

בְּרִית אֶהָבָה
סֵדֶר קִדּוּשִׁין לְזֻגּוֹת חֵד-מִינִיִּים

B'RIT AHAVAH
Seder Kiddushin l'Zugot Chad-Miniyyim

COVENANT OF LOVE
SERVICE OF COMMITMENT FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES

Female Version

Liberal Judaism

London
2005 - 5766

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יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אוֹמֵר ... וְקָנָה לָךְ חֵבֵר. כִּיצַד? מְלַמֵּד שְׂיִקְנֶה אָדָם חֵבֵר
לְעַצְמוֹ שְׂיֵאכֹל עִמּוֹ וְיִשְׁתֶּה עִמּוֹ וְיִקְרָא עִמּוֹ וְיִשְׁנֶה עִמּוֹ וְיִישָׁן עִמּוֹ וְיִגְלֶה לוֹ
כָּל-סִתְּרָיו, סִתְּרֵי תוֹרָה וְסִתְּרֵי דֶרֶךְ-אֶרֶץ.

“Joshua ben P’rachyah says ... get yourself a companion. How so? This teaches that a person should find herself / himself a companion, with whom to eat, to drink, to study Torah, to study Mishnah, to sleep, to confide all one’s secrets, both spiritual secrets and worldly secrets.”

(*Avot d’Rabbi Natan*, version A, chapter 8)

Judaism possesses no other set of symbols that conveys the same meaning: the formal and public celebration of an exclusive physical and emotional bond between two people, and the invocation upon this union of God's blessing. Many Jewish gay men and lesbians have grown up with the hope and expectation that they would, one day, stand under the *chuppah* and get married. When they come to seek a Jewish blessing for the central relationship in their lives, the forms and symbols that speak to them most powerfully are those of the wedding service. Thus the broad outline and some of the wording of this liturgy bear strong resemblance to the marriage service. A close reading, however, will show that much of the text is significantly different, with original concepts, symbols and formulations that mark it out as a new and distinctive ritual for a new social and communal reality.

The dual title of the ceremony indicates this twofold character. 'Covenant of Love' (*B'rit Ahavah*) is a novel formulation that seeks to find a model deeply embedded in the Jewish biblical heritage for an unprecedented ritual; while 'Service of Commitment' translates *Seder Kiddushin*, the name of the traditional Rabbinic betrothal ceremony. In Rabbinic Judaism *kiddushin* meant the 'setting apart' of a woman, by a symbolic act of acquisition, for a particular man. In Liberal Jewish weddings, the one-sided nature of betrothal has been replaced by a mutual consecration of two equal partners, and the present ceremony is seen as an extension and adaptation of the same idea—two people declaring their exclusive commitment to one another in the spirit of Jewish ethical tradition.

The ceremony has been laid out in 'modular' form, so that the various elements can be selected and combined to suit different couples. Some may choose to omit one or more of these elements. A selection of Biblical readings is provided.

More detailed discussion of the meaning and origin of elements within the ceremony can be found in the Notes and Acknowledgements at the end.

Introduction

B'rit Ahavah—Covenant of Love: Service of Commitment for Same-Sex Couples is a compendium of texts from which rabbis, and lesbian and gay couples, can choose material to construct a Commitment Ceremony. Although some of the materials are derived from the Jewish marriage service, the aim is not simply to imitate a wedding but to create a ceremony at once similar and different, celebrating love within a committed and faithful partnership of two Jews.

For couples where one partner is Jewish and the other is not, and where both wish to make Judaism the main spiritual framework of their lives together (and the upbringing of any children), a ceremony of blessing may be held, following the guidelines of the Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism. The officiating rabbi will assist the couple in selecting appropriate texts from this liturgy.

Our work in preparing this liturgy has coincided with the national debate in Britain leading to the Civil Partnership Act 2004, and it is expected that couples will enter into a civil partnership together (or the equivalent—if available—in their country of residence) prior to holding a Commitment Ceremony.

The Rabbinic Conference and Council of Liberal Judaism are committed to the justice of same-sex commitment ceremonies. Liberal Judaism has long acknowledged that modern ethical, psychological and scientific insight demands a change in the traditional attitude to same-sex relationships, and has welcomed lesbians and gay men as members of its congregations, teachers and rabbis. It recognises that encouragement and support for people entering into committed long-term relationships can help to strengthen such partnerships and contribute to the stability and cohesion, as well as the diversity and vitality, of our Jewish communities. This ceremony is an affirmation of the importance and holiness of marriage and Jewish family life.

In theory it might be possible to create a commitment ceremony that bears no resemblance whatever to a marriage service, but in practice

COVENANT OF LOVE — בְּרִית אֱהָבָה

סֵדֶר קְדוּשִׁין לְזִוגוֹת חֹדֶם-מִינִיִּים

Service of Commitment for Same-Sex Couples

OPENING PSALMS

One or more of the following Psalms may be used to open the ceremony, and sung as the Couple enters.

Psalm 100

Shout for joy, all the earth!
Worship the Eternal One with gladness!
Come into God's presence with singing.

Know that the Eternal One is God, the One who made us, to whom we belong, whose people and whose flock we are.

Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, God's courts with praise.

Pour forth your gratitude and adoration.

For the Eternal One is good, for ever loving, and faithful throughout all generations.

After Psalm 133

See! How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together.

See! How good and pleasant it is for sisters to dwell together.

הָרִיעוּ לַיהוָה כָּל-הָאָרֶץ:

עֲבֹדוּ אֶת-יְהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה

בָּאוּ לִפְנֵי בְּרִנָּה:

דַּעוּ כִּי-יְהוָה הוּא אֱלֹהִים

הוּא-עֲשָׂנוּ וְלוֹ אֲנַחְנוּ

עֲמוּ וְצֹאן מִרְעִיתוֹ:

בָּאוּ שְׁעָרָיו בְּתוֹדָה

חֲצִרֹתָיו בְּתִהְלָה

הוֹדוּ-לוֹ בְּרָכוּ שְׁמוֹ:

כִּי-טוֹב יְהוָה לַעֲוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ

וְעֵד-דָּר וָדָר אֱמוּנָתוֹ:

הִנֵּה מַה-טוֹב וּמַה-נָּעִים

שֵׁכֶת אֲחִים גַּם-יָחִיד:

הִנֵּה מַה-טוֹב וּמַה-נָּעִים

שֵׁכֶת אֲחִיּוֹת גַּם-יָחִיד:

The Rabbinic Conference hopes that this booklet will serve as a useful resource for the congregations of Liberal Judaism in their efforts to include lesbian and gay Jews in congregational life, and encourage them (and their non-Jewish partners) to see themselves as valued members of our communities, not only for who they are as individuals, but for what they can achieve and contribute together as couples.

May God, who entered into a covenant with our people and with all humanity, help us all to live lives of covenantal love and ethical commitment, so that we may overcome all forms of oppression and prejudice and bring 'love and harmony, peace and friendship' to our world.

WELCOMING THE COUPLE

The Rabbi welcomes the Couple

We stand here with you at this holy time to ask God's blessing on your partnership and to support you in your commitment to create a home together in which the Jewish values of compassion and justice, truth and faithfulness will be honoured. Therefore we greet you with joy, and say together:

*Blessed are you who come in the name of the Eternal One!
From the house of the Eternal One may you be blessed.*

בְּרוּכוֹת הַבָּאוֹת בְּשֵׁם יי,
בִּרְכוּנוֹכֶן מִבֵּית יי.

The Rabbi says to each partner in turn:

Do you commit yourself to to be her partner in life, promising to love, honour and cherish her in faithfulness?

Each partner answers in turn:

I do.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעֵנוּ
לְזִמַּן הַזֶּה.

*We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, that You have kept us
alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this joyous time.*

From Psalm 84

How lovely are Your dwelling-places, God of the hosts of heaven!

My soul longs and yearns for your courts, my heart and flesh sing for joy to You, the living God.

As the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow has a nest where she may lay her young, so do I seek out Your altars, my Sovereign and my God.

Happy are those who dwell in Your house, who are ever singing Your praise.

Happy are those who find their strength in You, whose hearts are full of Your praise.

Passing through the driest valley, they find it a place of springs, blessed with pools by the early rains.

Eternal God, You are a sun and a shield; Your gifts are grace and glory. You withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly.

Eternal Ruler of the hosts of heaven, happy are those who trust in You!

מִהֲיָדִידוֹת מְשֻׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת:

נִכְסְפָה וְגַם-כָּלְתָּהּ נַפְשִׁי
לְחַצְרוֹת יְהוָה לְבִי וּבִשְׂרִי
יִרְנְנוּ אֶל-אֵל חַי:

גַּם-צִפּוֹר מְצָאָה בֵּית וּדְרוֹר קָן
לָהּ אֲשֶׁר-שָׁתָה אֶפְרָחֶיהָ
אֶת-מִזְבְּחוֹתֶיךָ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
מִלְכֵּי וְאֱלֹהֵי:

אֲשֶׁרִי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ עוֹד יְהַלְלוּךָ
סֵלָה:

אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם עוֹז לוֹ-בְךָ מְסֻלוֹת
בְּלִבָּבָם:

עֲבְרִי בְּעֵמֶק הַבִּכָּא מַעֲיִן
יִשְׁתִּיאוּהוּ גַם-בְּרִכּוֹת יַעֲטָה
מוֹרָה:

כִּי שֹׁמֵשׁ וּמִגֵּן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים חַן
וְכָבוֹד יִתֵּן יְהוָה לֹא-יִמְנַע טוֹב
לְהַלְכִים בְּתַמִּים:

יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם בְּטַח
בְּךָ:

The Rabbi asks the Couple to exchange the rings (or tokens) and to recite in turn one or both of the following declarations:

אֲנִי הַתְּקַדְּשִׁי לִי בְּטַבְעֶת זוֹ (בְּחֶפֶץ זָה) בְּשֵׁם קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Please consecrate yourself to me with this ring (token)
in the name of the Holy One of Israel.

They may then say:

וְאֶרְשֶׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם.
וְאֶרְשֶׁתִּיךָ לִי בְצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים.
וְאֶרְשֶׁתִּיךָ לִי בְּאַמּוּנָה,
וְיָדַעְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה.

I betroth you to me forever.
I betroth you to me in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.
I betroth you to me in faithfulness,
and you shall know the Eternal One.

The Couple may make personal declarations to one another.

The Covenant of Love may be read

ENTERING A COVENANT OF LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

The Rabbi addresses the Couple, then, holding the rings or other tokens, says to them:

These gifts are a sign of the covenant which you are entering together as partners consecrated to each other in love. May they keep you ever mindful of your solemn promise to be loyal to one another, and to establish a Jewish home worthy of God's presence.

We praise You, Eternal One our God, Sovereign of the universe: You remember the covenant and have made Your creatures wonderfully varied. These loving companions stand here before You today, prepared and ready to enter into a sacred covenant of love.

Blessed are You, Eternal One: You sanctify our lives with love.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, זוֹכֵר הַבְּרִית וּמִשְׁנֶה
הַבְּרִיּוֹת. הִנֵּה נִצָּבוֹת לְפָנֶיךָ
הַיּוֹם הָרַעוּת הָאֲהוּבוֹת הֵלָלוּ,
מוֹכְנוֹת וּמְזֻמָּנוֹת לְהַכְנִס
בְּבְרִית קְדוּשָׁה שֶׁל אֲהָבָה.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת־חַיֵּינוּ
בְּאַהֲבָה.

May the Divine Presence rejoice greatly, for we were not created to be solitary, and these our sisters have found in each other a partner for mutual support. We praise You, O God, that You unite individuals through love.

Grant abundant happiness to this couple, united in love, and let them feel the joy which You intended for Your children in the Garden of Eden. We praise You, O God, that You cause these loving companions to rejoice.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, the Source of all joy and gladness, happiness and exultation, love and harmony, peace and friendship. Soon let there be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, and throughout all the world, the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of love and harmony. We praise You, O God, that You cause loving companions to rejoice together.

The Couple drink from the Cup of Blessing

שׁוֹשׁ תְּשִׁישׁ וְתִגַּל הַשְּׂכִינָה,
שֶׁלֹא נִבְרָאנוּ לְהִיּוֹת לְבַדָּנוּ,
וְנַעֲשֶׂה לְאַחִיוּתֵינוּ אֱלֹה עֶזֶר
כְּנִגְדָן. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מִיַּחַד
יְחִידוֹת בְּאַהֲבָה.

שִׂמְחַת תְּשִׂמַח רַעוּת הָאֱהוּבוֹת,
כְּשִׂמְחַת יִצְרֵךְ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן מִקֵּדֶם.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְשִׂמַח רַעוּת
הָאֱהוּבוֹת.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא שְׂשׂוֹן
וְשִׂמְחָה, גִּילָה, רִנָּה, דִּיצָה
וְחִדּוּה, אֶהְבָּה וְאַחֻוָּה וְשָׁלוֹם
וְרַעוּת. מְהֵרָה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
יִשְׁמַע בְּעָרֵי יִהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, וּבְכָל-הָעוֹלָם, קוֹל
שְׂשׂוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה, קוֹל אֶהְבָּה
וְקוֹל אֶחָוָה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי,
מְשִׂמַח רַעָה עִם רַעֲיָתָה.

BLESSING OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The Rabbi, holding the Cup of Blessing:

Now that, before God and with the loving support of this gathering, you have entered into a sacred covenant of love, you begin a new stage of your lives as consecrated partners. We pray that you may be blessed with deep and enduring happiness. But we remember that we live in a world as yet unredeemed, where joys and sorrows, love and hatred, acceptance and prejudice are commingled. Therefore we pray that, as your love will enhance the sweetness of your joys, so it will lighten any burden you may have to bear. For henceforth you will share all things, as you will share this cup of wine.

THE SEVEN BLESSINGS

שבע ברכות

The following Seven Blessings may be read or chanted, or seven friends and relatives may be invited to offer their own blessings to the Couple.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, whose glory all things proclaim.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Source of life and Creator of all living beings.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, that You have created humankind in Your image and made us both male and female. We praise You, O God, Creator of humankind.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל בָּרָא לְכְבוֹדוֹ.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, מְקוֹר-הַחַיִּים, יוֹצֵר
כָּל-חַי.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת-הָאָדָם
בְּצַלְמוֹ, זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.

CONCLUDING PRAYER AND BLESSING

One or more of the following may be used:

Eternal God, who taught human beings to help and serve each other in faithful partnerships, and lead each other into happiness, bless this covenant of affection, these promises of truth. Protect and care for these loving companions as they go through life together. May they be secure in a devotion which deepens with the passing years, and may the generosity of their love be a source of joy and blessing to all who know them. May Your presence dwell with them in the warmth of their love, in the kindness of their home, and in their care and concern for others. *Amen.*

A Blessing

יְשֵׁלֵם יְהוָה פְּעֻלָּתְךָ וְתַהֲיִי מִשְׁכָּרְתְּךָ שְׁלָמָה מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר-בָּאתָ לְחַסוֹת תַּחַת-כְּנָפָיו.

With the help of the Eternal One, may your deeds bring wholeness, and may your reward be the completeness that flows from the presence of the Eternal God of Israel, beneath whose sheltering wings you have come to care for one another.

The Priestly Blessing

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ:
יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֶךָ:
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ
וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

May God bless you and keep you;

May God smile upon you and be gracious to you;

May God reach out to you in tenderness, and grant you peace.

The following may be said before breaking of the glass (or glasses):

There are many explanations for the custom of breaking a glass. One interpretation is that this practice reminds us of the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam*, our duty to heal and repair the world in partnership with God. Wherever there is oppression and pain, we are asked to respond.

Because so many gay men and lesbians sadly still know the oppression and pain of hiding, because so many lesbians and gay men still lack equality of civil rights in our world, we break a glass/glasses on this day of celebration to remind us that even in this hour of great joy, our world is still incomplete and in need of healing. May the time come soon, speedily and in our day, when all who are in hiding shall be free and all who are in exile shall come home.

May the shattering of this glass / these glasses by and remind them and all of us to work towards this time of wholeness, this *tikkun*, for ourselves and our world. *Amen.*

A glass or glasses may be broken

Psalm 117

Praise God, all you nations;
extol the Eternal One, all you
peoples:
For great is God's love towards us,
and God's faithfulness endures for
ever. Halleluyah!

Psalm 150

Halleluyah!
Praise God in the sanctuary,
Praise God whose power the
heavens proclaim.
Praise God's mighty deeds,
Praise God's abundant greatness.
Praise God with Shofar blast,
Praise God with lyre and harp.
Praise God with timbrel and
dance,
Praise God with lute and pipe.
Praise God with cymbals
sounding,
Praise God with cymbals
resounding.
Let every soul praise the Eternal
One.
Halleluyah!

הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כָּל־גּוֹיִם
שִׁבְחוּהוּ כָּל־הָאֲמִיּוֹת:
כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדוֹ
וְאַמֶּת־יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּיָהּ:

הַלְלוּיָהּ
הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקֹדֶשׁוֹ
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּרִקְיעַ עֶזוֹ:
הַלְלוּהוּ בַּגְּבוּרָתוֹ
הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גִּדְלוֹ:
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר
הַלְלוּהוּ בַּנֶּבֶל וְכִנּוֹר:
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתוֹף וּמַחֲוֹל
הַלְלוּהוּ בַּמִּנִּים וְעוּגָב:
הַלְלוּהוּ בַּצִּלְצָלִי־שֹׁמֵעַ
הַלְלוּהוּ בַּצִּלְצָלִי תְרוּעָה:
כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תִּהְלֵל יָהּ
הַלְלוּיָהּ:

CLOSING PSALMS

One or more of the following Psalms may be used to close the Ceremony

Psalm 98

Sing a new song to the Eternal
One, who has done wonderful
things, whose loving strength has
brought deliverance.

*You have made known Your
saving power, Your righteousness to
the nations.*

You remember Your love and
faithfulness for Israel; all the ends
of the earth have seen Your saving
power.

*Shout for joy to the Eternal One,
all the earth; break forth, sing aloud,
sing praise!*

Sing praise with the harp, with
the harp and the sound of melody.

*Let trumpet-blast and horn
resound before the sovereign God.*

Let the sea roar, and all that
fills it; the world, and all who
dwell in it.

*Let the rivers clap hands! Let the
mountains join in joyful song —*

Before the Eternal God, who
comes to rule the earth:

*To rule the world with justice, and
the peoples with righteousness.*

מִזְמוֹר שִׁירוֹ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ
כִּי־נִפְלְאוֹת עָשָׂה הוֹשִׁיעָה־לוֹ
יְמִינוּ וּזְרוּעַ קֹדֶשׁוֹ:

הוֹדִיעַ יְהוָה יְשׁוּעָתוֹ לְעֵינֵי
הַגּוֹיִם גְּלָה צְדָקָתוֹ:

זָכַר חֶסֶדוֹ וְאַמוּנָתוֹ לְבֵית
יִשְׂרָאֵל רָאוּ כָּל־אַפְסֵי־אֶרֶץ אֵת
יְשׁוּעַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

הִרְיעוּ לַיהוָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ פָּצְחוּ
וּרְנְנוּ וּזְמְרוּ:

זַמְרוּ לַיהוָה בְּכִנּוֹר בְּכִנּוֹר וְקוֹל
זִמְרָה:

בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת וְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר הִרְיעוּ
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה:

יָרַעַם הַיָּם וּמִלְאוּ תִּבְל וַיִּשְׁבִּי
בָּהּ:

נְהַרֹת יִמְחֲאוּ־כַף יַחַד הָרִים
יִרְנְנוּ:

לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה כִּי בָא לְשַׁפֵּט הָאָרֶץ
יִשְׁפֹּט־תִּבְל בְּצֶדֶק וְעַמִּים
בְּמִישְׁרִים:

Traditional opening for the exchange of rings

By this ring (token) you are
consecrated to me in the name of
the Holy One of Israel.

הָרִי אֶת מְקֻדְשְׁתִּי לִי בְּטַבְעֶת זֶה
(בְּחֶפֶץ זֶה) בְּשֵׁם קָדוֹשׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Alternative forms of declaration for exchanging rings

Each partner in turn gives a ring and says:

Come, let us go out into the open
together!

לֵךְ וְנֵצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה.

Each partner in turn accepts the ring and replies:

I will go with you out into the open.

אֵלֶיכֶם-נָא הַשָּׂדֶה.

The Rabbi then says:

בְּרוּכוֹת אַתֶּן בְּבֵית
וּבְרוּכוֹת אַתֶּן בַּשָּׂדֶה;
בְּרוּכוֹת אַתֶּן בְּבֹאֲכֵן
וּבְרוּכוֹת אַתֶּן בְּצֵאתְכֵן.

May you be blessed at home and in the open;
May you be blessed when you come in and when you go out.

זֹאת דּוֹדָתִי וְזֹאת רַעֲיָתִי.

This is my beloved and this is my friend!

SUPPLEMENT

Alternative or additional texts that may be used if desired

Welcoming the Couple, with 'Sh'chinah'

Blessed are you who come under
the wings of the *Sh'chinah*.

בְּרוּכוֹת הַבָּאוֹת תַּחַת כַּנְפֵי
הַשְּׁכִינָה.

Covenant Blessing in feminine gender

We praise You, Divine Presence
and Source of life: You remember
the covenant of the rainbow and
make Your creatures wonderfully
varied. These loving companions
stand here before You today,
prepared and ready to enter into a
sacred covenant of love.

*Blessed are You, Sh'chinah: You
sanctify our lives with love.*

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׁכִינָה, מְקוֹר
הַחַיִּים, זוֹכֶרֶת בְּרִית-הַקֶּשֶׁת
וּמַשְׁנֶה הַבְּרִיּוֹת. הִנֵּה נִצְבוֹת
לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם הָרַעוּת הָאֱהוּבוֹת
הַלָּלוּ, מוֹכְנוֹת וּמְזֻמְנוֹת לְהַכְנִס
בְּבְרִית קְדוּשָׁה שֶׁל אֲהָבָה.
בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׁכִינָה, מְקַדְּשֶׁת
אֶת-חַיֵּינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה.

May the Divine Presence rejoice greatly, for we were not created to be solitary, and these our sisters have found in each other a partner for mutual support. We praise You, *Sh'chinah*, that You unite individuals through love.

Grant abundant happiness to this couple, united in love, and let them feel the joy which You intended for Your children in the Garden of Eden. We praise You, *Sh'chinah*, that You cause these loving companions to rejoice.

We praise You, Divine Presence, Source of life, the fountain of all joy and gladness, happiness and exultation, love and harmony, peace and friendship. Soon let there be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, and in all the world, the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of love and harmony. We praise You, *Sh'chinah*, that You cause loving partners to rejoice together.

שׁוֹשׁ תְּשִׁישׁ וְתִגַּל הַשְּׂכִינָה,
שֶׁלֹא נִבְרָאנוּ לְהִיּוֹת לְבַדָּנוּ,
וְנַעֲשֶׂה לְאַחִיוֹתֵינוּ אֵלֶּה עֶזֶר
כְּנִגְדָם. בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה,
מִיַּחַדֶּת יַחֲדוֹת בְּאַהֲבָה.

שִׂמַּח תְּשִׂמְחֵי רַעוֹת הָאֲהוּבוֹת,
כְּשִׂמְחָךְ יִצִּירְךָ בְּגֶן עֵדֶן מְקַדָּם.
בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, מְשִׁמַּחַת
רַעוֹת הָאֲהוּבוֹת.

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, מְקוֹר
הַחַיִּים, אֲשֶׁר בָּרָאָה שְׁשׁוֹן
וְשִׂמְחָה, גִּילָה, רִנָּה, דִּיצָה
וְחֻדוּה, אֲהָבָה וְאַחֻוָה וְשָׁלוֹם
וְרַעוּת. מְהֵרָה, מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ,
יִשְׁמַע בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, וּבְכָל־הָעוֹלָם, קוֹל
שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה, קוֹל אֲהָבָה
וְקוֹל אַחֻוָה. בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ
שְׂכִינָה, מְשִׁמַּחַת רַעָה עִם
רַעֲיָתָהּ.

Sheva B'rachot in feminine gender with 'Sh'chinah'
[with alternative endings for the first four blessings]

We praise You, Divine Presence, Source of life: Creator of the fruit of the vine.
[You bring to ripeness the fruit of the vine].

We praise You, Divine Presence, Source of life, whose glory all things proclaim.
[whose glory shines forth in all creation].

We praise You, Divine Presence, Source of life, Creator of all living beings.
[whose energy fills all living beings].

We praise You, Divine Presence, Source of life, that You have created humankind in Your image and made us male and female. We praise You, *Sh'chinah*, Creator of humankind.
[You nourish humankind with understanding and embrace both female and male. We praise You, *Sh'chinah*, in whose image humankind finds perfection].

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, מְקוֹר
הַחַיִּים, בּוֹרֵאת פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.
[מְבַשִּׁילָה פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן].

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, מְקוֹר
הַחַיִּים, שֶׁהִפֵּל בָּרָאָה לְכַבּוּדָהּ.
[שֶׁהִפֵּל זוֹרַח בְּכַבּוּדָהּ].

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, מְקוֹר
הַחַיִּים, יוֹצֵרֶת כָּל־חַי.
[מְמַלֵּאת כָּל־חַי].

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, מְקוֹר
הַחַיִּים, אֲשֶׁר יִצְרָה אֶת־הָאָדָם
בְּצִלְמָהּ, נִקְבָּה וְזָכָר בָּרָאָה
אֹתָן. בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה,
יוֹצֵרֶת הָאָדָם.

[אֲשֶׁר הִנִּיקָה אֶת־הָאָדָם
בְּבִינָה, נִקְבָּה וְזָכָר כָּלְלָה אֹתָן.
בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה, שְׁלֵמוֹת
צֶלֶם הָאָדָם].

- 3 Rachel and Leah were sisters; they were the same and yet were different. May God bless you with the gift of respecting each other's capabilities and helping each other to grow in strength.
- 4 Just as Miriam led her people to freedom, may God bless you with the power to inspire others to sing and dance freely.
- 5 Just as Deborah was a prophet and a judge, may God bless you with eyes that see the good and bad in this world so that you may be partners with God in *tikkun olam*, healing the world.
- 6 And like Ruth, who in love and devotion declared, "For wherever you go I will go; wherever you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God, my God," may you both be strengthened in your commitment to one another as you journey from year to year.
- 7 At the feast of wine, Esther's courage brought her people "light and joy, gladness and honour" —so may it be for you, as you confront life's challenges together and share the cup of life.

We praise You, Divine Presence, Source of life,

Creator of the fruit of the vine.

בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה שְׂכִינָה, מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים, בּוֹרֵאת פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

A Concluding Blessing (with 'Sh'chinah')

תְּשִׁלֵּם הַשְׂכִּינָה פְּעֻלָּתְךָ, וְתִהְיֶה מְשַׁכְּרֶתְךָן שְׁלֵמָה מֵעַם הַשְׂכִּינָה,
עֵין־הַחַיִּים, אֲשֶׁר־בָּאתָן לְחֶסֶת תַּחַת־כַּנְפֶיהָ.

With the help of the Divine Presence, may your deeds bring wholeness, and may your reward be the completeness that flows from the *Sh'chinah*, the wellspring of life, beneath whose sheltering wings you have come to care for one another.

SEVEN BLESSINGS

An interpretative version

1

May you be blessed with gratitude and the wisdom of the universe.

2

May you be blessed with creativity and the living spirit of all life on earth.

3

May you pay homage to the universal humanity that links all people, and yet remember to respect the uniqueness of every person.

4

May you be blessed with companionship. May you hold and support each other with your love.

5

May you be blessed with fruitfulness, and with your love and your gifts bring life and joy to the world.

6

May you be blessed with laughter and friendship, health and contentment, peace and harmony. May your love and faithfulness help bring healing and redemption to the world.

7

May you drink deep from the cup of life, and find in one another a source of unending joy.

Seven Blessings of our Mothers

We look to our ancestors for guidance and ask God's blessing:

- 1 Just as Sarah brought new life into this world with laughter, so may God bless you with the ability to create a new life together—a life full of joy and laughter and happiness.
- 2 Just as Rebekah at the well satisfied the thirst of Eliezer and the camels, so may God bless you with the flow of generosity and lovingkindness in your home.

(For a female couple)

ב..... בשבת לחדש שנת חמשת
אלפים ושבע מאות לבריאת העולם למנין שאנו
מונין פה ב..... אנחנו בת
ו..... בת נכנסות בברית אהבה לפני
אלהים ועדים אלה, באמרנו זו לזו:

וארשתיך לי לעולם, וארשתיך לי בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד
וברחמים, וארשתיך לי באמונה וידעת את יי. רעה אוהבת אהיה
לך ברוח מסרת ישראל, כי לי את ואני לך. ואני אוקיר ואכבד
ואסעד אותך ואחלק בשמחותיך ובצרותיך. אותך ואת צלם אלהים
אשר בך ארום ואנשא.

על כן אנחנו כורתות ברית אהבה ואחוה ושלוה ורעות ומקבלות
עלינו לבנות בית בישראל לכבוד השכינה השוכנת בתוכנו
ומקדשת את חיינו באהבה.

כן נעשה בפנינו והכל שריר וקים.

נאום בת ברית ונאום בת ברית

נאום עד ונאום עד

הרב המסדר/ת

קהלה קדושה

שטר ברית אהבה – COVENANT OF LOVE

(נוסח כתבה לזוגות חד-מיניים (Form of K'tubbah for Same-Sex Unions

On the day of the month of in the year Two
Thousand and of the Common Era,
here in, we and enter into a
covenant of love before God and these witnesses. We hereby declare to
one another:

I betroth you to me forever. I betroth you to me in righteousness and
justice, in love and compassion. I betroth you to me in faithfulness, and
you will know the Eternal One. I will be a loving partner to you, in the
spirit of Jewish tradition, for you are mine and I am yours. I will
honour, cherish and support you. I will share in your joys and in your
sorrows. I will respect and cherish you and the divine image within
you.

Thus we enter into a sacred covenant of love and unity, peace and
friendship, and undertake to establish a Jewish home to the glory of
God, who dwells in our midst and sanctifies our lives with love.

This covenant was duly consecrated in our presence.

Partner Partner

Witness Witness

Officiating Rabbi

Congregation

3. Song of Songs 2: 10-14

Arise my love, my fair one, and come
away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove is
heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
And the vines are in blossom;
They give forth fragrance.
Arise my love, my fair one, and come
away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
In the shelter of the cliff,
Let me see your face,
Let me hear your voice,
For your voice is sweet, and your face
is beautiful.

קוֹמִי לְךָ רַעֲיָתִי יָפְתִי וְלִכִּי־לְךָ:
כִּי־הִנֵּה הִסְתָּיו עָבַר
הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הַלֵּךְ לוֹ:
הַנִּצְנָנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ
עֵת הַזְמִיר הִגִּיעַ
וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאַרְצֵנוּ:
הַתְּאֵנָה חֲנֻטָּה פָּגְיָה
וְהַגִּפְנִים סִמְדֵּר נִתְּנוּ רֵיחַ
קוֹמִי לְךָ רַעֲיָתִי יָפְתִי וְלִכִּי־לְךָ:
יוֹנְתִי בַּחֲגוּי הַסֶּלַע
בְּסֹתֵר הַמְּדֻרָּה
הִרְאֵנִי אֶת־מְרְאִיךָ
הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת־קוֹלְךָ
כִּי־קוֹלְךָ עָרֵב וּמְרְאִיךָ נָאוֹה:

4. Song of Songs 2: 16-17

My beloved is mine and I am his,
Pasturing among the lilies.
Until the day breathes
And the shadows flee,
Turn, my beloved,
Be like a gazelle,
Or a young stag
Upon rugged mountains.

דּוֹדִי לִי וָאֲנִי לוֹ
הִרְעָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים:
עַד שִׁיפּוּחַ הַיּוֹם
וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים
סֹב דְּמַה־לְךָ דּוֹדִי לִצְבִי
אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאֵילִים
עַל־הָרֵי בָּתָר:

SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS

1. I Samuel 18: 1, 3; 20: 17, 41-2

The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul ... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul ... Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Eternal One exact justice from the enemies of David." Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own life ... they kissed one another and wept with one another, though David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Eternal One, saying: The Eternal One shall be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, for ever."

וּנְפֹשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנִפְשׁ
דָּוִד וַיֵּאָהֲבֵהוּ יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנִפְשׁוֹ:
... וַיִּכְרַת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית
בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנִפְשׁוֹ: ... וַיִּכְרַת
יְהוֹנָתָן עִם־בֵּית דָּוִד וּבִקֵּשׁ
יְהוָה מִיַּד אֱלֹהֵי דָוִד: וַיֹּסֶף
יְהוֹנָתָן לְהַשְׁבִּיעַ אֶת־דָּוִד
בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כִּי־אָהֲבָת נִפְשׁוֹ
אֹהָבוֹ: ... וַיִּשָּׁקוּ אִישׁ
אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּבְכוּ וַיִּשָּׁקוּ אִישׁ
אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ עַד־דָּוִד הִגְדִּיל:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁנֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לֵאמֹר יְהוָה יִהְיֶה
בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זֶרְעִי וּבֵין
זֶרְעֶךָ עַד־עוֹלָם:

2. Ruth 1: 16-17

Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Eternal One do so to me, and more also, if even death parts me from you."

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת רֹת אֶל־תִּפְגַּעֵי־בִי
לְעִזְבְּךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי
אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלַי וּבְאֲשֶׁר
תִּלְיִנִי אֵלַיִן עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֱלֹהֵי: בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת
וּשְׁם אֶקְבֹּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי
וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הַמּוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי
וּבֵינְךָ:

Notes and Acknowledgements

Abbreviations used in the notes

BT	Babylonian Talmud
f.	and following page
MCC	(suitable for use in) Mixed Commitment Ceremonies
p., pp.	page, pages
Ps.	Psalm
SLC	<i>Siddur Lev Chadash</i> , ULPS 1995
Trad.	Traditional

As noted in the Introduction, the ceremony in the main part of the booklet is laid out in modular form, so that couples and rabbis who use it may feel encouraged to select and recombine the elements freely to create appropriate services. Some couples may wish to add further creative material in the form of poems, readings, songs, etc., to the texts provided here.

In addition, couples may wish to use one or more of the traditional wedding appurtenances, e.g. a *chuppah*, rings, a formal document or the breaking of a glass or glasses. Other creative symbols that may be used are candles, water, *challah* loaves—in short whatever the religious imagination of the couple and their rabbi finds helpful.

Since the *chuppah* nowadays symbolises for most people not the ancient wedding pavilion into which the groom took the bride, but the quality of the home a couple wish to create together, there is no reason why this should not apply to gay or lesbian couples. The ring, likewise, no longer represents for us the one-way acquisition of a woman by a man, but a pledge of loyalty symbolised by an exchange of precious tokens, expected by many gay and lesbian couples.

The main part of the liturgy uses the conventional formula for blessings, addressing God as 'Eternal One our God, Sovereign of the universe.' Some couples might prefer a formulation in which God is addressed as '*Sh'chinah* (Divine Presence), Source of life.' Alternative texts of the main blessings in this formulation are provided in the Supplement.

Although this ceremony has been created for the blessing of a partnership between two Jewish men or women, much of the material will also be suitable for the blessing of a same-sex relationship between a Jew and a non-Jew, in accordance with the guidelines of the Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism. The notes below will indicate passages especially suitable for this purpose by the addition of the letters MCC (mixed commitment ceremonies) in parentheses. This does not necessarily rule out the use of other passages not so marked.

The six psalms provided, a choice of three at the beginning of the service and three at the end, should be seen as suggestions, and may be combined in any way the celebrants see fit.

5. Song of Songs 8: 6-7

Set me as a seal upon your heart,

As a seal upon your arm;

For love is strong as death,

Passion is hard as the grave.

Its flashes are flashes of fire,

A blazing flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,

Neither can floods drown it.

If one offered for love all the wealth of
one's house,

It would be utterly scorned.

שִׁימֵנִי כַחוֹתֶם עַל־לִבְךָ

כַחוֹתֶם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ

כִּי־עֲזָה כַמוֹת אֲהָבָה

קָשָׁה כַשְׂאוֹל קִנְיָה

רִשְׁפֶּיהָ רִשְׁפֵי אֵשׁ

שִׁלְהַבְתֶּיהָ:

מַיִם רַבִּים לֹא יוֹכְלוּ לִכְבּוֹת

אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה

וְנַהֲרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטָפוּהָ

אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן

בֵּיתוֹ בְּאֲהָבָה

בוֹז יִבּוֹזוּ לוֹ:

6. Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to the one who falls alone, and there is no other to give support. Again, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone? And though an attacker might prevail against one who is alone, two can withstand attack; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן־הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר
יִשְׁלְּהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב בְּעִמְלָם: כִּי
אִם־יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת־הַחֵבֶרֶת
וְאִילוֹ הָאֶחָד שִׁיפּוֹל וְאֵין שְׁנִי
לְהַקִּימוֹ: גַּם אִם־יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנַיִם
וְחֶם לָהֶם וּלְאֶחָד אֵין יָחֶם:
וְאִם־יִתְקַפוּ הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם
יַעֲמְדוּ נִגְדּוֹ וְהַחֹט הַמִּשְׁשָׁל
לֹא בִמְהֵרָה יִנָּתֵק:

- reflecting the conviction that, in the creation of faithful partnerships, lesbian and gay Jews may live lives of ethical commitment open to the holiness which God bids us seek. Some may wish to substitute for rings a different sort of token, and the alternative phrase *b'chefetz zeh*, 'with this token,' in parentheses allows for this. *I betroth you to me ...* The feminine version is from Hosea 2:21-22, adapted to the masculine for use by men. The original context refers to a renewed covenant between God and Israel. The concluding phrase, 'and you shall know the Eternal One,' sometimes omitted in interpersonal contexts, is retained here, indicating that God's presence can be encountered in the faithful love between two people.
- 6 *Now that, before God ...* Adapted from SLC, p. 598. (MCC)
The Seven Blessings (Sheva B'rachot) provide an opportunity to celebrate the occasion and pray for the couple's future using a variety of traditional and modern symbolism. The number seven itself symbolises the achievement of wholeness. Here a relatively traditional form of *Sheva B'rachot* is provided, while in the Supplement three alternative versions are given. Some couples may wish, instead of or in addition to any of these, to invite friends and relatives to create seven personal 'blessings,' perhaps with the use of chosen objects that symbolise special periods or aspects of the couple's lives and relationship. (MCC, at rabbinic discretion)
We praise You...Creator of the fruit of the vine ... Trad., *Mishnah B'rachot* 6:1. Except where noted, text and translation of the Seven Blessings follow SLC pp. 599f.
We praise You...all things proclaim ... Trad., BT *K'tubbot* 8a.
We praise You...Creator of all living beings ... In place of the trad. 3rd blessing 'Creator of humankind,' we praise God here as the source of life in all its variety.
We praise You...Creator of humankind ... Based on *K'tubbot* 8a but replacing the trad. middle section with the words of Genesis 1:27, 'male and female God created them.' This acknowledges the fundamental fact of the existence, and equality, of the two sexes, but also alludes to the aggadic idea that Adam, and hence every human being, contains both female and male aspects (BT *B'rachot* 61a).
- 7 *May the Divine Presence ...* The fifth blessing opens with a trad. phrase, but replaces *akarah* ('the barren one,' meaning Zion) with *Sh'chinah*, the Divine Presence. It then alludes to Genesis 2:18 and the idea that a committed partnership is for mutual aid and the overcoming of loneliness.
Grant abundant happiness ... Trad., *K'tubbot* 8a, substituting the phrase 'loving companions' from the body of the blessing for the trad. 'bridegroom and bride' in the concluding formula.
We praise You...to rejoice together ... Trad., *K'tubbot* 8a, abridged as in SLC p. 599f., and substituting *ré'a/ré'ah*, 'companion, beloved,' for 'bridegroom and bride.'
- 8 *There are many explanations ...* Based on the Draft CCAR *Kiddushin Ceremony*, Eger/Kahn, 2002.

Page

- 1 *Psalm 100*. A psalm of universal thanksgiving and rejoicing, traditionally used at the start of the marriage service. (MCC)
From Psalm 133. Ps. 133:1, with an addition of the same words with 'sisters' (*achayot*) substituted for 'brothers' (*achim*). (MCC)
- 2 *From Psalm 84*. Often used as a prelude to weddings, and especially appropriate when the ceremony takes place within the synagogue. This extract comprises verses 2-7, 12-13, arranged for responsive reading if desired. (MCC)
- 3 *We stand here with you ...* New, based on SLC, p. 596.
Blessed are you who come ... Ps. 118:26, with Hebrew adapted to masculine and feminine plural.
Do you...commit yourself ... Based on SLC, p. 597, but instead of each partner 'taking' the other, each is asked to 'commit' her/himself, thus taking responsibility for their own action and respecting the autonomy of the other. (MCC)
We praise You...this joyous time ... Trad. blessing on new and happy occasions, *Mishnah B'rachot* 9:3, BT *Sukkah* 46a; not part of the marriage service, but may be chanted to the melody of the wedding blessing *Mi Adir*.
- 4 *These gifts ...* Based on SLC, p. 597.
We praise You...You sanctify our lives with love ... This 'Covenant Blessing' is the most original part of the liturgy. It is based on versions used in commitment ceremonies in Britain and the USA, and combines traditional formulations with modern feminist ones, emphasising the themes of covenant, holiness and love. Two phrases in it are borrowed from traditional blessings: 'You remember the covenant' from the blessing said upon seeing a rainbow, indicating that the covenant model intended here is not solely that between God and the people Israel, but also the universal covenant with all creation, symbolised by the rainbow whose spectrum of colours has become a proud emblem of both racial and sexual diversity in our world; 'and have made your creatures wonderfully varied' from the blessing said on seeing people of unusual appearance, here referring not to appearance, but to the persistent variety of sexual orientation that is a constant feature of human existence, and which we recognise as a good and vital aspect of God's creation. The next sentence alludes to the covenant passage in Deuteronomy 9:9 and to the *kavvanah* (intention) formula used prior to performing a religious act. The phrase 'loving companions' is borrowed from the 6th wedding blessing, BT *K'tubbot* 8a (p. 7 below). (MCC)
- 5 *Please accept ...* This version of the 'betrothal' formula reflects the phraseology of the *Mishnah*, *Kiddushin* 2:1, and emphasises the freedom and mutuality with which the partners enter into the covenant. A more conventional formula is provided in the Supplement. In each case the conclusion is not 'according to the law of Moses and Israel,' but 'in the name of the Holy One of Israel,' (Isaiah 47:4 and frequently)

- You nourish humankind ...* This new formulation alludes to the kabbalistic *S'firah* of *Binah* (understanding) which is known as the Upper *Sh'chinah* or Mother, and the Lower *Sh'chinah* in which the Ten *S'firot* culminate and which embraces both masculine aspects (symbolised by King David) and feminine (Rachel and Leah).
- 16 *May you be blessed ...* A modern humanistic interpretative version of the *Sheva B'rachot*, adapted from a text of uncertain origin. Designed to be read by friends or relatives, and especially suitable for mixed commitment ceremonies. (MCC)
- We look to our ancestors ...* A version of *Sheva B'rachot* invoking the stories of Biblical matriarchs, adapted with acknowledgement from the Draft CCAR *Kiddushin Ceremony*, Eger/Kahn, 2002.
- 16 *With the help of the Divine Presence ...* See on p. 9 above, referring to God as *Sh'chinah*.
- 18 *Covenant of Love*. Liberal Judaism has long ago abandoned the trad. legalistic *k'tubbah* in favour of a statement of the values entailed in a marriage. The version provided here is worded as a declaration by the couple of the meaning and terms of the covenant to which they commit themselves, and their vows to one another. It is called a *Deed of Covenant of Love (Sh'tar B'rit Ahavah)*, and could be signed either before the ceremony or at the point where it is read out. The text draws on phrases from the trad. *k'tubbah* and *Sheva B'rachot*, and on Hosea 2:21-22.
- To the glory of God, who dwells in our midst ...* In the masculine version of the Hebrew *k'tubbah* on p. 19 this phrase is rendered using the traditional epithet *ha-kadosh baruch hu*, 'the Holy One, ever to be praised,' while the feminine version on p. 18 uses *ha-sh'chinah*, the Divine Presence, and corresponding feminine verbs. These are given as examples, and couples are encouraged to choose wording they find suitable, which can be prepared individually as required.
- 21 The six supplementary readings are taken from the Bible, and may be used at one or more points in the service at the discretion of the couple and their rabbi. The inclusion of passages about David and Jonathan, and Ruth and Naomi, which have become traditional at Commitment Ceremonies, is not to suggest that these were sexual relationships, but because they provide Scriptural models of faithful covenantal love between persons of the same sex. The Song of Songs, from which three passages have been provided, uses the language of heterosexual love, but its joy and sensuousness, and its message of the power of love to overcome barriers and obstacles, make it suitable for use in the present ceremony.
- 22 *Arise my love ...* Couched in the feminine, especially suitable for two women. (MCC)
- My beloved is mine ...* Couched in the masculine, especially suitable for two men. (MCC)
- 23 *Set me as a seal ...* May be added on to either of the two preceding passages. (MCC)
- Two are better than one ...* The Hebrew, including the phrase 'If two lie together,' is

- 9 *Eternal God, who taught ...* Adapted from passages in *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship*, Volume I, RSGB, 1977, p. 280. (MCC)
- With the help of the Eternal One ...* New, based on Ruth 2:12, with the Hebrew text adapted to masculine and feminine plural, and an interpretative translation.
- May God bless you ...* The Priestly Blessing, Numbers 6:24-26, traditionally used at the end of the marriage service. The right-hand text retains the masculine singular endings found in the Torah, while that on the left uses feminine singular. (MCC)
- 10 *Psalm 98*. A 'new song' for a novel ceremony, expressing joy at the manifestation of God's power through acts of justice. Arranged for responsive reading if desired. (MCC)
- 11 *Psalm 117*. Traditionally part of the *Hallel* (SLC p. 474), a strongly universalistic psalm of thanksgiving. (MCC)
- Psalm 150*. Traditionally used at the end of the marriage service. (MCC)
- 12 See above pp. 3-4, alternative versions referring to God in the feminine as *Sh'chinah*. The 'Covenant Blessing' here mentions the 'covenant of the rainbow' explicitly.
- 13 *By this ring ...* See p. 5 above; here with the more familiar opening, SLC p. 598, *Mishnah Kiddushin* 3:1.
- Come, let us go out ...* Another possible formula for the exchange of rings, making use of the words of Jonathan to David in I Samuel 20:11 and of Ruth to Naomi in Ruth 2:2 (see notes on p. 20 below), verses that speak of going out into the 'field,' here symbolising the open, public space into which the couple lead one another in holding a Commitment Ceremony, as well as the new emotional and spiritual 'space' the couple enter through their union; adapted with acknowledgement from *Brit Rayut: Blueprint for a Same-Sex Jewish Wedding Ceremony*, Joanna Selznick Dulkan, 2000.
- May you be blessed at home ...* The rabbi's response is newly added here, adapted from Deuteronomy 28:3 (with *ba-bayit* 'at home' in place of *ba-ir* 'in the city') and 6. (MCC)
- This is my beloved ...* Yet another version uses a phrase from Song of Songs 5:16, so that each partner, in giving a ring, declares the other to be both beloved and friend. This and the preceding are particularly suitable for mixed commitment ceremonies. (MCC)
- 14 *We praise You* See pp. 6-7 above, here referring to God in the feminine as *Sh'chinah*, *m'kor chayyim* (Divine Presence, Source of life), a formula much used in modern feminist liturgy. In blessings 1 to 4 two possible forms of words are given, the first referring to God in the trad. way as a transcendent Creator, while an alternative in brackets uses verbs that evoke the immanent, nurturing and inspiring character of the *Sh'chinah* in Jewish mysticism and feminist thought. (MCC, at rabbinic discretion)

couched in the masculine, but can equally be used by a female couple. The reference to a 'threefold cord' is sometimes interpreted to refer to the couple and their offspring, but, as a metaphor for a strong relationship, could also imply that the divine element of holiness and spiritual commitment to one another strengthens the human dimension of a partnership between two people.

Material in this Commitment Ceremony has been adapted from a number of liturgies, mostly unpublished, created in Britain and the United States. Special acknowledgement is made to the *Brit Ahuvot* ceremony of Rabbi Lisa Edwards and Tracey Moore, Los Angeles, 1995; and to the draft *CCAR Gay and Lesbian Kiddushin Ceremony*, copyright Rabbi Denise L. Eger and Rabbi Yoel Kahn, 2002, kindly provided by the latter. Translation of psalms and other traditional passages generally follows SLC.

Grateful acknowledgement for ideas, advice and assistance in the creation of this ceremony is due to the members of the Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism, with special mention of Rabbis John D. Rayner ר"ד, Sheila Shulman and Shulamit Ambalu. Particular thanks are due to the Working Party on Same-Sex Commitment Ceremonies which laid the groundwork for discussion of this issue within Liberal Judaism, and contributed at every stage of the preparation of this liturgy: Rabbis James Baaden, Dr. Margaret Jacobi, Danny Rich (Chair) and Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah.

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London, November 2005