubah is significant in order to truly meet the needs of modern couples.

The following suggestions offer officiants a starting point for meaningfully engaging couples around their ketubah. Some of these conversations are already facilitated through premarital counseling. However, explicitly linking these conversations with the ketubah increases their salience because the ketubah remains visible in the home far beyond the end of counseling sessions and the wedding day.

# Five Meaningful Ketubah Conversations To Have with Couples:

## **Consider the interplay between civil and Jewish marriage documents.**

Outside of a halachically-bound framework, the ketubah can be understood as a spiritual and emotional accompaniment to the legal, state marriage license. Articulating it in this way creates space for couples to consider the impact of marriage on these different aspects of their lives. What will it mean for you to be legally married? Why is it important to you as a couple to include Jewish ritual in your wedding day? What makes this a Jewish family? For any number of reasons, some couples have already signed civil paperwork by the time of their Jewish ceremony. However, when applicable, signing both the ketubah and the state marriage license during the ketubah signing ceremony can be meaningful. Doing so ritualizes the civil legality of a marriage, and can feel like a moment of unity for the couple between multiple realms of life – secular and spiritual.

## **Consider the relationship between the ketubah and personal vows.**

It seems increasingly more common for couples to write and share personal vows during the ceremony, in addition to Hebrew vows. These creative pieces of writing most often sound like a letter from one partner to the other, recalling pivotal moments in their relationship, naming cherished characteristics of the partner, and sharing promises for the future. While not part of the traditional Jewish ceremony, they are perceived by many to be a quintessential element of a wedding. Officiants must advocate for the rituals offered by Jewish tradition, while also honoring the expectations couples bring to their wedding day influenced by pop culture, the wedding industry on social media, and ceremonies they have previously experienced (in both Jewish and non-Jewish settings).

There is an opportunity for the couple to consider the relationship between their ketubah and personal vows in order to help them be intentional with both. One possible framework for thinking about this centers around how each is written. Vows are written separately from one partner to the other, whereas the ketubah is written together about the couple as a unit. Vows are exchanged, whereas the ketubah is co-created and mutual. This articulation is not meant to elevate vows over the ketubah or visa versa. Instead, this framework invites couples to consider the content and function of their vows and ketubah distinctly. What do **I** need to promise to **you**? What do **we** need to promise one another?

**Discuss witnesses.**

The concept of the ketubah witness opens several avenues for conversation, all of which are relevant and important. The most obvious of these avenues is facilitating a conversation with the couple about who will sign their ketubah. Different officiants have varying opinions on the traditional practice of asking two Jewish adult males to serve as witnesses. Regardless of your opinions and requirements for the identities of these two folks, there's an opportunity to deepen this decision and how one thinks about the role of the witness. One guiding question for choosing a witness is: Who is going to keep you accountable for what is written in your ketubah? Frame for the couple that these witnesses should be people they feel in alignment with and can rely on – perhaps a best friend, a mentor, or another couple they look up to. Engage the couple further about *why* they chose these witnesses and the role those people play in their life.

In addition to the people who will serve as signatory witnesses on the ketubah, a conversation about witnesses can open the door to broader conversations about who will be present for the ketubah signing 'witnessing' the moment. In interviews, approximately half of the couples reported that decisions about who would be present for the ketubah signing were extremely stressful. Couples talked about balancing inclusivity with intimacy, mediating difficult relationships within the family, and navigating family expectations. As such, discussing witnesses broadly is one potential avenue for officiants to understand relevant family dynamics. Additionally, officiants might use this as an opportunity to ask questions such as: How do you navigate challenging moments with your families? What feels familiar and what feels uncomfortable in how your partner's family handles conflict? What role does your family/broader support network play in your relationship? How do you draw and maintain boundaries with others?

**Build layers of meaning.**

After the couple has selected a ketubah, look at the text and the design together. Unpack the text together to understand why they chose it and what resonates with them. Look at the design and ask questions such as: "Could you please describe your ketubah to me? What are your favorite elements of your ketubah? What do these elements represent for you?" If there is imagery or symbolic art with meaning in Jewish tradition (e.g., pomegranates, trees, doves, rainbows, etc.), share this wisdom with the couple in a premarital counseling session! Together, explore relevant Jewish texts and folklore about that symbol to help them make the Jewish connection beyond the symbol itself.



**Highlight the ongoing opportunity of the ketubah.**

Part of the ketubah's power is the fact that it outlasts the wedding day and hangs in the home as a visible reminder of how the couple hopes to show up in their marriage. As such, officiants can prompt reflection and help couples to realize the role their ketubah might play in the future. In the interviews for the research stage of this capstone, couples were all asked the same question to conclude the interview. After highlighting that throughout the conversation we'd talked about the ketubah interchangeably as "artwork," "contract," "document," "agreement," etc., couples were asked: "What is the ketubah? What does it represent to you?" The answers, several of which can be found as quotes throughout this booklet, were incredibly moving. Couples expressed a sense of appreciation for the opportunity to articulate the function and meaning of the ketubah for themselves. In a premarital counseling session (or a session following the wedding), ask questions such as: What is the ketubah actually doing for you two as a couple? What does this ketubah represent to you? What does it mean to make a promise? What role might this ketubah play for you on the day you receive it? On your wedding day? On your anniversary? On any random day in your marriage?

## Five Ways To Logistically Support Couples with Their Ketubah:

**Mention the ketubah in your first session.**

Doing so sets a tone and sends the message that the ketubah is important. If we as officiants treat the ketubah as an afterthought, so will the couples we counsel. Mentioning the ketubah early on also encourages couples to start the process early, which gives them the most flexibility in their decision making and (hopefully) eliminates the stress of a rush order.

**Offer a starting point.**

Some couples will know exactly what they're looking for, while other couples might have less exposure to ketubah designs and texts. The process can feel especially overwhelming for these couples. Connect folks with "A Guide For Starting Your Ketubah Search" (page 15) or offer a more customized starting point when they are selecting a ketubah text. For example, send them 3 texts you think might resonate based on your knowledge of the couple, along with a link directing them towards other options.



**Define terms.**

Help couples understand terminology they may encounter on ketubah websites, such as the "Lieberman Clause" or the differences between "Reform" and Orthodox texts.

Explaining these concepts will enable couples to navigate text categories on any site with more confidence and clarity, reducing feelings of being overwhelmed by allowing them to narrow their focus more easily.

**Know where your couple is ordering their ketubah from.**

Most ketubah vendors/artists have great customer service, however, different sites offer different levels of support with small details like the correct Hebrew date and the spelling of Jewish ritual names. For example, ketubah.com uses a "Ketubah Text Tool" to gather details for personalization. An individual can type their Hebrew name in English letters and the form will automatically fill in the correct Hebrew name (or Hebrew transliteration for folks who will be using their English name). Smaller ketubah vendors will often rely on the couple to fill out a form with this information in full. Knowing where your couple is ordering from can impact what level of support they might need from you. These details might feel benign, but treating them with care will help signal the importance of the ketubah to couples you're working with.

**Use your Hebrew expertise to ensure the text reflects the couple.**

For many couples, the Hebrew on their ketubah feels inaccessible and therefore harder to connect with. Share your Hebrew expertise in order to assure couples the Hebrew is in alignment with the English, and perhaps even teach specific Hebrew words/phrases to bring the couple into the Hebrew text. Additionally, help couples (especially LBGTQ+ folks) navigate gendered Hebrew language. While many vendors offer same-sex and gender inclusive text options, the Hebrew doesn't always follow suit. For example, the ketubah text for two brides might still inadvertently include masculine plural verbs.



*"As an interfaith couple, we're creating our own family traditions now. Designing the ketubah was something special because it was something that we did together, and it symbolizes we have a Jewish home that we're building together."*

*-Elaine (Los Angeles, CA)*

# Rationale: From Paper to Promise: The Ketubah's Role in Marriage

**WHO:** This resource is intended for use by educators interested in bringing together a cohort of couples within their first few years of marriage. This lesson assumes that the couples participating chose to incorporate the ketubah into their wedding festivities and that they chose not to use the traditional text.

**WHAT:** A 1.5-hour lesson plan that can either be incorporated into an existing couples cohort curriculum or taught as a one-off session.

**WHY:** There is an opportunity to engage married couples in ongoing reflection and conversation about their relationships through the ketubah. While a ketubah hanging on the wall of someone's home may still have passive long-term impact, educators can continue to facilitate active moments of connection between a couple and their ketubah. Doing so has the potential to consistently re-inspire the couple to explore the role Judaism plays in their marriage, home, and life.

**ALTERNATIVE USES:** This lesson asks couples to reflect on the promises they have already made through their ketubah and how those promises translate into everyday life and action. If the cohort of couples are not yet married, the framing and activities could be adapted slightly in order to make them more hypothetical. For example, a couple could look at a sample ketubah text in order to reflect on how the broad promises might be translated into daily actions. They would still have the opportunity to call to mind real memories and moments of trust building through this activity. If adapted in this way, the lesson becomes a tool for teaching about promise and the opportunity of a ketubah, as opposed to an opportunity for a couple to reconnect with their ketubah and marriage promises.

# From Paper to Promise: The Ketubah's Role In Marriage

## Enduring Understandings:

- The ketubah is a reminder of the promises a couple made to one another and can be a tool for ongoing reflection and celebration of who they are as a couple.
- Jewish tradition offers valuable language and wisdom for exploring the deeply intertwined concepts of promise, covenant, and trust.

## Objectives:

- Participants will gain familiarity with several Jewish texts focused on promise and covenant.
- Participants will be able to articulate 2-3 considerations in making promises.
- Participants will reflect and connect with their partner.
- Participants will consider how the promises outlined in their ketubah translate to everyday life and actions.

## Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Tape
- 3 sheets of printer paper, labeled:
  - "...sounds like"
  - "...feels like"
  - "...looks like"
- Sticky notes - approx. 10 per participant
- Pens - 1 per participant
- Copies of source sheet (see page 58-59) - 1 per participant
- Device to play video with sound
- Printed copies of a few egalitarian ketubah texts (as needed for couples who did not bring a photo of their ketubah)
- Mini glass mason jars - 1 per couple
- Marbles - enough for each couple to fill their jar, approx. 15-20

## Timeline:

- 00:00-00:10 Welcome and Schmoozing
- 00:10-00:17 Set Induction
- 00:17-00:20 Introduction to the Theme
- 00:20-00:40 Text Study: Diving into Promises
- 00:40-00:45 Bridging from Promises to Trust
- 00:45-01:00 Brene Brown's "The Anatomy of Trust" and Brief Reflection
- 01:00-01:25 Marble Jar Activity and Discussion
- 01:25-01:30 Educator Takeaways and Wrap Up

## Session Details:

**Note to the educator:** In advance of the session, ask each couple to take a clear photo of the text of their ketubah and bring it with them to class. Be sure to emphasize that they'll need to be able to read the text of their ketubah.

Before participants arrive, prepare for the set induction by taping the 3 sheets of printer paper (each labeled with one prompt) to different spots on the wall around the room.

### 00:00-00:10 Welcome and Schmoozing

### 00:10-00:17 Set Induction

Make sure everyone has approx. 10 sticky notes and a pen. Briefly share that we'll start our time together thinking about promises, so this activity is meant to just get our minds moving. Asking individuals to use separate sticky notes for each thought, prompt the group with these three questions. Share the questions one bullet point at a time, giving about a minute for folks to think and write before asking the next.

- What does a promise sound like? What language does someone need to use to indicate they've made a promise?
- Think of a time when someone made a promise to you. What did that feel like?
- What does it look like when a promise is broken?

As folks finish writing, ask them to find the corresponding spot on the wall and hang up their sticky notes. Also give folks 1-2 minutes to wander around and read what others have written. Before moving into the introduction, ask the group for reactions. Suggested prompts include: What stuck out to you? What themes/patterns did you notice? What surprised you?

### 00:17-00:20 Introduction to the Theme

Briefly highlight some of what came out of the sticky notes in order to make the point that “promises” can feel abstract and can look/sound/feel different depending on the situation. Then continue: *Promises are a huge part of our daily lives and are embedded into our interactions with others. There are also moments, such as getting married, where we make a pretty big promise to another person. All of this begs the question – what is a promise and what does it mean to make one? We’ll have the opportunity to dive into this question and others together, starting out by exploring a few written texts from Jewish tradition and psychology research. Not all of these texts are specific to romantic relationships, so throughout our discussion we’ll perhaps toggle between thinking about promises more universally and how these ideas might play out in the context of a marriage.*

### 00:20-00:40 Text Study: Diving into Promises

Pass around source sheets, and frame: *We’ll move through these sources together as a group. For each text, our main task will be to identify and pull out what the text might want us to understand about promises, either by what it explicitly or implicitly says. As we study these, I also invite you to consider and share what in the text resonates with you and what in the text challenges you.*

#### Source 1: Deuteronomy 23:24

You must fulfill what has crossed your lips and perform what you have voluntarily vowed to Adonai your God, having made the promise with your own mouth.

Ask: What might this text want us to understand about promises? What does it teach us – either explicitly or implicitly?

*Potential answers:*

- *Language of “you must” = We have an obligation to follow through on promises*
- *Promise as both word and action*
- *Promises are voluntary – we aren’t necessarily required to make any particular promise*

Create space for folks to share other thoughts and reactions.

#### Source 2: Or HaChaim on Deuteronomy 23:24:1

"You must fulfill what has crossed your lips..." The Torah suggests that you should wait before making a vow, a promise, until you are in a position to honor it without delay. In that event it is perfectly acceptable for you to make vows.

Ask: What might this text want us to understand about promises? What does it teach us?

*Potential answers:*

- *An important aspect of promise is the intention behind it.*
- *Making a promise requires self-reflection – Am I going to be able to keep this promise?*
- *There are situations where it’s not appropriate to make a promise.*

Create space for folks to share other thoughts and reactions.



Source 3: Commentary on Genesis 28:15 by Rabbanit Dr. Liz Shayne

And the promises that God makes, though they echo those made to Abraham, are carefully tailored to Jacob and his needs. “Behold,” says God, “I am with you and I will guard you everywhere you go and return you to this land, for I shall not leave you until I have done what I have said” (Genesis 28:15). God promises Jacob precisely what he lacks in this moment: a sense of security, a home, and a future. He provides Jacob with the stability needed to rebuild his identity by reminding him of his past, securing his future and protecting his present.

Ask: What might this text want us to understand about promises? What does it teach us – either explicitly or implicitly?

*Potential answers:*

- *Promises inherently reflect needs*
- *Making a promise requires that we be attentive to the other person*
- *There are elements of God’s promise that feel abstract and elements that feel more concrete (e.g., it’s clear what needs to happen for that promise to be ‘fulfilled’)*

Create space for folks to share other thoughts and reactions.

Source 4: I Kings 8:23-25

And [Solomon] said, “Oh Eternal God of Israel, in the heavens above and on the earth below there is no god like You, who keeps Your gracious covenant with Your servants when they walk before You in wholehearted devotion; You who have kept the promises You made to Your servant, my father David, fulfilling with deeds the promise You made—as is now the case. And now, Oh Eternal God of Israel, keep the further promise that You made to Your servant, my father David: ‘Your line on the throne of Israel shall never end, if only your descendants will look to their way and walk before Me as you have walked before Me.’”

Highlight the Hebrew in verse 25 (but that is used throughout these verses)

– אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ [...] שָׁמַר – share its literal translation (“guard that which you said”) and the colloquial translation (“keep the promise”).

Ask: What might this text want us to understand about promises? What does it teach us?

*Potential answers:*

- *Promises are a function of ongoing relationship*
- *Covenant = promise*
- *“Who keeps Your gracious covenant with Your servants when they walk before You in wholehearted devotion” – perhaps this can be interpreted to reflect a certain reciprocity; maybe also can be interpreted to reflect the idea that promises can be conditional*

Create space for folks to share other thoughts and reactions.

Source 5: 2011 Study in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology by Johanna Peetz and Lara Kammrath<sup>1</sup>

“People make and break promises frequently in interpersonal relationships. In this article, we investigate the processes leading up to making promises and the processes involved in keeping them. Across 4 studies, we demonstrate that people who had the most positive relationship feelings and who were most motivated to be responsive to the partner's needs made bigger promises than did other people but were not any better at keeping them. Instead, promisers' self-regulation skills, such as trait conscientiousness, predicted the extent to which promises were kept or broken. In a causal test of our hypotheses, participants who were focused on their feelings for their partner promised more, whereas participants who generated a plan of self-regulation followed through more on their promises. Thus, people were making promises for very different reasons (positive relationship feelings, responsiveness motivation) than what made them keep these promises (self-regulation skills). Ironically, then, those who are most motivated to be responsive may be most likely to break their romantic promises, as they are making ambitious commitments they will later be unable to keep.”

Ask: What might this text want us to understand about promises? What does it teach us – either explicitly or implicitly?

*Potential answers:*

- *Making a promise requires both knowing yourself and deep care for your partner*
- *Important to acknowledge that promises are not always kept*
- *Promises can be motivated by different reasons*

Create space for folks to share other thoughts and reactions.

### **00:40-00:45 Bridging from Promises to Trust**

Share aloud: *One idea we might learn from these texts is the idea that a promise can be made through words and through actions. In the context of marriage, this reminds me of the way a couple's commitment and promises are made in a Jewish wedding ceremony. I find it powerful that in a Jewish wedding ceremony, there's a combination of both the written promise (a ketubah, which requires the action of signing a document) and the verbal promise (vows said to one another). We might understand this as a symbolic testament to the strength of the promise of life partnership. Promises both big and small, have an inextricable relationship with the idea of trust – making and keeping promises helps to build trust, but perhaps a certain level of trust needs to exist in order to make a promise in the first place. Researcher, social worker, and storyteller Brene Brown teaches the idea that “trust is built in small moments.” As we think about our core question – what is a promise and what does it mean to make one? – we'll watch an excerpt of a talk she gave at UCLA in 2015 titled “The Anatomy of Trust.”*

<sup>1</sup> Peetz, J., & Kammrath, L. (2011). Only because I love you: Why people make and why they break promises in romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(5), 887–904. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021857>

### 00:45-01:00 Brene Brown's "The Anatomy of Trust" and Brief Reflection

Watch an excerpt of Brene Brown's 2015 talk at UCLA . Start the video at time mark 1:20, and play until time mark 11:20. If running behind schedule, it also works to stop the video at time mark 7:55. If needed, a decent transcript of Brown's talk can be found here. After watching the video as a group, prompt the group to share reactions, reflections, resistance, and resonance.

Video link: <https://brenebrown.com/videos/anatomy-trust-video/>

Transcript: <https://tinyurl.com/brenetranscript>.

### 01:00-01:25 Marble Jar Activity and Discussion

Distribute the small glass mason jars and the appropriate number of marbles to each couple. Also pass out printed copies of a few egalitarian ketubah texts, as needed for couples who did not bring a photo of their ketubah. Invite couples to pull up the photo/text of their ketubah.

Share aloud: *The activity we'll have the opportunity to dive into today is inspired by Brene Brown's story about the marble jar and the idea that trust and connection are often built in small moments. Your ketubah texts each contain many promises – promises that we might say are big picture or lofty commitments. This idea of the marble jar invites us to consider the little moments that have made up those big promises, because you each are doing the work every day of connecting with your partner and building a life together. Our time for the next 20 minutes will give you and your partner space to "translate" the promises of your ketubah into the memories and everyday moments that comprise your partnership.*

Explain the following instructions, but also display them on the screen or make printed copies so that couples can refer back to them.

1. As a couple, read through your ketubah text once.
2. Pick out a phrase or sentence that represents one of the promises embedded in your ketubah text.
3. Together, think through a memory, action, or circumstance that demonstrates a way you have upheld that promise. For each memory/action/circumstance you share with one another, place a marble in your jar.
  - An example of how this might sound –
    - Our ketubah says, "Each day we will strive to deepen our relationship."
    - Partner A - I really appreciate how every night while eating dinner we share about our days and check-in. It makes me feel like you're invested in the many aspects of my life and you care about what I'm experiencing when we're apart.
    - Partner B - I was feeling really stressed the other day and when I shared that with you, you gave me space to vent and then calmed me down. Feeling your support meant a lot to me.

4. Pick another phrase or sentence in your ketubah and repeat the process.
5. When you've filled your jar, run out of marbles, or feel ready to move onto the next phase, have a conversation as a pair guided by the questions below.
  - What was it like for you to do this marble jar activity?
  - What do you see as the relationship between the promises in your ketubah and the everyday moments in your marriage?
  - How do you hold yourselves accountable to these promises?
  - A central aspect of the Jewish wedding is the role of the witness in signing the ketubah and hearing a couple make their vows. Reflecting on this idea – Who in your life, outside of your partnership, supports you and holds you accountable to these promises? How might you facilitate that process of accountability?

### **01:25-01:30 Educator Takeaways and Wrap Up**

Bring the group back together for the final minutes of the session. Share your own thoughts and reflections on the conversations the group had as a whole and what you might have witnessed from couples' conversations during the marble activity. Here are a few ideas you might want to include in your closing comments:

- Take the marble jar home and place it somewhere, allowing it to be a reminder of the way everyday, small moments are a part of the bigger promises.
- Your ketubah can be an ongoing part of your reflection/relationship check-ins and celebration of who you are as a couple.
- Extending the metaphor of the marbles, it's important to call attention to the fact that there's space or wiggle room between the marbles. This space allows room for the marbles to shift within the jar and change. Perhaps they change color or reflect light differently as time continues on – just like it's okay for the ways you and your partner uphold these promises to change and shift over time.
- Trust is not all or nothing – trust and connection are constantly being built in small moments.

To close, invite each person to share: What's one idea or moment from our session that shifted your thinking or sparked something new for you?

# Diving into Promises

## Source 1

### Deuteronomy 23:24

You must fulfill what has crossed your lips and perform what you have voluntarily vowed to your God ", having made the promise with your own mouth.

### דברים כ"ג:כ"ד

(כד) מוצא שפתיך תשמר ועשית כאשר נדרת ליי אלקיך נדבה אשר דברת בפיו: {ס}

## Source 2

### Or HaChaim on Deuteronomy 23:24:1

#### "You must fulfill what has crossed your lips..."

The Torah suggests that you should wait before making a vow, a promise, until you are in a position to honor it without delay. In that event it is perfectly acceptable for you to make vows.

### אור החיים על דברים כ"ג:כ"ד:א' (א)

ואומרו מוצא שפתיך תשמור וגו', פירוש תמתין מלהוציא הנדר מפיו עד שתוכל לעשות פירוש לקיים הנדר אז תדור ותקיים הנדר.

## Source 3

### Commentary on Genesis 28:15 by Rabbanit Dr. Liz Shayne

And the promises that God makes, though they echo those made to Abraham, are carefully tailored to Jacob and his needs. "Behold," says God, "I am with you and I will guard you everywhere you go and return you to this land, for I shall not leave you until I have done what I have said" (Genesis 28:15). God promises Jacob precisely what he lacks in this moment: a sense of security, a home, and a future. He provides Jacob with the stability needed to rebuild his identity by reminding him of his past, securing his future and protecting his present.

**I Kings 8:23-25**

[23] And [Solomon] said, “Oh Eternal God of Israel, in the heavens above and on the earth below there is no god like You, who keeps Your gracious covenant with Your servants when they walk before You in wholehearted devotion; [24] You who have kept the promises You made to Your servant, my father David, fulfilling with deeds the promise You made—as is now the case. [25] And now, Oh Eternal God of Israel, keep the further promise that You made to Your servant, my father David: ‘Your line on the throne of Israel shall never end, if only your descendants will look to their way and walk before Me as you have walked before Me.’”

**מלכים א ח:כ"ג-כ"ה**

(כג) ויאמר יי אלקי ישראל אין כמוך אלקים בשמים ומעל ועל הארץ מתחת שמר הברית והחסד לעבדיך ההלכים לפניך בכל לבם: (כד) אשר שמרת לעבדיך דוד אבי את אשר דברת לו ותדבר בפיו וביןך מלאת כיום הזה: (כה) ועתה יי אלקי ישראל שמר לעבדיך דוד אבי את אשר דברת לו לאמר לא יכרת לך איש מלפני ישב על כסא ישראל רק אם ישמרו בניך את דרכם ללכת לפני כאשר הלכת לפני:

**2011 Study in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology by Johanna Peetz and Lara Kammrath**

“People make and break promises frequently in interpersonal relationships. In this article, we investigate the processes leading up to making promises and the processes involved in keeping them. Across 4 studies, we demonstrate that people who had the most positive relationship feelings and who were most motivated to be responsive to the partner's needs made bigger promises than did other people but were not any better at keeping them. Instead, promisers' self-regulation skills, such as trait conscientiousness, predicted the extent to which promises were kept or broken. In a causal test of our hypotheses, participants who were focused on their feelings for their partner promised more, whereas participants who generated a plan of self-regulation followed through more on their promises. Thus, people were making promises for very different reasons (positive relationship feelings, responsiveness motivation) than what made them keep these promises (self-regulation skills). Ironically, then, those who are most motivated to be responsive may be most likely to break their romantic promises, as they are making ambitious commitments they will later be unable to keep.”





*“I didn’t feel like I was signing a contract when I was signing our ketubah. I felt more like I was putting my signature as the finishing touch on this symbol of us being a Jewish couple.”*  
-Shira (Philadelphia, PA)

# Additional Resources

Resource	Purpose
Help writing your name in Hebrew letters <a href="https://tinyurl.com/translatenames">https://tinyurl.com/translatenames</a>	Make sure that the translator is set to “English to Hebrew.” This site can help when filling out your ketubah with Hebrew names. While this site is helpful, it’s recommended to still ask your officiant to proofread your text!
Hebrew date converter <a href="https://www.hebcal.com/converter">https://www.hebcal.com/converter</a>	This website may be helpful for converting your Gregorian wedding date into the Hebrew date for your ketubah text.
Ritualwell <a href="https://ritualwell.org/">https://ritualwell.org/</a>	Ritualwell is an extensive online resource that curates original Jewish rituals, ceremonies, prayers and poems to mark sacred moments in Jewish life. It can be extremely helpful if you’re looking for ceremony readings, creative translations of the Sheva Brachot (Seven Blessings), or unique rituals leading up to your wedding.
<i>The Jewish Wedding Now</i> by Anita Diamant	This book is a great resource for all couples to learn about the many possibilities for a Jewish wedding. In an interview with 18Doors, Diamant shares: “The book is intended to help people of any background decide which, if any, Jewish rituals, can help them create the wedding they want. I hope the tone and language of the book is clear, jargon-free and inclusive, so that the Jewish rituals described are doorways, never barriers.” Check out the full interview: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/18doorsdiamant">https://tinyurl.com/18doorsdiamant</a> .

# Additional Resources

Resource	Purpose
<p>Keshet Resources</p> <p><a href="https://www.keshetonline.org/resources/topic/weddings-marriage/">https://www.keshetonline.org/resources/topic/weddings-marriage/</a></p>	<p>Keshet is an organization dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ Jews and equipping Jewish organizations with the knowledge they need to be truly inclusive spaces. Their website includes a collection of LGBTQ-affirming resources for Jewish weddings.</p>
<p>Modern Jewish Couples</p> <p><a href="https://www.modernjewishcouples.com/">https://www.modernjewishcouples.com/</a></p>	<p>This organization aims to support couples in the transition to married life through workshops and online events. These resources may be especially helpful for couples who have chosen an officiant that isn't a clergy person!</p>
<p>18Doors</p> <p><a href="https://18doors.org/wedding/">https://18doors.org/wedding/</a></p>	<p>18Doors is an organization dedicated to empowering interfaith couples and families. They have wonderful wedding resources, including a blog, their clergy finder to connect with interfaith-friendly Jewish clergy locally, and a wedding ceremony script builder. Even if you're working with an officiant that writes their own script, the script builder can be helpful for exploring the pieces of a Jewish wedding. Use the script builder to learn the "why" behind each Jewish wedding tradition and begin to picture your ceremony.</p>

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