

## **Adat Shalom *Chevra Kadisha***

### **Reconstructionist *Tahara* Handbook for Women and Men**

**This booklet contains the service and instructions for performing *tahara*. It is one suggested liturgy, assembled by members of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation, rooted in tradition but revised in light of Reconstructionist principles.**

#### **Introduction**

“Just as a newborn child is immediately washed and enters this world clean and pure, so [one] who departs this world must be cleansed and made pure through the religious ritual called *taharah*. In addition to the physical cleansing and preparation of the body for burial, the *Chevrah Kadishah* recites required prayers asking Almighty God for forgiveness for any sins the deceased may have committed and praying that the All-Merciful may guard the deceased and grant him or her eternal peace.”

- Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (1969)

“The highest act of *gemilut chesed* [acts of loving kindness] is that which is done for the dead, for there can never be any question of repayment.”

- *Tanhuma Vayehi 107A*

#### **Glossary**

<b><i>Aron</i></b>	Coffin, casket.
<b><i>Chevra Kadisha</i></b>	Burial Society (literally, holy society).
<b><i>K’vod Hamet/ K’vod Hametah</i></b>	Respect for the dead (male/female).
<b><i>Met/Metah</i></b>	The deceased, also, the dead body.
<b><i>Mechilah</i></b>	Forgiveness, the forgiveness asked by the <i>chevra kadisha</i> for having disturbed the <i>met</i> .

***Tachrichim***

Shrouds: “All Jews are buried in the same type of garment . . . . Nineteen hundred years ago, Rabbi Gamaliel instituted this practice so that the poor would not be shamed and the wealthy would not vie with each other in displaying the costliness of their burial clothes.” (Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*)

***Tahara***

Purification, specifically, the ritual pouring of water before dressing the *met* for burial. Also refers to the entire service.

**NOTE:** These first few pages, Roman numerals iii-vi, are prefatory, *and should be read in advance.* The *tahara* service begins on Arabic page number 1.

## **Basic Information**

### **(1) Information about the deceased.**

The Hebrew name of the deceased and of his/her parents is obtained by the leader of the *chevra* from the synagogue's Life Cycle Committee, which is in touch with the family. The deceased's family will also know the cause of death. (See the end note, "Complications.") If necessary, the family of the deceased may be called directly for this information.

### **(2) Who performs *tahara*?**

Participation in *tahara* is a *mitzvah* of the highest order. It is performed by Jews to honor a deceased person who is Jewish. Generally speaking, women perform *taharot* for women, men for men, though this may be modified if circumstances require.

Close relatives of the deceased generally do not perform the *tahara*. For instance, a man generally does not do *tahara* for his father, brother, or father-in-law. A woman would not usually do *tahara* for the analogous relatives. This too can be modified as circumstances require.

Performing the ritual requires moderate physical effort, including the ability to lift a substantial part of a body for short periods of time.

A woman **may** perform *tahara* during her menstrual period.

Only members of the *chevra kadisha* are permitted to be in the room, or to see or hear into it, during a *tahara*.

### **(3) When is *tahara* performed?**

Ideally, *tahara* is not done more than three hours before burial. This is

rarely achieved nowadays, however, and it is permissible to do *tahara* on the night before burial. If the weather is hot or the condition of the *met* is known to be deteriorating rapidly, *tahara* can even be performed several days before burial. The honor of the *met* is the critical consideration.

#### **(4) Attitude.**

**Note: Discussion of any part of the *tahara* service, and any decisions that must be made regarding the ritual or liturgy, should occur before entering the room with the *met*.**

Once the service begins, participants should follow the instructions of the leader. Limit conversation to the actual procedures at hand. Discussion of the deceased's personality, family problems, disease (unless safety is in question), or other topics is inappropriate. Try to avoid turning your back on the deceased, which in some traditions is considered a sign of disrespect. Proceed with *k'vod hamet* (the honor of the person who has died) uppermost in mind. Handle the *met* in a gentle manner.

#### **(5) Clothing.**

You will be pouring water, and may step in some. Wear comfortable shoes with traction, and clothes that are comfortable as well, but nothing that might show disrespect for the dead. Bring a head covering -- such as a *kippah*, scarf, or hat -- for ritual rather than hygienic purposes. Head covering will also be available at the funeral home.

### **Summary of the Procedures**

Preparation of the *met* encompasses several procedures and rituals, done in a specific order. The actual *tahara* -- the pouring of water -- is one of these rituals. The summary below shows the order in which the rituals are performed.

Again, *tahara* is a ritual whose methods are governed by custom, not by Jewish law or *halachah*. As a result, although the general outline of the ritual

has become rather standardized, there is room for variation as long as respect for the *met* remains the primary concern.

(1) Perform ritual hand-washing (without gloves), without a blessing. The *chevra* wash their hands ritually at three points to mark the various stages of the service: preparation, *tahara* (with gloves), and conclusion. All hand-washings are traditionally performed without a blessing.

(2) Check equipment and supplies.

(3) Don protective clothing, including gloves.

(4) Lay out the *tachrichim* in the order of use.

(5) Open the *aron* or coffin.

(6) Recite three prayers:

a) The Prayer for Forgiveness (***Mechilah***), in which members ask the *met* to forgive them for disturbing it during the *tahara*.

b) The ***Ana Hashem***, the Prayer for the Chevra, in which members ask God for strength to carry out the *tahara*.

c) The ***Ribono Shel Olam***, the Prayer for the Dead, in which members ask for God's compassion towards the *met*.

(7) Gently uncover the *met*. If possible, remove any bandages, tubing, or other obstructions. (See "Complications" at the end of this booklet.)

(8) *Rechitsah* (physical washing). Prior to *tahara*, the *met* is cleansed to remove any soil.

(9) *Tahara* (purification): the heart of the service. The *met* is purified through ritual washing.

(10) *Halbashah* (dressing). The *met* is dried and dressed in *tachrichim*.

(11) Place the *met* in the *aron*.

(12) Pray again for forgiveness/*mechilah*.

### **Look Over the Liturgy**

**Note:** Before entering the room with the *met*, please look over the liturgy that follows and be sure that the entire *chevra kadisha* present is familiar with the liturgy and rituals. Keep conversation about process to a minimum, but make any necessary changes before, rather than during, the ritual.

The service that follows is intended to be standard for Adat Shalom. However, if a mistake occurs, it is important not to fret over it, but to keep going.

## **The Tahara Service**

Clean hands with soap, then wash them ritually as a purification, alternating left and right hands three times, without saying a blessing. The group may choose to wash each other's hands, as a way of increasing their sense of community for the emotional experience to follow. Allow the hands to air-dry.

Enter the room with the *met*, in silence.

### **Check Equipment and Supplies before Beginning**

#### For the Chevra

Surgical gowns and disposable masks

Surgical gloves

Head covering for members of *chevra* (kerchiefs or surgical hats)

#### For Washing

3 buckets, each of which holds at least two gallons or 8 quarts of water  
(equal to 8 kavim)

Smaller containers or pitchers

Cups for washing hands

Scissors

Paper towels

Linen towels or sheets for covering and drying the *met*

Head rest

Place to dispose of garbage

String

Nail clippers and nail polish remover

Comb

Gauze

1" surgical tape

Adult diapers

Balls of cotton

Skin sealer (Monsel Solution or something similar)

Toothpicks

## For Dressing

*Tachrichim* or shrouds for the *met* (includes a bag) -- same for men and women. Check for:

- pants, including ties for ankles
- shirt
- kittel* or tunic
- belt
- face cover
- head cover
- ties of various lengths
- white cotton socks (only if the pants are not sewn closed at the bottom and the *met* is so tall that the feet will hang out from the pants)

*Sovev* (cloth) for lining the coffin

*Tallit* for the *met* (optional)

*Afar* -- Dead Sea sand (earth or soil from Israel)

Shells or shards to cover the *met's* eyes and mouth

## Miscellaneous

*Aron* or casket

Copy of the liturgy

A Star of David or other symbol, to identify the head of the coffin

Candles

**Light a candle to soften the lighting in the room.**

**Don gowns and gloves.**

**Lay out the *tachrichim* in the following order:**

- trousers with closed feet and ties
- shirt
- kittel* or tunic
- belt
- face cover
- head cover

## **Prepare the Aron**

Remove the lid of the *aron*. Place the *sovev* (cloth) caddy-corner (in a diamond formation) in the *aron* as a lining. If there is a *tallit*, remove elaborate ornaments (e.g., silver pieces) and lay it out 1/3 of the way down from the top of the *aron*, like a belt. Using scissors, cut off one of the *tzitzit* to render the *tallit* unusable, and place it in the *aron*. Children 13 and over may be buried in a *tallit*; children under 13 are not.

Even if there is a reasonable likelihood that it will not be possible to do the *tahara*, because of the circumstances of death, do not unwrap the *met* to check prior to arranging the coffin and *tachrichim*. Perform the prayers in either case.

## **Prayers**

Say the following three prayers before uncovering the *met*. **Note:** *Tahara* prayers may be recited in Hebrew or English or a combination, at the leader's discretion.

### **(1) Prayer for Forgiveness (*mechilah*)**

The *chevra* ask, one-by-one, for personal *mechilah* (forgiveness for any unintended trespass or intrusion against the *met*), using the deceased's name. We suggest the prayer be said one-by-one because doing so makes the ritual more meaningful for the members of the *chevra*.

#### **For a Male:**

\_\_\_\_\_ (first name/Hebrew name if known), *bar* \_\_\_\_\_  
(first names of parents/Hebrew names if known) -- I ask *mechilah* for you,  
for your family and friends, and for all of Israel, and I ask *mechilah* from  
you for any mistakes or indiscretions I may unintentionally commit during  
this service.

בְּיָמֵינוּ  
אֲבִיקְשָׁה מְחִילָה בְּעִבּוּרְךָ, בְּעִבּוּר כָּל קְרוֹבֶיךָ וַיְדִידֶיךָ, וּבְעִבּוּר כָּל עַם  
יִשְׂרָאֵל-וְכֵן אֲבִיקְשָׁה מְחִילָה מִמֶּךָ בְּעִבּוּר שְׂגִיאוֹתֵינוּ שְׂגְרָמְנוּ בְּשִׁגְגָה  
בְּמִשְׁךְ טְהֵרַת הַמֵּת.

Avakshah mechilah ba-avoorchah, ba-avoor kol k'roveycha  
veedeedycha, oova-avoor kol am Yisrael, v'chen avakshah mechilah  
mimchah ba-avoor sh'gee-ohteynoo shegaramnoo bishgagah  
b'meshech taharat hamet.

**For a Female:**

\_\_\_\_\_ (first name/Hebrew name if known), *bat* \_\_\_\_\_  
(first names of parents/Hebrew names if known) -- I ask *mechilah* for you,  
for your family and friends, and for all of Israel, and I ask *mechilah* from  
you for any mistakes or indiscretions I may unintentionally commit during  
this service.

בְּת \_\_\_\_\_  
אֲבִיקְשָׁה מְחִילָה בְּעֵבוּרְךָ, בְּעֵבוּר כָּל קְרוֹבֶיךָ וַיְדִידֶיךָ, וּבְעֵבוּר כָּל עַם  
יִשְׂרָאֵל-וְכֵן אֲבִיקְשָׁה מְחִילָה מִמֶּךָ בְּעֵבוּר שְׂגִיאוֹתֵינוּ שְׂגִרְמָנוּ בְּשָׂגָה  
בְּמִשְׁךָ טְהַרְת הַמֵּת.

Avakshah mechilah ba-avoorech, ba-avoor kol k'rovayich  
veedeedayich, oova-avoor kol am Yisrael, v'chen avakshah mechilah  
mimech ba-avoor sh'gee-ohteynoo shegaramnoo bishgagah b'meshech  
taharat hamet.

**(2) Prayer for the Chevra (Ana Hashem)**

(to be recited jointly by the *chevra*)

Source of Kindness and Compassion, Whose ways are ways of mercy  
and truth, You have commanded us to act with loving-kindness and  
compassion towards the dead; and to engage in their proper burial.  
Grant us the courage and strength to perform this sacred work  
properly – washing and cleansing the *met*, dressing it in shrouds, and  
burying it. Guide our hands and hearts as we do this work, and enable  
us to complete it with love. Help us to see You in the face of the  
deceased, even as we see You in the faces of those who share this  
*mitzvah*. Source of Life and Death, be with us now and forever.

אָנָה אֱלֹהֵי הַחֶסֶד וְהַרְחָמִים, שְׁכֹל אוֹרְחוֹתֶיךָ חֶסֶד וְאֶמֶת-וְצִוִּיתָנוּ  
לַעֲשׂוֹת חֶסֶד וְאֶמֶת עִם הַמֵּתִים, וּלְהַתְעַסֵּק בְּקִבּוּרָתָם. וּבְכֵן יִהְיֶה רְצוֹן  
מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתִּאֲמָצִינוּ וּתְחַזְּקֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלַאכְתֵּינוּ מִלְּאֲכַת  
שְׁמִים זֶה כְּרַאוּי, הֵן בְּטַהַרַת הַמֵּת, הֵן בְּלְבוּשׁוֹ, וּבְקִבּוּרָתוֹ. חֲזֵק יְדֵינוּ  
וְעֲזֹר לָנוּ בְּמִלְאָכָה זֶה, לְמִלְאָה בְּאַהֲבָה.  
תֵּן לָנוּ לְרֵאוֹת אֶת צְלַמְךָ בְּפָנֵי הַמֵּתִים, כְּשֵׁם שֶׁהוּא נִשְׁקָף בְּפָנֵי  
הַמְּסִייעִים בְּיָדֵינוּ בְּמִצְוָה זֶה. מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים וְהַמְּוֹת, הִיְיָה עִמָּנוּ  
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם.

Anah elohei hachessed v'harachameem, shekol orchotecha chesed  
v'emet, v'tzeeveetanoo la-asot chesed v'emet eem hameteem,  
ool'hitasek bikvooratam. Oov'chen y'hee ratzon meelfarnecha,  
Adonai Eloheynoo, shet'amtzeynoot'chazkenoo la-asot  
m'lachteynoo m'lechet shamahyeem zoo kra-ooey, hen b'taharat  
hamet, hen bilvooshoh, ooveekvooratoh. Chazek yadeynoo bim'lacha  
zo va'azor lanoo l'mala'ah b'ahavah.

Ten lanoo liro't et tzalmecha bifney hameteem k'shem shehoo nishkaf  
bif'ney hame'sai-eem b'yadeynoo b'mitzvah zo. M'kor hachahyim  
v'hamavet, heyeh imanoo me'atah v'ad olam.

**(3) Prayer for the Dead (traditionally, Ribono Shel Olam)**

(to be recited jointly by the *chevra*)

**For a Male:**

Life of All Worlds, have compassion for \_\_\_\_\_ (first  
name/Hebrew name if known), son of \_\_\_\_\_ (first names  
of parents/Hebrew names if known), and of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,  
Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, Your dear ones. May his soul and  
spirit rest with those who have gone before, for You give eternal life  
to those who have died, even as You bring death to the living. May it  
be Your will, God of our ancestors, to encircle the departed one with  
Love, for he is Your beloved, the son of those who sought Your  
presence.

רבונו של עולם חמול על \_\_\_\_\_ בן \_\_\_\_\_  
 המת הזה שהוא בן אברהם, יצחק, יעקב,  
 שרה, רבקה, רחל, ולאה-שהלכו אחריו באמונה. תנוח נשמתו  
 בשלום עם כל הדורות, כי סולח ומוחל פשעי המתים אתה.  
 יהי רצון אלוהי אבותינו ואמותינו שתצרוך את המת האהוב עליך.  
 ברוך אתה יי הנותן אהבה גדולה למתי עמו ישראל אמן.

Reebono shel olam, chamol al \_\_\_\_\_ ben  
 \_\_\_\_\_ hamet hazeh shehoo ben Avraham,  
 Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel v'Leah shehalchoo

acharecha be-emoonah. Tanooach nishmatoh b'shalom im kol  
 hadorot, kee sole'ach oomochel pishe'ey hameteem atah. Y'hee  
 ratzon Elohey avoteynoo v'eemoteynoo shetitzror et hamet ha-ahoov  
 alechah. Baruch atah Adonai hanoten ahavah g'dolah l'metey amo  
 Yisrael. Amen.

### For a Female:

Life of All Worlds, have compassion for \_\_\_\_\_ (first  
 name/Hebrew name if known), daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ (first  
 names of parents/Hebrew names if known), and of Abraham, Isaac,  
 Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, Your dear ones. May her  
 soul and spirit rest with those who have gone before, for You give  
 eternal life to those who have died, even as You bring death to the  
 living. May it be Your will, God of our ancestors, to encircle the  
 departed one with Love, for she is Your beloved, the daughter of those  
 who sought Your presence.

רבונו של עולם חמול על \_\_\_\_\_ בת \_\_\_\_\_  
 המתה הזו שהיא בת אברהם, יצחק, יעקב, שרה,  
 רבקה, רחל, ולאה-שהלכו אחריו באמונה. תנוח נשמתה בשלום  
 עם כל הדורות, כי סולח ומוחל פשעי המתים אתה. יהי רצון  
 אלוהי אבותינו ואמותינו שתצרוך את המתה האהובה עליך.  
 ברוך אתה יי הנותן אהבה גדולה למתי עמו ישראל אמן.

Reebono shel olam, chamol al \_\_\_\_\_ bat \_\_\_\_\_ hametah hazo shehee bat Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel v'Leah shehalchoo acharecha be-emoonah. Tanooach nishmatah b'shalom im kol hadorot, kee soleach oomochel pische'ey hameteem atah. Y'hee ratzon Elohey avoteynoo v'eemoteynoo shetitzror et hametah ha-ahoovah alechah. Baruch atah Adonai hanoten ahavah g'dolah l'metey amo Yisrael. Amen.

## **Cleanse the Met**

### **(1) Pre-tahara wash (Rechitsah).**

Fill one or two buckets or containers with lukewarm water. There is no set amount of water to be used at this point. Place a sheet over the body. Gently uncover the *met*, a little at a time, re-covering it wherever possible, and visually examine the body.

**Note:** Should the condition of the body raise questions about the suitability of performing *tahara*, the group should move to the anteroom; read the relevant section under “Complications,” at the back of this booklet; and decide as a group whether *k'vod hamet* is best served by leaving the body as is, or proceeding with the *tahara*.

**If it is decided that it is not suitable to perform *tahara*,** re-cover the *met* and do not perform any washing. Simply proceed to p. 13, dress the *met* with the *tachrichim*, and place it in the coffin in the prescribed manner. Put in place the *afar*/Dead Sea sand and shards, and close the coffin.

**If the *met* is intact and the *tahara* can proceed,** cut away clothes and other extraneous objects. If possible, remove any bandages, tubing, or other obstructions. (If there is any question, see the “Bandages and tubing” section at the end, under “Complications.”)

Remove jewelry for return to family, but any jewelry that cannot be removed without tearing the flesh should be buried with the *met*. Designate a member of the *chevra* to deliver the jewelry that has been removed to Adat Shalom's executive director, who will give it to the family. (Traditionally, the family should not know who the members of the *chevra* were.)

Place a sheet over the *met*. Keep the *met* covered as much as possible for the sake of modesty.

Because blood is considered part of the body, bloody spots on clothes or sheets remaining from the time of death should be cut out and saved in their entirety in the bag that comes with the *tachrichim*. Ultimately, the bag will be put in the coffin. Try to prevent new bleeding. Using a cotton swab, seal any punctures, open wounds, or sores with sealer (Monsel Solution or something similar), or apply tape, a band-aid, and/or plastic, to prevent blood from seeping out. Any dried blood should be removed with a small moist cotton ball and saved in the bag. Even pouring the *tahara* water itself should not be done if it is likely to cause bleeding. (See the "Complications" section at the end for problems that arise when blood will not stop flowing, or the amount of blood is copious.)

Bodily wastes are not saved and should be washed away or discarded. Such waste can be removed with wet cotton or paper towels and thrown away.

Remove nail polish. Clean dirty fingernails and toenails with a toothpick and trim them, if necessary. If the nails are cut, the clippings and any debris should also go into the bag, as well as any tufts of hair, as these are considered part of the body. If false teeth are secure, leave them alone; if loose, remove them and place them at the foot of the coffin.

Recite together the passage of praise below from the *Amidah*, while beginning to cleanse the *met*.

Who can compare to You, in strength,  
In loving-kindness You sustain the living,  
Nurturing the life of every living thing, with Your great mercy,  
And keeping faith with those who rest in the earth.  
Blessed are You, Wellspring of Love,  
Who renews all life.

מי כְּמוֹד בְּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת  
 מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד,  
 מְחַיֶּה כָּל חַי בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים,  
 וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לִישְׁנֵי עָפָר.  
 בְּרוּכָה עֵין הָאֱהָבָה  
 מְחַדֶּשֶׁת כָּל חַי.  
 (עֲמִידָה)

Mee chamochah ba'al g'voorot. M'chalkel chayim b'chesed,  
 M'chayeh kol chai b'rachamim rabeem, oom'kayem emoonato  
 leesheyney afar. B'roochah eyn ha-ahavah m'chadeshet kol chai.

Continue reciting together a passage of praise from the *Shacharit*, while continuing to cleanse the *met*.

O God, the soul You gave me is pure. You created it, You shaped it,  
 You breathed it into me. You preserve it within me. And You will yet  
 take it from me, for eternal life.

אֱלֹהֵי נִשְׁמָה שְׁנַתַּת בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא  
 אַתָּה בְּרָאֲתָהּ, אַתָּה יָצַרְתָּהּ, אַתָּה נִפְחַתָּהּ בִּי,  
 וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי-  
 וְאַתָּה עֲתִיד לְטַלְהָ מִמֶּנִּי לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם.  
 (שְׁחִירִית)

Elohai neshamah shenatata bee tehorah hee. Atah bra'atah, Atah  
 y'tzartah, Atah n'fachtah bee v'atah m'shemrah b'keerbee v'atah  
 ateed litalah meemenee l'chayey olam.

Now you are ready to wash the body, starting with the head. If the bucket is  
 hard to handle, a smaller container or pitcher may be dipped into the bucket  
 for water. The sheet is pulled back to wash each part of the body and  
 replaced after each body part is washed.

**Note: The *met* should never be placed face down.**

The order of washing is:

Front of body

Entire head and neck (the eyes and mouth should be closed or covered so that water does not enter them)

Right upper arm, lower arm, and hand

Right upper trunk

Right lower trunk

Private parts

Right thigh, leg, and foot

Left upper arm, lower arm, and hand

Left upper trunk

Left lower trunk

Left thigh, leg, and foot

Back of body

To wash the back of the body, one person holds the head, while others turn and hold the body on its left side. Using a wash cloth, one person washes the back from the right shoulder to the right foot. Then incline the body on its right side and repeat the process on the left back. Lightly clean the anal area. Sometimes it may need to be packed with cotton. The back may be reddish or purplish since, in the absence of circulation, blood will pool by gravity.

After the *met* is clean, three or four people hold a fresh sheet above the body like a canopy, while facing away from the body. One or two other people stand on either side of the body and remove the used sheet from under the canopy. Lower the dry sheet over the body. If fewer *chevra* members are present, they can accomplish this same changing of the sheets by slowly pulling the used sheet off at the feet while continuing to replace it with the new sheet from the head.

Discard the used sheet in the laundry hamper. The *chevra* then wash their hands with gloves on, once with soap, for cleanliness, and, again, without soap, ritually, but without a blessing.

**(2) Tahara -- ritual washing.**

Fill three buckets with cool water, each bucket containing about 8 quarts or liters (*kavim*), totaling 24 quarts or liters (six gallons). Be sure that the *tahara* water, when poured, drains over the sink hole. However, if pouring water will cause additional bleeding, do not pour.

Before pouring the water, recite this teaching from Rabbi Akiva three times, in Hebrew and/or in English:

“God is the hope, the *mikveh* of Israel.”

מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל יי

During the *tahara*, one or more persons from the group may choose to study -- silently or out loud -- the following Talmudic text from which the previous line is drawn. Tradition holds our studying, in memory of the deceased, to be a great honor and an important show of respect. As people are moved, you may also choose to continue to chant, “*Mikveh Yisrael Adonai*,” meditatively or as a mantra, during the pouring of water.

Rabbi Akiva said: “Happy are you, the community of Israel. Before whom are you cleansed, and who cleanses you? Your Father, your God, who is in heaven! As it is said, ‘And I have sprinkled pure water upon you, and you should be cleansed from all your impurities and from all your falsehoods; I will cleanse you.’ (Ezekial 36:25) And it is said: ‘*Mikveh Yisrael Adonai* -- God is the purifier, the *mikveh*, the hope of Israel.’ (Jeremiah 17: 13). Just as the *mikveh* cleanses those who are impure, so does the Holy Blessed One cleanse the community of Israel.” (Talmud Jonah: 85)

אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: “אֲשַׁרְיֶכֶם,  
יִשְׂרָאֵל, לִפְנֵי מִי אַתֶּם מְטַהְרִין  
וּמִי מְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם? אָבִיכֶם  
שְׁבַשְׁמִים! שְׁנֵאמַר: וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם  
מִים טְהוֹרִים וְטַהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל  
טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל גְּלוּלֵיכֶם  
אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם.”

(יִחְזַקְאֵל: ל"ו: כה)

וְאָמַר:

**מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל יִי**

(יִרְמְיָהוּ: י"ז: יג)

מַה הַמִּקְוֵה מְטַהֵר אֶת

הַטְּמֵאִים אֲף־הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

מְטַהֵר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

(תְּלַמוּד יוֹנָה, פ"ה)

Amar rabee akeevah: “Ashrechem Yisrael lifney mee atem mitahareen oomee m’taher etchem? Avichem shebashamayim shene’emar: ‘V’zaraktee alechem mayim t’horeem oot’hertem mikol oomoteychem oomikol gilooleychem ataheir et’chem.’ (Ezekiel 36:25) V’omer: **‘Mikveh Yisrael Adonai’** (Jeremiah 17:13) Mah hamikveh m’taher et hat’me’eem af hakadosh baruch hoo m’taher et Yisrael.” (Talmud Jonah: 85)

Remove the sheet from the body during the pouring of *tahara* water, but exercise discretion in the presence of the uncovered *met* by averting your eyes as much as possible.

Three members of the *chevra* take buckets of water and place themselves on alternate sides of the met, one at the head, one at the lower ribs (on the other side of the body), and one by the thighs (again on the first side of the body). Each member pours a bucket of water, immediately after the one before, in staggered succession -- to create a cascade that flows from head to foot without pause. This sequential flow, without breaks, is the essential element of the *tahara*.

Just before the first person has emptied her/his bucket, the second member of the *chevra* begins pouring from the opposite side of the body. Just before the second member has finished emptying his/her bucket, the third member begins to pour (back again on the first side of the body). As a guide -- the first bucket might be finished pouring in the area of the *met*'s lower ribs, the second bucket might go from the ribs to the thighs, and the third would go from the thighs to the feet.

Note that should there be any break in the succession of the pouring of water, the process must begin over until 24 quarts are properly poured in a unbroken flow. (Ideally, a non-pouring member of the group should check to be sure that there is no interruption.)

Near the end of the pouring of the water, all say the words, “He is pure” or “She is pure” three times.

**For a Male:**

טהור הוא

Tahor hoo.

**For a Female:**

טהורה היא

T’horah hee.

When all the water has been poured, gently and thoroughly dry the *met* with the sheet and clean towels. Make sure to dry the sides and back. When drying the back, turn the *met* first onto the left side and dry the right back. Then turn the *met* onto the right side and dry the left back. **Remember that the *met* should never be turned face down on its stomach.** Check the ears for water and dry if necessary. Also dry the table under the *met*. Do not allow the *tachrichim* to get wet.

Cover the *met* with a clean, dry sheet. Mop the floor with extra towels if there is excess water.

**Dress the Met (Halbashah)**

The *met* is now physically and spiritually pure. Before dressing the *met*, recite:

“I greatly delight in God; my soul rejoices in my Source. For God has clothed me in garments of deliverance and wrapped me in a cloak of justice.” (Isiah 61:10)

שׁוֹשׁ אֲשֵׁישׁ בֵּינִי, תִּגַּל נַפְשִׁי בְּאֵלֶיהִי.  
כִּי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי יִשְׁע, מִעִיל צְדָקָה  
יַעֲטֵנִי.  
(יְשַׁעְיָהוּ: ס"א-ו)

Sos asees ba'Adonai, tagayl nafshee baylohai. Kee hilbeeshanee  
big'dey yesha, m'eel tzedakah.

Dress the *met* in the following order:

Pants (for both sexes), socks if necessary (see below), undershirt, top  
shirt/*kittel*, face cover, head cover.

If the arms and legs are stiff, use gentle pressure, especially at the elbow or  
knee, to facilitate insertion into the garment.

Put the pants on first, then the undershirt and the *kittel*. Tie the belt at the  
waist over the *kittel* with a slip knot, and complete with a "shin bow" (three  
loops for the *shin* in *Shadai*, as on a *mezuzzah*). Make sure that the hands  
are not tied down by the belt. The arms should be straight down alongside  
the body. Tie the wrists with normal bows. If the pants are sewn closed at  
the feet, tie the pants at the ankles. (The sewing shut of the feet symbolizes  
with finality that the *met* will no longer walk on this earth.)

If the pants are not sewn closed at the feet, push the feet up inside the pants  
and tie the pants at the tips of the toes, enclosing the feet inside. However, if  
this is impossible because the legs and feet together are so long that they do  
not fit inside the pants, put a pair of white socks on the feet and then tie the  
pants at the ankles.

Put on the face cover and the head cover.

The *tachrichim* must not be soiled, whether by excrement, puss, dirt, or  
blood. If they are soiled, do not repeat the *tahara*. Clean the soiled place  
and use new *tachrichim*. Extra *tachrichim* are stored at the funeral home.  
(In one of the closets at Hines Rinaldi Funeral Home, there are opened  
*tachrichim* packages, with broken sets, if that is useful.)

## Place the *Met* in the Coffin

Transfer the dressed *met* to the *aron*, placing it on top of the *tallit* and *sovev*. If the funeral home does not have automated pulleys and lifts, use one of the following methods to **move the *met***.

- a) Wheel the coffin next to the table and raise the table to the same level as the edge of coffin. With members of the *chevra* standing at each end of the *met*, move first the legs and then the upper body into the *aron*.
- b) Fireman technique: All but one member of the *chevra* line up next to the *met*, lift it straight up, then pull it towards them, and step back. The remaining member quickly wheels the coffin between the *chevra* members and the table. The *met* is lowered into the coffin.
- c) Hospital technique: Slip a sheet under the *met*, oriented to form a diamond. Place the coffin next to the table and raise the table to the same level as the edge of coffin. *Chevra* members lined up at the head and foot of the *met* use the sheet to hoist the *met* into the coffin. The sheet can be left in the coffin under the *met*. (This is probably the easiest method, involving the least physical strain to the members of the *chevra*.)

Wrap the *tallit* and then the *sovev* around the *met*. The *sovev* should cover the entire body of the *met*. Place pottery shards over the eyes. The shards address the mystics' concern that as long as the eyes of the *met* look upon this world, the soul cannot properly focus on the world-to-come. Some are accustomed to putting clay shards over the mouth as well. Sprinkle earth from *Eretz Yisrael* over the *met*, moving from head to foot, and also inside the coffin around the *met*. The shards and the Israeli soil reaffirm the Scriptural injunction: "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return."

Check the supporting table and the wet sheet for any hairs, which should be placed in the bag. Place the bag and any items that must be buried with the *met* (e.g., false teeth, blood-stained clothing) inside the *aron*, at the foot.

With everyone standing around the *aron*, say the following:

May God bless you and keep you.  
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
May God's face be lifted unto you and give you peace.  
(Numbers: 5)

**For a Male:**

יְבָרְכֶךָ יי וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ.  
יָאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ.  
יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Yevarechechah Adonai veyishmerechah. Ya'er Adonai panav elechah veyechoonechah. Yisa Adonai panav elechah veyasem lechah shalom.

**For a Female:**

יְבָרְכֶךָ יי וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ,  
יָאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ.  
יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Yevarchech Adonai veyishmerech. Ya'er Adonai panav elayich veechoonech. Yisa Adonai panav elayich veyasem lach shalom.

The members of the *chevra* now jointly ask the *met* to forgive them for any accidental indignities or wrongdoing committed during performance of the *tahara*:

\_\_\_\_\_ (first name/Hebrew name), *bat/bar*  
\_\_\_\_\_ (first names of parents/Hebrew names if known), we  
ask *mechilah* for any indignity that you may have suffered at our  
hands, despite the loving care and concern that we exercised during  
this *tahara*.

Close the *aron*. Place the Star of David at its head to identify the position of the body.

Leave the *tahara* room.

Remove gloves, gowns, etc. Wash hands three times with soap and water (without a *b'racha*), as a health precaution, alternating between right and left hand. Allow hands to air-dry.

Members of the *chevra kadisha* may wish to recite together this prayer:

Creator of the Universe, we have just completed our act of *g'milut chesed* for \_\_\_\_\_ (first name of the deceased). We thank You for the strength and courage to perform this *mitzvah*. We appreciate this sacred fellowship and cherish the bond that has brought us together.

Members may wish to recite a *Mi'Shebeirach*, or prayer of healing, for the family of the deceased and themselves.

*Mi shebeirach avoteinu, m'kor habracha l'avoteinu.*  
May the Source of strength Who blessed the ones before us  
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing.  
And let us say Amen.

*Mi shebirach imoteinu, m'kor habracha l'avoteinu.*  
Bless those in need of healing with *r'fuah sh'leima*.  
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,  
And let us say Amen.

*Chevra* members may then wish to observe a moment of silence for private meditation and reflection.

Exit the funeral home. Each member should bring a cup of water out of the funeral home for ritual hand-washing outside.

Once outside the building and beyond any roof overhang, wash hands ritually with cold water from drinking cups. Do not dry hands and do not water plants with this water. Cups may be disposed of at home if no wastebasket is provided near door.

Then, recite these final verses:

O House of Israel, come, let us walk in God's light. God has spoken and called the world into being, from the east where the sun rises to the place where it sets. Peace shall come, and each of us shall rest in our appointed place. For dust we are and to dust we shall return. God has given and God has taken away. Blessed be God's name. (Isiah 2:5, Psalms 50:1, after Kohelet 3:20, and Job 1:29)

בֵּית יַעֲקֹב לְכוּ וְנִלְכֶה בְּאוֹר יְיָ.  
אֵל אֱלֹהִים יְיָ דִּבֶּר וַיִּקְרָא אֶרֶץ מִמִּזְרַח שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבוֹאוֹ.  
יָבֵא שָׁלוֹם וְכָל אֶחָד יָנוּחַ עַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ, כִּי עֶפְרַיִם אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֶל  
עֶפְרַיִם נָשׁוּב.  
יְיָ נָתַן וְיְיָ לָקַח; יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבוֹרָךְ.

Beyt ya'akov l'choo v'nelchah b'or Adonai. El Elohim Adonai diber vayikrah aretz mimizrach shemesh ad m'vo'oh. Yavo shalom v'chol echad yanooach al mish'cavoh, kee afar anachnoo v'el afar nashoov. Adonai natan v'Adonai lakach; y'hee shem Adonai m'vorach.

## Complications

**NOTE: The *chevra* must be informed of all infectious causes of death. It is recommended that *chevra* members receive Hepatitis B vaccine shots.**

### **A. Patients Who Have Died from AIDS or Its Complications.**

Patients infected with AIDS are given *tahara*, but the *chevra* must be informed. Additional safeguards are warranted:

- (1) Individuals performing *tahara* should wear double gloves.
- (2) Blood and body fluids must be handled with extreme caution.

Some AIDS patients die from multiply drug-resistant tuberculosis. Since it is highly infectious, the *chevra* must be assured that a particular *met* did not die from this syndrome.

**B. Blood that Flows at the Time of Death.** Blood that flows at the time of death may not be washed away; it must be buried. This can create a number of complications:

**(1) Stopping the flow of blood.** If there is extensive blood flow that cannot be stopped, the *met* is not washed. Dress it, put it in the *aron*, and chant the concluding prayers. If the flow of blood is slight, the wound or hole may be gently plugged with cotton or gauze. A cotton plug may be held in place with a band-aid or tape if absolutely necessary. Or Monsel Solution may be applied as a sealer. Avoid that particular area during physical washing (*rechitsah*) and *tahara*.

**(2) 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 dressing the *met* in *tachrichim* difficult. Two options are available. First, the tubing can be cut and tied closer to the body. Cut tubing with blood in it would also have to be buried. If, however, cutting of the tubing would result in loss of blood, the uncut tubing can be tied down flush to the body with string. The second method is less preferable, but acceptable and certainly better than forgoing the *tahara*.

In any case, the tachrichim must not be torn or cut in order to dress the met.

**(3) Blood mixed with feces.** If blood is mixed with feces, discard both. Do not include them in the *aron*. In this particular case, *k'vod hamet* supercedes the halachic imperative to bury blood.

**C. Those Who Have Died a Violent Death.** In the case of dismemberment or disfigurement (fire, mutilation, etc.), all prayers are chanted as usual, but washing is not performed. The *met* is dressed, and the service from p. 13 onward is performed.

**D. Difficulty Because of Size of Met or Advanced Rigor Mortis.** The funeral home should have visibly available a larger coffin for bodies that cannot fit into the standard coffin.

## Adat Shalom Chevra Kadisha Supply Form

To be checked after every *tahara* and given to the funeral home for restocking as needed.

<u>Item and Amount</u>	<u>OK</u>	<u>Refill</u>
<i>Tahara</i> booklets, 8	_____	_____
<i>Tachrichim</i> , 10 sets (same for men/women)	_____	_____
White cotton socks, 5 pair (size: Men's Extra Large)	_____	_____
Buckets, 3	_____	_____
Smaller washing containers, 3	_____	_____
Toothpicks, 2 boxes	_____	_____
Cotton balls, 2 bags	_____	_____
Cotton swabs, 2 boxes	_____	_____
String, 2 spools	_____	_____
Nail clippers, 2	_____	_____
Nail polish remover, 1 bottle	_____	_____
Comb	_____	_____
Scissors, 2 pair	_____	_____
Adhesive tape, 2 rolls	_____	_____
1" Surgical tape, 2 rolls	_____	_____
Gauze, 5 packages	_____	_____
Bandages - large, 10 bandages	_____	_____
Bandages - small, 3 boxes	_____	_____
Skin sealer (Monsel Solution or similar)	_____	_____
Paper towels, 10 rolls	_____	_____
Paper cups for washing hands, 1 package	_____	_____
Linen towels or sheets	_____	_____
Cloth to line the coffin	_____	_____
Adult diapers, 2 boxes	_____	_____
Disposable surgical gloves, 3 boxes	_____	_____
Disposable surgical gowns, 30	_____	_____
Disposable surgical masks, 30	_____	_____
Disposable shoe covers, 30 pair	_____	_____
Goggles, 20	_____	_____

Kerchiefs, surgical hats, Kippot, 12	_____	_____
Long-burning (non-Yarzheit) candles, 20	_____	_____
Matches, 5 books	_____	_____
Soil from Israel	_____	_____
Shells or shards to cover the eyes of the <i>met</i>	_____	_____
Star of David to identify head of coffin, 10	_____	_____
Glue to attach Star of David (if necessary)	_____	_____