

LGBTQ+ WEDDINGS



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The authorship of some photos has either not been found, or can not be attributed



CONGRATULATIONS

You and your partner have decided to get married. This booklet is designed to give you some advice and explanation as to what is possible, and what you should be thinking about while planning your religious ceremony. Although it can not cover every eventuality, it is intended to point out some of the things you that will need to consider.

In the United Kingdom, only two Jews can be legally married in a synagogue. If a couple wish to be married in another location, or if only one of them is Jewish, then they must be married first by the civil authorities. Only Liberal and Reform synagogues will marry LGBTQ+ couples. For Jewish couples do not wish to be married in a synagogue, or under the auspices of a particular religious denomination, a civil ceremony will be required before a religious ceremony can take place. It is also possible to be civilly married at a venue that has been granted a license for this purpose, such as some hotels, country houses, galleries, castles, museums, and zoos. A religious ceremony can follow the civil one. Not all possible venues are licensed in this way. In which case, it is possible to be married in a registry office, prior to having a religious ceremony at another venue. In either case, you will both need to show proof to the civil authorities regarding your identity and that you are free to marry. You may also have to satisfy the religious authorities regarding your religious status.

Couples getting married in mainland Europe, will most likely need to have a civil and legally binding ceremony first at the Town Hall, before a religious ceremony can take place. In some countries it is possible for a marriage registrar to come to the religious venue and conduct a civil ceremony, before the religious ceremony. In some Scandinavian countries this can also happen during the religious ceremony. In some countries such as in Israel, only state approved religious officiants can legally marry couples, but this doesn't include LGBTQ+ couples. They will need to have a legal marriage elsewhere and then a private religious ceremony in Israel.



THE CEREMONY

LGBTQ+ weddings can be almost identical to religious ceremonies for non-LGBTQ+ couples. The main difference will be changes to pronouns in the ritual and documentation to take into account the gender of those getting married. Some couples wish to have a ceremony that reflects more clearly their sexual orientation. This can be done by adding a choice of personal readings, or including re-interpretations of liturgy.

For such an important document, the *ketubah*, or marriage document has surprising few regulations about how it should be written. It can be done by hand, photo-copied, or printed. There are many different texts that reflect on the diversity of the Jewish community and the understanding that each couple share about the importance of their union. If it is not your synagogue rabbi who is officiating, it is worth seeking your rabbi's advice about which text you can use. Traditionally, the *ketubah* is signed by two Jewish witnesses who are unrelated to either the couple, or to each other.

This helps guarantee their independence as official witnesses. The couple and rabbi may also sign the document, but they do not do so as witnesses.

Rings that traditionally a couple give to each other, should be worth more than the smallest coin of the country in which the wedding takes place. This is to encourage even the poorest to get married. Traditionally, the ring should be a plain metal band, without jewels, or holes in it.

A wedding canopy called a *Chuppah* is usually required for a Jewish wedding. There are no specific dimensions, although as a minimum it should cover the bride and groom. Nowadays they also cover the parents of the bride and groom and the rabbi. Details about the different styles of *Chuppah* can be found on the website. At least one table will be required placed at the back of the *Chuppah* for the wine, *kiddush* cup and glass.

A second table may be needed if a *ketubah* is to be signed during the course of the ceremony. If the ceremony has more than 80-100 guests, then a microphone will be required and loudspeakers to ensure that all the guests can hear the ceremony. Ideally the microphone for the rabbi should be a radio microphone that can be attached

to the rabbi's gown. An additional microphone on a stand may also be required if there are readers, or other participants in the ceremony.



INCLUSIVENESS



If you have non-Jewish guests attending your wedding, it is important to make sure that they feel included and are not just passive on-lookers. This can be done, by reminding men that they should have their heads covered during the ceremony, either by asking them to bring a hat, or by providing *kippot*. It is also a help to make clear whether there will be mixed seating, or not. Some people provide a printed, *Order of Service* giving the major stages of the ceremony and a short explanation to the different elements. The rabbi may also do this during the course of the ceremony. This is especially helpful if most of the ceremony is in Hebrew. Most rabbis will provide a translation, or explanation of anything said in Hebrew, or Aramaic.



Guidance should also be given as to whether photos and videos can be taken during the ceremony and what will happen after the ceremony. The aim should be to make all your guests comfortable and that they should enjoy the experience of being there. Particular attention should be given to guests who are elderly, infirm, pregnant, or with young children and those with physical, or mental handicaps. Make sure that guests are able to easily get to the venue and return to their hotels, or homes, particularly if they do not speak English, or have had a long journey to be with you.



As well as the Rabbi, some couples wish to have musicians, or a cantor, or choir. Other couples elect to have music of their own choice, played by musicians, or from a tape, or CD. through a suitable PA. system. it is important to ensure that any musicians, singers, or readers, don't mind by being recorded. Musicians will probably need a room where they can change and leave some of their bags. They may also need accomodation and refreshments if they are playing all night.

There is usually no problem with having your ceremony recorded on video and to have a photographer present. However, some rabbis may object and a certain amount of discretion is called for, to ensure that it is not intrusive during the ritual. It may be wise, prior to the ceremony, to outline the course of events to any professionals, so that they can find a good vantage point and know what to expect, particularly if they have not been to a jewish wedding before.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A couple should arrange to meet with the rabbi, either in person, or on-line, as soon as possible to discuss the options. If this is not possible because of time, or distance then other arrangements must be made. However, it is of considerable help for all concerned to meet a few times prior to the ceremony taking place. When you know the date, time and location for the religious ceremony, it would be wise to also ensure that the rabbi is available before you confirm the reservation with the venue, or anyone else. A rabbi “hold” a date for a week to allow for the written confirmation to arrive. Reservations are accepted by the rabbi in the order in which they are received. A deposit is payable, which is non-refundable. The last meeteting between the rabbi and couple will take place 6-8 weeks before the ceremony. You must be married in a legal ceremony, before the Jewish religious ceremony takes place, or in a ceremony which allows both to take place.



Although most Jewish men will remember to take a head covering known as a *kippah*, or *yamulka* to a wedding, it is increasingly usual to have a basket on a table, with some *kippot* (plural) in them, near the seating for the ceremony. This enables any non-Jews who are not aware of this tradition, or Jews who may have forgotten to bring one with them, not to be put in an awkward, or embarrassing situation. A cloth *kippah* is better than a paper one, which can easily fall off. If the ceremony is being held outside, it is worth providing a hair-grip, or a clip to attach the *kippah* to the top of the head.

Wine in a *kiddush* cup is used as part of the wedding ritual and this is usually provided by the rabbi. Some families have a treasured heirloom which they wish to use, or one of the wedding gifts to the couple can be a *kiddush* cup that is used for the first time at the wedding. The glass that is smashed by the groom at the end of the ceremony is usually also provided by the rabbi. It may be in the form of a tumbler, beaker, or brandy glass, rather than a wine glass. It is customary to throw away the broken pieces after the ceremony, although some couples from the USA may choose to keep them.



CHILDREN

You may be asked to give some undertaking as to which religion you will bring up any children. However, not all rabbis require this. According to Jewish law, the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. In the UK, liberal rabbis (broadly equivalent in the USA, to Reform rabbis,) will recognise as Jewish, any child with at least one Jewish parent. Such a child must also be brought up in a Jewish home and receive a Jewish education. Israel's, *Law of Return*, recognises that all Jews have an automatic right to citizenship and to live in Israel. The Israeli civil authorities accept LGBTQ+ couples who wish to do so, even if this includes a non-Jewish partner providing they have been legally married.



However, the religious authorities are more rigorous in their application and understanding of Jewish law and they do not accept LGBTQ+ couples can marry. However, some do accept that such a couple can have a family. Sometimes parents have found it difficult to accept the choices made by a son, or daughter, or feel unsure about the rabbi who is going to officiate at their ceremony. In such cases, a rabbi will be open to meeting the parents of the couple to discuss any concerns, or difficulties. In a couple, the one for whom religion is more important, is also the one most likely to take on the responsibility for the religious education of any children. If in a mixed faith couple, both parents believe that their religion is equally important, then both religions can be practised in an equal and positive manner.

Israeli Military Grants Equal Rights for Same-Sex Couples (June 2015)
<https://tcjewfolk.com/gays-israel-freedoms/>



INTERFAITH

For some couples, a ritual is required which recognises that both have strong beliefs in different traditions. These needs may be met by one of three ways. It is possible to have a Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or other religious ceremony first, followed by a Jewish ceremony, or vice-versa. Alternatively, it is possible to have one ceremony in which there are two officiants, thus reflecting both religious traditions. A final option is to have a ritual at which a Rabbi officiates, but which incorporates readings, or music from both traditions.

There is no difficulty in devising a ceremony in which members of the family and friends can also take an active part if they wish to do so. There have been ceremonies at which mothers have played musical instruments and brothers have danced, fathers have read poetry and sisters have sung. There have also been celebrations at which family and friends have done their party pieces and provided entertainment rather than just relying on speeches, after the ceremony.





HONORARIUMS

Fees for ceremonies within the UK.

Within the M25 ring: £850.

Outside the M25 £1000, plus travelling expenses.

Fee for ceremonies within the EU 1800 euros, plus travelling expenses.

Fees for ceremonies in Switzerland.
2200 CHF. plus travelling expenses.

IMPORTANT NOTE

No couple should be deprived of the services of a rabbi due to their financial situation. If there are good reasons, fees can be adjusted to suit all circumstances.







**Payments in Sterling
for all ceremonies held in the UK**

Bank:	Nationwide
Address:	798 High Street, Finchley, London, N12 9QX, United Kingdom.
Account Name:	Mr G D Hall
Account No:	29421300
Sort Code:	07-01-16
IBAN:	GB11 NAIA 070116294213 00
SWIFT - BIC:	NAIAGB21



**Payments in Euros
for all ceremonies held in the EU**

Bank:	KBC Bank, Ireland plc.
Address:	Sandwith Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.
Account Name:	Mr Guy Hall
Account No:	11547729
Sort Code:	990270
IBAN:	IE68ICON99027011547729
SWIFT - BIC:	ICONNIE2D



**Payments in Swiss Francs
for all ceremonies held in Switzerland**

Bank:	Raiffeissen Genossenschaft
Address:	Raiffeisenplatz, CH-9001 St. Gallen, Switzerland.
Account Name:	Guy David Hall
Account No:	26274478
Sort Code:	80808
IBAN:	CH3780808007726274478
SWIFT - BIC:	RAIFCH22XXX

One of the problems that all religions face nowadays is how to reconcile inherited tradition with the demands of their communities. Most faiths begin with a presumption that they must guard the knowledge of what has been received through divine revelation and historical experience. People are expected to conform, or change their behaviour to fit in with what is usually labelled Tradition. This is often accepted as being beyond question. Yet as *Fiddler on the Roof* showed, even in the shtetl, tradition was of limited value when it came to facing new challenges. The opposite is of greater help. Religious leaders could start off with being honest about the realities of people's lives. While, religion could adjust to these fresh situations. The rabbinic authorities of the past are not a helpful guide to finding solutions to problems in the present. Partly this is because, not all knowledge is within Judaism. Increasingly it is necessary to learn from outside and to take into account the insights of other disciplines. Working single parents, multiple step-parents, and gay parents are beyond the remit envisaged in rabbinic codes. Not everything inherited from the past is of value today. However, providing there are good reasons for doing so, some of it can be discarded. It is permissible to use our intelligence and conscience to pick and choose. The observance of ritual and customs only has value if it enhances the religious life of those involved. The idea that Judaism is something fixed and unchangeable is an illusion. If unacknowledged it can lead to the conclusion that we are wiser, more understanding than the God we worship. Religions no longer have control over what adherents think, or the way they behave. Statements may be put out by religious authorities which however worthy, or supported by religious law have little impact. This effects, amongst others, Christianity and Islam, as much as it effects Judaism. The result of entrenched religious views not being matched by the actuality of people's daily existence, leads both sides to react with disaffection, hypocrisy or, hysteria. Rabbis can not on the one hand complain about people leaving their communities, while on the other hand they are either unable, or unwilling to meet their religious needs. It is hardly surprising if people abandon a community, when they are left feeling rejected, or treated insensitively over their choice of long-term partner. Rabbinical interpretation of Jewish law is not the criteria by which a significant part of the community expresses their religious identity. Instead they rely on a combination of memory, symbolism and solidarity. Like many other times in history, new forms of religious expression have to be developed to sanctify special times that reflect upon our experiences. While they may be based on ancient customs they may also include other contemporary secular values, such as pluralism, anti-discriminatory attitudes, sexual equality, tolerance and democracy. Most religious authorities recognise that the number of Jews with non-Jewish partners are increasing, but the majority are unwilling to adapt. One might wonder how many mixed faith couples do there need to be, before such attitudes change? Many couples want a religious ceremony, at which at least a rabbi, (but sometimes also a priest, or pastor,) officiates and which contains elements that both faiths recognise as part of a wedding ceremony. If interfaith dialogue is to be taken seriously, then the consequences must be greater than occasional encounters, educational courses and academic papers. It must effect and change theology, the prayer book. and our lives.

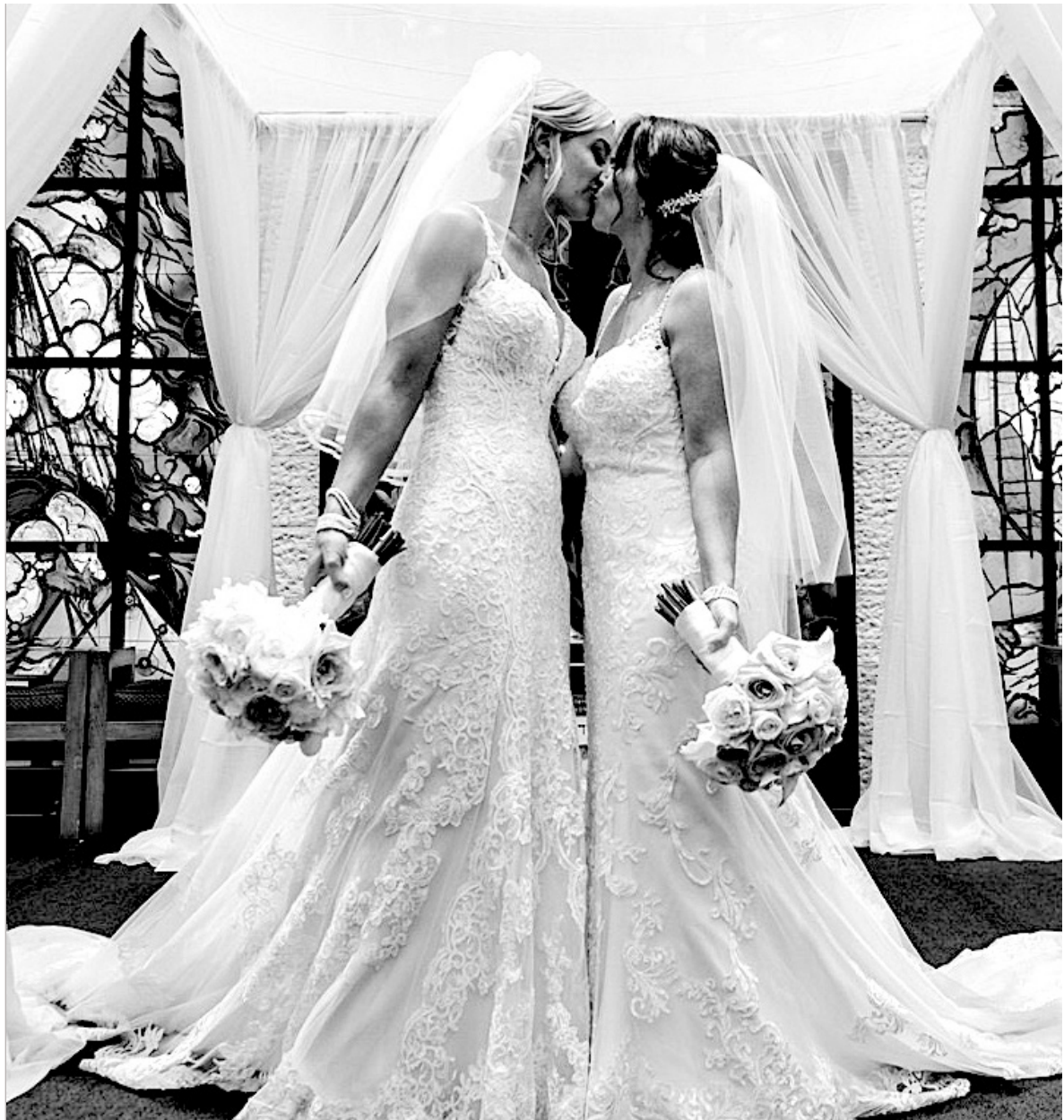
The Torah (Deuteronomy 7:1-5) only bans unions with seven defeated pagan tribes, who can no longer be identified. The rest of the Bible is more ambivalent. Ezra and Nehemiah speak out strongly against it. Ruth, long considered the originator of Davidic line, (including the Messiah) is not Jewish. Yet, she marries two Jewish men without converting to Judaism. The implication given, is that the Messiah may not be Jewish. Ester is able to save her community, because she has intermarried with King Ahasuerus. Each year at Purim we happily celebrate this story. More significantly, Moses the greatest prophet of Judaism, marries out not once, but twice. Jewish commentators have offered unconvincing apologetic explanations, mainly in the midrashim, for such behaviour. Rabbinic tradition has, by and large been against mixed faith marriages on the grounds that it may lead to idolatry. Moreover, the expression of some values within it can be extremely problematic.



Over the last 30 years, experience has been gained, working with mixed faith couples, which has included offering religious services to families from the UK, Western Europe, USA, Israel, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Pakistan, India, Japan, Thailand, Zambia and some Islamic countries. There is a need for at least one rabbi who is prepared to celebrate mixed faith unions, civil partnerships, commitment ceremonies, as well as baby-naming, coming of age, burial, or cremation ceremonies.



The benefit of such rituals can be judged by whether those involved find them to have been of religious significance. Such work has included co-officiating with Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Agnostics and Atheists. It has also been suggested that education will be the answer to weddings for mixed faith couples, but as Fiddler on the Roof also showed, there is little evidence that education can resist the power of hormones, genes, opportunity, or demography. Today, such fears are misplaced, since the major world religions are monotheistic in nature.



Survival of the Jewish people is a particularly important concern for a post Holocaust generation.. Fortunately, the State of Israel is now in a very strong and secure position. Anxiety about whether parents will have Jewish grandchildren is an unhelpful question. It implies that having children is the definition of a successful marriage, which is rarely the case. be healthy, happy and can grow up in a safe environment. Judaism can certainly contribute to this, but it is does not have a monopoly. Grandparents are often more concerned that any grandchildren should be healthy, happy and can grow up in a safe environment. Judaism can certainly contribute to this, but it is does not have a monopoly. Moreover, the expression of some values, such as within it such as agunot and mamzerim can be extremely problematic.



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Rabbi Guy Hall

FUNERALS

Not all Jews are members of synagogues, but when there is a death, a rabbi may need to be found quickly to officiate at a funeral, or cremation. Most, although not all, Liberal and Reform rabbis will conduct cremations. From a traditional point of view, cremations are not accepted. If you are Jewish, then there should be no problem in being buried in a Jewish cemetery. If you wish to be buried next to your spouse, you may need to reserve the adjoining plot. Your local community, or funeral director will be able to advise you.



Many Holocaust survivors opt to be cremated, perhaps keenly identifying with so many who died in the camps. However, this may be hard on children and a surviving spouse. There is always the option for interfaith couples to be buried in a civil, or non-denominational cemetery, if they can't find a Jewish cemetery. However, not all rabbis are prepared to officiate in such grounds. If you have not already done so, it is advisable to draw up a will, with the aid of your legal advisor and to leave clear instructions about end of life care, organ donation, etc. In the UK this can be done through the use of an *Enduring Power of Attorney*.

(<https://www.gov.uk/enduring-power-attorney-duties>)



INTERNET LINKS

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/creating-new-lifecycle-rituals>

<http://www.jglg.org.uk>

<https://www.keshetuk.org>

<https://gltjews.org>

<https://awiderbridge.org>

<https://embassies.gov.il/la/AboutIsrael/IsraelExperience/Pages/Gay-Israel.aspx>

<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4557943,00.html>







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