CASTING SEVEN SACRED CIRCLES:
A Feminine Translation of the Hakafot Ritual as found in Sefer Maavor Yabbok

Rabbi T'mimah Audrey Ickovits
Gamliel Institute Course 3 Project
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APPRECIATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Rena Boroditsky
Rabbi Ivan Ickovits
David Zinner
Gamliel Institute of Kavod v’Nichum
Team Ben Zakkai of Kavod v’Nichum

Thank you for sharing your time, heart, wisdom, and inspiration. Your insights come from experience; they are colorful, wise, inclusive, and nourishing beyond this world.
**INTRODUCTION**

Circuits are foundational aspects of our universe. In fact, orbiting defines local, earth based, space time continuum. Locally in our solar system, this is witnessed in many ways; the Earth completes a full turn, rotates on her axis, once every 24 hours. The moon completes a circuit around the Earth every 29 and quarter days. Earth orbits the sun completing a circuit each 365 1/4 days, defining Earth’s solar year. Our neighboring planets and celestial bodies impact Earth as well, transmitting their unique radiance which our planet receives.

Jews practice circuit movements (dances) to highlight and bless memorable occasions. Here are some examples:

- **Torah Service** - circuit around community with Torah before reading.
- **Sukkot** - circuit Torah carrying fragrant sets of lulav, etrog, myrtle and willow.
- **Simhat Torah** - seven circuits with Torah embellished with joyous dancing.
- **Tu B’Av** - “Betoolot B’mahol” maidens circle dances on the full moon of the month of Av; to engage a life partner.
- **Huppah** - wedding ritual of completing seven circuits.

A careful reading of the traditional text, Sefer Maavor Yabbok reveals that seven circuits were walked around the deceased following taharah and before burial, it can be done just before lifting the bier and taking the deceased to the grave.

Jewish practice repeatedly brings in the holiness of the seventh cycle. Shabbat liturgy affirms that Yisrael is an "Ahm Mekadshei Sh’vi‘i"; a people who bring forward the holiness of the seventh cycle.¹

**Significant Sevens (There is overlap with the previous list.)**

- Days of Creation in Torah
- Colors of the Rainbow
- Days of the Week
- Double Letters
- Hakafot (Circles) beneath the Huppah in weddings custom
- Hakafot (Circles) in the Sukkah on Hoshanah Rabbah
- Hakafot (Circles) on Simhat Torah
- Candles in a Menorah
- Heavens
- Drops of Blood for Temple Sacrifice Ritual
- Years of Sh’mitah cycle
- Seven Sh’mitah cycles for the Jubilee
- Wonders of the World
- Continents

¹ Nusah Ari - Maariv, Shahareet and Musaf, Nusah Ashkenazi - Shabbat Musaf
Notes on Western Scale

- **Weeks of seven days counting the omer**
- "Lower" - S’firot
- Gemmatria of דג, meaning "fish" [3+4] 7
- Gemmatria of יין, meaning "wine" [10+10+50=70] This is 10 times 7.
- Seven openings in the head - 2 eyes, 2 ears, two nostrils, and 1 mouth
- Beggars in Ren Nachman from Breslov’s story.
- Three patriarchs plus four matriarchs
- Stops to a Gravesite before burial
- Seven Years of Bounty followed by seven years of famine in Yoseph’s story in Genesis
- Prongs on the two shins of t’fillin; one has 3 and the other has 4
- Seventh Candle of Hannukah is - Rosh Hodesh; New Moon

Every step through the sequence of seven draws a unique resonance:

These circuits are completed following Taharah, after moving the meitah in her bier or casket; outside the Taharah room. It can be provide meaning at the community service in a synagogue or chapel for example. Moving through seven circuits offers an active means for mourners and those grieving to express, consider and move through emotions in an active, communal, meaningful, and safe ritual offered by a renown Master of Kabbalah.

Giving Tzedakah increases the potency of the blessing.

**BEFORE HAKKAFOT (CIRCUITS)**

The following is translated from Sefer Maavor Yabbok:

Seven hakafot (circles) bring great ease to the nefesh of the deceased. Their kavanot are discussed in chapter 17 part 3 and further in chapter 30 part 5 of Siftay Tzedek.

The fullest expression includes the following:

During each circle chant Yoshev b’seter elyon (from Psalm 91) until “ke atah Hashem Mahsi” following each circle, per Vilna. In the Ahavat Shalom version it is recited until “shilumat re-shaim tireh”. The prayer leader may get out of line to recite the Ana B’khoah or more between each Hakafah. There is an optionl practice of placing at least a coin in the Tzedakah box for each hakafah as tzedakah on behalf of the deceased. Some empty their pockets for the sake of the soul’s Kaparah (atonning).

Hareini notenet (noten m) prutah zoo letz’dakah al kol Yisra-el val “Plonit” zeh hanifteret lim’nuhat nishmatah b’Gan Eden.

2. See Addendum 1
3. Maavor Yabbok Vilna Version 106: נון וְלָעֳל שָׁלֹם אֵשׁ אֱוָה קְבָר AS
Behold, I give this money as tzedakah for all Yisrael and for ‘Plonit’, this deceased, to support her soul resting in Gan Eden.

In each individual Hakafah when the Hazan (prayer leader) exits the circle she/he chants Ana B’khaoh and I find it good to chant the 13 attributes.

May it be Your Will, YHVH, our G!D and G!D of our ancestors to offer maternal mercy to (Plonit), this deceased, and that any transgression and iniquity be released. YHVH YHVH, Eil Maternally Merciful and Gracious.

HAKAFOT

Rabbi Aharon Berekhiah author of Sefer Maavor Yabbok lived and published his work in Italy in 1626. The influence of Rabbi Avraham Abulafia who spent considerable time teaching in Italy in the middle of the 13th century. Abulafia modeled particular intentions (focuses) in sacred practice: a beginning, middle, and end. Rabbi Aharon Berekhiah z”l developed the verses for hakafot around the deceased reflecting this classical three part template for each of the seven lines, like this:

1. The beginning: provides an acronym for the Name of G!D associated with the line and its attribute. The words used weave together supplications for the deceased and Divine praise.
2. The middle are supplications on behalf of the deceased.
3. The end is a chorus that is repeated on each of the seven lines.

Remember to read the chart from right to left - the three parts are chanted during each hakafah. These verses are taken from Sefer Maavor Yabbok and modified for women honoring women. Contact the author if you seek the version for men.

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4. Maavor Yabbok  Vilna Version 106: נדנ נדנ נדנ נדנ נדנ נדנ נדנ נדנ
Ahavat Shalom Version
5. Avraham Abulafia went to visit the pope in the year 5000 on the Jewish calendar. Anticipating Abulafia’s arrival, the pope built a gallows to hang Abulafia, captured him, and through him in a dungeon upon arrival. That night the pope suddenly died. Abulafia was released and spent years in Italy. Moshe Idel pHD. 2002 UCLA.
These are the Hakafot; Circuits according to the sequence of the Name of 42.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KAVANAH</th>
<th>CHORUS</th>
<th>REQUEST</th>
<th>Acronym from Name of 42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Eilalehah Rahamayha</td>
<td>V’Yiftah Lah M’kom Kivray Avoteyha</td>
<td>HESED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Send Kaparah for remaining guilt and give to her the tenderness she built.</td>
<td>Open for her sacred space in graves of her ancestors.</td>
<td>EYLV, Blessed, Great, See the integrity of her Charity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>CAPRAH</th>
<th>KAVANAH 3</th>
<th>Choruses according to the sequence of the Name of 42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>V'Hal'tzeiha, pen t'akh'leiha lahah haherev b'eesho v'tikaneis l'gan od-neha v'lo yizkiru od avonayha:</td>
<td>DISCIPLINE CONTRACTION MEMBRANE DISCERNMENT NATURE</td>
<td>Kadosh Rahum Elyon Shur Tohar Nafshah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Save her, lest she be consumed by the flaming sword's fire. To her personal Eden, allow entry do not further recall iniquity.</td>
<td>HOLY, MATERIAL MERCY, HIGH, DIRECT, PURE, SOUL</td>
<td>Holy, Maternal Mercy, High, Direct, Pure, Soul</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7. Maavor Yabbok Vilna Version 106 Ahavat Shalom Version
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KAVANAH</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>REQUEST</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHORUS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>REQUEST</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIFERET</td>
<td>V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Elay-ha Rahamayha</td>
<td>V’tizkeh lica-neis l’negah v’anan m’sukatoh, oovo ta-aleh v’lo teireid, v’lo yizakheir la avon va-mered</td>
<td>Na Gadol Dagool Y’gadeil Ka’ah Sh’mira-ta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASSION HARMONY BALANCE MATERNAL MERCY</td>
<td>Send Kaparah for remaining guilt and give to her the tenderness she built.</td>
<td>merit entry to radiance, with protective cloud cover; in it you will rise, never descend, with no memory of iniquity nor offense</td>
<td>Please, Great Outstanding (One), Amplify the Potency of her Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETZAH</td>
<td>V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Elay-ha Rahamayha</td>
<td>Ominahal adanekha tash’keiha v’yit’hu lah sha-arei Y’rushalyim, ooMikha-el yak’rivah lifnei Shokhen Shamayim.</td>
<td>B’rahamei Tahor Rahameiha Tz’dakah, Tamid, Gam’leiha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSEVERANCE FOCUS ETERNAL VICTORY</td>
<td>Send Kaparah for remaining guilt and give to her the tenderness she built</td>
<td>Through the channel of Your Eden quench her. Open the gates of Yerushalayim for her, Mikha’el will bring her close to The “Shokheyn Shamayim”</td>
<td>Through Maternal Mercy, hers and Pure, give to her Tzedakah generously always</td>
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</tbody>
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**Verse 4**

V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Elay-ha Rahamayha

B’rahamei Tahor Rahameiha

Tz’dakah, Tamid, Gam’leiha

Ominahal adanekha tash’keiha v’yit’hu lah sha-arei Y’rushalyim, ooMikha-el yak’rivah lifnei Shokhen Shamayim.

Through the channel of Your Eden quench her. Open the gates of Yerushalayim for her, Mikha’el will bring her close to The “Shokheyn Shamayim”

One Who Dwells on High.
<table>
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<th>CHORUS</th>
<th>REQUEST</th>
<th>1  Acronym from Name of 42</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Elay-ha Rahamayha</td>
<td>Ooveit Mik’dash, v’Apiryon, Yefat’hu La B’ratzon, ooMikha-el, Yakh’niseiha B’Sason, B’Simhah oov;Sason.</td>
<td>Hai Kadosh, Barukh, Their, Naf’shah Elyon Heavenly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send Kaparah for any remaining guilt and give to her the tenderness she built</td>
<td>The Temple and High Heaven will desire and open for her, Mikha’el will escort her in - with glee with joy with glee.</td>
<td>Live, Holy, Blessed, Pure Her Soul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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*INTIMACY*  
**WAY OF THE PROPHET & PRIEST**

V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Elay-ha Rahamayha  
Send Kaparah for any remaining guilt and give to her the tenderness she built

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*YESOD*  
**WAITS FOR IMPETUS, GRATITUDE, ADAPTIVE WAY OF THE PROPHET & PRIEST**

V’yishlah Caparah L’Ashmatah, V’yiten Elay-ha Rahamayha  
V’al mizbah hakadosh nishmatah tih’yeh nitzevet, oomi-pi eley sham tih’yeh m’vorekhet  
YAH Galei Labat P’dootekeha, Zakh Kadosh

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*FOUNDATION*  
**IN CONVERSATION**

Send Kaparah for any remaining guilt and give to her the tenderness she built  
On the holy alter, her neshamah rooted will be, and from the Supreme Mouth - blessed be she  
YAH, Reveal to Your redemption to Your daughter - Transparent, Holy
KAVANAH

CHORUS

REQUEST

1. Acronym from Name of 42

MALKHUT  

V’yishlah Caparah  

L’Ashmatah, V’yiten  

Elay-ha Rahamayha

Yih’yeh l’nefesh zeh mahazik  

v’tomeikh oova-aravot

l’fanekha y’shameish v’yomam

v’liyla lo yamush

Shokhen Kedem  

Oomei-az,  

Tzedek Yosher

Toomekha

GROUNDING  

RECEPTIVITY

SH’KHINAH

Send Kaparah for any remaining guilt  

and give to her the tenderness built

There will be strengthening and wholesomeness for this Nefesh in the nightfall In You.  

Security, day and night, will never cease.

Dweller of Primordial days and earlier, Righteous Direct Support

Barookh shem k’vod malkhuto l’olam va’ed

Through Time and Space your Glory Shines, Majestic One.

AFTER HAKKAFOT

After the Circuits, the author of Mavor Yabbok invites the chanting the following verse.

v’livnei haflagshim asher l’avraham natan

Avraham matanot

And to the children of Avraham’s concubines, Avraham gave gifts.

Its good to do this at the cemetery after saying Tzaddok Hadin, or at the home of the meitah before lifting her up carrying her (to her final resting place).

8. Rabbi Tmimah Ickovits


10
ABOUT SEFER MAAVOR YABBOK, HEVRAH KADISHAH AND CONTEMPORARY LIFE

Sefer Maavor Yabbok was written by the Master of Kabbalah, Rabbi Aharon Berakha of Modena, Italy in 1626 CE and it was published in Mantua, Italy. The introduction says that its purpose is to educate the Jewish community about the traditions and rituals of the Hevrah Kadishah. Maavor Yabbok includes a full continuum of practice; including 112 verses offered for visiting the sick. It also incorporates a full range of tools to support the Neshamah on her journey, mourners, and the Hevrah members. The range of practices include confessions (vidui), prayers to support the Neshamah (soul) in transition, and practices and rituals for washing, taharah, dressing, funeral, burial, and comforting mourners.

“Maavor Yabbok” is a reference to Yakov Avinu\(^2\) crossing the River Yabbok\(^2\). Yaakov takes his family across the river. There, Yaakov wrestles with an angel, is successful and receives the name recognizing his enlightenment; Yisrael. This Name becomes the banner of Yaakov’s descendents; Bnai Yisrael, the Children of Yisrael\(^3\).

It is a comprehensive collection of liturgy and commentary for supporting end of life that testifies to the holistic involvement of community, especially the Hevrah Kadishah.

For example, in the past, the Hevrah offered support while the person was alive with the mitzvah of Bikur Holim, visiting and praying for the ill. Sometimes the person would heal and enter back into their life. Other times, they would support “healing into death.” Then, the Hevrah were the ‘death doulas’; comforting and assisting the Neshamah on its journey.

This book is an invitation to meet nuances from Judaism’s finest offerings related to healing, illness, and death. “Honor and Comfort” are key ongoing aspects. This work will support those 1) doing Bikur Holim, 2) present during the dying process 3) engaged with providing taharot, and 4) serving as shomrot or shomrim – guarding the meitah/meit, and 5) wishing to learn about liturgy, practices, and/or kabbalah.

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10. 112 is the gemmatria for Yabbok (יָבֹב) as in Maavor Yabbok (מַעֲוָר יָבֹב) (100 = פ, 2 = ב, 100 = פ) 100+2+10=112. That is the reason for 112 verses it references a complete crossing.

11. Our Ancestor Yaakov, aka Jacob son of Isaac

12. Genesis 32:23

13. The lineage of Yisrael, Yaakov, 2) parsing the Hebrew word gives ישור Eyl, Direct to Eyl (Gd), 3) Permuting the letters offers Shir Eyl - Song of Eyl (Gd) 4) Gd-Wrestlers 5) Parsing the letters offers ישור Eyl, literally “There are 231” referencing the 231 gates of creation that are derived from the distinct 2 letter combinations of the 22 letters of the Aleph Bet - from which creation manifested. Sefer Yetzirah 2:4 \(200+30+1 = 231\) in gemmatria.
The vision is to provide the greater Jewish community access to the earliest traditional book on end of life and teach skills to allow deeper access. It turns out the practices offered differ considerably from what is offered in Maavor Yabbok. Liturgy changes for a variety of reasons; customs that are ongoing, changing needs, resources, education level of the Hevrah Kadishah practitioners and more. Two types of liturgy are included in this edition; 1) Maavar Yabbok verses for visiting a gosesset, a woman in the dying process. These are some of Judaism’s most potent prayers, skillful means for calling in protection and healing. These prayers are suitable to be used when visiting or praying for someone’s health and wellbeing, or when we pray on our own behalf, 2) Prayers used by the Hevrah Kadishah for tending to the meitah; including washing before the Taharah, Taharah itself, dressing the meitah, laying to rest in a bier of coffin followed by a practice of hakafot, circling, around the meitah. The sequencing is different from what I have seen practiced to date, it is beautiful and hold integrity. I hope you are moved by it as I am.

This represents a new paradigm in scholarship. Previously liturgy and commentary has been developed and intended for use by men for men. Translations for women, embracing the language of the feminine has typically been inserted later if at all.
ADDENDUM 1

ANA B’KHOAH

The 42 letter Name of G’d is hidden in the first letter of each word. This Name is used to re-create the primordial “Light of Eden”. Each of the seven lines relate the “Secrets of Seven”.

Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Hakanah 2nd century

HESED, KINDNESS, EXPANSION LIMITLESS-NESS

AVRAHAM & MIRIAM

ANa B’Kho-ah G’DuLaT YMiNKHa TaTeeR TZRuRaH.

Source of Mercy, with loving strength, untie our tangles.

GVURAH, DISCIPLINE, CONTRACTION CONTAINMENT

YITZHAK & LEAH

KaBeil ReeNaT, AM’KHa SaG’VeiNu, TaHaReiNu NoRa.

Your chanting folk raise high, make pure, accept our song.

TIFERET, COMPASSION, HARMONIZING

YAKOV & HANNAH

NA GeeBoR DoRSHeIY YeekHooD’KHa K’VaVaT SHaM’ReiM.

Like your own eye, Lord keep us safe, who union seek with You.

NETZAH, PERSEVERANCE, FOCUS, VICTORY

MOSHE & RIVKAH

BaR’KHeiM TaHaReiM, RaHaMeiY TzeeD’K Ha, TaMeeD GaM’LeiM.

Cleanse and bless us, infuse us ever, with loving Care.

HOD, GLORY, HUMILITY

AARON & SARAH

HaSeEn KaDOSh, B’ROV TooV’KHa, NaHeiL ADaTeKHa.

Gracious Source, oh Holy Power, do guide Your folk.

YESOD, SEXUALITY, COMMUNITY

YOSEPH & TAMAR

YaHeed Gei-eh LaM’KHa P’Nay ZokhRei Ke’DooSHaTeKHa.

Sublime and Holy One, in your Great Goodness, lead Your flock.

MALKHUT, GROUNDING, REBIRTH, RELEASE

DAVID, RAHEL

SHA’V’sTeiNu KaBeL, OOSH’Ma Tza-AK’aTeiNU, YODEi-A Ta-aLuMOT.

Receive our prayer, do hear our cry, who secrets knows.

Barookh shem kavod malkhuto l’olam va’ed

Through Time and Space your Glory Shines, Majestic One.
Rabbi T’mimah Ickovits, BSE is the founding rabbi and spiritual leader of Holistic Jew, and an active member of Ben Zakkai Institute of Kavod v’Nichum, working in support of traditional, eco-conscious, cost effective, kind communal end of life options. She is an educator engaging a variety of communities and teaching ‘clergy in training’ at Aleph Ordinations Programs. Rabbi T’mimah is an authorized Continuum Movement teacher and staff member for the teacher training program.

Rabbi Ickovits is known for her work with Kabbalah. She attended Modern Orthodox Yeshivah and resonated with the deep initiation this offered into Torah Study, Hebrew, and traditional Jewish practices. The school’s philosophy of strict adhesion to rigid, patriarchal, and ethno-centric rules challenged her and fueled her inquiry into the subtle and deeper intentions (Kavanot) of Jewish practice.

Through engagement with classical text, Rabbi Ickovits learned to track patterns in Jewish practice. Indeed, the basis of Rabbinic Judaism is the calendar cycle. Moreover, she found Jewish Tradition is filled with skillful guidance to support living a nourishing productive life which includes time off from work as a foundational value.

Rabbi Ickovits’s unique strength is in engaging with traditional texts through a different ‘slant of light’ – that is, from a traditional, yet egalitarian, eco-aware spiritual perspective to bring forward renewed meaning and practice, creative sparks, & movement into contemporary Jewish life. Rabbi T’mimah has compiled the Holistic Jew series of prayer books that include Pesah Haggadah, Kabbalat Shabbat and Prayers for end of life; Before ordination Rabbi Ickovits had an 18 year career as an electronics engineer.