

“A Shattering Statement”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Why break a glass at the conclusion of a Jewish wedding? The traditional answer is that it recalls the destruction of the Temple, the difficulties of our history and, by extension, the profound truth that couples will face trials and challenges as well as celebrate joys.

A few years ago, a student at my synagogue, Sarah Super, came up with a poignant additional answer. As a teenager, she said, she knew that when you broke something, your parents would be angry, or exasperated, because it almost always belonged to them. Now you were getting married; the decisions you made, the things you kept or broke, would belong to you and your spouse. Breaking a glass was a ceremony of independence — now life turns on the decisions you make, good and bad, and they are determined not by parents but by husband and wife.

That answer finds its precursor in God’s words at the creation of Adam and Eve: “Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife.” (Gen. 2:24) I always considered that verse was intended for in-laws: you have to give up sovereignty over your child. Now he, or she, belongs to someone else. A marriage can only be successful when the generational tide turns from one’s parents to one’s partner.

We prepare our children for life by teaching them to put someone other than ourselves first. And it all begins with breaking a glass.