

## **Community Hevra Kadisha of Greater Boston**

### **Tahara Seder during COVID – Modifications for 1 person performing tahara**

The modified taharot we are currently doing in the tahara room reflects what we can accomplish in safety to serve our beloved dead. Deeds of true loving-kindness are made real in whatever way circumstance allows, even as we pray for the time when once again we shall be able to offer full *tahara*. May our way of *chesed shel emes* help to bring wholeness to the dead and be for the living its own way of healing, that we soon shall emerge from the scourge of this time.

Rabbi Victor Reinstein

### **Introduction**

At the present time we are advised that it is safe for one individual to be in the tahara room to perform tahara. We have been told that the risk of COVID transmission is between haveirim rather than from the Meyt/a who is no longer breathing. We are grateful to the Brezniak staff for doing much of the preparation for us so that we don't have to lift or turn the body. Brezniak funeral directors remove medical devices, clean the meytim and dress them in tachrichim for us. They then place the meytim/meytot in the aron over a sovev, a tallit (as appropriate) and an avnet. It is for us to bring our kavannah and recite the liturgy as we perform a modified *rehitza* and *tahara* and complete the *halbasha*, (dressing) as described below. Note that a revised *Mechila* has been written that reflects our kavanna performing Tahara during these challenging times.

Bella Rosner

## Entry and Set-up

Entry code to tahara room (from the rear parking lot): \_\_\_\_\_ Pull door towards you.

Enter directly into the Tahara room wearing your mask. The tahara room door is the black door in the *middle* of the parking lot. Change shoes before entering the room and leave everything you don't need in the car, including jewelry. Tahara room and upstairs bathrooms will have been sanitized by Brezniak staff.

*On entering, pause, stand quietly for a moment acknowledging the meyt/a lying before you, take a breath, acknowledging that you are alone in the presence of a body, each one holy, the living and the dead, each one alone, together.*

1. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, followed by a ritual handwash.
2. PPE: Review video at the end of these instructions. Surgical masks and face shields are on the wire shelving. Use the surgical mask on the shelves, placing it over your own if you wish. (*If you remove your own mask, place it in a baggy for home and rewash hands before touching clean PPE!*) Put on the face shield last. KEEP THE BAG that the face shield comes in so that you can re-use it to put the faceshield in later. (See cleanup below.)
3. Prepare room:
  - a. Sign tahara sheet now, while gloves clean.
  - b. Move the small gray wagon with these instructions and laminated liturgy near the aron as needed so you can read the liturgy directly facing the Meyt/a.
  - c. Prepare sherbelach (shards) and open packet of earth, leaving both on cart.
  - d. Lay out any supplies you think you may need on top of the cart which is closest to the head of the aron: extra washcloths, a scissor, orange sticks, nail polish remover, cotton, some cotton batting in case it is needed for packing the mouth. (see below.) Fill the 2 spray bottles to be used for tahara and test them out; fill a small pot with water and get wash cloth ready on cart for *Rehitza* of the face and hands.
  - e. IF the meyt/a not yet dressed, lay out tachrichim on aron cover. Fill pillow with straw that is kept in the supply closet (door near sink) in a green plastic bag.
  - f. Write name on a sheet of paper or whiteboard.
  - g. Light candle. נר ה' נשמת אדם

Take time to set your intention/kavannah after all is arranged before beginning the *Mechila*...

## ***Ana Elohei... Source of Kindness and Compassion***

(Women read this before *Mechila*)

Source of kindness and compassion, *Elohei hachessed v'harachamim*, whose ways are lovingkindness and truth, we (I) have gathered to fulfill the mitzvah of Taharah. Grant us (me) the courage and the strength to do this work with *kavod ha'metah* (honoring the deceased,) this holy task of cleaning and washing the body and dressing the *metah* in shrouds as the first step in her burial.

Forgive us (me) for any errors. Guide our (my) hands and our (my) heart as we (I) do this work, and enable us (me) to fulfill the mitzvah of love, the mitzvah of *gemilut chesed v'emet*.

Help us (me) see Your Face in the face of the *metah*, even as we (I) see You in the faces of those who share this task with us (me). Source of Life and Death, You have granted us (me) life, *shehecheyanu*, sustained us(me), *V'kiamanu*, and enabled us (me) to be here today, *V'higianu lazman hazeh*. Be with us now and always.

## Mechilah during COVID

\_\_\_\_\_ ben/bat/mibeit \_\_\_\_\_ v' \_\_\_\_\_,

*We ask your forgiveness for any distress we may cause you during this tahara, most of all for the ways in which we have had to modify the ritual preparation of your body for its final journey. We are here (women: as your sisters) to lovingly care for you and bring you to sleep with your ancestors in the ancient ways of our people. During this time of plague that besets and endangers all, the changes we make are an affirmation of the life you have lived and the lives of those who care for you now.*

*May our presence be a source of peace to your neshama and our tears as the flowing of living waters meant to bathe your body, declaring with full hearts that you are pure. Everything we do is for the sake of your honor.*

### **Chamol**

**Ana** (men only)

Inspect the face and body (if not wrapped). If the mouth is wide open, *pack the mouth with webril/cotton* to protect against possible aerosols that may be emitted when the head is manipulated. (Batting may be removed at the end of tahara and put in biohazard container.) Clean nails with orange stick as needed (placing dry washcloth underneath to protect tachrichim and sovev,) remove nail polish as needed.

Cut and save ID bracelet only if easily accessible and place on aron cover.

### **REHITZAH:**

**Va'yaan Va'yomer**

**Shir HaShirim** (easiest to read before you begin washing)

Clean/pat face with wrung out wash cloth. Wipe hands. Simulate Rehitza by patting down R side, then L. Optional reading below while stroking body over the tachrichim, or you may prefer to sing a niggun.

*While head is bathed:  
Blessed is the head that housed your thoughts.*

*While the neck is bathed:  
Blessed is the neck that held your head.*

*While the arm and hand are bathed:  
Blessed are the shoulder and arm that labored in your life.  
Blessed is the hand that opened in friendship.*

*While the torso is bathed:  
Blessed is the heart, the vessel of feeling.  
Blessed are the chest and abdomen that held the organs of breath and life.*

*While the leg and foot are bathed:  
Blessed are the leg and foot that enabled you to journey on your path.*

*--You may wish to repeat the last sentence of the Shir Hashirim selection at this time to complete the Rehitza..*

**\*\*\*Remove gloves using proper technique, rewash with soap followed by ritual wash, reglove. Step aside to check that the bottles are primed and ready for use.**

## **TAHARA**

### ***Amar R' Akiva***

Spray mist over face and body. To approximate continuous flow, hold one spray bottle in each hand, alternating spray. Say ***Tehora hi/hu*** x3 after spray

### **HALBASHA:**

Put on the *Mitznefet*. If this is too difficult because of the condition of the meyt/a, rest the *mitznefet* over the face.

*There is something particularly intimate and moving in placing the mitznefet alone, cradling the head of the meyt/a with one arm, working down the mitznefet with the other, offering words of comfort or a quiet nigun to the hovering soul, setting the soul and yourself at ease.*

If the *tachrichim* are already on: Touch each garment with hands as you say the verses. If not already dressed: Say the verses as you place each garment over the meyt/a, tucking them in around them.

Tie knots: If the *tachrichim* are already on the meyt/a, the knots can be tied as usual. (If the bands are already in bows, you can choose to untie them and redo them with traditional knots.) Tie the leg bands with the traditional knots. If you are placing the

*tachrichim* over the meyt/a, the bands can be placed loosely around the legs of the *michnasayim* and the knots tied, and the knots can be tied loosely at the neck for the *k'tonet* and *kittle*. The *avnet* can be tied as usual since it is in the aron and can be drawn around the meyt/a.

**V'lo yavo'u**, pottery on eyes, replace *Mitznefet*

**Tzitzit of Talit** made pasul by tying one of them, then wrapped around the Meyt.

**Sovev:** (wrap feet, right, left, head);

**Afar**

**V'Chiper**

**Close Aron** if possible, or cover entire aron with a sheet and Brezniak staff will close the aron. (Please inform coordinator if a sheet is used, so the staff can be alerted.)

### **Closing Mechilah**

\_\_\_\_ *ben/bat/mibeit* \_\_\_\_ v'\_\_\_\_,

*We ask your forgiveness for any distress we have caused you, most of all through the ways in which we have had to modify the ritual preparation of your body for its final journey. Everything we have done has been for the sake of your honor. As your body returns to the earth, may your soul come home to the Holy One in peace.*

## **Cleanup**

Place used wash cloths in laundry, empty the pot. Using clorox wipes (under white counter,) empty and wipe down spray bottles. Wipe down instruction and liturgy sheets *if* they got wet or are soiled. (It's helpful to do this on a towel spread over a gurney or other available surface.) Wipe down sink handles, top of soap dispenser, door knobs and all fixtures that were touched.

Carefully remove face shield holding elastic and pulling away from face. Replace in original bag to retain its shape, then in paper bag labeled with your name to bring home along with shoes until next time you're on a tahara. Faceshields don't need to be wiped down unless they are visibly soiled or got splashed. They can be reused after 24hrs. Slowly and carefully remove rest of the PPE except for mask following the instructions on the video.

Wash hands with soap and water thoroughly. Discard face mask and change shoes in the car followed by hand sanitizer.

## PPE Video

<https://www.nasck.org/donning-and-removing-ppe/> (Start video at 55 seconds mark.)

**PLEASE text or call your coordinator after the tahara is completed.**

Questions: Call Bella 617-620-9772 or your coordinator.