


the seedling to sprout, that the ideals of the parents can become the idols the children must shatter. These lessons, to be found in any number of books, I only really learned and internalized from the toughest teacher of all, experience. Becoming a parent had broken through my narcissistic blindness to perspectives other than my own childish one. My failures had kindled the intelligence of withholding judgment regarding the failures of others. Coming out stronger (sometimes) from difficulties awoke the recognition that unknown powers within could indeed be found and tapped. At good moments, then, my “higher self” is ready, even willing to have my children break me apart for their own sake. After all, who am I to demand absolute respect? Should the life I helped fashion be immune to criticism? To give life lovingly, surely I can survive a little disobedience, some insults, some bitter resentment. Haven’t I already surmounted a thousand little deaths with resurrections of sorts?

Rarely, though, is my less-transcendent self capable of such detachment. With great

sadness, I see that the smashing of idols has itself become an idol. American pop culture, modernity in general — in some sense even certain ways of being Jewish — seem fixated on destroying parental idols and ideals, unable or unwilling to sift through what is handed down by previous generations for wisdom, intent on wholly remaking the world anew. The idols may well have deserved reshaping, and the truth is that not all parents parent well, but the conflict has left us a world littered with the shards of countless broken hearts. How difficult it can be to consider the pain we have caused, that has been caused to us, that we continue to cause — and to move forward still.

With time, my children will grow, will become even wiser. They will craft their own ideals. One day, I hope they will recognize, as I have come to learn from the revolving mirror of life in which I periodically glimpse myself — that the clay that forms these new idols and ideals comes from the dust of the shattered old ones, that our unknown inner powers were likely, as not, sown by our parents. 

## Marriage by Document

BEN DREYFUS & ELIZABETH RICHMAN, BENJ KAMM & EMMA KIPPLEY-OGMAN

As the four of us planned our weddings last summer (two weddings, one week apart), we engaged in intense text study, consulted with teachers and friends, and explored many variations on Jewish wedding ceremonies in search of a ritual that would reflect our egalitarian values and partnerships. Our search led us to *kiddushin bi-shtar*, espousal by document, a rabbinic model used only rarely in the past 2,000 years.


We began by clarifying what we wanted: a powerful, replicable ritual firmly rooted in Jewish text and tradition that would initiate a marriage of partnership between two equal spouses of any genders.

Our study and deliberation focused on *kiddushin*. We believed many elements of classical *kiddushin* worth preserving: holiness in relationships, marriage as a fundamental change in personal status, and being set apart for our partners. Other elements, however, were more problematic, particularly if we took *kiddushin* seriously as a legal act and not merely as “ritual”: its similarity to acquisition, its unilateral nature, and its creation of a legal situation in which only one party can initiate divorce.

The Mishnah prescribes three methods of effecting *kiddushin*. The most common is *keseif* (using a ring or other object of value), but we chose the rarely used *shtar*, or document, to construct a truly egalitarian *kiddushin*. Among other reasons, we chose *kiddushin bi-shtar* because the *tenaim*, or conditions, that we placed on the *kiddushin* could be written directly into the document that effected *kiddushin*, unlike with *keseif*. The Talmud also draws a distinction

between a *shtar kiddushin* and a *shtar mechirah*, a document of sale. This distinction helped mitigate some concerns about *kiddushin* and acquisition.

Just before each of our individual ceremonies, the two partners finished hand-writing a document of *kiddushin* that they would give to each other under the *chuppah*. Each document included the condition that one partner’s *kiddushin* would go into effect, and stay that way, only as long as the other partner’s *kiddushin* was in effect. We gave our documents sequentially, but they went into effect simultaneously. And if, God forbid, one of the *kiddushin* should be terminated, the other *kiddushin* would automatically terminate as well, eliminating some concerns about divorce.

The central text of these documents, similar to the central text of most *kiddushin*, is, “You are hereby sanctified to me with this document according to the law of Moses and Israel.” How we understand this law continues to evolve and grow. 

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