Ohr Kodesh Congregation
Funeral Practices Committee

Guide to Taharah Practices

-- For Women --
General Guidelines

A taharah team consists of a leader (Rosh M'taharet) and three or more members (m’taharot).

Taharah is not performed on Shabbat.

M’taharot should be dressed in clean, modest, clothing. Shoes should offer appropriate protection from water. A hair covering should be worn.

No person should be present in the taharah room other than the m’taharot.

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.

A woman may perform taharah during her menstrual period.

No conversation should take place in the presence of the metah except for matters regarding the taharah. Discussion of the metah’s personality, disease, family problems, etc., is inappropriate. However, it is helpful to understand the cause of death and what is known about the metah 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 hametah.

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 metah and for taharah.

2. Hands are ritually washed without a brachah.

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

4. M’taharot ask for mechilah in unison.

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

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

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

8. Gloves are removed and hands are ritually washed without a brachah. New gloves are put on.
9. The *taharah* is performed.

10. The *metah* is dried and dressed in *tachrichim*.

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

12. *Mtaharat* ask for *mechilah*.

**Check Equipment and Supplies**

*Taharah* booklet
Three buckets
*Taharah* boards
Scissors
Paper towels
Towels or sheets for drying
Sheets for covering the metah
*Tallit* (belonging to the *metah, if desired by the family*)
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

**Laying Out the *Tachrichim***

*Tachrichim* are laid out in the following order:

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<tr>
<th><em>Mitznefet</em></th>
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<tbody>
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<td><em>Michnasayim</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sovev</em></td>
<td>Covering cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bag which contained the tachrichim</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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 sovev 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 M’tahrot ask for mechilah using the metah’s name:

bat

, forgive us for any indignity that you may suffer at the hands of this chevra 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 their 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 ______ bat ______, this deceased, for she is a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah your servants. May her 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 she is Your servant and daughter of Your maidservant. And You, Lord, our God and God of our fathers, who concerns Himself with the poor, save her 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 her heart. Blessed are you who establishes the merciful covenant with mercy.

In mercy hide and disregard the transgressions of this departed, your servant. Deliver her from consumption by fire, for she 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 she 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 *Metah, R'chitzah*

The washing containers are filled with lukewarm water. The *metah* is examined without removing the cover completely, and care is taken to keep her covered as much as possible.

The *metah* should be placed on three *taharah* boards. The *m'tharot* raise the *metah* one side at a time and slide each of the three moistened boards into place under the *metah*. The *metah* is never allowed to be placed face down.

The *metah* 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.

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 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.

During *rechitzah*, the following is said:

Your hair is like a flock of goats bounding down Mount Gilead.
Your teeth white ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond.
A crimson ribbon your lips -- how I listen for your voice! The curve of your cheek a pomegranate in the thicket of your hair.
Your neck is a tower of David raised in splendor, a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the shields of the warriors.
Your breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing in a field of lilies. You are all beautiful, my love, my perfect one. (Song of Songs 5:11)
Mtahrot again ritually wash their hands as before. No brachah is recited.

**Taharah**

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’taheret 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’taheret recites:

She is pure.

The metah is thoroughly dried with towels or sheets.
Halbashah

[Dressing the metah should be done with continuing concern for the dignity and respect of the metah. 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 two parts of the mitznefet over the head, covering the entire face with the cover and the back of the head down to the neck with the bonnet.

Michnasayim are drawn up the legs to the waist. It may be necessary to raise the metah 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 mtaheret counts alef, bet, gimel, dalet. The cord is then tied with two bows pointing toward the head. Other cords are used to tie the sleeves closed.

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.

Placing the Metah in the Aron

Bring the aron close to the metah.

Put the sovev in the aron in a diamond configuration.

If a tallit is to be used, put it 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 metah into the aron.

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

Wrap the tallit around the metah.

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

Sprinkle a small amount of earth over the metah.

Any other articles which are to be buried with the metah (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 articles in the 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’kahrot say:

_________________________ bat __________________________, forgive us for any indignity that you may have suffered at the hands of this chevra kadishah notwithstanding the loving care and concern that we exercised during this taharah. Grant mehilah 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 yartzeihei candle at the foot of the aron and recite the following:

נָהַמִּים נְווָיָיִם נְוָיָיִם נְוָיָיִם נְוָיָיִם

יברכוֹ נַהֲרָא יְיָ הָיָהָהּ: יַעֲרֵר יָהְוָא וֹיָם יּוֹאָדוּ יִשָּׂעֵי לְךָ

שלום: [ברקيم ו כי]  

**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 pus 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 toward the door 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 metah.

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 metah 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 metah 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.

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 space is at a premium, the blood portion can be cut from the larger sheet and placed in the aron).

Every effort should be made to stop blood flow in order to perform the taharah. 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. However, if there is extensive blood flow, the source is covered and the body is not washed.

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

Blood mixed with feces
Bloody feces must be discarded. Kavod hametah 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. Mtaharot should wear double gloves. Blood and body fluids must be handled with extreme caution to prevent transfer of infection.
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