

Introductory *Taharah* Demonstration

North American Chevrah Kadisha and Jewish Cemetery Conference
Presented by Kavod v'Nichum

***Taharah* Training Presentation Available On-Line**

The PowerPoint presentation used in this class is available on-line at:

<https://jewish-funerals.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Tahara-Training-May-2016.pptx>

***Taharah* Manuals Available Here at the Conference**

- *Chesed Shel Emet, The Truest Act of Kindness*, 3rd Edition, by Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel
- *To Midwife A Soul, Guidelines for Performing Tahara*, 5th Edition, by Richard A. Light
- *Final Kindness: Honoring K'rovei Yisrael*, by Richard A. Light

Order of Events During *Taharah*

- Pre-briefing
- Preparation procedures
- Washing the meit(ah) – Physical cleansing
- Tahara – Spiritual cleansing
- Dressing the meit(ah)
- Placing the meit(ah) into the aron
- Cleaning up
- Debriefing

Glossary

- Afar – earth from Israel placed into the casket and on the meit(ah).
- Aron – the casket. Jewish custom suggests the casket be made of plain wood, without metal, and be minimally adorned.
- Chevra Kadisha – lit. *Holy Society*, the “Jewish Burial Society” responsible for properly preparing Jewish bodies for burial. It is customary for this group to work anonymously within the community performing Tahara rituals when needed.
- Dom – blood.
- K’vod hameit – honoring (showing respect for) the dead.
- Meit – a deceased man.
- Meitah – a deceased woman.
- Sovev – sheet placed into the casket, wrapped around the meit(ah).
- Tachrichim – burial shrouds, specifically the clothes (usually plain linen or muslin) intended to represent the attire of the High Priest, as follows:
 - Mitsnefet – a full-head-covering (including face) for a man, bonnet for a woman.
 - Michnasayim – trousers with a tie at the waist and often the legs are sewn shut at the feet.
 - K’tonet – long-sleeve shirt with no collar, with tie at neck.
 - Kittel – outer long-sleeve robe with collar, also has tie at neck.
 - Avnet or Gartle – simple linen strap used as a belt.
 - Apron – simple apron of linen
- Taharah – the ritual cleansing of the deceased to provide physical and spiritual cleansing before burial. Sometimes used to mean the entire process of the physical and spiritual washing of the meit(ah), the dressing in tachrichim, and the placing of it into the casket.

Tasks for Team Members

- ❖ Tasks marked with this symbol are preparatory tasks.

➤ **Leader**

- ❖ Ensures room is properly organized, meit/meitah covered with clean sheet and in proper position with feet facing the door if possible, table properly tilted and locked in place (wheels too), extra table for spreading out contents of kit and tachrichim, etc.
- ❖ Lights candle (yartzeit candle or other long-burning candle); this candle will be placed on the aron after the Tahara is completed.
 - Handles overall coordination and all decision-making.
 - Guides others.
 - Interfaces with funeral home personnel.

➤ **Reader and shroud checker**

- ❖ Lays out the shrouds (tachrichim) ensuring all parts are there and can be found easily in the order required.
 - Follows the outline and directs the order of events.
 - Reads all prayers in both languages (or leads this and all read together).

➤ **Casket (aron) organizer**

- ❖ Places aron in proper position in the room, positioning it so the transfer of the body (meit/meitah) will be most easily managed (feet facing door, etc.).
- ❖ As appropriate:
 - Removes straw or padding from the aron, leaving enough for support of the head; placing extra straw along sides to hold the meit/meitah in position.
 - Drills holes in bottom of the aron, if not already done by funeral home. (Note that it shows more respect if you move the aron into another room to drill holes.)
 - Sprinkles earth from Israel (afar) into the aron.
 - Arranges the burial sheet (sovev) into position, diagonally across the aron.
 - For a man, cuts one tzitzit off of the tallit and places the tallit into the aron. The removed tzitzit is tucked into the belt (gartel) when the meit/meitah is placed into the aron.

➤ **Bucket filler**

- ❖ Fills 2 buckets or washing bowls with warm water for washing the meit/meitah, placing them near the head of the meit/meitah.
- ❖ Ensures small pitchers are in place for hand washing.
 - Fills 3 buckets with cold water at the beginning of the Tahara portion of these procedures (after washing is completed).

➤ **Kit contents organizer**

- ❖ Lays out contents of Chevrah Kadisha (Taharah) Supply Kit in an orderly manner so things can be found quickly and easily.
- ❖ Locates sheets and towels, moves them closer if needed.
- ❖ Ensures paper batting or equivalent is available for washing the meit/meitah.
- ❖ Notes if supplies are getting low, so they can be replenished after this Tahara.

Common Prayers Used During *Taharah*

➤ **Preparatory Prayer**

Before entering the Tahara room, the Chevra Kadisha team recites the following together:

Source of kindness and compassion, whose ways are ways of mercy and truth, You have commanded us to act with lovingkindness and righteousness towards the dead, and to engage in their proper burial. Grant us the courage and strength to perform this work properly: this holy task of cleaning and washing the body, dressing the dead in shrouds, and burying the deceased. Guide our hands and hearts as we do this work, and enable us to fulfill this commandment of love. Help us to see Your face in the face of the deceased, even as we see you in the faces of those who share this task with us. Source of life and death be with us now and always. Amen.

The following prayers are said in Hebrew, English, or both during the Tahara procedures:

➤ ***Chamol* for Men**

For men the following *tefilla* is said after washing hands and getting ready. The names of the *meit* and his father are inserted in the spaces.

Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for _____, the son of _____, this deceased, for he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May his soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You revive the dead and bring death to the living. Praised are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead and your people, Israel, upon petition. Therefore, may it be your will, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the deceased, for he is your servant and son of your maidservant. And You, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save him from all misery and from a day of evil and from banishment. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is the one who mercifully redeems the people Israel from all kinds of suffering. Therefore, may it be your will, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors, to remember the merit of the sacred covenant which is in his flesh. May this covenant be a redemption from banishment. Blessed are You who establishes the merciful covenant with mercy. Through 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, Hashem our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, great in council and mighty in achievement in mercy. May he tread with righteous feet into the Garden of Eden, for that is the place of the upright, and God protects the feet of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the departed of the people Israel. Amen. May such be your will.

➤ **Chamol for Women**

For women the following *tefilla* is said after washing hands and getting ready. The names of the *meitah* and her father are inserted in the spaces.

Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for _____, the daughter of _____, this deceased, for she is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May her soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You revive the dead and bring death to the living. Praised are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead and your people, Israel, upon petition. Therefore, may it be your will, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the deceased, for she is your maidservant and daughter of your maidservant. And You, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save her from all misery and from a day of evil and from banishment. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is the one who mercifully redeems the people Israel from all kinds of suffering. Through mercy, hide and disregard the transgressions of this departed, your maidservant. Deliver her from consumption by fire, for she needs your great mercy, and You, Hashem our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, great in council and mighty in achievement in mercy. May she tread with righteous feet into the Garden of Eden, for that is the place of the upright, and God protects the feet of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the departed of the people Israel. Amen. May such be your will.

➤ **Vaya'an Vayomer**

As the clothing is removed from the meit/meitah, the following is said:

And he (the angel of God) raised his voice and spoke to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the soiled garments from him (the High Priest)." And he said to him, "Behold, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you in fine garments."

Zecharia 3:4-5

➤ ***Rosho Ketem Paz (for Men)***

While washing the *meit* 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 arm 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, he is all delight. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Song of Songs 5:11-16

➤ ***Hinakh Yaffah (for Women)***

While washing the *meitah* the following is said:

How beautiful you are, my beloved friend: your eyes are doves from behind your tresses; your hair as a flock of goats that trail down from Mount Gil'ad. Your teeth like a flock of sheep that rise from the washing pool, that are all matched with no break among them. Like a crimson ribbon your lips, and your speech is pleasant; like a pomegranate is the curve of your cheek from behind your tresses. Like a tower of David your neck, raised in splendor; a thousand shields hang upon it, shields of the warriors. Your two breasts as two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. You are all lovely, my beloved friend, and there is no flaw in you.

Song of Songs 4:15,7

➤ ***Amar Rebbi Akiva***

In preparation for the Tahara ritual itself, the following is said:

Rabbi Aiva 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 your defilements, and from all your abominations I will purify you.' (Ezekiel 36:25).

And it says: 'God is the hope 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 Hashem 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 judgement and with a searing breath.' (Isaiah 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)." Yoma 8:9

➤ **Sos Assis**

Before beginning to dress the meit/meitah, the following is said:

I will greatly rejoice, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation; God has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom puts on priestly glory and as the bride adorns herself with jewels (Isaiah 61:10).

And I said, "Let them set a pure headdress upon his head," and they set the pure headdress upon his head, and they clothed him with garments, and the angel of Hashem stood by (Zechariah 3:5).

For as the earth brings forth her growth, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so Hashem will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations (Isaiah 61:11).

And Hashem will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in time of drought, and make strong your bones, and you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters never fail (Isaiah 58:11).

As pieces of the burial shrouds (*Tahcrichim*) are placed on the *meit/meitah* specific verses are recited:

- Headdress (mitsnefet for a man, bonnet for a woman): And he shall be attired in a linen headdress.
- Pants (michnasayim): And linen breeches shall be upon his flesh.
- Shirt (k'tonet, has no collar): He shall don a holy linen tunic.
- Jacket (kittel, has collar): --- nothing additional is said ---
- Belt (gartle or avnet): And he shall be girded with a linen sash.
- When finished dressing: And God Almighty give you mercy.

➤ **After the *Aron* is Closed**

After the casket is closed the following are said:

Behold, it is the bier of Solomon.

Sixty mighty men are about it, of the mighty men of Israel. They are all swordsmen and expert in war.

Each man has his sword on his thigh because of the dread in the night.

May Hashem bless you and protect you.

May Hashem's face shine unto and be gracious to you.

May Hashem's countenance be lifted unto you and give you peace.

His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his fragrance as Lebanon.

And now, may the might of Hashem be great, as you have spoken, saying, "But as truly I live, the glory of Hashem shall engulf all the earth."