Do the bride and groom fast on their wedding day?

In many Jewish communities the bride and groom fast on their wedding day, until the Hupa. The reason is that according to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Bikurim 3:3), on the day a person marries, all his sins are forgiven. The wedding day is, in that sense, a personal Yom Kippur, and the fast is the expression of repentance and atonement that such a day calls for.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan explains it this way: with marriage a person begins a new stage of life. Marriage means a complete change of lifestyle, and the couple is given the chance to begin it with a clean soul. The love they feel for each other on their wedding day can undo whatever misdirected passion they may have had in the past. And they also fast looking forward, to merit the Divine guidance that will let them get through whatever problems come.

In Ashkenazic communities this fast is taken very seriously.

THE SEPHARDIC CUSTOM

In most Sephardic communities, by contrast, the custom is not to fast.

Rabbi Obadia Yosef is explicit about this and advises Sephardic couples not to fast. Other Sephardic rabbis go further and forbid it outright. The reason is practical and it is common sense: the bride and groom need to be strong enough to handle the pressure of the day, the ceremony, and the celebration. A groom who has not eaten, after a sleepless night and with all the tension of that day, is in no condition to enjoy his own wedding.

And the underlying argument is the one that interests me most:

the process of Teshuba does not depend on fasting. It can be achieved just as well by devoting that important day to Torah study and Tefila.

Rabbi Obadia Yosef adds a suggestion for couples who still want to do something. Instead of a fast from food, he proposes a *taanit dibbur*, a "fast of words." Watching what you say that day, not talking too much, not speaking badly of anyone. And he is right that for most of us, that is harder than not eating.

THE VIDUY

In many communities, both Ashkenazic and Sephardic, the bride and groom recite the Viduy, the confession, before the Hupa, using the text of the Minha service of Yom Kippur or something similar.

That is the heart of this custom: not the restriction of food, but the fact that two people stand, each one separately, a few hours before getting married, and take an accounting of their life up to that point. And then walk out and start over.

Rabbi Yosef Bitton