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Rabbi Preferred, Judaism Essential

By [Molly Ritvo](#)

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Long before I met my now husband, I remember having tea in a [rabbi](#)'s home, after my grandmother passed. I recall the afternoon sun casting a slight glow around the wise rabbi. As I bit into a molasses cookie made by the rabbi's loving wife, I remember him saying "I feel like Jewish people who intermarry miss out on a Jewish experience." I remember his words hitting me hard. I was confused and saddened by his remark. I also remember not questioning why the rabbi said that.

As I left the rabbi's house with even more cookies wrapped up in a small brown bag, my thoughts wandered to the many families I know that have only one Jewish parent. I recalled [Shabbat](#) dinners where the blessings were led by both parents and I remember attending [Hanukkah](#) parties filled with people from all different backgrounds lighting candles together while their children played. I thought of close family friends who have known me my whole life and who exemplified the word [mensch](#), yet who may not know the first thing about Judaism. I also recalled my mother once telling me that all marriages are intermarriages in a way, as everyone has a different spiritual and religious background. Both of my parents came from Jewish families from the same Boston suburb, yet they expressed and felt their Jewishness in vastly different ways. I grew up believing and understanding that being Jewish comes from within and has nothing to do with labels.

Last summer, I remember sitting with my mom in front of a large [wedding planning](#) binder. As we combed through the pictures of bridal bouquets and hair styles and timelines and suggested budgets and sparkly shoes and adorable rustic signs from [Etsy](#), a lingering question remained. Who would marry me and my soon-to-be husband? I felt connected to the rabbis at a local Conservative [synagogue](#), yet knew asking them to marry two people of different faiths was sadly out of the question. A co-worker mentioned that many cantors perform lovely ceremonies, yet I didn't know any. I didn't want to ask a stranger to marry me and my fiancé. I was stubborn in my wanting someone who knew us to marry us. I wanted someone present who knew all that we had been through, who knew what mattered to us, to stand with me and my fiancé the day we became husband and wife.

After some time of mulling it over, we decided to ask a dear family friend to perform our ceremony. We wanted to create a meaningful ceremony that represented who we are. I wanted Jewish aspects present, but I also wanted a more personalized and meaningful approach that weaved in my fiancé's background and our appreciation of nature, poetry, music and community. As we began the ceremony planning with our deeply spiritual officiant, I began to worry that I couldn't have both the ceremony I wanted—a personalized, sacred ceremony that embraced more than just Judaism—and a wedding that embraced [Jewish traditions](#) at the same time.

I mentioned my fears to my fiancé and he asked what parts of a traditional wedding were important to me. I knew I wanted to be married under a [chuppah](#), to sign a [ketubah](#), to incorporate the breaking of the glass tradition and to drink a glass of rich [kosher](#) red wine together. I also wanted to honor yichud as I was deeply moved watching a dear friend and her new husband sneak away for a moment of peace after their

ceremony last summer. I then realized that [a rabbi alone does not make a wedding a Jewish one](#). A rabbi can add wisdom and support during the wedding planning stages, but my fiancé and I were lucky to find wisdom in other places. As I combed through InterfaithFamily's website, I felt empowered about planning a personalized, meaningful ceremony.

We were married under a chuppah dripping with lilacs and our officiant eloquently explained to our guests the meaning of the chuppah. We drank from kosher wine together and shared a blessing over the wine and the chuppah. We were married next to some sacred objects, including a Lutheran bible that belonged to my husband's grandparents. Our officiant played Tibetan singing bowls. And we included a poem by James Dillet Freenan, who we later learned was a Minister of the Unity Church. It was raining the day of our wedding, and as the rain fell gently above us in a wonderful Vermont barn, I felt nestled in all the many traditions and love that surrounded our chuppah.

Later that night during the reception, our band leader caught my eye and asked if it was time for the Hora. I nodded and suddenly my husband and I were lifted up on chairs as Hava Nagila roared around us. It was the only part of the wedding that we didn't plan, and it was pure joy—and a little terrifying. We couldn't stop laughing. As I clung to my chair watching the smiles below me, I remember feeling an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the community and rich culture around us. While there may not have been a rabbi in the room, I felt my connection to Judaism strongly. I know I will continue to feel that connection throughout the rest of my life. I am honored to be able to shape and mold that connection, much like how I was able to mold and shape my wedding ceremony into the meaningful expression that it was.

Derived from the Greek word for "assembly," a Jewish house of prayer. Synagogue refers to both the room where prayer services are held and the building where it occurs. In Yiddish, "shul." Reform synagogues are often called "temple." Hanukkah (known by many spellings) is an eight-day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt of the 2nd Century BCE. It is marked by the lighting of a menorah and the eating of fried foods. Hebrew for "document," a legal document that is both a prenuptial agreement and a certification that a Jewish marriage has taken place. Hebrew for "canopy" or "covering," the structure (open on all four sides) under which a Jewish wedding ceremony takes place. In its simplest form, it consists of a cloth, sheet, or tallit stretched or supported over four poles. The Jewish Sabbath, from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. Hebrew for "fit" (as in, "fit for consumption"), the Jewish dietary laws. Yiddish term for an honorable, decent person, usually means "a person of integrity and honor," someone of good character and a deep sense of what is right. Hebrew for "my master," the term refers to a spiritual leader and teacher of Torah. Often, but not always, a rabbi is the leader of a synagogue congregation.



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