Guide to Taharah Practices

-- For Men --
General Guidelines

A taharah team consists of a leader (Rosh M'taher) and three or more members (m'taharim).

Taharah is not performed on Shabbat.

M'taharim should be dressed in clean, modest, clothing. Shoes should offer appropriate protection from water.

No person should be present in the taharah room other than the m'taharim.

Family members do not perform taharah for close relatives. For example, a son does not perform taharah for his father, brother or father-in-law. A close relative is generally defined as one for whom the family member would say Kaddish.

Jewish men perform taharah for men and Jewish women perform taharah for women.

Kohanim do not perform taharah.

No conversation should take place in the presence of the met except for matters regarding the taharah. Discussion of the met's personality, disease, family problems, etc. is inappropriate. However, it is helpful to understand the cause of death and what is known about the met before beginning the taharah. Such information should be shared prior to arrival or to entering the taharah room.

Ideally, taharah is done within three hours of burial. That ideal is most frequently impossible. The chevrah kadishah should strive to schedule the taharah as close to burial as possible and in a manner that demonstrates kavod hamet.

Steps in a Taharah

1. Taharah implements are brought out, aron opened, tachrichim laid out in the order of use, buckets of water are filled for washing the met and for taharah.

2. Hands are ritually washed without a b'ratschah.

3. Protective clothing (gloves, mask and gown or apron) are put on.

4. M'taharim ask for mechilah in unison.

5. Following the initial prayer, the met is uncovered.

6. Bandages, tubing, jewelry or other obstructions are removed (see Appendix).

7. The met is washed to remove soil, excrement or blood (see Appendix).

8. Gloves are removed and hands are ritually washed without a b'ratschah. New gloves are put on.

9. The taharah is performed.
10. The *met* is dried and dressed in *tachrichim*.

11. The *met* is placed in the *aron*.

12. *M'tharim* ask for *mechilah*.

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**Check Equipment and Supplies**

*Tarahah* booklet  
Three buckets  
*Tarahah* boards  
Scissors  
Paper towels  
Towels or sheets for drying  
Sheets for covering the *met*  
*Tallit* (preferably belonging to the *met*)  
Earth from Israel  
Broken shards  
*Tachrichim*  
*Aron*  
Rubber/vinyl gloves  
Plastic gowns or aprons  
Gauze in a roll  
Gauze pads  
Head rest  
Garbage can  
String  
Nail clippers  
Nail file or flat toothpicks (for cleaning under nails)  
Nail polish remover  
Hand-washing vessel  
Surgical or adhesive tape (preferably paper rather than plastic)  
Spray bandage

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**Laying Out the *Tachrichim***

*Tachrichim* are laid out in the following order:

- *Mitznefet*  
  Head covering
- *Michnasayim*  
  Pants
- *K'tonet*  
  Shirt
- *Kittel*  
  Robe
- *Avnet*  
  Sash
- *Tallit*  
  Prayer shawl
- *Sovev*  
  Covering cloth
  Bag from *tachrichim*
Preparing the Aron

Remove the lid

Place a handful of earth near where the head will be, taking care that the soil will not fall through any perforations in the bottom of the aron.

Prepare the sower to be placed into the aron later

Opening Procedures

Wash hands by pouring water from the hand-washing vessel over the opposite hand, alternating hands three times. No b'rachah is said.

Put on gloves, mask and gown or apron.

The Mtaherim ask in unison for mechilah using the met's name:

________________________ ben____________________, forgive us for any indignity that you may suffer at the hands of this chevrah kadishah notwithstanding the loving care and concern that we will exercise during this taharah. Grant mechilah to us, our families and to the whole house of Israel.

Recite the introductory Anah Hashem prayer:

God of kindness and mercy, whose ways are merciful and true, You commanded us to treat the dead with true kindness and involve ourselves in their burial, as it is written, "you shall bury them." Therefore, may it be your will, Lord our God, to strengthen us to do our work in cleansing of the dead. Guard us from all injury and harm so that we not fail in our endeavor. Fulfill in us the Biblical statement, "The one who observes the commandments will not know evil." Recognize this deed of true kindness and fill our days with goodness. May God be merciful to us forever.
Recite the *Chamol* prayer:

Master of the universe! Have compassion for ____ ben ____ , this deceased, for he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, your servants. May his soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You are He who revives the dead and brings death to the living. Blessed are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead of Your people, Israel, upon petition.

Therefore, may it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the deceased for he is Your servant and son of Your maidservant. And You, Lord, our God and God of our fathers, who concerns Himself with the poor, save him from all misery and a day of evil. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is He who mercifully redeems His people Israel from all kinds of suffering.

Therefore, may it be Your will, Lord our God, and God of our fathers, to remember the merit of the sacred covenant which is in his flesh. Blessed are you who establishes the merciful covenant with mercy.

In mercy hide and disregard the transgressions of this departed, your servant. Deliver him from consumption by fire, for he needs your great mercy, and You, Lord our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, great in counsel and mighty in achievement in mercy. May he walk with righteous steps into the Garden of Eden, for that is the palace of the upright, and God protects the steps of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the departed of His people Israel.

Amen. May it be Your will.
Preparing the Met, R'chitzah

Once the washing containers are filled with lukewarm water, the met is uncovered. The met is never allowed to be placed face down. Genitalia are kept covered except when being washed.

A visual inspection is made thoroughly but quickly. Blood which flows at the time of death may not be thrown away. It is to be removed for burial in the aron. (See Appendix).

The met should be placed on three taharah boards. Pairs of m'taharim raise a portion of the met and slide each of the three moistened boards into place under the met.

The met is gently but thoroughly cleaned. Dirty nails are cleaned. If necessary, soiled nails may be clipped and set aside to be placed in the aron later.

The body is washed. The order of washing is:
- The entire head
- The neck
- Right upper arm, arm, hand
- Right upper half of body
- Genitals
- Right thigh, leg, foot
- Left upper arm, arm, hand
- Left upper half of body
- Left thigh, leg, foot
- Incline on left and wash right shoulder, back, leg, foot
- Incline on right and wash left shoulder, back, leg, foot
- Care should be taken to wash away all excrement. All washing must be done with water from the bucket. A hose must never be used.

The met is covered with a sheet.

During rechitzah, the following is said:

His head is burnished gold, the mane of his hair black as the raven.
His eyes like doves by the rivers of milk and plenty.
His cheeks a bed of spices, a treasure of precious scents, his lips red lilies wet with myrrh.
His arms a golden scepter with gems of topaz, his loins the ivory thrones inlaid with sapphire, his thighs like marble pillars on pedestals of gold.
Tall as Mount Lebanon, a man like a cedar!
His mouth is sweet wine, his is tall delight.
This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. (Song of Songs 5:11)
M’taharin again ritually wash their hands as before. No b’rachah is recited.

**Tarahar**

Nine kabin (approximately 24 quarts) of water is used for taharah. Cool water is used.

The water is distributed into three containers. No more than three containers may be used.

The taharah boards should be checked to be sure that they are completely wet and clean prior to the taharah.

The flow of water from successive containers must occur without interruption. One m’taher should observe those who are pouring to verify that the water flow is continuous.

As the water is poured, the following is recited:

Rabbi Akiba said, "You are fortunate, Israel. Before whom do you purify yourselves and who purifies you? Our father in heaven. As it is said, "And I will pour upon you pure water and you will be purified of all our defilements, and from all your abominations I will purify you." (Ezekiel 36:25) And it says, "God is the reservoir of Israel" (Jeremiah 17:13) Just as the reservoir of the ritual bath purifies the impure, so does the Holy One purify Israel. A fountain for gardens, a well of living waters and flowing streams from Lebanon. (Song of Songs 4:15) And the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by a spirit of judgment and with a searing breath. (Joshua 4:4) And I will pour upon you pure water and you will be purified of all your defilements, and from all your abominations I will purify you. (Ezekiel 36:25)

Each m’taher recites:  

He is pure.

The met is thoroughly dried with towels or sheets.
**Halbashah**

[Dressing the met should be done with continuing concern for the dignity and respect of the met. Tachrichim must not be permitted to become soiled. If soiling should occur, including soiling with excrement, blood, puss or dirt, the taharah is not repeated, but the soiled tachrichim are replaced.]

Put the mitznefet over the head, covering the entire face and back of the head down to the neck. Other cords are used to tie the sleeves closed.

Michnasayim are drawn up the legs to the waist. It may be necessary to raise the met from side to side in order to slide the legs up.

The ktonet is put on sleeves first and then pulled over the head and drawn down to the waist. The ends of the cords are twisted around four times as one m'taher counts alef, bet, gimel, dalet. The cord is then tied with two bows pointing toward the head.

The kitel is put on in the same manner as the ktonet.

The avnet is placed around the body over the kitel. The ends are wound around four times as with the ktonet but tied with three bows in the shape of the Hebrew letter shin. The loops of the bow should be toward the head.

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**Placing the Met in the Aron**

Bring the aron close to the met.

Put the sovev in the aron in a diamond configuration.

Put the tallit in the aron on top of the sovev. Cut off one of the tzitzit and place it in the bottom of the aron.

Lift the met into the aron.

Place shards on the face of the met over the eyes and mouth.

Wrap the tallit around the met.

Wrap the sovev over the met first over the head, then feet, then around the body.

Sprinkle a small amount of earth over the met.

Any other articles which are to be buried with the met (false teeth, loose hair, blood stained articles, nails, etc) should now be placed in the foot of the aron. Efforts should be taken (for example placing them in tachrichim bag and wrapping in straw) to prevent these articles from making noise or slipping through perforations in the bottom of the aron.
The M'taherim say together:

\[ \text{ben} \ldots \text{please forgive us for any kind of injury}
\]
\[ \ldots \text{may have suffered at the hands of this chevrah kadishah not with standing the}
\]
\[ \ldots \text{loving care and concern that we exercised during this taharah. Grant}
\]
\[ \text{mechilah to us, our families and to the whole house of Israel.}
\]

The aron is closed. Once closed the aron is not be re-opened.

Light a yartzheit candle at the foot of the aron and recite the following:

\[ \text{גוזה המחנה \ldots \text{please forgive us for any kind of injury}} \]
\[ \ldots \text{may have suffered at the hands of this chevrah kadishah not with standing the}
\]
\[ \ldots \text{loving care and concern that we exercised during this taharah. Grant}
\]
\[ \text{mechilah to us, our families and to the whole house of Israel.}
\]

\[ \text{ברכך \ldots \text{please forgive us for any kind of injury}} \]
\[ \ldots \text{may have suffered at the hands of this chevrah kadishah not with standing the}
\]
\[ \ldots \text{loving care and concern that we exercised during this taharah. Grant}
\]
\[ \text{mechilah to us, our families and to the whole house of Israel.}
\]

\[ \text{שלום \ldots \text{please forgive us for any kind of injury}} \]
\[ \ldots \text{may have suffered at the hands of this chevrah kadishah not with standing the}
\]
\[ \ldots \text{loving care and concern that we exercised during this taharah. Grant}
\]
\[ \text{mechilah to us, our families and to the whole house of Israel.}
\]

**Conclusion**

All supplies should be cleaned and returned to where they are kept and the room should be cleaned.

All soiled supplies should be discarded. Supplies with excrement, blood or puss should be discarded in appropriately marked containers.

If it is not obvious from the shape, mark which end of the aron is the head and which the feet.

The aron is taken feet first to the place where shmirah is to take place and left in the care of a shomer. The shomer should be told both the Hebrew and English names of the met.

Members of the taharah team should wash their hands with soap.

Members of the taharah team should wash their hands ritually as before without a brachah outside of the taharah room (preferably outside the building) using cups of water.
Appendix
Issues, Complications and Halachah

Blood that flows at the time of death may not be washed away. It must be buried. This can create a number of problematic situations which are addressed below:

**Blood, bandages and tubing**

If the *met* is wearing bandages, casts or tubing which, if removed, would cause blood to flow, these items should be left in place.

Protruding tubing can make the dressing of the *met* in *tachrichim* difficult. Tubing can be cut and tied closer to the body with string or gauze. Cut tubing with blood in it must be plugged (or crimped) and placed in the *aron* for burial. Tubing may also be kept in place but tied to the body.

Blood on the body should be wiped off with a towel or piece of sheet. The bloody sheet should be retained for burial in the *aron*.

If there is extensive blood flow, the source is covered and the body is not washed. If blood is flowing from a small wound, the hole can be covered with cotton or gauze held in place with tape or spray-on liquid bandage.

Sores (such as bed sores) which may bleed if washed may be covered with gauze pads and not wet either in washing the *met* or in performing *taharah*.

**Blood mixed with feces**

Bloody feces must be discarded. *Kavod hamet* supercedes the imperative to bury blood.

**Death of an infant**

Our practice is not to perform *taharah* on an infant that is less than thirty days of age. The child is wrapped in a white sheet or blanket rather than in *tachrichim*. A male child is circumcised without *brachot*. Rabbi Fishman should be consulted before *taharah*.

**Patients who died from HIV (AIDS), hepatitis or other infections**

*Taharah* is performed. *Mtaharam* should wear double gloves. Blood and body fluids must be handled with extreme caution to prevent transfer of infection.
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