

New Community Chevra Kadisha of Greater Pittsburgh



Adapted Virtual Liturgy for a Woman's Taharah

April 2020
Nisan 5780

Adapted Virtual Liturgy for a Woman's Taharah

When to use this adapted ritual: There are times when we are not able to attend to the meitah in the way to which we are accustomed. However, we want to use our loving presence to honor the meitah and to help midwife her soul in this tender and liminal time. This liturgy is an adapted version of our regular taharah manual, designed for this purpose, using visualization and simulation.

May we be guided by the wisdom of our ancestors and be inspired by the call to serve in these moments. May these meitot be sheltered under the wings of the Shechinah (Divine Presence) and guided on their way. May we be grounded in our holy task by the light and love of each other and of being in sacred community together.

General guidance for use of the adapted ritual:

- ROSHA: Get the meitah's obituary either online or from the funeral director; also get meitah's Hebrew/Yiddish name and the names of her parents, in Hebrew/Yiddish if possible.
- For each individual team member prior to logging in to the Zoom space:
 - Choose a quiet physical space where you will not be disturbed
 - Have the following on hand:
 - A candle (and matches) to be lit at the beginning of the ritual
 - For hand washing, an empty bowl and a pitcher or cup of water and a hand towel
 - For the taharah, 2 containers—one filled with water and the other empty
 - Pen/pencil and paper to write the name of the meitah and her parents' names
 - For the closing hand ritual, your favorite hand cream
 - Your copy of this manual
- As/after you log on to the Zoom taharah space, turn off cellphones and anything else in the space that might make noise during the taharah
- Once the team is logged into the taharah space, the Rosha will remind the team:
 - This will be a participatory ritual. The Rosha will lead and will ask individual members to read or sing specific parts.
 - Immediately prior to beginning the ritual, team members should put themselves on Mute until the Rosha calls on you.
 - We will use the meitah's English or Hebrew/Yiddish name as we read.
 - Handwashing will occur twice, with each person using her individual pitcher/cup of water and bowl.
 - Words in italics are read by the Rosha.
 - Other team members may be invited by the Rosha to read non-italicized parts of the liturgy. Remember to Unmute yourself if the Rosha calls on you. All team members are invited to read the non-italicized sections out loud in their own private spaces (on Mute).

[Before beginning the ritual on the next page, Rosha asks funeral director to remove the sheet from the meitah.]

SACRED SPACE

Let us mentally enter the taharah space.

[Roshia invites team members to light their candles, representing the neshamah of the meitah. She shares the name of the meitah (in English and Hebrew/Yiddish) and her parents' names and reads the obituary.

Roshia invites the team to perform the first ritual handwashing (pour water over the right hand, left hand, right hand).]

Take a moment to envision our gathering around [English name], placing your hands on her to offer comfort.

Source of kindness and compassion, whose ways are ways of mercy and truth, You have commanded us to act with loving-kindness and righteousness toward [English name]. Grant us the courage and the strength to properly perform this work, this holy task of cleaning and washing [English name], dressing her in tachrichim, and preparing her for burial. Guide our hands and hearts as we do this work, and enable us to fulfill the commandment of love. Help us see Your face in [English name]'s face, 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.

Kavanah Mechilah:

_____ bat _____ v' _____, we stand here ready to begin our work. Before we do so, we ask your understanding that we will do our best to prepare you for your final journey.

_____ bat _____ v' _____, we ask your forgiveness for any distress we may cause you during this taharah. We will do everything possible to ensure that you are treated with respect, and that all the elements of taharah are properly completed. Everything we are about to do is for the sake of your honor.

Kavanah Chamol:

Ruach Ha'Olam, we are acting on behalf of the neshamah of _____ bat _____ v' _____, asking You for compassion and mercy on her behalf.

Source of Life for all Worlds, we ask compassion for _____ bat _____ v' _____, this meitah, who is the daughter of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. May her soul and spirit rest with those who have gone before her. May it be Your will, our God and God of our ancestors, that we encircle [English name] with kindness, just as Your angels will receive her with love. We ask, too, for you to forgive [English name] for any wrong-doings and misdeeds. Blessed are You who imparts great compassion on Your people Israel. Amen, may this be Your will.

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

רבנו של עולם חמול על _____ בת _____
 המתה הזו שהיא בת שרה, רבקה, רחל, לאה, בלהה וזלפה
 ואברהם, יצחק, ויעקב, שהלכו אחריו באמונה.
 תנוח נשמתה בשלום עם כל הדורות, כי סולם ומוחל
 פשעי המתים אתה. יהי רצון אלוהי אבותנו ואמותינו
 שתצור את המתה האהובה עליך.
 ברוך אתה הנותן אהבה גדולה למתי עמו ישראל.
 אמן, כן יהי רצון.

WASHING THE MEITAH

Kavanah Rechitzah:

Just as _____ bat _____ v' _____, was created in God's image and was beautiful while alive, so may we continue to recognize the beauty of her neshamah.

And the angel of God spoke out and said to those standing there: "Remove their soiled garments"; and they said, "Behold, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you in fine garments." (Zecharia, 3:4-5)

As before birth you were surrounded by water, now as you depart this world, we bathe you in water.

Vaya'an vayomer el ha'omdim l'fanav leimor:

"Hasiru hab'gadim hatzo'im me'alav." Vayomer elav: ויענו ויאמר אל העמדים לפניו לאמר:
 "הסירו הבגדים הצאים מעליו." ויאמר אליו:
 "R'eh he'evarti me'alecha avonecha וראה העברתי מעליך עונך והלבש אתך מחלצות."
 v'halbeish otcha machalatzot."

Please visualize yourself washing each part of [English name]'s body as I read.

"Blessed is the head that housed your thoughts, words, dreams and visions."

"Blessed is the neck that held your head and was a bridge between your head and body."

"Blessed are the shoulder, arm and hand that labored in your life – shaping and touching and reaching out."

"Blessed are the chest and abdomen that held the organs of breath and life."

"Blessed are your leg and foot that supported and carried you on your path."

"Blessed are the arm and hand that opened in friendship and received the gifts that life offered."

"Blessed again are the chest and abdomen that held the vital organs.

"Blessed is the heart, the vessel of feeling."

"Blessed are the leg and foot that enabled you to journey on your path."

"Blessed is the spine which has held you and carried your vital energy."

Please join together to say these words:

כָּלֶךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי, וּמוֹם אֵין בָּךְ.

Koolach yafa ray'yati, u'moom ayn bach

You are beautiful my beloved friend, and there is no flaw in you.

(Song of Songs, 4: 7)

Imagine drying the table and placing a clean, dry sheet over the meitah.

Kavanah Taharah:

To midwife the soul is the purpose of taharah. As the central element of this ritual, the spiritual phase is perhaps one of the most simple of tasks, yet also one of the most significant.... It is the goal to purify the deceased through the transformative power of water. We simulate this act with a continuous pouring of water. (adapted from To Midwife a Soul by Richard A. Light)

[Roshia invites the team to perform the second ritual handwashing (pour water over the right hand, left hand, right hand).]

[When that is complete, Roshia offers instructions for the taharah:

- To simulate the taharah, we will be using the full cup of water and the empty bowl. We will imagine pouring a steady and continuous stream of water along the body, beginning first on the right side, then the left side, and then from head to toe.
- As we begin, please Unmute yourself]

Imagine again that we are gathered around [English name].

TAHARAH

Said Rabbi Akiva, You are fortunate, Israel. Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? The Eternal One, as it is said: "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall become purified" (Ezekiel, 36:25), and it says: "Mikveh Yisrael, Adonai" "Yah is the Hope, the mikvah of Israel" (Jeremiah, 17:13). Just as a mikvah purifies the impure, so too does the Holy One of Blessings purify Israel" (Mishnah Yoma 8:9).

A fountain for gardens, a well of living waters, flowing from Lebanon (Song of Songs, 4:15). And I will pour pure water upon you, and you shall be purified from all of your impurities; and I shall purify you (Ezekiel, 36:25).

Amar Rabbi Akiva: Ashreichem Yisra'el, lifnei
 mi atem mitaharin umi m'taher etchem?
 Avichem shebashamayim, shene'emar:
 "V'zarakti alechem mayim t'horim ut'hartem."
 V'omer: "Mikveh Yisra'el Adonai."
 Ma mikveh m'taher et hat'me'im,
 af haKadosh Baruch Hu m'taher et Yisra'el.

אמר רבי עקיבא: אשריכם ישראל, לפני
 מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם?
 אביכם שבשמים, שנאמר: "וזרקתי עליכם
 מים טהורים וטהרתם" (יחזקאל לו:כה).
 ואומר: "מקוה ישראל יי" (ירמיה יז:ג).
 מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים,
 אף הקדוש ברוך הוא מטהר את ישראל.

Ma'ayan ganim b'er mayim chayim v'nozlim min l'vanon.

מעין גנים באר מים חיים ונזלים מן לבנון.

V'zarakti aleichem mayim t'horim ut'hartem mikol
 tum'otechem umikol giluleichem ataheir etchem.

וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל
 טמאותיכם ומכל גלוליכם אטהר אתכם.

Begin pouring as we all say:

טהורה היא טהורה היא טהורה היא

Tehorah hee Tehora hee Tehorah hee

She is pure She is pure She is pure

[Moment of silence...]

Please Mute yourselves as we imagine drying the meitah and covering her with a clean sheet, while we sing....

Elo-hai, Elo-hai, neshama
 shenatata bi tehora hi.
 Ata ve'rata ata yetzarta,
 ata nefachta bi,
 ve'ata me'shamra,
 me'shamra be'kirbi

אלהי, נשמה
 שנתת בי טהורה היא.
 אתה בראתה, אתה יצרתה,
 אתה נפחתה בי,
 ואתה משמרה בקרבי

The soul that You, my God,
 have given me is pure.
 You created it, You formed it,
 You breathed it into me,
 You protect it within me

Return again, return again
 Return to the land of your soul. (repeat)

Return to who you are
 Return to what you are
 Return to where you are
 Born and reborn again (repeat these 4 lines)

DRESSING THE MEITAH

Kavanah before dressing the meitah:

We have now completed the pouring ritual of taharah, and will dress you, [English name], in plain white garments. According to the Zohar, the tachrichim correspond to “chalukkah d’rabbana” – the robe of the sages, woven from a person’s mitzvot that she fulfilled while alive.

I greatly delight in Adonai; my soul rejoices.

For God has clothed me in garments of redemption and wrapped me in a cloak of justice.

(Isaiah, 61:10)

Sos asis ba’Adonai tageil nafshi beilohai
ki hilbishani bigdei yesha m’il tzedakah y’atani
kechatan y’chahein p’eir v’chakalah ta’dah cheilehah.

שׁוֹשׁ אֲשִׁישׁ בִּיהוּה תִּגַּל נַפְשִׁי בְּאֱלֹהֵי
כִּי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי יְשׁע מְעִיל צְדָקָה יְעֲטֶנִּי
כְּחַטָּתִי יִכְהֶן פָּאֵר וְכִפְלָה תַעֲדָה כְּלִיָּהּ.

[Rosha asks funeral director to begin placing the tachrichim]

1. Pants / Michnasayim.

Linen pants shall be on your flesh

*U’michn’sei bad yihyu
al b’sara*

וּמִכְנֵסֵי בַד יְהִיו עַל בְּשָׂרָהּ

2. Collarless tunic / K’tonet

You shall wear a holy linen tunic

K’tonet bad kodesh tilbash

תִּלְבַּשׁ כְּתֹנֶת בַד קֹדֶשׁ

3. Tunic with collar / Kittel Gartel / Avnet

... and a linen sash shall you tie

Uv’avnet bad tachgor

וּבְאַבְנֵט בַד תַּחְגֹּר

4. Bonnet/ Mitznefet

... and a linen headdress shall you don

Uv’mitznefet bad titznof

וּבְמִצְנֶפֶת בַד תִּצְנוֹף

*Bigdei kodesh hem v’rachatz bamayim
et b’sara ul’vasham.*

בְּגָדֵי קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם אֶת בְּשָׂרָהּ וּלְבַשְׁם.

V’El Shaddai yiten lach rachamim.

וְאֵל שְׁדַי יִתֵּן לְךָ רַחֲמִים.

... these are garments of holiness, and you shall bathe your flesh in water and put them on. And may the God of nurturance give you compassion (Leviticus, 16:4)

[The sovev is placed over the meitah]

[Rosha informs the funeral director that s/he can now leave if desired,
but the Zoom meeting stays active]

LAYING THE MEITAH TO REST

Ye'var'chech Adonai ve'yishme'rech.
Ya'er Adonai panav e'la'yich vee'chu'nech.
Yisa Adonai panav e'la'yich ve'ya'sem lach shalom.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יי' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:
יָאֵר יי' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַחַנְךָ:
יִשָּׂא יי' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וְיִשֶּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

May God bless and keep you.
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May God's face be lifted up to you and give you peace.

(Numbers, 6:24-26)

Hinei lo yanum vlo yishan, shomer Yisrael. הִנֵּה לֹא־יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן, שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל .

For the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

(Psalms, 121:4)

B'sheim Adonai elohei yisrael:
mimini Michael, umismoli Gavriel,
umilfanai Uriel, umeachorai Rafael,
v'al roshi shechinat el.

בְּשֵׁם יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
מִיְמִינֵי מִיכָאֵל, וּמִשְׂמָאלֵי גַבְרִיאֵל,
וּמִלְפָּנֵי אֹרִיאֵל, וּמֵאַחֲרֵי רַפָּאֵל,
וְעַל רֹאשֵׁי שְׁכִינַת אֵל

In the name of the God of Israel:
At my right hand Michael, at my left hand Gavriel;
Before me Uriel, behind me Raphael;
And above my head, the Shechina, God's sheltering Presence. (from the bedtime Shma)

Let us visualize our gathering around [English name], asking her for forgiveness.

Kavanah Mechilah:

_____ bat _____ v' _____, we stand here having completed our work. We hope we have treated you with dignity. Please know that we have done our best to prepare you for your final journey.

_____ bat _____ v' _____ anu mevakshot _____! _____, אָנוּ מְבַקְּשׁוֹת
mechila meitach im lo aseenu kefee chvodech, _____, מְחִילָה מֵאֲתָךְ אִם לֹא עָשִׂינוּ כְּפִי כְבוֹדְךָ,
aval aseenu k'minchag ha'makom. אַבְּל עָשִׂינוּ כְּמִנְחַג הַמָּקוֹם.

_____ bat _____ v' _____, we ask your forgiveness if we did not act according to your honor, even though we acted according to our custom.

ESCORTING THE MEITAH

Take a moment to imagine our hands on the aron as we offer [English name] comfort and compassion.

May you be blessed and protected.
May you be filled with light and grace.
May you be filled with sacred presence and peace.

Kavanah:

Adonai, we now ask for assurance from You that this neshamah will be protected for eternity.

L'chi lach, to a land that we will show you.	L'chi lach, and we shall make your name great.
Leich l'cha, to a place you do not know.	Leich l'cha, and all shall praise your name.
L'chi lach, on your journey we will bless you	L'chi lach, to the place that we will show you
And (you shall be a blessing)3x l'chi lach.	(L'sim-chat cha-yim)3x l'chi lach.

Beyt Ya'a'kov l'chu v'nel'chah b'or Adonai.

El Elohim Adonai diber va'yik'rah aretz, mi'miz'rach shemesh ad m'vo'oh. Ya'vo shalom, ya'nu'chu al mish'ka'votam, Kee afar a'nach'nu v'el a'far na'shuv. Adonai na'tan v'Adonai la'kach; Y'he shem Adonai m'vo'rach.

בֵּית יַעֲקֹב לְכוּ וְנִלְכֶה בְּאוֹר יְיָ.

אֵל אֱלֹהִים יְיָ דִּבֶּר וַיִּקְרָא אֶרֶץ מִמִּזְרַח שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבֹאֵי. יבֹא שְׁלוֹם יְנוּחוּ עַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹתֵם, כִּי עָפָר אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֵל עָפָר נִשְׁוֵב, יְיָ נָתַן וְיְיָ לָקַח; יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבֹרָךְ.

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 unto dust we return.
God has given, and God has taken away;
May the name of God be blessed.

[Zoom host goes into Participants and locates Funeral Director's device,
then clicks on More, then Remove]

[Rosha directs team members to wash their hands with soap and water, then to put on hand cream.]

TIME FOR SHARING THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

[Rosha directs team to Unmute themselves]

CLOSING RITUAL

Ruach Ha'olam, we have just completed our mitzvah of g'mi'lat chesed for _____ bat _____ v' _____.

We are thankful for the strength and courage to perform this mitzvah during this difficult time. We cherish the bond that brings us together in this sacred community.

Bless these Hands
For the Kindness they show
For Holiness they embody
For the Mitzvot they enact (Rabbi Me'irah Iliinsky)

May this mitzvah be a blessing that we take with us throughout our day and into our lives.

[Rosha suggests that team members can pour the taharah water outside in a special place such as a garden.]

[Rosha: Inform the funeral home office of the names of taharah team members so they can complete the taharah certificate]

The New Community Chevra Kadisha of Greater Pittsburgh thanks:

**Chevra Kadisha of Kehilla Community Synagogue in Piedmont CA
Chevra Kavod haMet of Portland OR**

for sharing their creative ideas and their liturgies that greatly aided us in the preparation of our adapted ritual.