

The Israel Religious Action Center's (IRAC's) Marriage in Israel Program

Goals

1. Program Participants (PP's) will understand how the process of marriage works in Israel.
2. PP's will explore the implications of the Orthodox control of the marriage of Jews in Israel, particularly in regard to Reform and Conservative Jews.
3. PP's will be exposed to the various ways IRAC is attempting to reform the marriage situation in Israel.
4. PP's will be exposed to the struggle of Reform and Conservative Judaism to gain recognition and equal rights in Israel.
5. PP's will HAVE FUN!

Objectives

1. By the end of the program, PP's will have learned the facts of, and discussed, the current marriage situation in Israel, including the various choices Jewish couples have and the criteria required for those choices.
2. PP's will have discussed the lack of civil marriage in Israel and will be able to express their personal opinions on the issue.
3. PP's will have discussed the lack of recognition of Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel and IRAC's work to gain equal rights for Reform and Conservative Jews.

Materials

- Make-shift *chupa* (for the marriage ceremony at end of program)
- A glass to break at the wedding at end of program (plastic glass suggested)
- A cloth to wrap the glass in
- 50-100 identity cards (as many as participants, model copy in appendices)
- 50-100 pens
- 50 colored pipe cleaners, cut into thirds (to be used as wedding rings)
- Signs for each channel of marriage- "the Rabbinate", "The Reform Ceremony", "The Ceremony Abroad"
- Cyprus 'marriage certificates' (as many as PP's) to be stamped by 3 different GL's
- 3 different stamps, to be used in Cyprus station
- Music for post-discussion celebration (traditional Jewish wedding songs recommended)
- Snacks for post-discussion celebration (Israeli snacks recommended- Bamba, Bisli, etc.)

People

- At least 3 group leaders (GL's) to 'officiate' marriages through the Rabbinate (males only)
- At least 3 GL's to 'officiate' marriages through the Reform movement (males & females suggested)
- At least 3 GL's to 'officiate' marriages abroad (males or females)
- These GL's will later lead the discussions on the implications of each marriage option.
- At least 2 people needed to make sure transitions from each rotation go smoothly
- Two people to play 'mom' and 'dad' of the bride
- Two people to play 'mom' and 'dad' of the groom.
- Three GL's to be stationed in 'Cyprus'. These GL's will stamp marriage certificates.

Space needed

- One large room is ideal (such as a banquet hall)
- Three smaller rooms can work as well (if program is run using three separate rooms, at least 3 people will be needed to ensure transitions between each rotation go smoothly).

Timetable:

- 00:00-00:10 GL's get PP's seated and program leader introduces program
- 00:10-00:15 PP's fill in their identity cards and find marriage partners
- 00:15-00:35 PP's roam through the various marriage choices in 'Israel and "get married" through different channels- the Rabbinate, a Reform ceremony, a ceremony abroad (Cyprus)
- 00:35-00:40 PP's divide into groups (ideally of about 10) in either the Rabbinate, the Reform ceremony or the ceremony abroad, where they will discuss the implications of the marriage medium they are sitting in.
- 00:40-00:55 1st rotation of marriage discussion (PP's in Rabbinate move to Reform, Reform to abroad and abroad to the Rabbinate)
- 00:55-01:10 2nd rotation of marriage discussion
- 01:10-01:25 3rd rotation of marriage discussion
- 01:25-01:35 wrap-up discussion, PP's write 4 emotions towards Israel on identity cards
- 01:35-02:00 Final wedding ceremony and celebration- w/music, dancing, Israeli snacks (Program can be easily modified to fit time constraints.)

Detailed Procedure

- *It is recommended to run through a copy of this program with everyone involved in facilitating the program, including GL's, 'role-players' and those responsible for managing transitions. This will ensure that the program runs as smoothly as possible.
- * 'Invitations' can even be sent out at the beginning of the event to get the PP's excited about the program. PP's can even dress up to make the atmosphere more festive.

00:00-00:5 Introduction script, read by program leader

- Program leader will use script to welcome PP's to the program and introduce the topic of marriage in Israel.
- After script is read, program leader explains that PP's will have 5 minutes to fill in their identity cards and find someone to "marry".

00:5-00:10 PP's fill in their identity cards and find partners

- Once 5 minutes have passed, program leader instructs PP's that they have 20 minutes to explore the different marriage options in Israel

00:10-00:30 PP's 'get married' though the various marriage channels in Israel

- PP's will have 20 minutes to roam around the room(s) and try and marry through each marriage channel (The Rabbinate, the Reform ceremony, and the ceremony abroad).
- PP's will refer to their identity cards in each marriage channel, and will either be accepted or denied a marriage.
- GL's assigned to officiate marriages will refer to the their respective "guide to marriage in Israel" (copy found in appendices)

00:30-00:40 PP's break out into groups of about 10 in either the Rabbinate, the Reform ceremony or the ceremony abroad for marriage discussions

- Using the IRAC fact sheets as guides, group leaders will guide PP's in a discussion on the implications of each marriage option. The group leaders in the Rabbinate will discuss the process and implications of marrying through the Rabbinate, the leaders in the Reform ceremony will discuss the process and implications of marrying through the Reform movement, etc.

00:40-00:55 1st rotation of marriage discussion

- Participants will learn the facts about marrying in Israel and will discuss the criteria for being married through the various marriage channels and will be encouraged to share their opinions on their experiences in the different channels.
- Program leader will notify groups when the 1st rotation is over and when PP's should move to next location. (groups in the Rabbinate move to the Reform ceremony, groups in the Reform ceremony move to the ceremony abroad and the groups in the ceremony abroad go to the Rabbinate)

00:55-1:05 2nd rotation of marriage discussion

- Program leader will notify groups when the 2nd rotation is over and when PP's should move to next location.

1:05-1:20 3rd rotation of marriage discussion

- When 3rd rotation is over, PP's stay where they are for a wrap-up discussion.

1:20-1:35 wrap-up discussion

- Using the IRAC wrap-up fact sheet as a guide, GL's will lead a discussion on what PP's have learned about marriage in Israel, including the Orthodox control over the marriage of Jews, the lack of recognition of Reform and Conservative marriages, the absence of a civil marriage option and IRAC's work to improve the situation
- PP's will be encouraged to share their personal opinions on the current marriage situation in Israel and the potential for more egalitarian reform.
- Program leader should now instruct PP's to gather together and sit as one group to be guests at the final wedding ceremony.

1:35-2:00 Final wedding ceremony and celebration

- This section of the program allows the program leaders to get a bit creative.
- All PP's will be guests at this final wedding ceremony.
- Before the program starts, be sure to assign GL's certain roles- a bride, a groom, a rabbi, parents of the couple, 4 chupa holders, even bridesmaids or a best man. Make sure each GL knows what his or her role in the final wedding ceremony is before the program is run.
- Program leader can pick the type of wedding ceremony to hold (Reform, Orthodox, civil), or even leave it up to the participants to vote and decide.
- Once the PP's are all seated together the wedding ceremony can take place. After the ceremony, the celebration begins!

- Music and snacks infuse fun into the end of the program, especially when they are relevant to its theme. Popular Israeli snacks (such as Bamba and Bisli) are not uncommon in American cities. A big cake is HIGHLY suggested- everyone loves cake!

Appendices

1) Introduction script for program leader	p.5
2) The Rabbinat's guide to officiating marriages in Israel	p.7
3) IRAC fact sheet: marrying through the Rabbinat in Israel	p.8
4) A Reform Rabbi's guide to officiating marriages in Israel	p.9
5) IRAC fact sheet: marrying through the Reform Movement in Israel	p.10
6) A Guide to officiating marriages in ceremonies outside Israel	p.11
7) IRAC fact sheet: going abroad to be married in Israel	p.12
8) IRAC wrap up fact sheet	p.13
9) Model of participants' ID cards	p.14

1) Program Introduction Skit

Program Leader and another GL should use the following script to introduce the program. Remember- be enthusiastic! While there is much to be learned about the marriage system in Israel, weddings are a time of joy and celebration!

David: “Yael- I love you with all of my heart. These past few years with you have been the best of my ENTIRE LIFE! I can’t imagine living with out you and want to spend the rest of my life with you.” *(get down on one knee and act like you are proposing)*

Yael: “Oh my Gd David, oh my Gd! You’re proposing?!?!”

David: “Yael- you are the love of my life. There is no doubt in my mind that we are meant to be together, to raise a family together and to grow old together. Will you marry me???”

Yael: “Of course I will!! I LOVE YOU SO MUCH DAVID!! But what cannel do we use to get married through?” *(‘Yael’ should direct the following discussion to the group of PP’s)* “Here in Israel, the marriage system works differently than it does over in the US. Unlike in America, there is no civil marriage in Israel- meaning all marriages must be part of a *recognized* religious ceremony. Only religious authorities are empowered to officiate marriages. This means that each person can get married only according to his or her religion”.

David: “You know, I’ve heard the term ‘civil marriage’ but don’t really know what it means. Can’t we just get married through the Orthodox Rabbinate, like most other Jewish Israelis? We’re both Jewish, so that shouldn’t be a problem, right???”

Yael: “Well, according to the Orthodox Rabbinate, I may not be considered Jewish because my mother converted to Judaism under the Reform Movement. Because the only recognized form of Judaism in Israel is Orthodox Judaism, the Rabbinate only recognizes Orthodox conversions. Because of the exclusive Orthodox control over the marriage of Jews in Israel, members of different religions cannot marry each other; both partners must be of the same religion. Same-sex couples also cannot be married. The same is true for those with no religion, or whose religion is doubted by the Rabbinate- such as people who cannot prove their Jewish through matrilineal lineage.
A civil marriage would be great for us. A civil marriage is a marriage that is officiated by a government official that takes place without any religious affiliation. BUT civil marriage doesn’t really exist in Israel.”

David: “Whoa- I never realized there were so many limitations on marriage in Israel. I think we should learn a bit more about our options before we decide on a specific ceremony. So should all these young, great looking Jewish teens. Understanding the marriage system in Israel sheds important light on the dynamics between religion and state in the country.

(skit continues →)

Yael: *(speaking to group of PP's)-* “In the next twenty minutes or so, you will have the opportunity to explore the different marriage channels in Israel. Look around and you will see Israel’s Rabbinat, a Reform congregation and even a courtroom in Cyprus. These are the different mediums that you, like all Jews in Israel, have to choose from when getting married. Before you find spouses and run off to the altars, take just five minutes to fill out your identity cards. This will help the marriage processes run much more smoothly.”

- Once five minutes have passed and it seems the PP's are ready for the next part of the program:

“Alright everyone, you have twenty minutes to explore the different marriage options in Israel!”

- Once twenty minutes have passed, instruct PP's to stop what they are doing and sit in groups of 10 in either the Rabbinat, the Reform congregation or abroad.

- Remind GL's that they should stay attentive and help the PP's organize into groups for the discussion.

* Give this document to the person playing the Orthodox rabbi- MUST be male (beard is a plus!)

2) The Orthodox Rabbinat's guide to officiating marriages in Israel

- *The following document outlines the criteria required for a couple to be wed through the Rabbinat in Israel and describes the conditions for refusing to marry a couple. This document should be referred to in the first part of the program, when PP's are exploring the different channels of marriage in Israel.*

- *Use these guidelines to determine whether or not you, as a religious authority of the State of Israel, will officiate each prospective couple's marriage. Ask to see the identity cards of each couple and then use the guidelines to either accept or reject the proposed marriage.*

Criteria to marry a couple

- In order to be married through the Rabbinat, both partners must be considered Jewish according to Halacha (traditional Jewish law)- meaning either they are the natural born child of a Jewish mother or have converted to Judaism under Orthodox auspices.
- *If both partners in the couple attempting to marry through the Rabbinat are Halachically Jewish, they can be married through the Rabbinat, which entails a strictly Orthodox ceremony.*

Criteria to reject a couple

- Because Orthodox Judaism is the only recognized form of Judaism in Israel, all non-Orthodox conversions, including those performed through the Reform and Conservative movements, are not recognized in Israel.
- Non-Orthodox converts and the children of non-Orthodox converts are NOT considered Jewish by the Rabbinat and therefore cannot be married through it.
- Couples in which either partner cannot prove they're Jewish by matrilineal lineage also cannot be married through the Rabbinat.
- Couples in which either partner has converted under Orthodox auspices must not only produce a conversion certificate from the Orthodox Rabbinat, but also prove that they live an Orthodox lifestyle.
- *If either partner in the couple attempting to marry has undergone a non-Orthodox conversion or if either of their mothers have undergone a non-Orthodox conversion, the Rabbinat will not marry them.*

If a couple meets the criteria to be married through the Rabbinat:

- Orthodox rabbi should instruct the 'groom' to recite any vows that he may want to share. The bride does not recite any vows.
- Rabbi: "By the power invested in me as the supreme religious authority in Israel, I now pronounce you husband and wife."

3) IRAC Fact Sheet: Marrying through the Orthodox Rabbinate in Israel

This document is the GL's guide to leading the discussion on the process and implications of marrying through the Rabbinate in Israel. Read the facts to your group, as well as the discussion the questions.

Keep in mind you have 15 minutes to discuss marrying through the Rabbinate with each group.

- **In Israel, people can get married *only* according to their recognized religion.**
- Orthodox Judaism is the only form of Judaism recognized in Israel; both Reform and Conservative movements are not recognized. Marriage ceremonies performed under Reform or Conservative auspices in Israel are not considered valid.
- **The Orthodox Rabbinate, Israel's supreme religious authority, holds exclusive control of the marriage of all Jews in Israel.**
- **Because there is no civil marriage option in Israel and Orthodox Judaism is the only recognized form of Judaism in Israel, an Orthodox ceremony is the ONLY way for a Jew to legally marry another Jew in Israel.**
- It is not possible for a Jew and a non-Jew to be legally married in Israel; both partners must be of the same religion.

- *How does the marriage situation in Israel make you feel??* (Give PP's some time to think, then welcome any answers.)
- Lets look at some statistics about the Jewish population in Israel:
- Of the 5.5 million Jews in Israel, only 20% are Orthodox; 80% are non-Orthodox.
- So it should be pretty clear that the limitations on Israelis' freedom to marry apply to most of the population, as most of the population is *not* Orthodox.
- Forcing two Jews to get married through the Orthodox establishment in Israel is a clear violation of freedom of religion.

- *Did anyone get turned away from the Rabbinate? Why were you turned away?*
- (Don't worry if no one raises their hands, just go on to explain the conditions for getting turned away from the Rabbinate)
- Because Reform and Conservative movements are not recognized in Israel, people who converted to Judaism under the Reform and Conservative auspices cannot be married through the Rabbinate.
- The Rabbinate is the only way for a Jew to legally marry another Jew in Israel, yet there are hundreds of thousands of Jews in Israel who don't fit the Orthodox Rabbinate's criteria for what makes someone Jewish and thus have no way to be married there.
- **How would you react to such a situation if you were living in Israel?**
- **How do you think you'd feel if your only option to be married was through an Orthodox ceremony, with an Orthodox rabbi??**
- **How do you think you'd feel if your only option to be married was through an Orthodox ceremony but you were turned away for 'not being Jewish enough'?**

* Give this document to the person playing the Reform rabbi (male or female)

4) Reform Rabbi's guide to officiating marriages in Israel

- The following document outlines the criteria required for a couple to be wed through the Reform movement in Israel and describes status of such a marriage. This document should be referred to in the first part of the program, when PP's are exploring the different channels of marriage in Israel.

- Use these guidelines to determine whether or not you, as a Reform rabbi in the State of Israel, will officiate each prospective couple's marriage. Ask to see the identity cards of each couple and then use the guidelines to either accept or reject the proposed marriage.

Before marrying a couple, make sure they know the following facts:

- Since Reform and Conservative sects of Judaism are not officially recognized in Israel, marriages performed under the Reform or Conservative movements in Israel and NOT considered valid marriages. They do not entitle a couple to a marriage certificate or the rights that go along with a marriage.
- To be recognized as married (and to receive the benefits associated with it such as residence, healthcare, insurance, education and taxation), a couple that wed in a Reform or Conservative service in Israel must also be legally married outside of Israel or through the Rabbinat in Israel.

Criteria to marry a couple?

- The Reform Movement recognizes the validity of all other streams of Judaism.
- Thus, Reform rabbis will marry Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews, as well as all converts to Judaism.

Criteria to reject a couple

- *A child born to a non-Jewish woman and a Jewish man is not considered Jewish by the Reform Movement in Israel.
- Thus, the only way a couple will be unable to wed through the Reform Movement in Israel is if the bride or her mother are not Jewish.

If a couple meets the criteria to be married through the Reform Movement:

- Rabbi should let both the bride and the groom recite any vows they wish to share with each other.
- Rabbi: "As a religious leader of the Reform Movement in Israel, I now pronounce you husband and wife."
- Remember to remind the newly weds that marrying through the Reform Movement in Israel does *not* constitute a legal marriage in the eyes of the state.

5) IRAC fact sheet: marrying through the Reform Movement in Israel

This document is the GL's guide to leading the discussion on the implications of marrying in a Reform service in Israel. Read the facts out loud to your group, as well as the discussion questions.

Keep in mind you have 15 minutes to discuss marrying through the Reform Movement with each group.

- Because Reform and Conservative sects of Judaism are not recognized in Israel, Reform and Conservative marriages performed in Israel do not constitute a legal marriage.
- Because the Israeli government recognizes legal marriages performed outside of Israel, a couple wed in a Reform service must also be married outside of Israel to be recognized as married.
- **How does the fact that the Israeli government recognizes only Orthodox Judaism make you feel?**
- **Should the Orthodox rabbinical courts hold exclusive control over the marriage of Jews in Israel? Why or why not?**

Legal consequences for couples that don't legally marry abroad after a Reform ceremony:

IRAC has conducted extensive research about the legal consequences of performing a Reform marriage service without having a civil service. This is what IRAC found-

- Couples who wed in Reform or Conservative ceremonies in Israel who do not marry abroad or through the Rabbinate will not receive a marriage certificate. The couple will not be able to register as spouses but rather will hold the legal standing of a 'publicly known couple', a form or recognition of a couple that does not equate to marriage.
- The couple also will not receive the benefits that are associated with marriage, such as residence, healthcare, insurance, education and taxation.

How would you feel if you were told that your Reform marriage ceremony was not Jewish enough to constitute a valid marriage in Israel?

Would instituting a civil marriage option improve the marriage situation for people in Israel? Why or why not?

Why do you think that civil marriage doesn't quite yet exist in Israel?

*Give this document to the person playing the Cyprus city hall official/judge.

6) A Guide to officiating marriages in ceremonies outside Israel

- The following document outlines the criteria required for a couple to wed in a marriage ceremony outside of Israel and describes the status of such marriages. This document should be referred to in the first part of the program, when PP's are exploring the different channels of marriage in Israel.

- Refer to this document to explain that marriages performed abroad receive full recognition in Israel.

Recognition of Marriages Performed Outside of Israel

- **The State of Israel will recognize marriages of Jews performed outside of Israel that are valid in the country in which they were performed.**
- This includes civil marriages and non-Orthodox marriages.
- The Law of Rabbinical Courts (Marriages and Divorces) - 1953 – maintains that legal marriages performed outside of Israel are recognized.
- **In November 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that civil marriages of Jewish couples who could have wed in Israel, but chose to marry abroad, have full legal recognition as a marriage for the purpose of Israeli law.** While the state for many years has treated these marriages as valid, their actual legal status was not clear.
- The Supreme Court acknowledged the fact that thousands of Israeli chose to marry abroad, and it became necessary to recognize the validity of such marriages.
- *Figures show that in 2002, 7,089 Israelis got married overseas - with 49 percent of them wedding in Cyprus*

Criteria to be married in a ceremony abroad

- Couples wed in a civil or a religious ceremony that is valid in the country it was officiated in receives full recognition by the State of Israel.
- Any officially authenticated marriage certificate from abroad will be recognized as valid by the ministry of the interior, even for couples with different religions.

If a couple chooses to wed in Cyprus

- The process is very bureaucratic. 'Cyprus official' should hand every couple a document ("Cyprus marriage certificate") and instruct the couples to get their certificate stamped in 3 different locations, which should be situated around the Cyprus station.
- 3 other GL's should be seated around the Cyprus station, ready to stamp marriage certificates.

7) IRAC fact sheet: going abroad to be married in Israel

- This document is the GL's guide to leading the discussion on the implications of marrying in a ceremony abroad. Read the facts out loud to your group, as well as the discussion questions.

- Keep in mind you have 15 minutes to discuss marrying abroad with each group.

Background

- The Law of Rabbinical Courts (Marriages and Divorces) - 1953 - establishes that matters of marriage of Jews in Israel are under the exclusive jurisdiction of Orthodox rabbinical courts. **However, legal marriages performed outside of Israel are recognized.**
- This law is what initiated the trend followed by many Israelis wherein Jewish couples leave Israel to marry abroad.
- Because Israeli marriage restrictions apply to such a significant portion of Israel's diverse population, many couples find it suiting to marry in a civil ceremony abroad.

The Validity of Marriages Performed Outside of Israel

- **In 1962, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Ministry of the Interior must register as married all couples who married in a civil marriage abroad, even if either or both of the couple were citizens of Israel.**
- **In November 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that civil marriages of Jewish couples who could have wed in Israel, but chose to marry abroad, have full legal recognition as a marriage for the purpose of Israeli law.** While the state for many years has treated these marriages as valid, their actual legal status was not clear. The Supreme Court recognized the importance of the right to family life and it acknowledged the fact that thousands of Israelis choose to marry abroad. Therefore, it was necessary to recognize the validity of such marriages.
- Of those Israelis who married between 2000 and 2005, About 47,000 (12 percent) secured their union abroad, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics

The Jewish Public is Tired of Religious Coercion

- The large number of Jewish immigrants who choose to get married overseas proves they do not want "to go through the torture of the rabbinic exams."
- "The fact that most of those Israelis who marry overseas are Jews proves that the Jewish public is fed up with religious coercion and the Orthodox monopoly." (Zamira Segev of the Forum for Free Choice in Marriage)
- Upon the publication of the data regarding Israelis and marriage abroad in 2005, IRAC sent Israel's then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a letter calling for a government solution to the dilemma of those Israelis who are not allowed to marry in Israel because of their doubted Jewish identity.
- There are around 300,000 Jews in Israel who face the dilemma of not being able to marry in Israel because they do not qualify as Jews according to Halacha. Officially, they are considered by the Rabbinic to be "without religion."

8) IRAC wrap up fact sheet

- Below you will find a concise summary of what PP's have learned throughout the program, as well as a few discussion questions to encourage participation.

- Use this document to lead the program's wrap-up discussion. Read the statements out loud followed by the questions posed to PP's and encourage PP's to share their opinions. Keep in mind you have 15 minutes for this part of the program.

- Because there is no civil marriage option in Israel and Orthodox Judaism is the only recognized form of Judaism in Israel, an Orthodox ceremony is the ONLY way for a Jew to legally marry another Jew in Israel.
- **Does anyone think the State's recognition of Orthodox marriage ceremonies but not Reform or Conservative ceremonies constitutes discrimination? Why or why not?**
- Because thousands of Israelis choose to marry abroad each year, it became necessary for the State to recognize the legal marriage of Jews performed outside of Israel.
- **How do you think you would be married if you lived in Israel? Would you go abroad? Or choose the Orthodox path?**
- Because Reform and Conservative sects of Judaism are not recognized in Israel, Reform and Conservative marriages performed in Israel do not constitute a legal marriage. To be considered legally married, a couple which wed in a Reform service in Israel must also be married outside of Israel.
- **How do you think you'd feel if you were married at the temple you grew up at, with the rabbi who helped you become a bar/bat mitzvah, but the state refused to recognize the marriage?**
- Because the Orthodox Rabbinate holds exclusive control over the marriage of Jews in Israel and will not marry Jews unless they are both Halachically Jewish, over 300,000 Jews in Israel who identify as Jewish but do not qualify as Jews according to Halacha *cannot get married in Israel*.
- **Does anyone think the Rabbinate's decision to marry only Jews who are Halachically Jewish is unfair? Why or why not?**
- The Reform and Conservative movements have been amongst the most ardent opponents of the lack of civil marriage in Israel, as Israeli marriage laws discriminate against many different groups of people in Israel.
- IRAC is committed to challenging the current marriage situation in Israel. As an organization founded with the goals of progressing pluralism and freedom of religion in Israel, IRAC is dedicated to working for more freedom of marriage.

* PL should now instruct all PP' to come together for the final wedding ceremony.

9) Model of participants' identity cards:

First name:

Last name:

Religion:

Religion mother was born into:

Religion father was born into:

Did you or your mother undergo a conversion?

If yes, under what movement?