

You're Invited!

JOIN US FOR A HENNA CELEBRATION

Long before a wedding, the celebration begins. In Morocco, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Kurdistan, India, and other Jewish communities, family and friends gather for a henna party to bless the bride and groom with joy, good fortune, and protection. In the communities' home countries, the henna was usually held on the eve of the wedding; today many families celebrate a few days before.

The henna plant

Henna is a natural dye made from the dried leaves of a flowering shrub, *Lawsonia inermis*, that grows in hot, dry lands from North Africa to South Asia. Its leaves contain a pigment called lawsone that stains skin a reddish brown. The stain fades after a week or two.

Henna in the Bible

The Song of Songs mentions henna, called *kofer*: אֲשָׁכַל הַכֹּפֶר דּוֹדִי לִי בְכֶרֶם עֵין גֶּדִי "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Ein Gedi" (1:14). The commentator Rashi saw the verse as a symbol of God's many acts of forgiveness, and some explain the henna as a wish that a new couple begin with a clean slate.

Dress for the occasion

Moroccan brides wear the embroidered velvet *keswa el kbira*, the "grand dress." Yemenite brides from Sana'a wear the towering *tishbuk lulu* headdress of pearls and silver with layers of jewelry. Guests wear their most festive clothes.

A blessing of protection

Many families believed henna brought good luck and protected the couple from the evil eye. Henna is applied to the palms of the bride and groom, and guests may receive a dot of henna as a wish for joy.

Music and joy

Women sing special henna songs, play drums, and ululate, a high trilling cry of joy. Candles and dancing fill the room. Our song, "Ahlan wa Sahlan," is a traditional Moroccan song whose title means "welcome."

Sweets for a sweet life

The henna tray is surrounded by sweets: dates, almonds, and colorful Moroccan marzipan. Sharing sweets expresses the hope for a sweet life together.

Written by JIMENA. Sources: My Jewish Learning; Song of Songs 1:14 and Rashi (Sefaria).