Betrothal and Wedding Ceremonies within Christianity and Judaism

Teacher Information

For many people, marriage is the foundation of life together. When two people marry they promise to love and support each other through good and bad times. Many couples hope for children and plan to bring them up within their particular religious tradition. For followers of the world’s major religions believers often make their vows to each other in the eyes of their God. To mark the importance of the occasion friends and family gather from far and wide and bring gifts and good wishes to share at the wedding feast.

Christian Marriage

Marriage is a sacred rite of passage for Christians. When the bride & groom exchange vows, Christians believe that Jesus becomes present through these vows and that the man & woman are symbolically transformed into one flesh - they are transformed into loving one another totally in body, mind and spirit. Rings are blessed by the minister and given by man & woman to each other as a symbol of their unending union in love. The community itself witnesses this union and recognises that the couple are now one. Marriage creates a new family, a new home, where God’s love is made present through the love and faithfulness of husband and wife. It is into this loving family that children can be brought. The love and faithfulness of the couple are reminders to the community of God’s love for and faithfulness to us all.

Order of Events for Christian Marriage:

- **Preliminal**: Rite of Separation - engagement - couple are “separated” from general community and marked as candidates for marriage - ring, party etc.
- **Liminal**: The couple learn about each other & about the new state they are about to enter, they grow in understanding of the religious & social significance of what they are about to do. Attendance at a Marriage Preparation Course is encouraged. The Rite of Inclusion - the marriage ceremony or wedding - occurs, the main features being: bride “given away” by her father/family; readings from the Bible; homily; rite of marriage including the blessing of the rings; exchange of vows and rings; prayers said for the couple & sacred blessing of the marriage by the minister; signing of the register of marriages and marriage certificate; Wedding Reception (celebration)
- **Post Liminal**: The couple usually begin their married life with some private celebration time - the Honeymoon. The couple settle down to their new existence as husband & wife. They create a home together into which they can bring and raise children.

Jewish Marriage

In Judaism, marriage is a sacred and highly respected rite of passage. It is a covenant between two people that is reminiscent of the covenant between God and His people. Ideally, marriage is a person’s highest relationship, one in which both partners unite physically and spiritually to uphold and to strengthen the sacredness of life. A man is not considered complete until he has married and raised a family. Marriage allows the couple to share in God’s process of creation. Marriage establishes the basic Jewish religious unit - the family. Marriage allows children to be raised in the Jewish faith.

Order of Events for Jewish Marriage:

- **Preliminal**: Rite of Separation - the Betrothal - couple are “separated” from general community and marked as candidates for marriage - betrothal party etc.
- **Liminal**: The couple learn about each other & about the new state they are about to enter, they grow in understanding of the religious & social significance of what they are about to do. As the wedding day approaches gifts are exchanged between bride & groom (tokens of their future life together). The groom is called to the Synagogue on the Sabbath before the wedding to recite the blessings over the Torah. The bride immerses herself in the ritual bath
(mikvah) before the wedding. The Rite of Inclusion - the marriage ceremony or wedding - occurs, the main features being: signing of the Ketubah by the witnesses and its acceptance by the groom; use of the chuppah; escorting of the groom first & then the bride underneath the chuppah; the sharing of the first cup of wine and chanting of the betrothal blessings; giving of the ring by the groom to the bride and his vow of consecration; reading of the Ketubah and its presentation to the bride; the sharing of the second cup of wine and chanting of the seven b’rachot of marriage; the breaking of the glass & traditional shouting of "Mazel Tov"; the festive meal

- **Post Liminal**: The couple usually begin their married life with a week of celebration - the seudat mitzvah. The couple settle down to their new existence as husband & wife. They create a home together into which they can bring and raise children.