Celebrating my daughter's intermarriage

Our family had a wedding last month. Following her mother's example, my daughter married a *mensh*
. Like my husband David, my son-in-law is a sweet, smart, dependable guy who makes good jokes, loves to cook, and comes from a loving family that happens not to be Jewish. Like my mother when I got married, I happily endorsed my daughter's choice, and hoped her nuptials would honor her Jewish upbringing.

"As long as it's a Jewish wedding," my mother said. She didn't need an "or else." We wanted to please her. Besides, I wanted a Jewish wedding, too. For her, and me, having a rabbi officiate was a promise about her future grandchildren. David didn't object, and neither did his parents – they had grown up in a Zoroastrian home in India and a Methodist one in Iowa, but raised their own kids religion-free.

My mother selected the flowers, planned the menu and found the rabbi. "Just do the standard Jewish ceremony," we told him, and that's what he did. After he left, David's mother performed a Zoroastrian blessing.

Sophie and Henry wanted to organize their own wedding. And they didn't want to include a rabbi. "As long as it's not on a Saturday," I said. When they asked which Jewish elements I'd like included in the ceremony, the answer wasn't obvious. I considered the *huppah*, the wine, the Seven Blessings, the broken glass. I didn't want to see any of them thrown in just for flavor. What universal meanings could we uncover within these specific symbols?

The wedding took place on a Sunday, at a camp on a lake south of Boston. A friend of Sophie and Henry's officiated, certified for the occasion by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The *h uppah*
was a bedspread crocheted by Henry's Protestant great-great grandmother, supported by poles Sophie's brother Sam fashioned from driftwood. Henry's mother brought roses to memorialize three pairs of grandparents. Indian designs stenciled in on the floorboards in chalk dust marked the specialness of the space, and the occasion.

We sang a Unitarian hymn Henry's mom remembers hearing when she was pregnant. Readings included excerpts from the decision that made marriage equality legal in

Massachusetts and Charles Darwin's notes on whether to marry (con: less money for books; pro: a soft wife on the sofa). A friend sang a stunning aria by Bellini.

Following the vows and the exchange of rings, guests read the Seven Blessings, which I had reconstructed for the occasion. Sophie and Henry don't believe in God, and didn't want anything in the ceremony to suggest that marriage is only for heterosexuals. But they do value gratitude and working for the good. So the blessing over wine became, "Blessed be the fruit of the vine, symbol of our joy." The one about God creating Man in his image drew on the divine attributes mentioned in Exodus – "Blessed be compassion, graciousness, patience, kindness and truth, and all that humans should strive for."

The traditional blessings' mentions of Zion and Jerusalem suggested a particularism that Sophie and Henry wanted to avoid. I took the blessing that imagines Zion as an abandoned mother welcoming home her long-lost children, and universalized its underlying message about a dispersed community longing for reunion: "May joy and exultation fill this gathering. Blessed are we when families and friends are reunited and friends become family." Mentions of "groom and bride" were changed to "grooms and brides," to include homosexual as well as heterosexual couples.

After the seventh blessing, the couple shared wine from Sophie's *Kiddush* cup – her bat mitzvah gift from the Sisterhood at our former *shul*. Then David's mother joined them under the *huppah* and performed the same Zoroastrian blessing she gave us when we married. A silver tray held a variety of symbols: rice for plenty; spices for savoring life; betel nut for life's bitter passages (with hopes that these be few); fruits and sugar for times of sweetness (with hopes that these be many). She hung flower garlands around Sophie and Henry's necks, marked their foreheads with red paste and tossed rice over them. To ward off evil, she broke an egg at their feet.

Then their officiating friend pronounced them married, they stomped on a pair of wine glasses, and everyone applauded.

Would I have been happier if my daughter had had a fully Jewish wedding? Not if she didn't care about the ritual. While David and I just followed a script, Sophie and Henry thought about what they were doing, and made sure they meant what was said. The ceremony they designed

reflected what they believe and what they're like: thoughtful, honest, caring and fun. I can't think of better ingredients for beginning a marriage.

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