# Comparative Study of the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Wedding Ceremony

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Yamin Levy

I recently attended the wedding of a young (very young) couple. They were both raised in a strong Orthodox Sephardic community, yet religiously influenced by Chabad and Breslav. Their heroic attempt at creating a ceremony that was true to their Sephardic heritage and reflected the Ashkenazic / Chassidic traditions of their rabbis inspired the writing of this essay. What struck me as I watched the various parts of the wedding ceremony unfold was the contrasting ambiances, tones and qualities stirred by the conflicting cultural backgrounds that the diverse Minhagim exposed.

The research for this essay brought to light not only the substantive differences in the way Sephardic Jews and Ashkenaz Jews achieve community sanctioned matrimony but also uncovered the differences in Halakhic methodology and attitudes towards Minhag (which requires a more in-depth study). European legalist spoke with the same if not very similar authoritative voice when codifying Minhag as they did when codifying Halakhah while Sephardic authorities clearly distinguish between that which is Halakhic and essential to the ceremony and that which is Minhag and considered a dressing to the ritual. This of course makes for a much greater amount of material originating in Ashkenaz sources where codification, responsa and texts dedicated to Minhag rarely differentiate between the essential ritual (law, Halakha) and that which is tradition (Minhag).

**Two Examples**

Take for example the use of a gold ring band under the Chupah. The traditional wedding ceremony consists of two[1] parts: Erusin[2] (or Kiddushin) and Nesu'in[3]. Originally these two ceremonies were held as much as a year apart. Today both of these ceremonies take place under the Chupah[4].

Erusin is introduced with a blessing over wine and is completed after the groom places a ring that is at least worth a Peruta, a coin of minimum value[5], on the bride's finger. This is not an act of acquisition as much as it is an act of separation or exclusivity thus the term Kiddushin. Rachel Biale argues that the fact that Halakha rules the smallest coin ratifies the *kinyan* suggests: "the amount of money is immaterial because the acquisition is symbolic"[6].

Halakhically this can be accomplished by giving the bride anything of value and declaring that the exchange is for purposes of Erusin[7]. Ahkenaz Jewry streamlined this ceremony and only permit using a simple gold band for the Erusin[8] while Sephardic authorities point out that the use of a ring is a Minhag and a coin[9] or anything of value may also be used to complete the Erusin ceremony. The preferred choice for Sephardic Jews is either a ring, a coin or a piece of Jewelry.

What is most interesting is that European Jewry's Halakhic authority's view the use of a ring not only as a quasi-legal stricture and is codified as such but much ink is invested in the details of how the transfer of the ring takes place, why it's done this way and why a ring is chosen as opposed to any other object of value. In other words because this simple act of transfer is infused with legal, religious and theological meaning the detail becomes significant. The groom must take the ring in his right hand [10] and place it on the bride's right forefinger[11]. If the groom is left-handed he must take the ring in his left hand[12].

The Zohar is invoked as stating that the right hand represents love while the left hand represents strength[13]. The ring is placed on the bride's forefinger because it is the seventh finger if you count the five fingers of the left hand and seven is a meaningful number in the wedding ceremony[14]. These are but a sampling of the many permutations the symbolism and meaning of the gold ring band produced in Ashkenaz Halakhic sources.

Another legal matter that finds expression in Ashkenaz Halakhic sources which leads to unique Minhagim which do not exist in Sephardic Halakhic sources is *Ma'aseh Goyim*, not mimicking the Christian church wedding practices. For example there is a school of Halakhic authorities in Ashkenaz that forbid making a Chupah in a Synagogue Sanctuary because it is reminiscent of a church wedding [15]. This led to a substantive amount of literature on the symbolism and meaning of the Chupah and its association with, the giving of the Torah, the Mishkan, and Bet HaMikdash, creation, and the Garden of Eden as proof texts or proof ideas to support the tradition that a Chupah is best performed outdoors[16] or in a non-sanctuary hall. None of this exists in Sephardic sources[17].

It is difficult to distinguish when *Ma'aseh Goyim* is invoked to prohibit the mimicking of Church practices and when it actually influences Jewish law. Grossman argues that Ashkenaz attitudes towards age[18] appropriateness for Marriage, and polygamy[19] are two of numerous examples where the Christian cultural background influenced Jewish attitudes in Ashkenaz.

This leads me to make humble disclaimer before I proceed. The goal of this essay is simply to bring to light the varying Minhagim of the wedding ceremony as it is observed today. In addition I will suggest that the tapestry of Minhagim reflect a community's attitudes towards, marriage, sexuality, and public celebration while setting the mood and atmosphere of the ceremony.

For a comprehensive study of issues relating to marriage, divorce and a range of other topics relating to women's issues in Europe (and in Moslem lands) during the middle ages and by extensions their influence in contemporary ritual I recommend the most recent contribution to the subject written by Avraham Grossman Pious and Rebellious Jewish Women in Medieval Europe[20]. Another less contemporary but comprehensive work on the subject is Ze'ev W. Falk's, Jewish Matrimonial Law in the Middle Ages.

The amount of material available is daunting and the way it is used and manipulated can be endless. As my footnotes indicate I use a limited number of sources that I believe reflect the roots of the unadulterated contemporary wedding ceremony in Ashkenaz and in Sephardic communities today.

**NiSu'in**

The second part of the wedding ceremony involves the recitation of seven blessings in the presence of a Minyan[21]. The seven blessings or the Sheva Berakhot are recited over a cup of wine. Ashkenazim use a second cup of wine while Sepharadim refill the first. The European tradition has nothing to do with the Halakhic stricture of yayin pagum[22] which is easily rectified by adding "non-pagum wine into the cup"[23]. Rather it may have to do with preserving an element of the original custom of Erusin and NeSu'in being two distinct rituals performed months apart[24]. By using a second cup of wine the officiating rabbi distinguishes one ceremony from the other.

The more interesting reason given is found in a classic work on marriage originating in Ashkenaz called Shulchan HaEzer[25]. There the author Rabbi Yizchak Tzi Leibowitz (Central Europe pre-ww1) argues that the reason two cups are necessary has to do with the possibility that the bride or groom are Shabbath desecrators and once they drink from the glass of wine the wine is disqualified and cannot be blessed again.

Each of the explanations for two cups of wine under the Chupah are independently fascinating. The first suggests a lingering commitment to the way ceremonies were observed in the past and doing whatever possible to preserve even commemorations of the past behaviors. Rabbinic authorities in Ashkenaz infused tradition with religious significance, and even if the custom is irrelevant today, the way it was done in the past remains sacred. The second reason introduces an inescapable element that involves the larger community. Clergy serve the public and the community comprises of people who observe the law at varying degrees. The Ashkenaz rabbinic authorities protect the clergy from the pitfalls of such contact by introducing strictures that Halakhically have little to do with the ceremony at hand.

NiSu'in is completed with an act that unambiguously demonstrates that the couple is now husband and wife. The Talmud rules that the Sheva Berakhot are recited when the groom is ready to bring the bride into his home in order to consummate the marriage[26]. Although NeSu'in could be accomplished by physical consummation, in practice this was frowned upon[27]. How the NiSu'in ceremony is perceived and the nature of the Chupah leads to one of the more noticeable Halakhic differences between Sepharadim and Ashkenazim.

The term Chupah appears in Tanakh a number of times and is clearly associated with the marriage chambers[28]. In rabbinic literature Chupah is a preparation for intercourse[29]: "Everyone knows why the bride goes to the Chupah[30]". The nature of Chupah is disputed among the authorities and leads to a difference in practice. The question at hand is whether or not Chupah suffices as a means of demonstrating marriage or not. According to European authorities Chupah alone does not suffice and therefore the couple must have enough time[31] in a secluded place to potentially consummate the marriage[32]. This is called Yichud. In some Ashkenaz circles the groom is either given the room or he pays a symbolic fee for the room so that he actually brings his bride into his own domain[33]. Two witnesses are designated and posted outside the chambers so that the couple's seclusion is legally ratified[34]. The witnesses first examine the room and make sure it is empty before allowing the married couple to enter[35]. Yichud is thus, according to Ashkenaz tradition, the final stage of the NiSu'in.

Sephardic authorities maintain that the Chupah suffices as a means of completing NiSu'in and the couple's Yichud takes place after the wedding festivities when the groom brings the bride into his chambers or home. It has been suggested that the reason why the groom in Sephardic wedding ceremonies drapes himself and his bride with a new Tallith is in order to demonstrate publically that he is providing her a garment – a biblically ordained husbandly act[36]. Therefore Sephardic wedding ceremonies do not include Yichud immediately following the Chupah[37].

**The Ketubah**

According to Jewish Law it is forbidden for a man to live with his wife unless a Ketubah has been dully executed[38], and signed by two witnesses. The Ketubah remains in the possession of the wife or her agent. If it is lost a Ketubah deIrkhesa (Ketubah for one lost) must be written[39] and duly signed by witnesses.

Prior to Rabbenu Gershom (circa 960 -1028) a man could divorce his wife against her will. The costly promise of a Ketubah not only protected the wife financially in case of death or divorce but also mitigated the possibility of a man impulsively divorcing his wife against her will[40].

The difference between Sephardim and Ashkenazim regarding the Ketubah has to do with its legal origin. According to Sephardic Poskim the Ketubah is rabbinically legislated and is therefore written as such[41] in contrast Ashkenaz Poskim view the Ketubah as Biblically ordained[42] and their text states "*zuzei matan dechazu likhi mide'oraita*" "two hundred zuz that you are entitled to from the Torah".

The differing conclusions suggest that there is more here than the interpretation of an ambiguous Talmudic text because the Talmud is not at all ambiguous. The majority of the Talmudic sages clearly rule that the Ketubah is Rabbinic in origin. The single opinion of Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel is even stated in a tentative manner: "*Mikan Samkhu Liktubat Isha min HaTorah*" From here the sages found SUPORT for the Ketubah being from the Torah. At least one medieval Ashkenaz authority created a legal compromise[43] in order to make sense of the position that the Ketubah is biblically ordained. One wonders if Chachmei Ashkenaz imputed a Biblical origin to the Ketubah in order to emphasize its importance to the people. Here again contact with the larger community presents a unique problem. Not everyone will observe and respect the ritual on the same level. In order to impress upon the uneducated the importance of the Ketubah, Chachmei Ashkenaz amplified its significance by attributing to it biblical authority. Once invoked the position becomes legal with all its ramifications.

The prevalent Ashkenaz custom is to read the entire Ketubah immediately following the Erusin while the custom among many Sephardic communities is to read the first few lines and the last few lines of the Ketubah[44]. If indeed Chachmei Ashkenaz were intent on emphasizing the importance and significance of the Ketubah it makes sense that it was read in its entirety at the wedding ceremony. For Sephardic communities the reading of the Ketubah under the Chupah functions as an interlude between the two parts of the wedding ceremony and therefore only portions of it need to be read.

**Tena'im**

The Signing of Tena'im[45], a contract setting the wedding date and stipulating certain prenuptial conditions was a Minhag that at one time was observed by both the Sephardic[46] and Ashkenaz[47] communities. Sepahardic communities call this a Shetar, a contract. This ceremony did not have a religious character and did not involve any sort of blessings. Sephardic communities therefore considered the engagement to wed a festive event[48] but never gave this ceremony religious significance. Verbal agreement or other forms of understanding between the families replaced the need of a *Shetar*[49].

In Ashkenaz the Tena'im were infused with religious and symbolic character and has thus been ensured a much longer life span. The difference between Sepharadim and Ashkenazim regarding this ceremony may have to do with their respective attitudes towards cancelling engagements. In Sepharad the cancellation of an engagement did not cast aspersions or shame on the family and Sephardic rabbis did not impose financial penalties. Rabbi Saadya Gaon clearly states:

"For in this generation we do not have monetary penalties for either shame or damages. For it is the custom of the world that several people may speak of marriage with the daughters of Israel, and they do not marry except the one who falls to their lot. Because the matching of a woman to a man is nothing short of an act from heaven"[50].

Chachmei Ashkenaz on the other hand penalized families who broke engagements[51]. Within this context it makes sense that the engagement ceremony Tena'im played a large role in European communities.

Ze'ev Falk attributes the strict rules associated with cancelling an engagement in Ashkenaz to the influence of the surrounding Christian society[52]. Pitchei Teshuva writes that trusting that the bride scheduled her menstrual cycle appropriately depends on her being assured that the Tena'im were duly signed. Rabbi Hizkia Medini in his work Sedei Hemed writes that it is the Minhag of Ashkenaz to break a glass plate at the Tena'im ceremony. The dish must be earth ware and is broken by the mothers of the groom and bride[53] as a reminder of the destruction of Jerusalem. Again we note the pattern of infusing a Minhag with symbolic and theological significance. The legal discussion continues as to why the mothers break the dish at this ceremony while the groom breaks the glass under the Chupah? [54]

Today despite the template nature of the Tenaim text, and the lack of communal pressure associated with cancelling engagements the custom is still meticulously observed.

**Seeing Each Other**

Another difference in Minhag between Sepharadim and Ashkenazim has to do with the couple seeing each other prior to the wedding ceremony. In some Ashkenazic circles the couple does not see each other the day prior to the Chupah, in some circles they do not see each other evenings for an entire week while in some circles they don't see each other at all and don't even speak to each other for an entire week prior to the Chupah. Despite the accepted practice of this tradition it is hard to find an authentic rabbinic source for this Minhag[55].

The reasons given for this tradition vary. Some sources suggest that the *Yetzer Hara* is most potent at this time or that the Satan is eager to ruin the party. Other sources suggest that the bride and groom should miss each other and feel a yearning to be intimate and thus fulfill the Mitzvah of marital union with much greater zeal after not having seen each other for an extended period of time. A Halakhic parallel would be not eating *Matzah* for an entire month before Pesach so that the *Mitzvah* of eating *Matzvah* is performed *BeTei'avon* with enthusiasm[56].

The first time in one week that the couple sees each other is at a ceremony immediately prior to the Chupah called *Bedekung* in Yiddish or in Hebrew *Hachnasat Kallah*.[57] There the groom veils the bride and family blesses the couple.

Sepharadim do not share this practice at all. In fact the groom signs the Ketubah in the presence of the Bride immediately prior to the Chupah. Sepharadim did not share the concern of satanic influence and assume the bride and groom would yearn for each other's closeness the more they saw each other prior to their Chupah. Some Sephardic sources suggest that forbidding the bride and groom the opportunity to see and speak with each other would cause them unnecessary *Za'ar* pain and suffering at this time of great joy.

## The Day of the Wedding

A common practice among Ashkenazim is the Minhag that has the bride and groom fasting on their wedding day[58]. At the Minha service on the day of their wedding the Bride and groom recite Aneinu in the Amidah as they would on any other fast day[59]. In some Chabad circles the father of the bride also fasts on the day of his daughter's wedding. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944) in his Likutim writes "whoever increases and intensifies his tears during this fast day, a day likened to Yom Kippur, is to be praised". The Yom Kippur theme is further amplified by having the bride and groom recite "Al Chet" the penitential prayers of the eve of Yom Kippur and the viduy confessional prayers on the day of their wedding[60].

The Ashkenaz tradition has the groom wearing a Kittle under the Chupah[61]. The Kittle is a white cotton robe without pockets – a reminder of the shrouds in which one is buried[62]. Men wear their Kittle on Yom Kippur (and Rosh Hashanah) and under their Chupah. The Kittle on Yom Kippur is a clear evocation of death. In Frankfort it was customary that the groom cover his head like a mourner [63]. The assumption is that its appearance under the Chupah suggests the motif of repentance, sobriety and solemnity taken to an extreme. The groom on the happiest day of his life is reminded of his death[64]. Prior to the wedding ceremony some Ashkenazic communities place ashes on the head of the groom as a sign of mourning for Jerusalem[65].

In Sephardic circles any association with death or tragedy at an auspicious moment like a wedding ceremony would be very much frowned upon and regarded as a bad omen.

Sepharadim have never practiced Minhagim[66] (until the wedding of the young couple I mentioned above) that invoke mourning, penitence or even contrition. Such Minhagim for Sephardic Jews would be contrary to the celebratory and festive quality infused in every aspect of the day. The Talmud states clearly "Any man who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness" (B. Yev. 62b); 'They taught: whoever has no wife is lacking in goodness, without help, without joy, without blessing without atonement…even without peace … without life … nor is he a complete person…[67]. A man is considered excommunicated from heaven if he does not have a wife[68]. These and numerous other such statements in Talmudic literature clearly describe a positive disposition towards marriage. Furthermore the Talmud takes very seriously the Mitzvah to rejoice the bride and groom. A page and a half of Talmudic discourse is devoted to how one dances before the bride and groom[69]. It is therefore no surprise that Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph z"l and earlier Sephardic Halakhic authorities took serious exception against those who fasted on their wedding day[70].

In stark contrast to the Kittle the Sephardic groom wears a newly purchased Tallith. Usually a gift from the bride, and if the ceremony is during the day the groom recites the blessing *Lehitatef Bezizit* and *Shehecheyanu*. If the ceremony is in the evening only Shehecheyanu is recited. The assumption being that the Mitzvah of marriage and the joy associated with the moment warrants the recitation of Shehecheyanu[71].

Here we encounter the most significant aesthetic difference between Sephardic Jews and Ashkenaz Jews in terms of the wedding ceremony. One can only speculate why it is that European Jewry introduced such sobering rituals into what should be a festive ceremony. Some have suggested that the wedding ceremony is in consonance with the oppressed existence of the Jews in Christian Europe over the ages[72]. Sephardic Jews also experienced their share of oppression in Arab lands and did not turn joyous occasions into solemn ceremonies.

Others have suggested that discomfort with too much merriment has roots in the Talmud itself. The beginning of chapter five of Tractatce Berakhot pages 30b and 31a in defining the verse in Psalms "rejoice with trembling" the sages express ambivalence about too much festivity.

Alternatively, the sexuality underling the marriage ceremony made European authorities uncomfortable and led to a tempering of the rituals.

Marriage in Judaism is favorable (see above) and the institution of marriage is healthy as Rabbi Yaacov Ben HaRosh, the author of the Tur Shulchan Arukh insinuates in his introduction to his Evven HaEzer where lists the psychological, social and physical benefits of marriage. It is good for society and the most civil way to procreate and propagate. And yet Judaism walks a religious tightrope between the permissibility of sexuality within marriage and the value of ascetic denial of the libidinal drive. This very tension is expressed in the rabbinic statement: "Let us be thankful to our forefathers for had they not sinned (by having sexual intercourse) we would not have come into the world.[73]"

Sephardic Communities and Ashkenaz Communities through the Middle Ages and into contemporary practice have each emphasized the opposite spectrum of the tightrope-tension. In Muslim and Middle Eastern countries in Middle-Ages sexuality, while scrutinized, was actually celebrated in literature, poetry and art. Take the well know comment of Nachmanides on Shemoth 21:11 where he claims that the three biblical obligations of a man to his spouse: "She'era, Kesuta, Ve'Onata" all refer to the quality of sexual intimacy[74]. Such an interpretation can only emerge from a culture that is comfortable with sexuality and embraces it. The Iggeret HaKodesh which is ascribed to Nachmanides, but probably written by another Sephardic Medievalist Joseph Ben Avraham Gikatilla (1248-1325), has a very positive view of sexuality emphasizing the proper ways of initiating intimacy. He goes as far as saying that intercourse is a part of the divine process[75]. Shemuel HaNagid's well-known erotic poetry[76] is not an exception in Muslim lands. There were countless Jewish and Muslim writers poets and artists who celebrated human sexuality through literature, exegesis, poetry and erotic art[77].

This attitude towards sexuality in Sepharad is not an innovation but rather a continuation of an attitude that finds full expression in Talmudic literature for example the very graphic advice Rav Hisda gives his daughters:

"Rabbi Hisda said to his daughters: When you husband caresses you to arouse the desire for intercourse and holds the breast with one hand and 'that place' with the other hand give him the breast at first to increase his passion and do not give him the place of intercourse too soon, until his passion increases and he is in pain with desire. Then give him[78]."

One does not find this kind of comfort with sexuality in Europe. As a result Ashkenaz had a very different attitude towards sexual intimacy and eroticism. The Church's more suppressed views on marriage and sexuality carried the day in Europe and influenced Jewish attitudes on the subject. It is therefore no surprise that the Ashkenaz wedding ceremony tips towards the opposite direction in the tightrope-tension[79].

**Rabbi Yehuda HaHassid**

Rabbi Yehuda HaHassid (1150-1217) born Yehudah ben Shemuel of Regensburg was a leader of Chassidei Ashkenaz, a mystic sect in Germany. In addition to his most famous work Sefer HaHasidim that is devoted to ethical guidance he authored a series of decrees that have been passed down through the generations.

One of his decrees that influenced not only Ashkenaz communities but also some Sephardic communities has to do with the name of one's bride. The saintly rabbi decreed that a man could not marry a woman whose name is the same as that of his mother[80]. While no reason was given some have speculated that this has to do with the man thinking about his mother while he engaged in sexual relations with his wife. Later Ashkenaz authorities have even ruled that if the man becomes aware of this after marriage he must divorce his wife. Again I argue that much of these Minhagim are driven by an ambivalence with sexuality.

Two decrees, which have been accepted universally by the Ashkenaz community but not at all by the Sephardic community, are: 1. Two brothers may not marry two sisters[81] 2. A man may not marry the sister of his deceased wife[82]. Both of these unions were universally practiced in Sephardic communities of the previous generation.

Besides the nuclear family the Torah presents the following list of forbidden relationships: One's aunt, sister-in-law, stepsisters, mother-in-law, step-daughters, daughters of a sister-in-law, daughters-in-law and granddaughters. According to Maimonides these prohibitions cover all the females in an extended four-generation family that may be exploited by men in their care[83]. The one exception is one's niece, which is not forbidden in Halakha. In fact marrying a sister's daughter is considered a special act of kindness[84]. In Sephardic communities of the previous generation such marriage arrangement were common.

In Ashkenaz communities they were not only rare but as mentioned above relationships that are Halakhically permissible were forbidden in Ashkenaz.

**Seven Rotations**

The Ashkenaz wedding ceremony is unique in that it begins with the bride circling the groom seven times. In the Kabbalah this ritual symbolizes the Soveiv, God's eternal light encircling the couple to protect them.[85] Other explanations include the bride walking around the groom as an act of binding him to certain commitments and obligations[86]. On a more cosmological level the seven circuits

represent the seven revolutions the earth made during creation[87]. Others associate this tradition to a selective reading of a verse in Jeremiah (31:21) where according to this translation the prophet says that in the time of Messiah woman will protect the man.

The Kabbalistic idea may very well have its origins in the mythological magic circle, which wards off evil spirits and demons. The use of a circle was common in other practices as a boundary of an area that becomes sacred. The area encircled is set apart from everyday life and is protected from evil influences.

Ashkenazim are not unique in introducing practices that are designed to ward off evil spirits or the evil eye. Sephardim have a ceremony called the *Hinnah*. This ceremony usually takes place the night before the wedding and the *Hinnah* dye is put in the hands of the groom and bride protecting them from the *Ayin HaRa*.

**The Breaking of the Glass**

Investigating the origin of Minhagim is often regarded as blasphemous. And yet it is something we cannot do without. The universal practice of breaking a glass at a marriage ceremony is nowhere to be found in Talmudic literature[88]. It first appears in the late Middle Ages in Franco German Ashkenaz [89]. A similar custom is found among the non-Jewish German folk who would break a glass when celebrating their joyous occasions in order to trick the demons into believing that a catastrophe rather than a celebration was taking place.

Like so many Minhagim, its source is not relevant and despite the controversial[90] nature of its origin breaking a glass was eventually universally accepted and practiced by both Sepharadim and Ashkenazim as a reminder that on their happy day, they should reflect on the destruction of the Temple.

The Bet HaMikdash is often associated with marriage. We pray that the groom and bride build a home where the Shechinah will dwell like the Bet HaMikdash. In contrast “The Mizbe’ach sheds tears when a couple divorces”.

This practice amplifies the meaning of the seventh of the Sheva Berakhot: “Let there soon be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of gladness the sound of the groom and the voice of the bride”.

**Final Thought**

It is theorized that even before the expulsion of the Jews from Israel after the destruction of the second Temple there was a range of Minhagim associated with life-cycle events, holidays and rituals. Certainly after the close of the Talmud and the dispersion of Jews throughout the world distinct Minhagim evolved into the practice of various, and geographically separated communities. In many cases Minhagim emerged with a basis in Talmudic or rabbinic lore while in some cases, Minhagim developed without support in the legal system. At times rabbinic authorities struggled with this kind of

folk custom but when it became rooted in popular practice it became almost impossible to eradicate. Once a part of the ritual, these “new” Minhagim were given a Jewish interpretation, thus rendering them innocuous[91].

Halakha exposes Judaism’s core values while Minhag reflects its community’s fears, and aspirations, dresses moments with joy or navigates ceremonies through moments of sadness. Minhag transforms ritual into a culturally relevant aesthetic experience.

If this is indeed so our study of the differences in the way Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazic Jews wed has given us a unique viewpoint on the intersection between Law and tradition and its role in the making of special moments within Judaism.

[1] Avraham Grossman, Pious and Rebellious Jewish Women in Medieval Europe, Brandies University Press, New England, 2004 argues that there was originally three parts to the wedding ceremony, Shidukhin, Erusin and Chupah. Shidukhin was a cultural ceremony involving financial agreements between the families with no religious connotation while Erusin and Chupah were infused with religious significance page 49.
[2] There is actually no adequate English translation for the word Erusin. Devraim 20:7 speaks of a man who took a woman (aras Isha) but did not marry her (VeLo Lekakha). The Arus (the man) and the Arusa (the women) each have the status of a married individual but not the status of a married couple. See BT Sanhedrin 57a, MT Ishuth 1:1, MT Melakhim 9:7, Ritva Ketuboth 7b, Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1:1, Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 1:1.
[3] See Arukh HaShulchan 55:12. The root of the word is Nasa which means to lift or take used in Tanakh as marriage for example Judges 21:23; Ruth 13:4; Ezra 9:1,2; Nehemiah 23:25
[4] See Grossman for various reasons why the ceremonies merged pages 49-51.
[5] Kiddushin 2a. A Peruta is approximately 1/40 gram of pure silver. Some say 1/46 gram of pure silver. In Monetary terms this is about .8c
[6] Rachel Biale, Woman and Jewish Law: Essential Texts, Their History and Their Relevance Today, Schocken Books, New York, 1984 page 48
[7] TB Kiddushin 2a
[8] Teshuvoth HaRosh 35:2, 35b as quoted in Ba’er Hetiv 28:36; Also Teshuvoth MaHari Bruna 94. If a ring is absolutely not available he may use a coin see Shulchan HaEzzer 8:1:18; Eduth LeYisrael 45 (Henkin) page 141.
[9] Particularly Syrian Jews from Aleppo
[10] Ba’er Hetiv 27:1; Teshuvoth Maharan Mintz 109; Shulchan HaEzer 8:2:2.

[11] This is mentioned by Rabbi Eliezer of Worms (1162-1232), Sefer HaRokeach 351 page 238. Also see Maharil 64b; Ba'er Hetiv 27:1 Shulchan Ha'Ezer 8:2:2; also Shemtob Gaguine (1884-1953) Kether Shem Tov 19
[12] Shulchan HaEzer 8:2:2
[13] Tikkuney Zohar 21, 55b. See GRA on Tikkuney Zohar 47b s.v. *Tul.*
[14] For an entire menu of the symbolism of each and every Minhag of the Ashkenaz wedding ceremony see Rabbi Areyeh Kaplan, Made in Heaven a Jewish Wedding Guide, Moznaim Publishing Corp. New York / Jerusalem 1983
[15] Teshuvoth Chatam Sofer, Evven Ha'Ezer 98 and Teshuvoth Chatam Sofer 85; Teshuvoth Sho'el U'Meshiv, third Edition 1:182; Teshuvoth Ketav Sofer, Evven Ha'Ezer 47; Levushey Mordechai, Evven Ha'Ezer 47; see also Chaim Hizkia Medini (1834-1905) Jerusalem, Hebron, Sedei Chemed, Chattan VeKallah 1; Shulchan Ha'Ezer 7:2:3; Teshuvoth Maharam Shick, Evven Ha'ezer 87; Rabbi Eliezer Gershewitz (19th Century), Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun 16:6
[16] Eliyahu Ben Shelomo of Vilna, HaGra Evven Ha'Ezer 55:9; Arukh HaShulchan 55:18; Shulchan Ha'Ezer 7:2:6.
[17] See Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph, Yabia Omer Volume 3 Number 18. I did not consider secondary sources written in the United States or Canada by contemporary rabbis because of the cross-pollination of Minhagim that has taken place here.
[18] Page 36
[19] Pages 70-78
[20] Brandeis University Press, New England 2004 translated from the Hebrew by Jonathon Chipman
[21] TB Kiddushin 7b
[22] Flawed wine because it has been drunk from.
[23] Any non-pagum liquid can rectify the wine see OC 271:10, OC 182:3-7
[24] See Tosafoth Pesachim 102b; SA Even Ha'Ezer 62:9; see also Teshuvoth HaRambam Pe'er Hador 8:1 Machon Yerushalayim edition 1984. Some sources suggest that the cup of Erusin was given to the bride as a gift.
[25] Shulkhan HaEzer 2:46:1
[26] TB Ketubot 7b
[27] TB Kiddushin 10a; Arukh HaShulchan 55:14;
[28] See Yoel 2:16; Psalms 19:6 with a sort of roof or covering see Isaiah 4:5
[29] See TB Shabbath 33a; TB Kiddushin 5a; Arukh HaShuchan 55:15 and 55:17
[30] Tosafot TB Yevamot 57b
[31] The time required to fry an egg and eat it see TB Sota 4a and Even HaEzer 178:4
[32] Arukh Hashulchan 55:11; Pitchey Teshuva 62:1; Teshuvoth Chavath Yair 50. The Gaon of Vilna (GRA) suggests based on Yerushalmi Ketuboth 1:1 that Yichud is essential immediately after the ceremony so that the groom will not have to divorce his bride if she is not a virgin.
[33] Mishna Berurah 139:32
[34] Tosafoth Ri HaZaken Kiddushin 10a; Arukh Hashulchan 55:5, 55:14; Or Sameyach Ishuth 10:2; Yad Ramah 52
[35] I have not yet found a source for this interesting custom.
[36] Otzar HaGeonim Ketuboth 66 page 21. Kol Bo 75, 44c; Ben Ish Chai Shofetim 12; Some German communities share this custom.
[37] Ovadia Yoseph, Teshuvoth Yabia Omer Even Ha'Ezer 5; See also Turey Zahav 57:4 and Arukh HaShulchan 55:15 who maintain that the Chupah is sufficient and that Yichud in not required by law.
[38] TB Ketuboth 57a opinion of Rabbi Meir; see also Ketuboth 54b. MT Ishuth 10:10
[39] TB Ketuboth 56a; SA Evven Ha'Ezer 66:3 for a text of the Ketubah deIrkhesa see Nachalat Shiva 13
[40] See Rama in SA Evven Ha'Ezer 66:3;
[41] TB Ketubot 10a the majority opinion rule that it is rabbinic in origin. See Shulkhan Arukh Evven Ha'Ezer 66:6 Yabia Omer Volume 3:12
[42] Individual opinion of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel TB Ketuboth 10a. also Tosafot on page s.v. Amar. See also TB Ketuboth 56b and 110b. Rosh Ketunoth 1:19 suggests a compromise position namely that the Ketubah is of rabbinic origin but the amount of 200 zuz is based on biblical currency of kesef tzuri.
[43] Rosh Ketubot 1:19
[44] That the Ketubah is read appears in numerous sources. See Rama Shulchan Arukh Evven HaEzer 62:9; Rabbi Shem Tob Gaguine, Keter Shem Tov 1. How much of it is read is not discussed in the primary sources.
[45] Grossman calls this Shidukhim
[46] See MT Mekhirah 11:18; Shulchan Arukh Even Ha'ezer 50:12; Rabbi Yehuda Barceloni (circa 1100) Sefer HaShetarot 72. Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai (Chida) Avodath HaKodesh, Tziporen Shamir 6:87; Keter Shem

Tob
[47] Turey Zahaz Orach Chaim 546:2; Teshuvoth HaRosh 35:1; GRA Even Ha'Ezer 51:14; Rama Even HaEzer 51:1. See Grossman pages 49-52
[48] Kaf Hachaim Orach Chaim 131:72
[49] Kether Shem Tov, Seder HaErusin VeHaNesuin 23; Nachalat Shiva Siman 8 &9.
[50] Quoted by Grossman page 54 see footnote #14
[51] Grossman page 51-53 discusses the official ban on cancelation of engagements in Ashkenaz and the Franco-German influence on these issues
[52] Ze'ev Falk, Jewish Matrimonial Law in the Middle Ages, Oxford 1966
[53] Pri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav, Orach Chaim 560:4. See also Shulchan HaEzer Volume 1 page 52
[54] The Tena'm ceremony celebrates the mother's joy that her child is getting married while the Chupah celebrates the grooms joy of marriage.
[55] Sefer HaMinhagim Lubavitch Page 75; Rabbi Chaim Uri Lipshitz, Betrothed Forever (New York, 1979) page 9. No Mention of this in Sefer HaNisu'in KeHilkhata, by Binyamin Adler, HaMasora Press, Jerusalem 2005
[56] In the secular world it is a bad omen for the groom to see the bride prior to their ceremony
[57] First appears about 600 years ago in Europe. See Maharil 64b; Tashbatz 463. Hachnasat Kallah may actually be another ceremony involving the bride see Tur Shulchan Arukh Yoreh Deah 342
[58] This custom is first mentioned by Rabbi Eliezer of Worms (circa 1165-1230) Sefer HaRokeach 353. Rama Evven HaEzer 61:1 and his note on Orach Chaim 573:1. Original source is in Maharam Mintz 109. See Nachalat Shiva 12:15 and Sedei Chemed, Chatan VeKallah 4. Some authorities maintain that the bride should not fast on her wedding day Matteh Moshe 3:2 and Pri Megadim, Eshel Avraham 571.
[59] Terumat HaDeshen 157; see also Rama Orach Chaim 562:2
[60] Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Igros [t] Kodesh Volume 5 page 8. See also Rabbi Yehuda Leib Puchavitser, Daath Chokhma, Shaar Teshuva quoted in Rabbi Yoseph Yuspa Nordlinger (17th century) Nohag KeTzon Yosef 8. Also Pitchey Teshuva, Evven HaEzer 61:9. Sedei Chemed, Chathan VeKallah 4 Viduy 3 (6:458). Mishna Berura 173:8.
[61] Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 147:4. Sefer HaMinhagim Lubavitch page 76. Rama Orach Chaim 610:4
[62] Rabbi Michel Tucazinsky, Gesher HaChaim10:1:4
[63] Rabbi Yoseph Nordlinger, Nohag Ketzon Yosef 8
[64] Derech HaChayim Seder Birkat Erusin explicitly states that the white garment is to remind the groom of the day of his death
[65] Tur Shulkhan Arukh OH 65 states that this was the custom in Ashkenaz. Arukh HaShulchan 65:5 writes that the ashes are immediately removed while Shulkhan Ha'Ezer 2:7:10 writes the ashes stay on the grooms forehead throught the chupah
[66] Rabbi Chaim Benvenisti (17th century) K'nesset HaGedolah 562 was aware of the European custom and states that in Turkey the bride and groom do not fast on their wedding day.
[67] TB Kiddushin 29b. Hazal had much to say about a bad wife: "A bad wife is as hard as a cloudy day" "How bad is a bad wife Gehinom is compared to her"
[68] TB Pesachim 113b
[69] TB Ketuboth 16b-17a
[70] Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph , Yabia Omer Evven HaEzer 3:9
[71] See Kaph HaChayim Orach Chaim 223:25. Chatam Sofer and other Ashkenaz Poskim are very much against the recitation of Shehecheyanu under the Chupa see Chatam Sofer Orach Chaim 55
[72] Yizhak Baer, Jews in Christian Spain, page …
[73] TB Avodah Zara 5a
[74] Nachamanides takes this position against the majority of Talmudic interpretations see Ketubot 77b-48a not to mention against all interpretations of the Franco German and European exegetes.
[75] Nachmanides, C. B. Chavel Edition, Kitvei HaRamban, 1963, Iggeret HaKodesh Chapter 2
[76] Shari Lowin Arabaic and Hebrew Love Poems in Al-Andalus
[77] Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif, Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art: Old Issues New Perspectives, copyright Ashgate.com
[78] TB Shabbath 140b. Rashi
[79] David M. Feldman Birth Control In Jewish Law: Marital relations, Contraception, and Abortion as Set Forth in Classic Texts of Jewish Law, New York University Press London, University of London Press 1968, makes a strong case for sexual suppression in Christianity and support from Christian Texts he is however very selective of the Jewish texts he uses to show a favorable attitude towards sexuality.
[80] Mishnat Hassidim, Masechet Hatuna 1:8; Also Tzemach Tzedek 64 Yoreh De'ah 116 who writes his grandfather the Baal HaTanya took this Minhag very seriously. Rabbi Moshe Fienstien permitted a man to marry a woman with the same name as his mother Iggerot Moshe Evven HaEzer 7:4

[81] Decrees of Rabbi Yehuda Hahassid number 25. He adds in his Sefer HaHassidim 477 that even if they already married the couple must divorce.
[82] Decrees of Rabbi Yehuda number 26
[83] Moreh Nevuchim 111:49
[84] TB Yevamot 62b
[85] Rabbi Gavriel Tzinner, Nitei Gavriel Laws of Marriage 17:8
[86] Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun 16:7; Rokeach 355
[87] Tikuney Zohar 13, 29b
[88] It has been suggested that maybe there is a source in Berakhot 31a where Mari Berei de Ravina and Rav Ashi threw glassware on the floor at their son's wedding in order to reduce the unruly and unseemly hilarity of the rabbis who were present.
[89] Rama Orach Chaim 560:2 and Evven Ha'ezer 65:3. See Sedei Chemed, Chathan VeKallah 2.
[90] In Algiers this practice was not accepted see Zeh HaShulchan Page 213 note 14. Normally it is forbidden to destroy things (Deuteronomy 20:19), TB Bava Kama 91b, MT Melakhi 6:10. Here it is regarded as a purposeful destruction see Sedei Chemed, Asifath Dinim, Zayin 12 (6:462); also Arukh Hashulchan 65:5.
[91] See for example Amichai Levy and Yamin Levy , Solemn Space: Praying at Cemeteries and the Prohibition of Lo'eg  LaRash, Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rabbi Shalom Carmy called Rav Shelom Banayikh.

ies and the Prohibition of Lo'eg LaRash, Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rabbi Shalom Carmy called Rav Shelom Banayikh.