



Interfaith Judaica: The "Kosher-Style" Ketubah

By Vanessa L. Ochs

At Celebrations, the elegant design shop next door to the Jewish Museum in New York City, I started leafing through the sample ketubot, wedding contracts, and was impressed by the selection. Not only was there a choice of artists, designs and types of paper; you could choose the words of the text. Depending upon your preference, you could choose the traditional Orthodox in Aramaic, modern Hebrew, traditional with the Lieberman clause (representing a protection for wives developed by the Conservative movement), just English, and even anniversary texts to celebrate the renewal of vows. Of the myriad of choices, all reflecting a contemporary desire to keep some version of tradition while referencing our personalities, our individual histories and even our preferred color schemes, only one choice left me quite surprised: a ketubah that could be made with a text, both in English and Hebrew, for an interfaith marriage.

The text, available from Gad Almaliah, is quite beautiful. It says, "We, _____, entered into the holy covenant of marriage and made this pledge: We unite in love to comfort and to care for one another. We affirm our commitment to support each other as we meet the joys and challenges of life..." and so forth. It concludes, "With these rings we consecrate our love for one another as husband and wife."

I had not come to the store in search of a ketubah. Rather, I was looking for a wedding present idea. I wanted to find something Jewish I could give to my niece Evelyn who is getting married to a non-Jew, something that might help her keep alive a Jewish flavor in her future home, particularly if she had children one day and planned to give them Jewish experiences. When I had walked into the store, I quickly decided a mezuzah seemed too aggressively Jewish. Maybe an artsy menorah was right. Initially, I knew a ketubah was clearly out of the question because that was for "Jews only"....or was it?

On the one hand, this interfaith ketubah I had stumbled upon was the perfect gift. It might tell my niece that we, her traditionally Jewish aunt and uncle, celebrate her loving match and stand ready to help her mark all the big moments of her new life in Jewish ways. If she were to hang the ketubah on the wall of her house, her future children would grow up seeing a Jewish document with Hebrew letters as part of the landscape of their home.

On the other hand, an interfaith ketubah felt fake, almost like a cheating, like a forged license or ID that might, at the moment, feel morally acceptable, but could

risk diminishing the weightiness of the genuine document. A ketubah is a contract, a document that has both meaning and consequence in the Jewish community. And while some may feel that the traditional ketubah text cries out for change that reflects contemporary ethical sensibilities, few of us bicker over this premise: a ketubah is a document which acts performatively to legitimate and make real and binding a marriage between two Jews.

In the olden days, I might have gone to my rabbi for guidance in this matter. But reflecting the democratization of Jewish experience in our lifetime, I turn to you, dear Derekh CLAL readers: What should I do? Present my niece with an interfaith ketubah or go back to the menorah idea?

