

WEB OF LIFE KETUBAH

This ketubah contains images of life and blessing, fertility and growth, abundance and connection, diversity and beauty, kindness and justice. And above all – love and joy.

TEXT

(Hebrew around inner circle corresponds to English translation around the square.)

Four phrases from Song of Songs traditionally found in ketubot:

“My beloved is mine and I am my beloved’s”

“This is my beloved and this is my friend”

“I have found my heart’s beloved.”

“Set me as a seal on your heart.”

ANIMALS

- Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima says, “Be as brave as a **leopard**, as light as an **eagle**, as swift as a **deer**, and as strong as a **lion** — to do the will of your God in Heaven.” Pirkei Avot (5:20). These four animals are found in much of Jewish art, often identifying it as Jewish. I include them in ketubot, because marriage requires all of these qualities. Although these animals are usually portrayed as male, I have included a chick as well as the rooster, and a female deer caring for her fawn, referring to the importance of *hesed*- loving kindness, of family in our tradition, and for the blessings of children.
- **Rabbits** are universal symbols of fertility. They are also unusually silent animals. I include them as a reminder that silence is also part of relationship.
- **Bees** refer to the intricate web and interconnection of life, as demonstrated by the environmental impact on bees and hives that we are facing today.
- The **tree frog** is an endangered species which needs our concern and attention.
- The **turtle** is a universal symbol of long life, and also refers to the patience to enjoy it.
- The **dragonfly** and **butterfly** represent the diversity and beauty of the species we share this planet with.
- **Fish** represent survival and fertility because they survived the biblical flood and are plentiful in our oceans.
- The **ram** is the source of the shofar blown at our Jewish new year. The ram also was the animal sacrificed instead of Isaac in the biblical story. This ram therefore stands in for the willing offerings and generosity necessary in a marriage.
- The baby **goat** is reminder of the importance of coming together again and again to celebrate traditions with family and community, as we sing *Had Gadya* each year at the seder. Goats are also adaptable creatures who find whatever they need to eat wherever they are. May this couple find what they need in life to sustain them with the agility and enthusiasm of baby goats.
- Ketubot traditionally contained images of the place they were created, for example, the double headed eagle, symbol of the Austrian Hungarian Empire, where many Jews used to live. I included a lizard to represent New Mexico, where Chloe grew up and returned to, the place of the wedding and the adopted home of the artist. The **lizard** (New Mexico whiptail (*Aspidoscelis neomexicanus*) is a female-only species of lizard found in New Mexico, Arizona and northern Mexico. It is the official state reptile of New Mexico and is one of many lizard species known to be parthenogenetic- showing the diversity and creativity of life.

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BIRDS

- **Doves** represent hope and peace from the story of Noah. Two doves fly towards each other, showing the amazing good luck and gift when two souls find each other.
- The **rooster** is honored in Jewish art as the first animal in the morning to praise God. I have included a **chick** as well as the traditional rooster, reinforcing the value of generation to generation – *L'Dor V'Dor*.
- **Hummingbirds** represent fragility of life, as well as its beauty and strength.
- The **Sandhill Crane** is another symbol of New Mexico; these beautiful cranes winter along the Rio Grande River in New Mexico. They also mate for life and are symbols of faithfulness, vigilance, grace and endurance. They always return home to each other.

PLANTS

- Seven species of plants of ancient Israel mentioned in the Torah are found in this ketubah: **dates, figs, pomegranates, grapes, olives, wheat and barley.**
- **Olives** represent peace and hope as the plant the dove brought back to Noah after the flood. Especially in these times, we need peace and hope.
- **Pomegranates** are found in the Song of Songs, which the four texts are from. The life cycle of the pomegranate is found from bud to flower to fruit.
- **Grapes** represent the joy and celebration which our Jewish tradition encourages.
- **Grapes and figs together** at the top of the papercut represent our hope for peace from the verse in Micah 4:4: "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid."
- A lovely ancient custom was to plant a tree at the birth of a child: a **cedar** for son and a **cypress** for a daughter. The branches of each tree were then used to construct the huppah. A cypress trees is found on the left, a cedar tree on the right. The words found in the trees are from the seven blessings recited at a Jewish wedding : "Voice of joy, Voice of happiness". Hebrew contains many, many words to describe this quality which is highly valued in the Jewish tradition. Rebbe Nahman, a Hasidic rabbi from the 18th century, said: "It is a great mitzvah to remain in happiness always". May this couple experience much happiness, and comfort each other in the inevitably difficult times in their new lives together.
- Pomegranates are shown in all stages from seed to bud to flower to fruit and back to seed, referring to the cycle of life. Pomegranates are also symbols of the ancient priests, who task was to provide service to the community, which the bride's vocation embodies.
- The **palm branch** is used during the Sukkot holiday, which is a reminder of our fragile and precious stay on earth. The four plants used on Sukkot, are shown with the four animals in the corners of the inner square: palm, willow, myrtle and *etrog*. These four plants represent the spine, eye, mouth and heart, which each partner brings to this new marriage.
- A sunflower on the side of the moon and night balances the complexity and clarity of the, showing that in darkest times there is always light. The sunflower is also a symbol in our day of the fight for independence, freedom and justice, and honors the struggles of the people of Ukraine, where many Jews used to live. Sunflowers are resilient and hardy, growing along the side of roads, recalling the many times Jews traveled seeking safety and freedom.

- In Jewish mysticism, the **rose** represents the many layered, hidden essence of the sacred as the *Shechinah*, the female presence of God. The **rose** next to the **wheat** recalls the 1918 Bread and Roses Strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Women factory workers, many of whom were Jewish, went on strike demanding not only bare minimum living conditions, but joy and beauty in life. The rose remind us of the Jewish tradition of "*Hiddur Mitzvah*", which calls upon us to carrying out all of our actions in beauty.

NATURE

- The **sun** shines through layers of clouds and rain, producing a **rainbow**, another symbol of hope and peace from the story of Noah. **Clouds and rain** and refer to the constantly changing patterns of life - threatening storms as well as glorious rainbows - that we all face.
- The complete cycle of the **moon** is shown in nine moons, referring to the months of human birth. In the Jewish tradition, the sun and moon are not supposed to appear on the same image until the Messiah when the moon will be as bright as the sun. I put both in all my artwork since there are many things that we can do now without waiting for the Messiah to appear.
- The **land and hills** remind us of the biblical commandment in Genesis "*Shomrei Adamah* – protect the earth. "
- **Water, rivers and waves** are universal symbols of life, spirit and the transitions implicit in marriage. The **shells** in the waves remind us of the interconnectedness of all life and nature in their fractal, spiral shapes.

HUMAN SYMBOLS

- The **huppah** – a canopy that is open on all four sides –derives from the Bible; the Talmud teaches that the huppah evokes the home of Abraham and Sarah, which was always open to strangers as well as family and friends. The huppah is found in the woven fabric in the upper arch. This intertwining of the huppah also recalls the braiding of the hallah on Shabbat.
- Also found is the **Kiddush cup** which holds the wine that celebrates all Jewish occasions in joy. This cup, which is broken at the end of the wedding ceremony, also refers to the inevitable challenges and sorrows of life and love, made sweeter by connection and community.
- **Two candles** and their flames remind us of the celebrations of Shabbat and holidays that bring light and holiness into our human lives.