The Children of Noah: A Wedding or Covenanting Ceremony
By the Shalom Center

The original version of this ceremony was created by Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, Rabbi Linda Holtzman, and Dr. (now Rabbi) Arthur Waskow. This version has been somewhat revised by Rabbi Waskow out of his experience in using it. The Introductory explanation (in Item 2 below) is by Rabbi Waskow. The translation of passages from the Song of Songs is by Marcia Falk, Song of Songs (San Francisco: Harper, 1990).

1. If at all possible, the setting and symbols of the ceremony should reflect the motif of the Rainbow Covenant — that not only the whole human race but also all of life are in covenant with God. For instance, it might be held outdoors, where all life can be present. If, because of weather or for other reasons, this is impossible, greenery and living plants might be brought to an inside area.

Over the area where the ceremony is to take place, there might be a bow-shaped arch, perhaps a lattice-work with flowers or a wooden arch painted like a Rainbow. Some participants could hold either clusters of flowers or clusters of balloons in the colors of the Rainbow. The couple might bring favorite plants or animals with them as part of the Noachide covenant. The coordinator of the service may arrange for a signing of the formal statement of marriage or covenanted commitment beforehand, or the couple may actually pause during the ceremony to sign it. (See Item below.)

2. The person who is coordinating or leading the ceremony may begin by explaining it in some such way as this:

In many traditions, the Breath/ Wind/ Spirit that intertwines all life is sacred. — Let us pause to breathe together, the simple breathing that for us all is one of the Names of the Divine. — Blessed are all who gather here in the Name of the Breath of Life.

You are about to witness an unusual ceremony. That is not a passive role, for the ceremony itself will not be real unless you become a witness on behalf of Earth and Heaven. So when the time comes for witnessing, please focus your attention on what is happening as if you had to testify in both a heavenly and earthly court that you saw it fully happen in the Four Worlds of Action, Emotion, Intellect, and Spirit.

This ceremony was created to bring together in a holy marriage/ covenant two human beings who belong to two different families of the single human race. For that reason, it is shaped according to the symbols of the Biblical story of the Flood, the Rainbow, and the Covenant God made with Noah, his wife Na’amah, their children, and all the breathing life upon this planet. In
In today’s ceremony, the two who are becoming partners come from different branches of the family of Noah and Na’amah. They come together in marriage as unique individuals, each of their faces a face of the Infinite God, each of their faces glowing with the light of love for each other.

The passages they will say to each other come from the Song of Songs, the Covenant of the Rainbow, and the words of the Prophet Hosea, all of which are sacred to both the People of Israel and the Community of XXXX. The ceremony also draws on the tradition of Kabbala, Jewish mysticism, that God’s creation of the universe took shape through Four Worlds of Action, Emotion, Intellect, and Spirit, represented by the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire. The couple will share these four elements at the end of the ceremony.

3. In full sight of the congregation, the coordinator pours or sprinkles from a pitcher of water a circle on the earth or floor where the ceremony is to take place — and then within this circle, a circle of sand. The water represents the Flood, the sand that earthen boundary of dry land that God raised up against the Flood. The actual wedding will take place within the inner circle.

4. The couple come forward — separately, with whatever companions each wishes. The couple enter the inner circle; the others stand just outside.

5. The couple sing or recite from the Song of Songs:

One partner: Sweet fruit tree growing wild Within the thickets — I blossom in your shade And taste your love.

The other: Rose among the brambles, Brightest flower, — I choose you from all other For my love.

Both together: Endless seas and floods, Torrents and rivers, Never put out love’ Infinite fires.

6. Someone drapes around the shoulders of the couple, standing close together, a “chain” of seven scarves of the seven colors of the Rainbow, knotted together.

THE COUPLE SAYS, IN UNISON:

I join in covenant with you and God and every living creature, In the sign of the Bow that appears in the clouds, That together we shall so act That seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Summer and winter, Day and night Shall not cease;
And I join in covenant with you and God That between the peoples who are all The children of Noah and Na’amah, Between our peoples and among all peoples, We shall seek to banish Bow, sword, and battle from the earth.

And I join in covenant with you and God That through all change In the weather of our lives — In seedtime and harvest, In cold and heat, In suffering and joy — I will share with you my body, my feelings, my thoughts, my spirit; I will make Torah present in our lives together. [Or: for the last line, substitute: “I will make present in our lives together The Holy One Who is the Breath of Life.”]

7. The couple each say the following to the other, at the end of the passage slipping a ring onto the other’s finger:

With this ring I espouse you to me. I espouse you in righteousness and justice, In goodness and loving kindness. I espouse you in faithfulness.

8. The facilitator of the ceremony lifts the written statement of commitment and covenant that the couple have signed beforehand, or they may sign it now. The coordinator reads it aloud, as follows:

“(Repeat the pledge in (7) above.)”

“And they further made covenant that (read whatever else the couple agree on).”

Witnessed _____ Signed _____

9. The couple says aloud:

(The facilitator can instead put these in the form of questions to which the couple answers “We will” or “We do”.)

Together we shall share the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air — as a sign that we now share our lives together.

We pledge ourselves to light this fire not to burn the earth and destroy all life, but to make a light with which we can see God’s Image clearly, in each other and all life. (Light candles).
We pledge ourselves to share God’s bounty from the earth with each other and with the hungry of the earth. (Share olives or other food.)

We pledge ourselves to pour this water not to flood ourselves and drown the world in danger, but to sustain each other as we drink.

Each pours a glass of water for the other, and both drink. They turn to face the congregation and say — We are prepared to share God’s gift of air from the Breath of Life.

10. Congregants may join with the coordinator in saying:

By the authority vested in u through the covenant of God with all of Noah’s children; Through the teachings of the Torah, And through the laws of the State of _, We proclaim you husband and wife (or, “spouses” or “life-partners” or other formulation).

11. The couple say aloud, together:

We pledge ourselves to share the Breath of Life. (Kiss)

12. Participants shout Mazel Tov. At this point they could also toss their multi-colored flowers toward the couple, sing, or otherwise share their joy.

*Development and distribution of this ceremony is carried on by The Shalom Center, 6711 Lincoln Drive, Philadelphia PA 19119. Contributions to The Shalom Center can help continue this and other work toward the renewal of Judaism as a path toward tikkun olam — the healing of our wounded world. For further information on the use of this ceremony, write Rabbi Arthur Waskow at The Shalom Center, shalomctr@aol.com.

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