

Unraveling the Secrets: A Guide Through the Liturgy of Taharah

Based on *Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness*
Exploring the Meaning of Taharah: 3rd Edition
By Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel

Kavanot

These suggestions for *kavanot* are brief statements that the leader of the *taharah* team might read prior to saying various parts of the liturgy, to remind the team of the meaning and purpose of the upcoming prayer.

OPENING PRAYERS

1. **MECHILAH:** We begin the ritual of *taharah* by addressing the *met/metah*.

Kavanah: _____ [name of deceased], 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.

2. **CHAMOL:** We recite our first prayer to God, speaking to God on behalf of the deceased.

Kavanah: God, we are acting on behalf of the *neshamah* of _____ <name of deceased>, asking You for compassion and mercy on his/her behalf.

3. **ANA ELOHEI HACHESED:** We ask God to give us strength and keep us from harm.

Kavanah: God, give us the strength to do our work properly, keep us from harm, and give us heightened awareness of what we are doing.

RECHITZAH (Physical Washing)

4. **VAYA'AN VAYOMER:** We invoke the mythical context from Zechariah.

Kavanah: God, help us to take the first step in preparing _____ [name of deceased], for this journey. As we do so, may we be conscious to show this *met/metah* the same dignity that God's angels showed to Joshua in preparing him to be *Kohen Gadol*.

5. **ROSHO KETEM PAZ or HINACH YAFAH:** We praise the body of the *met/metah* as we physically cleanse it.

Kavanah: Just as this *met/metah* was created in God's image, and beautiful while alive, so may we continue to recognize the beauty of his/her *neshamah*.

TAHARAH (Spiritual Washing)

6. **AMAR RABBI AKIVA:** The reasons for the pouring of water

Kavanah: Help us prepare this *neshamah* to enter the heavenly kingdom and to witness Your Presence.

7. TAHOR HU/T'HORAH HI: The actual moment of status transformation

[No *kavanah* is needed for this two-word chant. It is the one portion of the liturgy that virtually every member of a *Chevra Kadisha* understands.]

8. V'HITKADASHEM: The closing of the ritual of *taharah*

Kavanah: By pouring of the water, we have completed the process of *taharah*.

HALBASHAH and HALANAH (Dressing and Placing in the *Aron*)

9. SOS ASIS: We prepare to dress the *met/metah* in priestly/spiritual garments.

Kavanah: We stand here having completed the pouring ritual of *taharah*, preparing to dress this *met/metah* in plain linen garments, like the simple linens worn by the *Kohen Gadol* who served in the Temple.

10. K'TONET BAD KODESH YILBASH, etc.: We do the actual dressing of the *met/metah*.

Kavanah: As we dress this *met/metah*, let us be conscious that we are clothing him/her in the garments of the *Kohen Gadol*.

11. V'LO YAVO'U: We place the *met/metah* into the *aron*.

Kavanah: We stand here at a liminal, potentially dangerous moment. Help us now as we gently lift the *met/metah* and place him/her into the *aron*.

12. V'CHIPEIR ADMATO: We place shards (where practiced) and *afar* (earth) from Israel on the body of the deceased.

Kavanah: As no one is so righteous as to have never sinned, we pray for atonement for _____ [name of deceased].

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

13. HINEIH MITATO: We invoke various protections from "terror by night."

Kavanah: We pray that God, in the image of Solomon's mighty men, will protect _____ [name of deceased].

14. MECHILAH: We make a closing request for forgiveness from the *met/metah*.

Kavanah: _____ [name of deceased], 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.

15. UVINSO'A: We move the *met/metah* out of the *taharah* room, and one step closer to eternity.

Kavanah: God, we now ask for assurance from You that this *neshamah* will be protected for eternity.