

God creates new worlds constantly.
In what way?
By causing marriages to take place.

-Zohar

Noemi & Barry

July 1st, 2001
American Park in the Battery
Manhattan, New York City

Wedding Program

The Sheva Brachot, the seven marriage blessings, place a particular bride and groom within the context of Jewish time. The first one is the kiddush, the blessing over the wine to begin the ritual. The next three blessings celebrate the theme of creation in a sequence that builds to the blessing of marriage. The fifth blessing looks forward to the eventual redemption of the Jewish people. The last two blessings specifically relate the act of marriage to the preceding themes of creation and liberation. They celebrate the joy of love and the significance of marriage to the Jewish community.

Today we will be adding an eighth blessing, to remind us that as partners in creation we must strive towards a world in which there is a place for all committed, loving relationships, regardless of gender.

The Sheva Brachot will be chanted in Hebrew by Jack Gruenberg, followed by the English and commentary, which will be read by some of our family and friends.

The Talmudic rabbis framed a wedding as a glimpse into Olam Ha-Ba, the world to come. We see a little bit of redemption as we look into each other's faces today, as we bask in the warmth of our community. We encourage you to notice that in us and in each other throughout the day.

Our promise to you, on this day of promises, is to try to maintain that glimpse through our marriage, and to strive for it to become the everyday condition of all of our lives.

To grow into the kind of people we want to be, we have tried to let each other into our lives as deeply as we can, to build a strong relationship that would give us each the freedom to strive for our dreams and the safety to discover who we really are. And getting married, we felt, would push us to address all sorts of issues that were all too often easier to avoid. We got even more than we expected – we are closer now than at the beginning of the wedding planning process, with more trust, a better sense of who we each are, and how much we can back each other and accomplish together.

We bucked tradition and shared between us the work of planning this day, the symbol of our growing closer together. But we found that we each need more than one person for support, not just for the wedding but in our lives – it does truly take a village. So we decided to deepen our relationships with our immediate family and friends. Planning the wedding became not only an opportunity for us to challenge where we had settled in our relationship with each other, but with the people around us as well. Getting married has become a great reminder to ignore nagging insecurities and take ourselves more seriously.

For example, Barry elicited a beautiful level of commitment from his groomsmen. He held out the expectation for them to grow closer and more involved with him and each other. They got together on a regular basis, coordinated and kvetched through email, and got a picture of what it means for a Jewish man, in an egalitarian relationship, to confront the expected invisibility of the groom in the wedding planning process.

THE WISHING WELL

In the rear of the patio area where the ceremony will be held you will find a beautiful water table, with water and roses swirling around. You are invited to visit the table before heading upstairs to the reception. Instead of throwing in coins, however, you will find slips of paper and little bottles. Please write a small wish for us on a slip of paper, cork it in a bottle, and toss it into the pool. Afterwards, the bottles will be collected into a basket and on the date of our first anniversary, we will open them up!

THE RITUALS

In researching everything that goes into a Jewish wedding, we have learned a great deal about Jewish traditions and customs, some of which have gained new meaning for us and which we have incorporated into this day. What follows is a description of some of what we learned.

KETUBAH

The Ketubah is the Jewish wedding contract, which traditionally outlines the obligations between husband and wife. We have written our own Ketubah, based on the traditional text, and incorporating our understanding of the commitments we are making to each other. It will be signed by two witnesses. The Ketubah has been calligraphed by two of Noemi's family friends, in the Hebrew by Jack Gruenberg and in the English by Ellen Hollander. After the wedding, Ellen will decorate the Ketubah and we will display it in our home.

CEREMONY

Barry and Noemi will be standing under a Chuppah. The Chuppah represents the marital home, but one which is open to the community. This Chuppah has been hand sewn by Noemi's mother, Gaby, incorporating Barry's tallit, created by his grandmother when he was still in his mother's womb, worn during his Bar Mitzvah, and used as the Chuppah during his father's wedding to his step-mother, Carol.

The Jewish wedding ceremony is composed of two distinct rituals. The first is called Kiddushin, or Betrothal. Kiddushin is a precise legal ritual that is centered around the ring ceremony. The two rituals will be separated by the reading of the ketubah. The second part is called Nissuin, or Nuptials. The nuptials are centered around the Sheva Brachot, the seven marriage blessings. Kiddushin designates the bride and groom for each other only, while Nissuin gives them to each other.

WELCOME!

Thank you for coming to share this important day in our lives. It is deeply significant to us that you, in particular, are here. This wedding is not just for the two of us, it is a community event. It brings our families and communities together, as well as connecting us with the past and with the larger Jewish community. According to Jewish law, one is obligated to rejoice before the bride and groom. Therefore, by dancing, participating in the festivities and enjoying yourselves at our wedding, you are fulfilling one of the simplest obligations of traditional Judaism.

WHY GET MARRIED?

There were many reasons we decided to get married. We made a conscious decision early on in our relationship to structure our lives to grow closer to one another. After living together for over two years, we felt we were ready to take the next step, albeit a pretty BIG step, in getting closer.

We wanted to approach marriage intentionally, not simply to do it because of social pressure or issues of convenience. We thought about what we would get out of marriage. Marriage is one of the few places in our culture where people's thoughtful relationships with each other are given the respect and primacy they deserve. Relationships between people, after all, are more important than money, more important than renown, more important, when you get right down to it, than anything else in life. It is no small thing to hold an event where the love and commitment between two people get to be celebrated. A wedding is a rare opportunity in our society to openly show caring, both for each other and for our community.

UNITED TO END RACISM

As is frequently done at many contemporary weddings, a donation has been made in lieu of party favors. We have made a donation to United to End Racism (UER), a non-governmental organization that will send an international team next month to the United Nation's World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa. WCAR is a major effort to bring together governmental and NGO representatives from around the world to address the social and personal manifestations of racism, in all of its forms, and come up with an action plan to which all countries can agree. UER is a project of Re-evaluation Counseling (RC), an international non-profit organization that trains people to exchange active listening as a tool for achieving personal and social change. WCAR is an opportunity for RC to take what they have learned in working to end racism and bring it to a large collection of groups and individuals who are all working to end racism. Noemi and Barry have been involved with the local RC communities for several years. Quite coincidentally, after our decision was made, we learned that Barry would be taking a number of urban youths to WCAR through his job. Due to our commitment to eliminate racism worldwide, our support of the efforts of the RC communities, and Barry's direct relationship to this event, we feel this donation is a perfect way to use this occasion when so much attention is focused on us, to redirect some of it out into the world, and to move beyond symbols of liberation to direct action.