

mikvah

Judaism

Alternate titles: mikveh, miqwe

By [The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) [Edit History](#)



[*mikvah*](#)

mikvah, also spelled **Mikveh**, or **Miqwe**, (“collection [of water]”), in [Judaism](#), a pool of natural [water](#) in which one bathes for the restoration of [ritual](#) purity. The [Mishna](#) (Jewish code of law) describes in elaborate detail the requirements for ritually proper water and for the quantity of water required for ritual cleansing. In former times, a *mikvah* was so essential to each [community](#) of Jews that, if necessary, a [synagogue](#) could be sold to finance its construction.

With the destruction of the Second [Temple of Jerusalem](#) in ad 70, many laws of ritual purity lost their relevance. Consequently, ritual bathing in modern times is much restricted. Traditionally observant Jews, however, still use the *mikvah*, and converts are required by [Halakha](#) (legal tradition) to undergo a [ritual bath](#). Males bathe each Friday and before major festivals, while women use the *mikvah* (as the law prescribes) before their wedding, after [childbirth](#), and following [menstruation](#).

The Mikvah

By [Rivkah Slonim](#)



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What Is a Mikvah?

To the uninitiated, a modern-day [mikvah](#) (מִקְוָה) looks like a miniature swimming pool. In a religion rich with detail, beauty and ornamentation—against the backdrop of the ancient Temple or even contemporary synagogues—the *mikvah* is surprisingly nondescript, a humble structure.

Its ordinary appearance, however, belies its primary place in Jewish life and law. The *mikvah* offers the individual, the community and the nation of Israel the

remarkable gift of purity and holiness. No other religious establishment, structure or rite can affect the Jew in this. The mikvah offers the individual, the community and the nation of Israel the remarkable gift of purity and holiness way and, indeed, on such an essential level. Its extraordinary power, however, is contingent on its construction in accordance with the numerous and complex specifications as outlined in *halachah*, Jewish law.

The world's natural bodies of water—its oceans, rivers, wells and spring-fed lakes—are *mikvahs* in their most primal form. They contain waters of Divine source, and thus, tradition teaches, the power to purify. Created even before the earth took shape, these bodies of water offer a quintessential route to consecration. But they pose difficulties as well. They are not necessarily kosher for immersion (a competent rabbi must be consulted). In addition, these waters may be inaccessible or dangerous, not to mention the problems of inclement weather and lack of privacy. Jewish life therefore necessitates the construction of [mikvahs](#) (“pools”), and indeed this has been done by Jews in every age and circumstance.

Briefly: A *mikvah* must be built into the ground or built as an essential part of a building. Portable receptacles, such as bathtubs, whirlpools or Jacuzzis, can therefore never function as *mikvahs*. The *mikvah* must contain a minimum of 200 gallons of rainwater that was gathered and siphoned into the *mikvah* pool in accordance with a highly specific set of regulations. In extreme cases where the acquisition of rainwater is impossible, ice or snow originating from a natural source may be used to fill the *mikvah*. As with the rainwater, an intricate set of laws surrounds its transport and handling.

The casual observer will often see only one pool—the one used for immersion. In reality, most [mikvahs](#) are comprised of two, sometimes three, attached pools. While the accumulated rainwater is kept in a lower pool, the upper immersion pool is drained and refilled regularly with tap water. Connected via a hole of at least two inches in diameter on the bottom of the upper pool, the free flow, or “kissing,” of waters between the two pools makes the waters of the immersion pool an extension of the natural rainwater, thus conferring upon the immersion pool the legal status of a *mikvah*. An alternative method involves side-by-side pools which share a common wall that has a hole in it. Halachah stipulates that a person must be scrupulously clean before immersing. Modern-day *mikvah* pools are equipped with filtration and water-purification systems.

The *mikvah* waters are commonly chest high and kept at a comfortable temperature. Access to the pool is achieved via stairs. (Accessible *mikvahs* are equipped with lifts.)

The *mikvah* as an institution is the victim of a popular misconception. Immersion in water is naturally associated with cleansing. To further complicate the issue, Jews historically were often barred by the authorities from using rivers in their cities for bathing. In response they built bathhouses, many with *mikvahs* in or near them. Together, these factors forged an inextricable link between the idea of *mikvah* and physical hygiene. But the *mikvah* never was a monthly substitute for a bath or shower. In fact, the *halachah* stipulates that one must be scrupulously clean *before* immersing. To facilitate this requirement, preparation areas—with baths and showers, shampoo and soaps, and other cleansing and beauty aids—are a staple of the modern *mikvah*.

Until a relatively short time ago, most *mikvahs* could best be described as utilitarian: function, not comfort, dictated their style. A new awareness among modern Jewish women, the rabbinate and community leaders over the last few decades has sparked a new trend in *mikvah* construction. Beautiful, even lavish, *mikvahs*—complete with elegant foyers and waiting rooms, fully equipped preparation areas and well-designed *mikvah* pools—are being built across this country and around the world. Some *mikvahs* rival luxurious European spas and offer patrons more amenities than they could enjoy at home.

In communities with large populations of *mikvah* users, the building may house as many as 20 or 30 preparation areas, and two to four immersion pools. In these facilities, an intercom system links each of the rooms to a central desk, and an attendant ensures the privacy of the many *mikvah* users. Some of the larger *mikvah* buildings include conference rooms used for tours and educational programming.

Today, it is not just a Jewish metropolis that can boast a *mikvah*. In remote, even exotic, locations—Anchorage, Alaska, and Bogotá, Colombia; Yerres, France, and Ladispoli, Italy; Agadir, Morocco, and Asunción in Paraguay; Lima, Peru, and Cape Town, South Africa; Bangkok, Thailand, and Zarzis, Tunisia; and almost every city in the former Soviet Union—there are [kosher](#) and comfortable *mikvahs*, and rabbis and rebbetzins willing and able to assist any woman in their use. In many communities, a tour of the *mikvah* is available on request. Upon arrival in a new

city or when traveling, information about *mikvahs* in the region can be obtained by phoning the local *mikvah* office, the Orthodox synagogue or the [Chabad House](#).

The Gateway to Purity

Immersion in the *mikvah* has offered a gateway to purity ever since the creation of man. The *Midrash* relates that after being banished from Eden, Adam sat in a river that flowed from the garden. This was an integral part of his *teshuvah* (repentance) process, of his attempt at return to his original perfection.

Before the revelation at Sinai, all Jews were commanded to immerse themselves in preparation for coming face to face with G-d.

Immersion in the mikvah has offered a gateway to purity ever since the creation of man

In the desert, the famed “well of Miriam” served as a *mikvah*. And Aaron and his sons’ induction into the priesthood was marked by immersion in the *mikvah*.

In Temple times, the priests as well as each Jew who wished entry into the House of [G-d](#) had first to immerse in a *mikvah*.

On Yom Kippur, the holiest of all days, the High Priest was allowed entrance into the Holy of Holies, the innermost chamber of the Temple, into which no other mortal could enter. This was the zenith of a day that involved an ascending order of services, each of which was preceded by immersion in the *mikvah*.

The primary uses of *mikvah* today are delineated in Jewish law and date back to the dawn of Jewish history. They cover many elements of Jewish life. *Mikvah* is an integral part of conversion to Judaism. It is used, though less widely known, for the immersion of new pots, dishes and utensils before they are utilized by a Jew. The *mikvah* concept is also the focal point of the *taharah*, the purification rite of a Jew before the person is laid to rest and the soul ascends on high. The manual pouring of water in a highly specific manner over the entire body of the deceased serves this purpose.

Mikvah is also used by men on various occasions; with the exception of conversion, they are all customary. The most widely practiced are immersion by a groom on his wedding day and by every man before [Yom Kippur](#). Many Chassidic men use the

mikvah before each Shabbat and holiday, some even making use of *mikvah* each day before morning prayer (in cities with large populations of observant Jews, special *mikvahs* for men facilitate these customs). But the most important and general usage of *mikvah* is for purification by the menstruant woman.

For the menstruant woman, immersion in a *mikvah* is part of a larger framework best known as *Taharat Hamishpachah* (Family Purity). As with every area of Jewish practice, [Family Purity](#) involves a set of detailed laws; namely, the “when” “what” and “how” of observance. Studying with a woman who is experienced in this field is the time-honored way of gaining familiarity and comfort with the practice. In cities or communities with large Jewish populations, there may be classes one can join. The majority of women, however, come by this knowledge through a more personal one-on-one encounter. While books are a poor substitute for a knowledgeable teacher, select titles can be used as a guide to this ritual or for quick reference (see suggested book list in appendix to this essay). What follows is only a brief overview of these laws. It is not, and was not intended to be, a substitute for proper study of this subject.

Family purity is a system predicated on the woman’s monthly cycle. From the onset of menstruation and for seven days after its end, until the woman immerses in the *mikvah*, husband and wife may not engage in sexual relations. To avoid violation of this law, the couple should curtail their indulgence in actions they find arousing, putting a check on direct physical contact and refraining from physical manifestations of affection. The technical term for a woman in this state is *niddah* (literal meaning: “to be separated”).

Exactly a week from when the woman has established the cessation of her flow, she visits the *mikvah*. Immersion takes place after nightfall of the seventh day and is preceded by a requisite cleansing. The immersion is valid only when the waters of the *mikvah* envelop each and every part of the body and, indeed, each hair. To this end, the woman bathes, shampoos, combs her hair and removes from her body anything that might impede her total immersion.

Immersion in the *mikvah* is the culmination of the [Taharat Hamishpachah](#) discipline. It is a special moment for the woman who has adhered to the many nuances of the mitzvah and has anticipated this night. Sometimes, however, the woman may be feeling rushed or anxious for reasons related or unrelated to this rite. At this point, she should relax, spend a few moments contemplating the

importance of the immersion, and in an unhurried fashion, lower herself into the waters. After immersing once, while standing in the waters of the *mikvah*, the woman recites the blessing for ritual purification and then, in accordance with widespread custom, immerses twice more. Many women use this auspicious time for personal prayer and communication with G-d. After immersion, woman and husband may resume marital relations.

The Centrality of Mikvah

Before exploring the deeper dimensions of this ritual, we must briefly examine the centrality of *mikvah* to Jewish life.

Most Jews, even those who deem themselves secular, are familiar, at least conceptually, with religious observances such as the Sabbath, the dietary laws, Yom Kippur and a number of other Torah laws. *Mikvah* and Family Purity, on the other hand, are shrouded in obscurity—pages torn out of the book, as it were.

Yet the observance of Family Purity is a biblical injunction of the highest order. The infraction of this law is equated with major transgressions such as eating *chametz* (leavened foods) on Passover, intentional violation of the fast on the holy day of Yom Kippur, and not entering into the covenant through ritual circumcision, *brit milah*.

The mikvah's unparalleled function lies in its power of transformation, its ability to effect metamorphosis

Most Jews see the synagogue as the central institution in Jewish life, But Jewish law states that constructing a *mikvah* takes precedence even over building a house of worship. Both a synagogue and a [Torah](#) scroll, Judaism's most venerated treasure, may be sold to raise funds for the building of a *mikvah*. In fact, in the eyes of Jewish law, a group of Jewish families living together do not attain the status of a community if they do not have a communal *mikvah*.

This is so for a simple reason: private and even communal prayer can be held in virtually any location, and venues for the social functions of the synagogue can be found elsewhere. But Jewish married life, and therefore the birth of future generations in accordance with *halachah*, is possible only where there is

accessibility to a *mikvah*. It is no exaggeration to state that the *mikvah* is the touchstone of Jewish life and the portal to a Jewish future.

The Spiritual Meaning of Mikvah

We have already determined that the function of *mikvah* is not to enhance physical hygiene. The concept of *mikvah* is rooted in the spiritual.

Jewish life is marked by the notion of Havdalah: separation and distinction. On Saturday night, as Shabbat departs and the new week begins, Jews are reminded of the borders that delineate every aspect of life. Over a cup of sanctified wine, the Jew blesses G-d who “separates between the holy and the mundane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and six days of labor”

In fact, the literal definition of the Hebrew word *kodesh*—most often translated as “holy”—is that which is separated; segregated from the rest for a unique purpose, for consecration.

In many ways, *mikvah* is the threshold separating the unholy from the holy, but it is even more. Simply put, immersion in a *mikvah* signals a change in status—more correctly, an elevation in status. Its unparalleled function lies in its power of transformation, its ability to effect metamorphosis.

Utensils that could heretofore not be used can, after immersion, be utilized in the holy act of eating as a Jew. A woman, who from the onset of her menses was in a state of *niddut*, separated from her husband, may after immersion be reunited with him in the ultimate holiness of married intimacy. Men or women in Temple times, who were precluded from services because of ritual defilement, could, after immersion, alight the Temple Mount, enter the House of G-d and involve themselves in sacrificial offerings and the like. The case of the convert is most dramatic. The individual who descends into the *mikvah* as a gentile emerges from beneath its waters as a Jew.

G-d’s commandments, the 613 injunctions known as *mitzvot*, are divided into three distinct categories:

Mishpatim are those laws governing the civil and moral fabric of life; they are logical, readily understood and widely appreciated as pivotal to the foundation and

maintenance of a healthy society. Examples are the proscription against murder, theft and adultery.

Eidut are those rituals and rites best described as testimonials. This category includes the many religious acts that remind Jews of historic moments in their history and serve as testament to cardinal beliefs of the Jewish faith, such as the observance of the Sabbath, the celebration of [Passover](#) and the affixing of a *mezuzah* on the doorpost.

The third category, *chukkim*, are supra-rational principles; they are Divine decrees about which the human mind can form no judgment. [Chukkim](#) completely defy human intellect and understanding. From time immemorial they have been a source of amusement, a target of scorn, and an uncomfortable and shameful presence to the detractors of Jewish observance. For the observant Jew, they personify a [mitzvah](#) at its best; a pure, unadulterated avenue of connection with G-d. These [mitzvot](#) are recognized as the greatest, the ones capable of affecting the soul on the deepest level. Unimpeded by the limitations of the human mind, these statutes are practiced for one reason only: the fulfillment of G-d's word. Examples are the laws of kashrut; the prohibition against wearing *shatnez* (clothes containing a combination of wool and linen); and the laws of ritual purity and *mikvah*.

The *mikvah* personifies both the womb and the grave; the portals to life and afterlife

When all is said and done, an understanding of the ultimate reason for the framework of Family Purity and its culminating point—immersion in the *mikvah*—is impossible. We observe simply because G-d so ordained it. Still there are insights that can help add dimension and meaning to our *mikvah* experience.

In the beginning, there was only water. A miraculous compound, it is the primary source and vivifying factor of all sustenance and, by extension, all life as we know it. But Judaism teaches it is more. For these very same attributes—water as source and sustaining energy—are mirrored in the spiritual. Water has the power to purify: to restore and replenish life to our essential, spiritual selves.

The *mikvah* personifies both the womb and the grave; the portals to life and afterlife. In both, the person is stripped of all power and prowess. In both, there is a mode of total reliance, complete abdication of control. Immersion in the *mikvah* can be understood as a symbolic act of self-abnegation, the conscious suspension

of the self as an autonomous force. In so doing, the immersing Jew signals a desire to achieve oneness with the source of all life, to return to a primeval unity with G-d. Immersion indicates the abandonment of one form of existence to embrace one infinitely higher. In keeping with this theme, immersion in the *mikvah* is described not only in terms of purification, revitalization and rejuvenation, but also, and perhaps primarily, as rebirth.

Is Family Purity an Outdated Taboo?

In years gone by, menstruating women were a grave source of consternation and fear. At best they were avoided, at worst they were shunned and cast aside. Often, menstruating women were blamed for tragedy and mishap, as if they had polluted the environment with their breath or gaze. This was a simplistic, if not misguided, response to a complex phenomenon whose rhyme and reason eluded the primitive mind. In those societies, peace could be made with menstruation only by ascribing it to evil and demonic spirits, and by the adaptation of a social structure that facilitated its avoidance.

Viewed against this backdrop, the Jewish rhythm in marriage is perceived by many as a throwback to archaic taboos, a system rooted in antiquated attitudes and a ubiquitous form of misogyny. In truth, Family Purity is a celebration of life and our most precious human relationships. It can be understood most fully only within a deeper notion of purity and impurity.

Judaism teaches that the source of all *taharah*, “purity,” is life itself. Conversely, death is the harbinger of *tumah*, “impurity.” All types of ritual impurity, and the Torah describes many, are rooted in the absence of life or some measure—even a whisper—of death.

When stripped to its essence, a woman’s menses signals the death of potential life. Each month a woman’s body prepares for the possibility of conception. The uterine lining is built up—rich and replete, ready to serve as a cradle for life—in anticipation of a fertilized ovum. Menstruation is the shedding of the lining, the end of this possibility.

The presence of potential life within fills a woman’s body with holiness and purity. With the departure of this potential, impurity sets in, conferring upon the woman a state of impurity or, more specifically, *niddut*. Impurity is neither evil nor

dangerous and it is not. The concept of purity and impurity as mandated by the Torah and applied within Jewish life is unique; it has no parallel or equivalent in this postmodern age something tangible. Impurity is a spiritual state of being, the absence of purity, much as darkness is the absence of light. Only immersion in the *mikvah*, following the requisite preparation, has the power to change the status of the woman.

The concept of purity and impurity as mandated by the Torah and applied within Jewish life is unique; it has no parallel or equivalent in this postmodern age. Perhaps that is why it is difficult for the contemporary mind to relate to the notion and view it as relevant.

In ancient times, however, *tumah* and *taharah* were central and determining factors. The status of a Jew, whether he or she was ritually pure or impure, was at the very core of Jewish living; it dictated and regulated a person's involvement in all areas of ritual. Most notably, *tumah* made entrance into the Holy Temple impossible and thus sacrificial offering inaccessible.

There were numerous types of impurities that affected Jews, regarding both their life and Temple service, and a commensurate number of purification processes. *Mikvah* immersion was the culmination of the purification rite in every case. Even for the ritually pure, ascending to a higher level of spiritual involvement or holiness necessitated immersion in a *mikvah*. As such, the institution of *mikvah* took center stage in Jewish life.

In our day, in this post-Temple period, the power and interplay of ritual status has all but vanished, relegating this dynamic to obscurity. There is, however, one arena in which purity and impurity continue to be pivotal. In this connection only is there a biblical mandate for *mikvah* immersion—and that is regarding human sexuality. To understand why this is so, we must first understand how the Torah views sexuality.

Judaism and Sensuality

The alleged incompatibility of sexuality and spirituality—more precisely, their antithetical nature—is a notion that, while foreign to Torah thought, is attributed by many to Judaic philosophy under the larger and completely mythical rubric of a

“Judeo-Christian” creed. Few concepts have done more harm than this widespread misapprehension.

In stark contrast to Christian dogma—where marriage is seen as a concession to the weakness of the flesh, and celibacy is extolled as a virtue—the Torah accords matrimony an exalted and holy position.

Within that consecrated union, the expression of human sexuality is a mandate, a mitzvah. In fact, it is the first mitzvah in the Torah and one of the holiest of all human endeavors.

Moreover, human lovemaking signals the possibility and potential for new life, the formation of a new body and the descent from heaven of a new soul. In their fusing, man and woman become part of something larger; in their transcendence of the self, they draw on, and even touch, the Divine. They enter into a partnership with G-d; they come closest to taking on the godly attribute of creator. In fact, the sacredness of the intimate union remains unmitigated even when the possibility of conception does not exist. In the metaphysical sense, the act and its potential remain linked.

Human sexuality is a primary force in the lives of a married couple; it is the unique language and expression of the love they share. A strong relationship between husband and wife is not only the backbone of their own family unit, but is integral to the world at large. For the blessings of trust, stability, continuity, and ultimately, community, all flow from the commitment they have to each other and to a joint future.

In reaffirming their commitment, in their intimacy, the couple adds to the vibrancy and health of their society, of humanity, and ultimately, to the fruition of the Divine plan: a world perfected by man. In their private, personal togetherness, they are creators of peace, harmony and healing—on a micro-cosmic scale, but with macrocosmic reverberations—and as such, are engaged in the most sacred of pursuits.

In this light, it becomes clear why marital relations are often referred to as the Holy Temple of human endeavor. And entrance to the Holy always was, and continues to be, contingent on ritual purity.

While we can not presently serve G-d in a physical Temple in Jerusalem, we can erect a sacred shrine within our lives. Immersion in the *mikvah* is the gateway to the holy ground of conjugality.

Human sexuality is a primary force in the lives of a married couple; it is the unique language and expression of the love they share

The Ebb and Flow of Desire

The laws of Family Purity are a Divine ordinance. There is no better, more legitimate, more logical or essential reason for their observance. It is a difficult commandment, a discipline that makes demands on our time, our psyche and our emotions. It is a force at odds with the flesh, a way of life that the average person would not likely choose or devise. It calls for willful suspension of self-determination, the subservience of our most intimate desires to the bidding of a higher authority.

And therein lies the *mitzvah's* potency. The knowledge that it is sourced in something larger than the self—that it is not based on the emotions or subjective decision of one or the other—allows *Taharat Hamishpachah* to work for the mutual benefit of woman and husband. Ironically, this “unfathomable” mitzvah reveals its blessings to us more than almost any other, in daily, palpable ways. Its rewards are commensurate with the challenge of observance.

At first glance, the *mikvah* system speaks of limitations and constraints—a loss of freedom. In truth, emancipation is born of restriction. Secure, confident, well-adjusted children (and adults) are disciplined children; they understand restraint and learn self-control. Safe, stable countries are those pieces of land surrounded by definite, well-guarded borders. The drawing of parameters creates terra firma amid chaos and confusion, and allows for traversing of the plain we call “life” in a progressive and productive manner. And in no area of life is this more necessary than in our most intimate relationships.

“From every tree of the garden you may indeed eat but from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil you must not eat” So G-d commanded Adam and Eve on the day of their creation. But they indulged on that fateful Friday afternoon, and the history of mankind was altered forever.

The complicated nature of human sexuality has its genesis in this tale. For the Tree of Knowledge contained a mixture of good and bad, and indulgence of this “knowledge” by primeval man introduced a new world order: a world where good and bad intermingled, a world of confusion and challenge, multiple choices and endless potential.

No longer would intimate relations—one among many human biological functions—be as natural and uncomplicated as the others. Banishment from the Garden of Eden meant the introduction of a new sexuality: one pregnant with possibility and fraught with tension. It would hold the key to great ecstasy and excruciating pain, the most tantalizing fulfillment and most devastating sensation of void. A meaningful union would necessitate unequivocal commitment and constant nurturing by man and woman. But even the maximum effort put forth by man would need to be augmented by help from above. The blessing would flow from a reservoir called *mikvah*, and Eden as it was before the sin would be attainable.

Trite as it may sound, *mikvah* offers couples the possibility of repeated “honeymoons” during the course of their marriage. Boredom, a seemingly innocuous state of affairs, can beleaguer any relationship and chip away at its foundation. The mandatory monthly separation fosters feelings of longing and desire—at the very least, a sense of appreciation—which is followed by the excitement of reunion.

Over the course of a lifetime, open-ended sexual availability may well lead to a waning of excitement and even interest. The monthly hiatus teaches couples to treasure the time they have together and gives them something to look forward to when they are apart. Every month, they are separated (not always when convenient or easy), and they wait for one another. They count the days until their togetherness, and each time there is a new quality to their reunion. In this regard, the Talmud states: “So that she will be as beloved as on the day of her marriage.”

The man-woman relationship thrives on a model of withdrawal and return. The Torah teaches that Adam and Eve in their original form were created as an androgynous being. Subsequently, G-d separated them, thus granting them independence on the one hand and the possibility for a chosen union on the other. Men and women have been pulling apart and coming together ever since. The *mikvah* system grants the married couple this necessary dynamic. Within their

commitment to live together and be loyal to each other forever, within their monogamy and security, there is still this springlike mechanism at work.

G-d wanted man and woman to find each other on their own and to work at that quest—not merely once, but constantly, in an ongoing process of becoming “one flesh.”

The man-woman relationship thrives on a model of withdrawal and return

Human beings share a nearly universal intuitive tendency for the forbidden. Solomon, the wisest of all men, spoke of “stolen waters which are sweeter.” How many otherwise intelligent, calculated individuals have jeopardized their marriages and families in pursuit of the illicit because of its seeming promise of the romantic and the new? *Mikvah* introduces a novel scenario: one’s spouse—one’s partner in life, day after day, for better and for worse—becomes temporarily inaccessible, forbidden, off-limits. Often, this gives couples reason and opportunity to consider each other anew. In this “removed” span of time, from this new vantage point, they view and approach each other with enhanced appreciation.

The *Taharat Hamishpachah* discipline is helpful in other ways as well: fluctuation and disparity in sexual desire can never be completely alleviated. Yet the regulation in the *mikvah* system serves to assuage tensions that arise from this source. For couples who must abstain for a minimum of 12 days a month, the time they have together is peak time for both, a time they cherish and savor.

For many women, their time as a [niddah](#) also offers them a measure of solitude and introspection. There is, additionally, an empowering feeling of autonomy over their bodies and, indeed, over the sexual relationship they share with their spouses. There is strength and comfort in the knowledge that human beings can neither have their every whim nor be had at whim.

The benefits brought to married life by the practice of Family Purity have been recognized by numerous experts, Jew and non-Jew alike. To be sure, this type of analysis, as any other, is subject to argument and critique. Ultimately, however, *mikvah’s* powerful hold on the Jewish people—its promise of hope and redemption—is rooted in the Torah and flows from a belief in G-d and His perfect wisdom.

Mikvah Before Marriage (and Other Times)

Judaism calls for the consecration of human sexuality. It is not enough that intimacy be born of commitment and sworn to exclusivity; it must be sacred. As such, the first mandated time for immersion in the *mikvah* is at the threshold of marriage.

Mikvah before marriage, strictly speaking, is not contingent upon a commitment to regular observance of Family Purity. Even so, it should not be understood as unrelated to this larger framework. It is simply the first time a Jewish woman is commanded to purify herself in this way. And it is an awesome and auspicious way to start a new life together with one's beloved.

After learning of the details and giving them due consideration, *mikvah* is a ritual that can be easily incorporated in the pre-wedding preparations by every Jewish bride and groom. The wedding date should be planned around the bride's monthly cycle, thus allowing for her immersion before the nuptial.

Tremendous amounts of time and energy are expended in planning a wedding. There is an innate human hope that a perfect wedding equals a perfect start in life. Yet all thinking individuals recognize human limitations. That which we most need and want—health, good fortune and children—are beyond our control. As we voice the age-old greeting of *mazel tov*, we are offering up a prayer to the One above, asking that He bless the new couple with abundant goodness. Immersion in the *mikvah* is an important way of drawing G-d and His blessing into the marriage.

For as long as a woman menstruates, her monthly cycle dictates the rhythm of conjugal relations within the marriage, and each month, it is a mitzvah for husband and wife to draw renewal from the waters of the *mikvah*. For those who have not made a lifelong commitment at the onset of married life, it is never too late to begin following the laws of Family Purity. Similarly, while observance should ideally be continuous, one should not allow a lapse of any length to deter further commitment. Nor is this practice contingent on the observance of other precepts in the Torah. *Mikvah* is not, as is often thought, the exclusive domain of the strictly observant.

Even if they are not ready for adherence to these laws at all times, women and their husbands should give particular consideration to this mitzvah before the

conception of their children. *Mikvah*, we are taught, is the conduit for drawing down an exalted soul vested in a receptive and healthy body.

For the postmenopausal woman, one final immersion in the *mikvah* offers purity for the rest of her life. Even a woman who has never used the *mikvah* before should make a special effort to immerse after menopause (it is never too late for a woman to do this, even if many years have elapsed since her menopause), thus allowing for all subsequent intimacies to be Divinely blessed.

The single greatest gift granted by G-d to humankind is [teshuvah](#)—the possibility of return-to start anew and wash away the past. *Teshuvah* allows man to rise above the limitations imposed by time and makes it possible to affect our life retroactively. A single immersion in the *mikvah* late in life may appear insignificant to some, a quick and puny act. Yet coupled with dedication and awe, it is a monumental feat; it brings purity and its regenerative power not only to the present and future, but even to one's past.

In this way, each woman can link herself to an ongoing tradition that has spanned the generations. Through *mikvah* she brings herself in immediate contact with the source of life, purity and holiness—with the G-d who surrounds her and is within her always.

See also: [On the Essence of Ritual Impurity](#) and [Mikvah Time](#)

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What Is A Mikveh?

Whether you're dunking for conversion or for any other reason, here's what to expect at the ritual bath.

By [Shoshanna Lockshin](#)

(pronounced MICK-vuh, also spelled mikvah), is a Jewish ritual bath.

Almost every Jewish community has at least one mikveh (you can search [here](#) for a traditional mikveh, or [here](#) for a non-Orthodox mikveh directory). In larger Jewish communities you might have a choice among *mikva'ot* (plural for mikveh).

Why Immerse in the Mikveh?

Jewish law requires that one immerse in a mikveh as part of the process of [conversion](#) to Judaism. It also requires women to immerse before [getting married](#) and when observing the laws of [niddah](#) (menstrual purity). There are also various other reasons — both traditional and modern — that women, as well as men and Jews who are gender-non-conforming, visit the mikveh.

[READ: Marking My Recovery in the Mikveh](#)

Beyond the halakhically (Jewish law) mandated mikveh uses (for conversion and for women getting married and observing niddah), the powerful symbolism of the mikveh waters has inspired various mikveh practices. For example, many

men immerse themselves in the mikveh every day. Others immerse every Friday before Shabbat. In some Jewish communities, it is also customary to immerse before Yom Kippur, and for grooms to immerse before their weddings.

These immersions, which do not require a blessing, might take place in a separate “men’s mikveh” large enough for 10 or more to immerse simultaneously. Because of their non-required nature, most men’s mikva’ot are more casual — some might not have a constant attendant, and most operate on a walk-in basis rather than scheduling in advance.

In recent years, some progressive Jews have also begun to use mikveh to mark various milestones, such as a graduation, a bar or

or an important birthday, and to signify a new start after pain or loss. For example, immersion can mark the completion of a year of bereavement, or recovery from divorce, rape, abuse, or life-threatening illness. Often [new prayers](#) are composed to accompany these new rituals.

[READ: I'm A Non-Orthodox Jew Who Loves Going to the Mikveh](#)

Finally, another kind of mikveh in use today is the *kelim mikveh* — a mikveh for [immersing dishes](#), in order to make them [kosher](#). Typically much smaller than a mikveh designed for human use, this kind of mikveh is often located in the same building as the main mikveh.

Traditional Specifications



The mikveh at Masada, in Israel. (Wikimedia)

According to the classical regulations, a mikveh must contain enough water to cover the entire body of an average-sized man (Babylonian Talmud, [Eruvin 4b](#)). The rabbis calculated the necessary volume of water as being 40 *seah* (most

contemporary authorities believe this is about 150 gallons). The rabbis also specified that a mikveh must be connected to a natural spring, or to a well of naturally occurring water — like rainwater.

If you've ever visited an ancient historical site in Israel, such as the fortress Masada, there's a good chance you've seen a mikveh — or the remains of one.

Since the mikveh at Masada was far from any natural spring, it presumably functioned as a cistern for rain, and the Masada residents immersed therein. Though stagnant rainwater could hardly have been hygienic, this mikveh would still have met the legal requirements to purify; in Judaism, ritual purity and hygiene can be two very different categories.

Know What You're Getting Into



If you visit an operating mikveh, rest assured that mikveh architecture has come a long way in the past 2,000 years. Today, systems for gathering water for mikva'ot are much more complex — and much more hygienic.

Generally, a tank of rainwater is connected to a small pool that contains heated and treated (often chlorinated) tap water, much like a swimming pool. Since the

tank and the pool are connected, the waters of the latter “acquire” the purifying quality of the rainwater in the tank. Nearly every contemporary mikveh has a filtration and disinfecting system.

When You Get There

When you arrive at the mikveh, if you are coming for one of the reasons mandated by Jewish law, you most likely will not go straight to the ritual bath. Instead, you will be assigned a private preparation room, essentially a large bathroom complete with a bathtub, shower, sink, and toilet. Before immersing in the mikveh, Jewish law requires that one thoroughly clean one’s body, typically including taking a bath or shower, clipping nails, and brushing teeth. This ensures that there are no barriers between the person immersing and the mikveh water. Some mikva’ot provide shampoo, soap, combs and toothbrushes. It’s best to ask before you visit so you know if you have to bring your own toiletries.

In an effort to cultivate an image of mikveh observance as relaxing and spa-like, many new mikva’ot have lovely, even lavish, preparation rooms. Some are even equipped with jacuzzis. You can take your time in the preparation room. Or, if you prefer, you can get ready at home and just use the preparation room for a quick shower before you immerse.

After your bath or shower, cover up with a towel or bathrobe (almost always provided). At most modern mikva’ot, there is a bell to ring to alert a mikveh attendant when you are ready to dunk. Usually, the mikveh attendant will meet you at the back door of your preparation room — this door leads straight to the ritual bath. No one other than the mikveh attendant will see you when you walk from your preparation room to the mikveh itself.

The Big Dip

Before you enter the mikveh, the attendant may offer to check your hands, feet, or back for stray hairs or other potentially unwanted barriers that may get between you and the mikveh waters. If you are comfortable with this, you can accept the offer. But if you do not want to be checked, you usually do not have to.

The mikveh attendant will take your towel or bathrobe and look away as you go down the stairs and enter the water. Though it can feel awkward or uncomfortable

to be naked in front of a stranger, it may help to keep in mind that mikveh attendants attempt to be discreet and look at your body only once you are under water, ready to immerse your head. They are watching to check that every part of your hair and body is submerged, and they are also there to ensure your safety in the water.

The [Sephardic](#) custom is to recite the blessing first and then submerge completely for a moment or two. [Ashkenazic](#) Jews usually submerge once, then recite the blessing, and then submerge either one or two more times. The mikveh blessing is the same for converts and for women before marriage and keeping niddah. Many mikva'ot provide the text.

Barukh ata

Elohenu melekh ha'olam asher kideshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al ha'tevillah.

Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us concerning the immersion.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על הטבילה

After you have blessed and immersed, if you like, you can spend some time in the mikveh for personal reflection or prayer.

As you come out of the water, the mikveh attendant will give you back your towel or bathrobe, and might give you a little blessing too — for a healthy marriage, or a happy life as a Jew, depending on the reason you immersed.

You can return to your preparation room and get dressed. On your way out, you may be asked to pay a fee (usually in the \$18-\$36 range, though it can be more for a conversion), or to make a donation, for maintenance of the mikveh.

Are you considering conversion to Judaism? [Sign up here for a special email series that will guide you through everything you need to know.](#)

DEFINITION: BAPTISM

[βάπτισμα \(baptisma\)](#)

Strong: G908

GK: G967

pr. immersion; baptism, ordinance of baptism, [Mt. 3:7](#); [Rom. 6:4](#); met. baptism in the trial of suffering, [Mt. 20:22, 23](#); [Mk. 10:38, 39](#)

[Strong's Concordance](#)

baptisma: (the result of) a dipping or sinking

Original Word: βάπτισμα, ατος, τό

Part of Speech: Noun, Neuter

Transliteration: baptisma

Phonetic Spelling: (bap'-tis-mah)

Definition: (the result of) a dipping or sinking

Usage: the rite or ceremony of baptism.

HELPS Word-studies

Cognate: **908** *báptisma* – *baptism* (note the *-ma* suffix, emphasizing it is a *result*, i.e. of sincere repentance.) **908** (*báptisma*) indicates *submerging* (*dipping, immersion*).

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

from [baptizó](#)

Definition

(the result of) a dipping or sinking

NASB Translation

baptism (20).

22 Bible results for “baptism” from
New American Standard Bible.
Results 1-22.

Suggested result

[Acts 19:4](#)

Paul said, “John baptized with a **baptism** of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

Bible search results

1. [Matthew 3:7](#)

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for **baptism**, he said to them, “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

2. [Matthew 3:13](#)

The Baptism of Jesus

Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan, *coming* to John to be baptized by him.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

3. [Matthew 21:25](#)

The **baptism** of John was from what *source*: from heaven or from men?” And they *began* considering *the implications* among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

4. [Mark 1:4](#)

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a **baptism** of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

5. [Mark 1:9](#)

The Baptism of Jesus

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

6. [Mark 10:38](#)

But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the **baptism** with which I am baptized?”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

7. [Mark 10:39](#)

They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the **baptism** with which I am baptized.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

8. [Mark 11:30](#)

Was the **baptism** of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me.”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

9. [Luke 3:3](#)

And he came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a **baptism** of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

10. [Luke 7:29](#)

When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this*, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the **baptism** of John.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

11. [Luke 12:50](#)

But I have a **baptism** to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

12. [Luke 20:4](#)

Was the **baptism** of John from heaven or from men?”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

13. [Acts 1:22](#)

beginning with the **baptism** of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

14. [Acts 10:37](#)

you yourselves know the thing that happened throughout Judea, starting from Galilee, after the **baptism** which John proclaimed.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

15. [Acts 13:24](#)

after John had proclaimed, before His coming, a **baptism** of repentance to all the people of Israel.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

16. [Acts 18:25](#)

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was accurately speaking and teaching things about Jesus, being acquainted only with the **baptism** of John;

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

17. [Acts 19:3](#)

And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s **baptism**.”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

18. [Acts 19:4](#)

Paul said, “John baptized with a **baptism** of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

19. [Romans 6:4](#)

Therefore we have been buried with Him through **baptism** into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

20. [Ephesians 4:5](#)

one Lord, one faith, one **baptism**,

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

21. [Colossians 2:12](#)

having been buried with Him in **baptism**, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

22. [1 Peter 3:21](#)

Corresponding to that, **baptism** now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

[In Context](#) | [Full Chapter](#) | [Other Translations](#)

The Jewish Roots of Baptism



- [ONE FOR ISRAEL](http://ONEFORISRAEL.org)
- [- June 2, 2016](#)

A Jewish man called Yochanan was baptising people in the Jordan River in first century Israel, including his cousin who would later become world famous: Yeshua of Nazareth. Many Jewish people responded to the call of this Jewish man to immerse themselves in the river as a sign of repentance, and a desire to get right with God. Some of the Pharisees were also among them. Did Yochanan invent baptism at this time? Or was it part of Jewish tradition and practice before that?

No he didn't, and yes it was.

And the Hebrew word for an immersion pool built for this purpose, "mikveh", also points us in the right direction in understanding deeper meaning in the practice.

Immersion in Jewish Tradition

The Jewish laws which had been passed down orally from generation to generation had several things to say about the need for ritual washing, and the most desirable places to do it.[1] There are six different options suggested that satisfy the requirements, starting with pits or cisterns of standing water as acceptable but least desirable, moving up to pits that are refreshed by rainwater as slightly more desirable, then the custom-built ritual bath, or "mikveh" with 40 se'ahs (300 liters) or more of water, then fountains, then flowing waters. But "living waters" (as found in natural lakes and rivers) which were considered to be the best possible situation.

The Mishnah specifies what makes the water clean or unclean, and expresses a preference for a larger, fresher body of water, "For in it persons may immerse

themselves and immerse others,” So Yochanan immersing people in the “Living waters” of the River Jordan was perfectly within Jewish law and practice at the time.

The Essenes, a strict Jewish sect, were doing it too out in the Judean Desert. But why were Jewish people immersing themselves in water? Is baptism in the Jewish Scriptures? Well, sort of, yes.

Ritual Bathing in the Bible

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations.” Exod 30:17-21

The priests had to be ritually clean (tahor) in order to serve at the tabernacle, and Israelites who had become ritually unclean (tamay) had to restore their situation with the passing of time and bathing their whole body in fresh, ritually clean (tahor) water, according to Leviticus 15.

Later, when the temple had been built, it was necessary for everyone to be immersed in a mikveh to become ritually clean before entering the temple. There are many ancient mikva’ot (plural of mikveh) to be seen in Jerusalem, and it is clear to see the two sets of steps for each one – a set of steps going down to the mikveh in an impure (tamay) state on one side, and on the other side, steps where the pilgrim will emerge fresh and ritually clean (tahor).

What did it look like in the time of Jesus?

Following the upheaval of the 1967 war, archaeologists were presented with the opportunity to excavate parts of the upper city of Jerusalem, giving a new window into daily life in ancient times. Many of the houses were grand and spacious, with their own water cisterns and ritual baths in the basements.[2] Some houses were found to have had several of these mikva’ot, since it is thought that as well as

providing for the household (which could even be up to fifty people) they would have been able to welcome and host pilgrims arriving for the Jewish feasts, catering for many more. Many of this upper city aristocracy were among the priestly class, who would have to stay in a state of ritual purity as much as possible, and so would have to immerse themselves in a mikveh frequently. Archaeologists also believe that the pools of Siloam and Bethsaida could have been used for ritual bathing in the Second Temple period for those visiting Jerusalem for the high holy days.

So immersion in a mikveh was quite common at the time of Yeshua, but the New Testament also describes baptisms taking place not only in rivers, but in any available body of water. In Acts 8, we read of a visiting pilgrim from Ethiopia, who came to believe in Yeshua as he read Isaiah on the way home:

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” (verse 36).

By this point baptism had come to signify a decision to accept Yeshua as Messiah and Lord.

The word “Mikveh”

The Hebrew noun for a ritual bath (mikveh) can help us understand a bit more about the Jewish notion of immersion. Often the Hebrew language reveals keys in the Hebrew thought behind the words. The word mikveh shares the same root as the word for hope (tikvah), for line (kav) and alignment, and the concept of hoping or waiting on God (kiviti l’Adonai).

Here is what Strong’s Lexicon has to say about the word:

מִקְוֵה **miqveh, mik-veh’;**

something waited for, i.e. confidence (objective or subjective);

also a collection, i.e. (of water) a pond, or (of men and horses) a caravan or drove:—

abiding, gathering together, hope, linen yarn, plenty (of water), pool.

and the same root word:

קָוָה qâvâh, kaw-vaw’;

to bind together (perhaps by twisting), i.e. collect; (figuratively) to expect:—gather (together), look, patiently, tarry, wait (for, on, upon).

The ideas of binding together, or twisting together, of yarn, gives us a good mental picture of what it means to align ourselves with God, and wait for him. We gather ourselves and bind ourselves to his word and to him, we line ourselves up with him, and wait for him in confidence and hope. When you read that the Psalmist says he waits upon the Lord, this is usually the word he is using.

The linked concepts of mikvah (collected pool of water) and tikvah (hope, confidence) are played out beautifully in Jeremiah 17:5-6, where the prophet poetically expresses the ideas through the metaphor of trees either rooted and flourishing beside water when we trust in God, or drying up for the lack of water when we put our trust in man. A few verses later, Jeremiah summarises:

Lord, you are the hope (mikveh) of Israel; all who forsake you will be ashamed (or dried out). Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.

This is a word play – the text actually says “The Lord is the MIKVEH of Israel, and all who forsake him will be ashamed or dried out!” So it makes more sense now that Jeremiah continues, to say that when we turn away from this mikveh of water and hope, we will be ashamed, which can also be translated “dried out”. Through this word play, Jeremiah deliberately points us back to the analogy of the man who trusts in God being like a tree beside plenty of water, and the one who leaves God ending up in dry, dusty shame.

A “Mikveh” of living water represents the bounty and resources of the new life that we can enjoy in God. Those who put their hope in God, choosing to align their lives with him, will never be dried out, but will always have fresh life in him.

Next time you see someone being immersed in water to signify their new life in Yeshua, the hope of Israel, the mikveh of Israel, call to mind all that he said about being the water of life, the well of living water that springs up to eternal life... because that’s exactly who He is!

[1] Tractate Mivaoth, Babylonian Talmud, Mishnah 1-8

There are six degrees of gatherings of water, each superior to the other. The water of pits... The same rules apply to the water of pits, the water of cisterns, the water of ditches, the water of caverns, the water of rain drippings which have stopped, and mikwehs of less than forty se'ahs: they are all clean during the time of rain; when the rain has stopped those near to a city or to a road are unclean, and those distant remain clean until the majority of people pass [that way].

Superior to such [water] is the water of rain drippings which have not stopped. Superior to such [water] is [the water of] the mikveh containing forty se'ahs, for in it persons may immerse themselves and immerse others.

Superior again is [the water of] a fountain whose own water is little but has been increased by a greater quantity of drawn water; it is equivalent to the mikveh inasmuch as it may render clean by standing water, and to an [ordinary] fountain in as much as one may immerse in it whatever the quantity of its contents.

Superior again are 'smitten waters' which can render clean even when flowing. Superior again are 'living waters' which serve for the immersion of persons who have a running issue and for the sprinkling of lepers, and are valid for the preparation of the water of purification.

[2] Jerusalem Archeological Park / The Antiques Authority website:
www.archpark.org.il

Levine Lee I., *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period (538 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.)*, Jewish Publication Society, 2002

Photo by Sime Basioli on Unsplash

How did baptism originate? What is the origin of baptism?

Baptism is the public expression of a person's faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation in Jesus is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). However, Jesus commanded all Christians to be baptized when they believed ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

Jesus was personally baptized as an example for Christians to follow ([Matthew 3:13-17](#)). The apostles were baptized and also baptized others who believed. However, before this, John the Baptist had already had a ministry that called the Jewish people to repentance and included baptism as a sign of repentance: "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" ([Mark 1:4-5](#)). John's baptism was one of repentance rather than salvation.

Prior to John the Baptist, baptism had already existed in Jewish culture. Some believe it was associated with the cleansing of the priests with water before performing their priestly duties ([Leviticus 16:4](#)). [Leviticus 16:23-24](#) notes, "Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out."

Regardless of whether this was the origin of baptism, Jewish history shows that Jewish cleansing ceremonies that resembled baptism clearly existed during the intertestamental period prior to John the Baptist. His ministry likely used this existing practice as a method to call the general public to repentance prior to Christ's ministry.

Following Christ's ministry, early believers were baptized after professing faith in Jesus. On the day the church began on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, we are told, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" ([Acts 2:41](#)). Other notable baptisms include the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:26-40](#)) and the baptism of Paul ([Acts 9:18](#)).

Still today, it is expected that believers are baptized: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" ([Matthew 28:19](#)). By doing so, the Christian publicly expresses allegiance to Jesus and association with other Christians. Though there are many other questions today about how and when baptism is performed, Scripture is clear regarding its importance for those who follow Jesus Christ.

Related Truth:

[What is Christian baptism?](#)

[What does water baptism symbolize?](#)

[Is there a correct mode of baptism?](#)

[Who is allowed to baptize another person? Is anyone permitted to baptize/
perform baptisms?](#)

[In whose name are we to be baptized—Jesus' name \(Acts 2:38\), or in the name of
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit \(Matthew 28:19\)?](#)

Understanding The Hebrew Mikveh vs Baptism

I was recently asked a few questions concerning the ancient Hebrew practice of water immersion (known as “mikveh” in the Hebrew language) and how it differs from traditional Christian baptism. So I felt I should address this for those unfamiliar with the ancient practice.

The Christian doctrine of water baptism that many have embraced and been taught all of their lives was not unique to that religion but, rather, originated in a Hebraic purification ceremony that had nothing to do with salvation. And, also, that Hebrew ceremony did not involve someone pushing another under water – the individuals immersed themselves.

First, we must not confuse the Hebrew “mikveh” and the Hebrew “mitzvah”...a common mistake due to the similarity of the two words.

Mikveh actually means “collection”, and refers to any “collection” or gathering of water for ritual purposes. Whereas, Mitzvah means “a good deed”... especially one related to a scriptural commandment or religious duty.

A true Hebrew MIKVEH is accomplished by a person completely submersing oneself beneath water...a FULL BODY IMMERSION wherein the entire being goes below the water’s surface.

(Please note: a proper MIKVEH is NOT simply taking a bath! In fact, according to ancient tradition, whenever possible, the one seeking to mikveh should shower, bathe, or clean him/her PRIOR TO entering the Mikveh site whenever possible.)

A true Hebrew mikveh must be performed in a body of water large enough to allow a human body to fully submerge below the water’s surface. Further, the body of water must be fed by “mayim chayim” ...which means “living water” in Hebrew. The body must be MOVING water, such as a river or deep Creek...or a lake that is fed water from an outside source such as a spring, etc.

In general, anything large enough for submersion that does NOT consist of STAGNANT water can constitute a Mikveh.

Now, unlike a traditional Christian “baptism”...a Hebrew Yisraelite would undergo multiple mikveh immersions throughout his/her lifetime for a wide variety of

reasons. While I cannot possibly begin to list the entirety of reasons that Hebrews would immerse in mikveh in this brief article... I can cover a few examples that are relevant to our Faith walk. These include the following:

° Repentance (Hebrew: Teshuvah)

Hebrew Yisraelites would undergo a full water mikveh to publicly demonstrate their desire to perform “Teshuvah”...meaning to “turn from their sins and RETURN to Torah”.

This is the act that Yohanan the Immerser (aka John the Baptist) was performing with the Yisraelites at the Jordan River! He was immersing them into a Mikveh for the purpose of demonstrating their desire to perform Teshuvah and “turn from their Sin and return to Torah”! This explains biblical references to John performing a baptism of repentance with his cry of “Repent!”

“Yohanan came immersing in the wilderness and proclaiming an immersion of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Marqos (Mark) 1:4

Other reasons...

° A major change in One's life...

A Hebrew Yisraelite would often undergo a water Mikveh when they were faced with major changes or events in their life/lifestyle. **It was used as a symbolic act of ENDING one phase of life and ENTERING INTO the next... symbolizing a fresh, clean start!**

This was one of SEVERAL reasons that Yahusha of Nazareth committed Mikveh at the Jordan River under John's supervision. Obviously Yahusha was sinless, therefore He had no need for a Mikveh of “repentance”, Amein?!

So, Yahusha's Jordan River Mikveh was a Hebrew traditional Mikveh indicating a MAJOR change or event was taking place in His life at that time. And what was that “change or event” that He felt necessitated a Mikveh of ‘new beginning’ you might ask?

Yahusha's Jordan River Mikveh marked a milestone in Yahusha's life...from that moment forward He would no longer be just “Yahusha the carpenter”, but rather

“RABBONI Yahusha” as He began His ministry that very day and began calling His disciples to follow Him and His teachings! A MAJOR milestone in His life for sure...worthy of Mikveh to symbolize His change of vocation!

° Upon entering discipleship under a Rabbi/teacher...

Whenever a Hebrew Yisraelite willfully chose to enter into a life of discipleship under the teaching of a Rabbi, that new disciple would undergo a water Mikveh indicating both a major change of lifestyle, AND to make a PUBLIC DECLARATION to everyone that they had chosen to submit their spiritual training to their chosen Rabbi/teacher.

The Rabbi/disciple relationship was equated with that of a son and his father. This is why the traditional practice for entering discipleship was to undergo a public Mikveh with the understanding that the disciple was being Mikvehed (listen)..“INTO THE NAME OF (insert Rabbi’s name)!”

Does this sound familiar?...it should. **This is the source wherein Christianity derived their doctrine of being “baptized INTO THE NAME of “Jesus”!** It is rooted in ancient Hebrew Rabbinic tradition!! YEP...those SAME Rabbinic traditions most Christians denounce vehemently! Lol!

Failing to realize that THEIR very practice of baptizing “INTO THE NAME...” is nothing more than a Rabbinic tradition itself!!

In fact, The Great Commission of Matthew 28...with its command to “get forth and MAKE DISCIPLES ..

IMMERSING INTO THE NAME...” Is validation that the Hebrew practice of making disciples through water immersion/Mikveh “into the name...” is the accepted means of entering discipleship under MESSIAH YAHUSHA!

This practice of immersing new disciples “into the name of” a Rabbi is what Paul was upset about...the new disciples were mistakenly thinking that they were entering into discipleship under Peter, Apollos, Barnabas, etc...rather than understanding that they were entering into discipleship under RABBONI YAHUSHA...THE MESSIAH!!

“For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers, by those of the house of Chloe, that there are strifes among you. What I mean is this, that each one of you says, “I am of Sha’ul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Kěpha,” or “I am of Messiah.” Has the Messiah been divided? Was Sha’ul impaled for you? Or were you immersed in the name of Sha’ul? I thank Elohim that I immersed not one of you except Crispus and Gaios, that no one should say that I immersed into my own name.” Qorintiyim Aleph (1 Corinthians) 1:11-15

Moving on...there were MANY reasons for Mikveh immersing:

- **Ritual purity;**
- **Major life change;**
- **Entering discipleship;**
- **Repentance;**
- **Before sacrificing an animal;**
- **Before entering the Tabernacle or Temple courtyard;**
- **Women Mikveh on the 7th day after ending their menstrual cycle;**
- **Before Shabbat;**
- **Before a Set-Apart Day obeisance....**

And the list could go on. As I stated earlier, an observant Hebrew Yisraelite would undergo MANY water immersion Mikvot in their lifetime...it was NOT a singular, one time only event as practiced in modern Christianity.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MIKVEH AND BAPTISM:

In the first century, those who embraced the Hebrew Yahusha as the promised Hebrew Messiah to Yisra’El were called followers of the Way, practicing all the Hebrew rituals of Torah in synagogues as the only place to learn of the Set-Apart One of Yisra’El (Acts 9:2, Acts 24:14) before becoming corrupted by the man-made religion of “Christianity”.

However, the Torah does not say much about immersion and the centerpiece of that ritual, the mikveh, which appears to have become an essential part of Hebraic religious life by Temple times – the times the Hebrew Messiah was born into.

In the course of the instructions given to Moses regarding the ceremonial washings that would be required of the priesthood, YaHuWaH established the unchanging principle of cleansing – not to remove physical contamination but to establish ritual

purity. From the record of scripture, water always played a key role in the life of the Yisraelites. Leviticus 12:5 speaks of washing for purification for women, and Leviticus 14:8-9 of purification for leprosy. Exodus 29:4-5 gives instruction for consecrating the priests.

A search on the word “bathe” will produce many verses, such as Leviticus 15:13. Immersion, however, is not mentioned; but the context of these commands is of the moving Mishkan/Tabernacle in the wilderness where immersion in a mikveh was presumably impractical. Upon entering the Mishkan, when the priests approached the altar of the tabernacle, they washed their hands and feet in water from a laver so that they would be ceremonially clean when they stood in the Set-Apart Place (Exodus 30:20-21).

As the post Babylonian-exiled Yisraelites began to consider the importance of YaHuWaH’s demands on the priests of the temple, they took upon themselves some of those priestly requirements to be pleasing to Him as well. The reasoning was that if YaHuWaH required the priests to be ceremonially clean through ablutions and immersions, then it would surely be proper for any worshiper to demonstrate the same purity of heart through the outward sign of immersion. It should be noted, however, that this was the reasoning of men – not something instigated by YaHuWaH Himself.

This reasoning formed the foundation for the mikveh tradition among the Yisraelites after they returned from Babylon to restore Jerusalem and the temple. Eventually, these ceremonial pools were constructed throughout the Land. The mikva’ot (pl. of mikveh) were designed to facilitate the t’vilah (ritual purification) by means of the immersion of worshipers in water – not for personal hygiene. Because the mikveh is for ceremonial purity, the water must touch every part of the body necessitating the worshiper be completely nude with no object interposed between the body and the water (Ronald L. Eisenberg, Jewish Traditions: A JPS Guide {Philadelphia, PA; Jewish Publication Society, 2004}, p. 556).

The mikva’ot were patterned after the pools in which the priests immersed themselves before going before the presence of YaHuWaH in the temple.

By the first century, the Hebrew people were not even permitted to enter the temple complex unless they had first immersed themselves in one of the mikva’ot of the immersion complex that had been constructed at the southern end of the

temple (William James Hamblin and David Roth Seely, *Solomon's Temple: Myth and History* {London, UK; Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 2007}, p.45). It was these mikva'ot that made it possible for 3,000 new believers in Yahusha as the Messiah of Yisra'El to be baptized on Yom Shavu'ot (Day of Pentecost) in a city that has no river, lake or significant stream. The one small stream, the Brook Kidron, between the city and the Mount of Olives, would have been inadequate to accommodate such a crowd. In Jerusalem today, you can see the remains of the mikva'ot outside the Temple, where ritual immersion was practiced.



The mikveh remains of a temple mikveh.

All of this information throws some light on the ministry of Yochanan haMatbil (John the Immerser), who was perhaps the last of the Old Testament immersers (read Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3 and John 1). **Incidentally, the baptism of John was by full immersion as Mark 1 records Yahusha coming up out of the water.**

In using the title Yochanan haMatbil, **it should be noted that John did not put people under the water in the same manner as most do today; John was the one who caused people to immerse themselves in the ritual of the mikveh through his preaching (Acts 8:38).**

A Hebrew person being immersed would wade into the water and then crouch down just below the surface. That way, no contact from the immerser prevented

the water from reaching their whole body. The birth of Yochanan is recorded in Luke 1, where we note that his father was a priest ministering in the Temple.

So John was of the priestly line as well as being a child of special promise of YaHuWaH. It is believed that John should have been High Priest at the time when he commenced his ministry in the Jordan wilderness, but the priesthood had become corrupt and had been bought by men with wealth and influence.

Yahusha submitted to immersion by John, in spite of John's reservations, "...to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). John was, as the legitimate high priest, initiating Yahusha who he had identified as "the Lamb of YaHuWaH" into the priesthood. He was not immersing him for repentance for sin. "He will turn many of the children of Yisra'El to YaHuWaH, their Elohim. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Eliyahu, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready for YaHuWaH a people prepared." Luke 1:16-17

It was into this milieu that Yohanan haMatbil came, preaching the message of repentance and immersing those who did repent in the waters of the Jordan River. John did not somehow dream up the idea of immersion. He was simply following the culture of his Hebrew family. **Yohanan purposefully positioned himself at the southern end of the Jordan River, just north of Qumran and began preaching the need for all of the people of Yisra'El to repent and be immersed in order to prepare for the breaking forth of the Kingdom of YaHuWaH. John 1:28 says, "These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan where John was baptizing." The word Bethabara means "house of the ford". This was the village situated near the junction of the Jordan River and Wadi el-Kharrar, just five miles north of the place where the Jordan emptied into the Salt Sea (the "Dead Sea" is a misnomer). This location at the ford of the Jordan was the exact place where the Yisraelites some fifteen centuries earlier had entered the "Promised Land". When the newly repentant Hebrews were led by John into the Jordan River, they were walking back into the river at the same place where their ancestors had come into the Land. In this physical demonstration, it was as though they were momentarily abandoning their status as YaHuWaH's Chosen People. Then, when they turned around, immersed in the waters of the river and returned to the Land, it was as though they had been "reborn" into the covenant of YaHuWaH. The Hebrew word for repentance, teshuvah, is more accurately understood as shuv ("to turn**

around”), the Yisraelites’ physical act demonstrated graphically the repentance they were experiencing within.

Clearly, John’s immersing in the Jordan and his ministry in the wilderness evoked the exodus-conquest tradition of Yisra’El’s beginnings as a nation. It was a demonstration that was pregnant with meaning to all of the Hebrews who came to be immersed. What John had done was to take the mikveh experience out of the ceremonial immersion pools and returned it to the Jordan River for the purpose of making a graphic illustration. YaHuWaH wanted repentance of His People, the turning of the hearts of the people back to the Father (Malachi 4:6). Only those who manifested real change in their life demonstrated the true fruit of repentance and were deemed worthy of immersion as an outward sign of that inward determined change of direction.



Picture of the Jordan river

The waters of the mikveh had to contain “living waters” either from a spring, a moving stream or, in some circumstances, from rainfall. Usually, a minimum of three witnesses were to observe the self-immersion to be certain that the worshiper had been completely submerged in the water. This witnessing factor was based on the Hebraic idea that every matter is established in the presence of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6, Matthew 18:16). Witnesses were so important that those who immersed themselves were often said to have been immersed “in the name” or a natural bend in the Jordan River “under the authority of” the witness(es). Thus, those being immersed along the Jordan were said to have been “immersed unto John” (Acts 19:3) just as the Yisraelites had been “immersed

unto Moses” at the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:2). Because the actual immersion ritual was performed in the nude, there was segregation between women serving as witnesses to women and men to men so a natural bend in the river would have served as a sufficient partition between the two. **Since immersion in water would inevitably eventuate in death if one were to remain for too long under the surface, those who immersed themselves in the mikveh came to be viewed as having a “death, burial and resurrection” upon their emergence (Yitzhak Buxbaum, Jewish Spiritual Practices {Northvale, NJ; Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994}, p.569). Additionally, the immersion experience was understood as a rebirth process (Thomas Macy Finn, From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity {Mahwah, NJ; Paulist Press, 1997} p.132).**

Because the waters of the mikveh were believed to symbolize the waters of the womb, those who emerged from those waters after having been immersed were considered to have been “reborn” or “Born Again”. This concept was extended to various areas of life, including the monthly renewal that takes place in the bodies of women when they are re-equipped with the potential for generating new life. The immersion of women after menses was a rebirth process and it was also part of the tumah and taharah – death and resurrection process; a transition from being forbidden to participate in set-apart things concerning the temple sacrifices into being completely free to engage in them. Tumah means “to become impure”. When applied to women it refers to the state of ritual impurity that is associated with menses. It never implied that any physical impurity was associated with menses. It is also thought to mean “entombed” – meaning that a person is blocked or unable to participate in set-apart things. Taharah means “to be transparent or clean”. It is purification, freedom from ritual impurity. Immersion produced a change of status – from “forbidden” to “permitted” in the case of the removal of ritual impurity in the lives of the Yisraelites.

In the case of the transformative rite of proselyte immersion, it also represented a forensic change of status in which a Gentile (Ger – Foreigner, Alien) actually became a Hebrew (Ezrach – Native Born). What one was after immersion was different from what he had been prior to immersion. For this reason, the practice was also used in the consecration of priests, the coronation of kings and the elevation of individuals to other offices – but never was immersion considered a means of salvation. Not then, not now.

Acts 2:38 so closely ties repentance and immersion because it is contextually covenantal language and covenant concept. It is not stating that you must be baptized in order to be saved. It is saying that baptism is the complete and total covenantal identification with Yahusha in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is not the covenant representation (immersion) of what Yahusha did that rescues us but the reality of His sacrifice which we receive by faith (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:8).

Is baptism necessary for salvation? No, it isn't. Acts 2:38 does not contain the issue of faith. It is a covenant declaration.

Tevilah and Mikvah During Biblical Times

Tevilah is the Biblical act of immersing oneself in a natural living water source for ritual cleansing of sin and symbolizing death to the self-centered ego and rebirth to a new spiritual life of selfless love in harmony with the principles of God's law of love – "Torah". In ancient times a stream or river was used, but in modern times a specially constructed pool called a "mikveh" is normally used. Today, in Judaism, the terms are used somewhat interchangeable, with mikveh emerging as the more familiar term. As believers in Yeshua the term "baptism" is a common English word and plays a significant part in one's spiritual walk. But in a person's return to the Hebrew roots of their faith in the God of Abraham, how can understanding the tevilah and mikveh of Judaism become important concepts in our lives today? Let's examine the origins of the tevilah and mikveh and discover the rich symbolism that is available to all who are Grafted-In believers.

Many may be surprised to learn that water baptism (immersion) did not originate with Christianity. All through the TaNaKH (Old Testament), the children of Isra'el, whenever they would have to come before God, would cleanse themselves. The priests had to cleanse themselves, and what they went through was the mikveh, or a cleansing. A woman went through a mikveh once a month. There are many reasons for a mikveh in Scripture. It was not uncommon for the people of Isra'el to be immersed in water.

The three types of ritual washing (ablution) mentioned in Biblical and Talmudic literature are: 1) complete immersion (tevilah) in a natural water-source or in a specially constructed mikveh, prescribed for married women following their periods of menstruation or after childbirth as well as for proselytes (gerim) on being accepted into Judaism; 2) washing of the feet and hands, prescribed for the priests in the Temple service at Yerushalayim; 3) washing of the hands (netilat yadayim) before sitting down to a meal and before prayer, upon rising from sleep and after the elimination of bodily wastes, also after being in proximity to a dead human body. Apart from ritual purification, the Jewish people have always regarded bathing and physical cleanliness as implicitly important because, as Hillel taught, the human body reflects the divine image of God. Maimonides (an ancient rabbinical teacher) finds a symbolical significance in tevilah:

"The person who directs his heart to purify his soul from spiritual impurities, such as iniquitous thoughts and evil notions, becomes clean as soon as he determines in

his heart to keep apart from these courses, and bathes his soul in the water of pure knowledge.”

So when Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptist) was down along the river of Jordan and there were multitudes that came down to him, it wasn't unusual that so many of those Judeans had come out of Yerushalayim and Judea.

Before you go into the water or mikveh, you should know why you go into the water. You don't go into the mikveh to join a church. You're not sprinkled to join a church. You go into the water as an outward manifestation of an inward work that's happened in your life; a change in your life. That day it was to be for repentance.

The book of Yochanan records that

On the next day, he saw Yeshua coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘ Behind me comes one who has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.’ I did not know him, but for this reason I came immersing in water: that he would be revealed to Yisra’el.” Yochanan testified, saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained on him. I did not recognize him, but he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, ‘On whoever you will see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” [John (Yochanan) 1:29-34, Online Kitvei Talmidei HaMashiach]

We need to get the picture, almost 2,000 years ago, of Yochanan the Immerser, along the river of Jordan; a prophet, one who came in the spirit of Elijah. He was down along the hot desert area of the Jordan. It was a Jewish community that was coming out because only the Jewish community knew anything about a Messiah. It wasn't the Greeks, it wasn't the Romans, nor any other nation, because no other nation had been promised a Messiah. Isra'el was the chosen nation. Today, we can be thankful that His mercy and grace have been extended to all nations. But until that time, the only people who knew the God of Isra'el, outside of Isra'el, were those who had become converts or proselytes to Judaism. They were down along the river of Jordan because they knew the prophecies, saw the signs of the time, and recognized there was going to be a Messiah (and that he would come at that time).

Let us reflect on why Yochanan was immersing. It was not just a mikveh for a woman at her season. It was not for a man with a skin disease or a running sore. It was not for the high priest at Yom Kippur. In fact it was for something different and special. It was for repentance! It was fulfilling the words of the prophet,

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

This was a mikveh for repentance.

According to history, in the first century, there were many men who were prophesying and many of those claimed to be the Messiah. Many prophets rose up talking about the coming of Messiah. When Yochanan was baptizing, he said,

“The reason I came is that the Messiah might be revealed to Isra’el.”

You might think that if you were watching that mikveh along the river of Jordan, and the Messiah came out of the water, you would recognize him as the Messiah. But many did not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. Many of Yochanan’s disciples continued as his disciples, but a few of them left Yochanan and began to follow Yeshua. There was another baptism mikveh that followed and Yeshua and his disciples began to immerse and make more disciples than Yochanan. Yet Yochanan continued with his disciples; so, we see that not everyone recognizes when God makes a move. Even though the Messiah was before all the people who were there, and these were sincere people, honest people who were looking for Messiah, they still didn’t see or recognize him.

Then Yochanan gave this testimony,

“I saw the spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I would not have known him except that the one who sent me to immerse with water told me the man on whom you see the Spirit (Ruach) come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh). I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

Yochanan was testifying and telling that this was the Son of God, this was Yeshua, the Emmanuel (God with us).

In the third chapter, continuing on the theme of water, after Yeshua had entered into his ministry, and he had changed the water into wine, Yeshua began to tell them something strange again and he said,

“You must be born again.”

And Nicodemus questioned him. Yeshua replied,

“I tell you the truth — no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

Something has to really happen to a person to see what God is doing. It takes something on the inside to change a person’s life, to want to live a life that’s holy and pure and righteous and reject the world. In the book of Hebrews, it says that Moses “chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.” He made a choice to follow in the righteous way that God showed him to lead the people, and we also have to walk in the righteous way God shows us.

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born.” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit.”

Actually going into the water (tevilah) does not give you birth. But what happens, is something takes place before you go into the water. It’s an outward manifestation of something that has taken place in your life. Repentance must take place and an acknowledgement that you need God and are a sinner must be realized. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, and spirit gives birth to spirit.”

Part of receiving the Spirit of the Lord (Ruach HaKodesh) into your life comes with repentance, acknowledging our sins, changing our ways, and beginning to walk in the ways of righteousness.

In the Encyclopedia Judaica listed under sin, we find over 70 word references, but only three major categories for sin: the words “Het”, “Pesha”, and “Awon” (Avon).

In the Tanach the word “Het” (Hata) is found 59 times. “Hata” means to fail. The word “Pesha” is found 136 times. “Psh” means breach. This refers to breaking a

covenant, a criminal law, to break peaceful relations between two parties or as sinful behavior between man towards God. Then there is "Awah" which is found 17 times, or the root "Awon" – "To wrong", found 229 times, which infers "crookedness"; not upright in conduct, dishonest, as swindler, a deceiver.

So, sin is an act or deed against God and His Torah, (1) by failure, (2) the breaking of a covenant with God or fellow man, or (3) being crooked by cheating, swindling, dishonesty or being a deceiver in general.

For these transgressions we must repent. The same Encyclopedia Judaica describes repentance as such:

"Repentance is a prerequisite for divine forgiveness: God will not pardon man unconditionally but waits for him to repent. In repentance, man must experience genuine remorse for the wrong he has committed and then convert his penitential energy into concrete acts. Two sub-stages are discernable in the latter process: first the negative one of ceasing to do evil and then the second, the positive step of doing good. It is a call to return to God, or "t'shuvah" (to return). The motion of turning (or returning) implies that sin is not an ineradicable stain but a straying from the path, and that by the effort of turning, (a power God has given to all men) the sinner can redirect his (or her) destiny."

The Great King of Isra'el, David HaMelekh, cried to God for mercy and said,

"Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts... Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

This is all a part of being born again; changing our sinful ways and turning or returning to a righteous God with righteous deeds. First we must acknowledge our sins, and second, repent and turn from our evil ways and deeds. After that, going through the mikveh or water of separates us from our past. Only then is new birth or rebirth evident by our deeds and actions.

“You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wither it pleases, you hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Just as with the wind, you can't see where the Holy Spirit comes from, but you can see the effects of the Holy Spirit in peoples' lives; you can tell if a person really is born of the Spirit by the type of life he or she is living. Therefore, let us press our way forward for the kingdom of heaven is very near.

When does tevilah take place?

When a Jew goes into the mikveh tank he or she is symbolically starting afresh, hence the parable used by Yeshua as he conversed with Nak'dimon (Nicodemus). The symbolism is surprisingly similar to being baptized where the convert identifies publicly with the death and burial of Yeshua. Various life cycles in the life of the Jew are marked by such an immersion, to include marriage and conversion.

On conversion:

Once a person has decided to convert, the proselyte must begin to learn Jewish religion, law and customs and begin to observe them. This teaching process generally takes at least one year, because the prospective convert must experience each of the Jewish holidays; however, the actual amount of study required will vary from person to person (a convert who was raised as a Jew might not need any further education, for example, while another person might need several years).

After the teaching is complete, the proselyte is brought before a Beit Din (rabbinical court) which examines the proselyte and determines whether he or she is ready to become a Jew. If the proselyte passes this oral examination, the rituals of conversion are performed. If the convert is male, he is circumcised (or, if he was already circumcised, a pinprick of blood is drawn for a symbolic circumcision). Both male and female converts are immersed in the mikveh (a ritual bath used for spiritual purification). The convert is given a Jewish name and is then introduced into the Jewish community.

On marriage:

According to the Torah, a man is forbidden from having sexual intercourse with a niddah, that is, a menstruating woman. The law of niddah is the only law of ritual purity that continues to be observed today. At one time, a large portion of Jewish law revolved around questions of ritual purity and impurity. All of the other laws had significance in the time of the Temple, but because of the absence of the Temple many are not applicable today.

The time of separation begins at the first sign of blood and ends in the evening of the woman's seventh "clean day." This separation lasts a minimum of 12 days. The rabbis broadened this prohibition, maintaining that a man may not even touch his wife or sleep in the same bed as her during this time. Weddings must be scheduled carefully, so that the woman is not in a state of niddah on her wedding night.

At the end of the period of niddah, as soon as possible after nightfall after the seventh clean day, the woman must immerse herself in a kosher mikveh, a ritual pool. The mikveh was traditionally used to cleanse a person of various forms of ritual impurity. Today, it is used almost exclusively for this purpose and as part of the ritual of conversion. It is important to note that the purpose of the mikveh is solely ritual purification, not physical cleanliness; in fact, immersion in the mikveh is not valid unless the woman is thoroughly bathed before immersion. The mikveh is such an important part of traditional Jewish ritual life that a new community will build a mikveh before they build a synagogue.

As with most things in Judaism, a standardized blessing is attached to the immersion process. Here is the blessing:

Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-Olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al-t'vilah.

"Blessed are you LORD, King of the Universe,
who has sanctified us with his commandments
and [instructed] us concerning immersion."

Mikveh Vs. Baptism for the Remission of Sins

Posted on [09/12/2015](#) by [Natan Lawrence](#)

Just got this excellent question about mikveh from someone on this blog:

Doesn't the blood of Yeshua cleanse us? I am a newbie so please bear with me.

My answer:

Yes, absolutely. Good question.

[Hebrews 6:2](#) talks about the doctrine of baptisms (plural). The Greek word baptism means "full immersion in water." Baptism for the remission of sins which one does at the beginning of one's spiritual walk with Yeshua is but one type of baptism. It's the most important one, but not the only one. There's the baptism of the Holy Spirit and of fire as well. There's also the baptism of repentance that John the Baptist did. Once we're baptized for the remission of sins, do we ever sin again? Obviously yes. What do we do? We repent, ask Yeshua to forgive us, to cleanse us by his blood, and then we turn away from our sin ([1 John 1:9](#)). But sometimes it's good to rehearse the ritual again even as we do communion every year at Passover, even as we do the Sabbath every week and biblical feasts every year. These are memorials of important things past, present and future. Same with the mikveh. It's not a replacement for baptism for the remission of sins. It's a rededication of oneself to YHVH.

Each time the priests came into the Tabernacle of Moses to minister, they had to cleanse themselves to be set-apart or holy unto YHVH. It wasn't for Yah's benefit. He looks at things from a heart and spirit perspective. It's for our benefit, so we can better appreciate the difference between the common, profane, physical, polluted, and the earthly compared to the holy, set-apart, spiritual and heavenly realm. When we cross from one realm into the other, we need to stop and take note of it, and enter into the higher realm carefully and slowly through prayer, repentance and spiritual and even physical cleansing. This shows a good and willing heart attitude on our part before our YHVH Elohim, our Heavenly King.

Most of us would take more care to come into the presence of the president of the U.S. or the queen of England than we do to come into the Presence of the King of the universe. Think about this for a moment. It's true isn't it! This is one of the big problems with modern Christianity. Most believers are too casual when it comes to spiritual things. We don't take coming into the Presence of the Almighty seriously enough.

Yeshua our Bridegroom is coming back soon, and he expects his bride (that's us — redeemed Israel) to get ready. That's what the Parable of the Ten Virgins is all about in [Matthew 25](#). In [Revelation 19:7-9](#), the bride of Yeshua is to be adorned in clean and white garments, not filthy one. What are those white garments? The righteous deeds of the saints (verse 8). Go read it for yourself.

So when I do mikveh, it represents a lot of things to me. Try doing it yourself. See if this one ceremony doesn't bring you great blessings and bring you closer to Yeshua!

Baptism or Mikveh

“Steve, I can’t do it, I just can’t do it. I know all about the plans we’ve made, but this is not going to happen. I’m Jewish; this would be too much for my family.” The voice on the other end of the phone was quivering with emotion. This was not the Mike I knew. Usually he was self-assured, confident, and strong. On the phone he sounded frightened and intimidated.

Mike and I had met through a mutual friend and immediately struck up a friendship. Over time he and his wife became interested in spiritual things and began attending our home Bible study. After many meetings and dozens of answered questions, Mike received Jesus as his Messiah. He was so excited! Constantly reading God’s Word brought Mike to the inevitable question of baptism. He soon began planning his own private ceremony, with a sensitivity toward his many invited Jewish guests. He really wanted the opportunity to explain to them what had happened in his life. The leadership at a local church agreed to allow the use of their facilities. The date was set, and more than 50 invitations were sent.

His phone call canceling the ceremony came on the very day it was scheduled to occur, just hours before it was to start. What had happened? And why?

Most Gentiles and Christians consider it a privilege to witness or participate in a baptism. This is not the case for Jewish people, however, who view it as taboo for several reasons. First, Jews who are baptized are viewed as *meshumeds*, or *traitors*. In Jewish eyes, they have shamed their families and the Jewish community by forsaking their people, their heritage, and their traditions. Second, baptism speaks to the Jewish person of *forced conversion*, a reminder of the thousands of people over the years who were threatened with the loss of property or life if they refused to undergo it. Baptism is associated with Christianity and is generally viewed as no friend of the Jewish people. Just the very word *baptism* causes shivers to run up the spines of many Jewish people.

On the phone Mike told me he had been thinking about what was going to take place. He thought about the effect baptism would have on his family, some of whom had said they were deeply hurt and would never attend such an event. Mike said, “I’m not a traitor, but they think I am. I don’t know if I can bear that thought.”

Was Mike's family correct? Was he a Jewish man betraying his heritage? What was I to tell him?

Immersion is nothing new to the Jewish people. Its purpose has always been for cleansing, although not physical cleansing. Maimonides, the great Jewish sage, said, "Uncleanness is not mud or filth which water can remove, but is a matter of scriptural decree and dependent on the intention of the heart." Thus, rabbinical thought holds that there must be a special intent for being immersed, or there is no value in the immersion.

During the days of the Tabernacle and Temple, Jewish law required immersion in the event of spiritual uncleanness, such as contact with a dead body (Num. 19) or an emission of unclean bodily fluid (Lev. 15). In 70 A.D., such immersions ceased due to the Roman destruction of the Temple. Other kinds of immersions continued, however.

Today, immersions take place for a variety of reasons. They are carried out in a *mikveh*, "a collection of water." This special pool contains a minimum of 120 gallons of water, the majority of which must be "moving," such as rain, melted snow, or ice. These ritual baths are divided into two sides, one for men and one for women. The "bathers" must first shower, and they then are given white cotton coverings to place on their bodies. They are escorted into the bath, where complete submersion must be achieved.

Orthodox Jews...are usually the only ones who use a mikveh today, which is why these baths are primarily located in religious neighborhoods.

Orthodox Jews (a minority of the Jewish population) are usually the only ones who use a mikveh today, which is why these baths are primarily located in religious neighborhoods. *Tevilah*, or *immersion*, is used when a person converts to Judaism or in preparation for special days like the Sabbath or the Day of Atonement. Couples about to be married must enter the waters of a mikveh, separately, just before the wedding.

While there are many reasons for a mikveh, it is most often used by married women who have been in a state of separation (*niddah*) from their husbands during their monthly cycle. The Torah demands that couples abstain from marital relations during this time. Before they resume relations, the wife must go into the waters of the mikveh for purification. As the woman immerses herself, she recites two

blessings: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast hallowed us with thy commandments and commanded us concerning immersion,” and “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast kept us in life and sustained us and enabled us to reach this significant moment.” Once she has immersed herself, she is ready to come together with her husband.

Regardless of the reason for the immersion, its importance is regarded as internal, not external.

The Gospels tell of a Jewish prophet named John who came out of the wilderness of Judea to preach a message of repentance to his people. He was to prepare them for the Messiah and the coming kingdom, which was at hand. Jewish people from Jerusalem and all of Judea came to him to be immersed in the Jordan River, where they publicly confessed their sins.

Luke records that the people wondered if John himself was, in fact, the Messiah. John responded by saying, “I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose” (Lk. 3:16).

These were Jewish people, called by a Jewish prophet, to do a perfectly acceptable and necessary biblical thing—immerse in a body of moving water to publicly express an inward reality. In this case, it was to express sorrow for sin. Remember the rabbinical rule: There must be special intent, or the immersion is useless.

When Jesus arrived, John was reluctant to baptize Him, requesting instead that Jesus baptize him. He correctly stated that Jesus was greater than he: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). Jesus insisted, however, that John baptize Him. Jesus needed no inward or outward cleansing, but His public baptism was used by God as a significant ceremony to launch His Son’s earthly ministry, as well as to introduce Him to and identify Him with His people. This would begin His public and prophetic journey to His death and resurrection.

Followers of Jesus today do not receive baptism because there is something unique or powerful about the water. Without a heart decision, without that “intent of the heart” as described by the rabbis, baptism is just a public show. But when people recognize that they are sinners and that the provision to satisfy a holy God has been met through the person of the Messiah, Jesus, they desire to identify with His death and resurrection.

As Mike and I discussed his decision to halt his baptism, I could sense that something was happening, even as we spoke on the phone. His voice was gaining strength and a sense of confidence. For a few minutes, it seemed that he was speaking, not to me, but to himself. It was almost as if I was not even there. He was actually talking himself into going through with it. He knew this would be his opportunity to explain, in his own words, the very Jewish thing he was doing. He could assure his family and friends that he would never betray his Jewish heritage, a heritage he was very proud of. He could tell them that he loved them and that his only desire was for them to read the Jewish Scriptures, where they too could find the Messiah. He could tell them that he understood why this ceremony might cause some pain. As he would stand in that little baptismal pool in a small local church, he could tell them that his decision to receive Christ had brought him peace and joy and that by being baptized he could explain his action to everyone at the same time. Just before the conversation ended Mike said, "Steve, we have to do this."

And that is exactly what we did!

Mikveh or Baptism?

by Rav Sha'ul

Introduction

Now that we have been given a look into what occurred after John “baptized” Yahusha and he fled into the desert in the last chapter, I want to explain more about what Zachariah saw in his vision:

Zechariah 3

Clean Garments for The High Priest, Yahusha

¹ Then he showed me Yahusha **the high priest** standing before the angel of YHVH, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ² YHVH said to Satan, “YHVH rebuke you, Satan! YHVH, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man *a burning stick snatched from the fire?*” ³ Now Yahusha was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then YHVH said to Yahusha, “*See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.*”

YHVH tells Yahusha that He has taken away Yahusha’s sin and then dresses Yahusha in the garments of the High Priest. What is going on here? Didn’t Yahusha “**know no sin**”?

This is a direct reference to what had just happened to Yahusha when he was Mikveh’d by John. The ritual of Mikveh is the defined ritual in The Law of YHVH where YHVH cleanses a man of sin, and consecrates him as High Priest! We don’t want to acknowledge this is referring to Yahusha because we have been taught that he lived a sinless life and that he was god. However, scripture records that Yahusha was not born perfect but had to be perfected over his life through trials and tribulations. Scripture tells us that Yahusha was not always perfectly obedient but had to learn obedience through suffering. Yahusha didn’t receive his promises based on his own merit but through inheritance and obedience to The Law:

Hebrews 1:4 NKJV

4 having become so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Hebrews 5:8-9 NKJV

8 though he was a Son (not God), yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered (just like all men do). 9 And having been perfected (not born perfect as a God), he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey hi

Hebrews 7:28 NKJV

28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness (Yahusha too was appointed High Priest according to The Law from The House of Zadok), but (in addition to The Law) the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son (to be the Melchizedek or the Ruling Zadoc) who has been perfected forever (as The Eternal High Priest).

When the Apostle Paul said Yahusha “knew no sin” he was absolutely correct and in context (I clarify in blue) Paul is saying the same thing I am. Paul was a Torah Master and **LAW**yer, he knew exactly what happened when Yahusha was Mikveh’d and what it meant:

2 Corinthians 5:21

YHVH **made** Yahusha who had no sin (in YHVH’s eyes after his Mikveh until his execution) to be sin for us (a sin offering), so that in (covenant with) Yahusha we might become the righteousness of YHVH (the blood of The Lamb covers our sin restoring us to perfection in righteousness).

What Paul said above is simply explaining exactly what The Passover Lamb did for Israel every year. Paul knew nothing of Yahusha’s life prior to Mikveh (it is not recorded anywhere) except that he was not born perfect and had to grow in wisdom, grown in the knowledge of YHVH, increase in favor with YHVH, and learn obedience to YHVH as Paul clearly stated.

If Yahusha had to become better than the angels, learn obedience, come to know YHVH, increase over time in YHVH's favor, and be perfected through suffering... that is another way of saying at some point he was not better than the angels, not highly favored by YHVH, not perfect and not obedient. He was a man like everyone else and had to develop into a “son” over the course of his life which is the example we are all to follow i.e. **The Way**. We too must repent of our sin, we too must have faith in YHVH to wipe our sin away, we too must be Mikveh'd, we too grown over time in the knowledge of YHVH, we too have to learn obedience to YHVH, we too are sanctified over time and increase in the favor of YHVH. This is what Yahusha was talking about when he said he was **The Truth and the Way** (his example is the true way) and no one comes to YHVH accept through him (his example).

Our misguided belief that Yahusha was somehow a man-god requires him to be perfect leading to false doctrine after false doctrine. Each one to cover the obvious "problems" with the previous one. Leading to a "web of lies" called Christianity. He in fact was not a man-god, but “fully human”:

Hebrews 2

17 For this reason Yahusha had to be made like them (**he was made human**), **fully human in every way**, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest (**who are chosen from among men**) in service to YHVH

I'll get deeper into this in later chapters of this book.

With the proper understanding of scripture (mainly The Torah) we find there is no conflict with the vision Zachariah saw in Chapter 3 and Yahusha's requirement to live a “spotless” life for a year “yearling” prior to his execution. From the point of Yahusha's Mikveh when YHVH totally cleansed his life of sin and took away the sins of the world (dirty rags), Yahusha did just that which is what Paul is teaching in his letters.

What scripture does record is that Yahusha fulfilled the role of “Passover Lamb” and those lambs were **spotless yearlings**. **Few people realize that Yahusha's ministry was not 3.5 years as we are taught (there is no scriptural support for that “tradition of men”) but rather 70 weeks or “around a year” as the Prophet Daniel so foretold.** This is admitted in the Jewish Encyclopedia

as well. From Yahusha's Mikveh when he was cleansed of sin and anointed The Messiah, he lived in perfect obedience and when he died he truly was The Passover Lamb a "spotless **yearling**". For those who would like to know more about Yahusha's ministry and the duration of it, I highly recommend the following video from teacher Michael Rood:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cg87u3GY2rI>

Our "understanding" has been clouded by Christianity who, having abolished The Law, knows literally nothing about what "baptism" really is supposed to be and what it meant in the life of The Messiah. That is the purpose of this book to define what happened to Yahusha when John "baptized him".

Next: [The Great Notsris - Nazarenes](#)

MIKVAH: An Introduction

A WALK OF PURITY

It is not the intention of the writer to criticize Christendom for the lack of understanding that abounds about immersion, or add to the controversy, or think that by this humble book there will be a great change across the world, that would be very much akin to trying to empty the Atlantic ocean with a tea cup. But for the few hungry souls that cry for understanding I pray that this will be a help. Understanding the Hebrew rites and rituals is a long journey for us that were not exposed to the teaching at an early age, and I dare say that not all that have had the privilege of experiencing them for most or all of their life, see the significance of their teaching as related to *Yeshua/Jesus*. I shall endeavor to help in a small way to expand on the understanding.

One of the most misunderstood teachings in the Bible is immersion. The Bible has much to say about immersion/or the doctrine of washing/baptisms. The first century believers understood the teachings of the different immersions and their purpose. In this brief writing it will be impossible to explore all the different immersions, but I would like to discuss briefly some of them, and in the process bring a glimmer of light to this most misunderstood teaching in scripture. In Hebrew 6:1 it is written:

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Messiah/Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God," (2) "Of the doctrine of baptism(s), and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

Rav Sha'ul/Paul in the above referenced verses states that the elementary teachings of Messiah are as follows;

1. Foundation of repentance from dead works
2. Faith toward G-d
3. Of the instructions/doctrine of immersions/baptism(s)... please note plural

4. Laying on of hands
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgement

Understanding of these six principals was considered by *Sha'ul/Paul*, to be elementary teachings of Messiah. If we fully understand the above six teachings then, and only then are we qualified to move on to the MEAT of the word leaving the milk.

Ephesians 4:5 states that "One L-rd, one faith, one immersion". To the casual student this might seem to be a contradiction in scripture, but we know that the *Ruach haKodesh/Holy Spirit* inspired all scripture so *Rav Sha'ul/Paul* is referring to one of the many immersions, and in particular to the immersion into Messiah.

I was confused by what seemed to me to be a new doctrine when *Yochanan haMatvil/John the Baptist* arrived on the banks of the Jordan river preaching and immersing. *Yochanan haMatvil/John the Baptist* was not suspect, by the people, as to where he received the doctrine nor the validity of the teaching questioned. Never did anyone ask him why was he immersing. They all seemed to accept the teaching, even in light of Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32 and Revelations 22:19 stating that the Word could not be added to or taken away from. In Deuteronomy 4:2 it is written:

"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

In Deuteronomy 12:32 it is written:

"What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

In Revelation 22:19 it is written:

"And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

The severest punishment is the penalty for such an act. It seems today that little thought is given to the fact that G-d said not to add to or take away from the form of worship that he gave to Adam in the Garden, had Moses write down on the mountain of Sinai and again gave to King David before the temple was built by his

son Solomon. This form of worship/teaching, as prescribed by G-d, seems to have fallen by the way side in this present day of many doctrinal differences. I hear many times "we must have UNITY of the Faith" but the people that preach this the strongest, are the very ones that say the only way to have unity is for you to come and join us because we have the true revelation of the word, and you are lacking in your understanding. I dare say that UNITY will not be realized to any great measure until Messiah has returned and set up His Kingdom on earth. Then, and only then, will UNITY be enjoyed by all believers. Maintenance of this unity will require Messiah to rule with a rod of iron. In Revelation 19:15 it is written:

"And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron"... Rev 19:15 NAS

The Jews were chosen by G-d to show all the world the ways of the L-rd. To teach the world about Messiah, our relationship to Him, to each other, and end time events. All things must be centered on Messiah. In Romans 3:1-2 it is written:

"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? (2), Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God (or words of G-d)."

All the festivals, customs, foods, sacrificial system, laws of ritual purity including immersion were given to the Jewish people as teaching tools for us to learn more about Messiah. We must always keep Messiah in the forethought of our studies and realize that all things are to give us a better understanding of what Messiah has done for us, and what is in store for us. If we want rest, peace and contentment in our lives we must know of Him. In Matthew 11:29 it is written:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

The entire Bible is written about Messiah. In Psalm 40:7 it tell us this.

"Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me"

To follow the instructions of our L-rd and learn of Him, we must learn about the festivals, customs, foods, sacrificial system and laws of ritual purity. We must not only know about them as we are commanded, but put into practice the things that we can do. Some of the commandments require that the Holy Temple be standing

in Jerusalem. The other commandments that do not require the standing of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we must make a part of our life to please our L-rd. The commandments in Torah fall into three major categories

1. *Mishpatim* - Literally translated Judgements these are ethical / moral laws
2. *Edos* - literally translated witnesses
3. *Chukim* - literally translated Decrees

Some of the commandments that the L-rd requires of us are hard to understand. We can understand, do not kill or steal, as in "*mishpatim*/ethical" laws. We can understand the "*Edos*/witness" commandments. These are the rituals and festivals which teach us of important religious truths or commemorate key events. The third group of commandments "*Chukim*/decrees" does not seem to have a logical reason as to why we must obey them. The "*chukim*/decrees" are commandments which we must obey whether or not we understand their reason. In Exodus 24:7 it is written:

"All that G-d says, we will do and we will hear".

This indicates that when Torah was given, we were ready to keep the commandments and "*do*" them before we "*heard*" reason or logic. When we keep commandments that have no apparent reason, we demonstrate our faith and inner security as followers of Messiah. Even though we may not be able to justify these commandments to the world, we feel secure to continue observing them. If a person is unsure of himself, or wavering in his faith the laws that are not understood are the first to be abandon. We understand what the Torah means when it says in Deuteronomy 4:6 as it is written:

"Observe and keep [commandments], for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations"

Messiah, Himself said in John 14:15 as it is written:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments".

We do not observe the commandments because logic demands it, but simply because they were given by G-d. This shows a "heart attitude" set to please G-d.. One of the most important of these commandments is immersion in a *mikvah*, the

ritual bath for the purpose of bringing about ritual purity, and that is the one that we are going to discuss.

The Greek word for baptism is *baptizo* meaning to immerse or dip cloth into a vat of dye. The word is derived from an industry of dying cloth in Lebanon. The vats used to hold the different colors of dye, and the process of placing the cloth into the vats was called *baptizo*. As time passed the ritual purity process of immersion began to be known as baptism. The Hebrew word for immersion is *tevilah* and means literally immersing in a ritual bath known as a *mikvah*. Immersion is the act of washing performed to correct a condition of ritual impurity and restore the impure to a state of ritual purity. It is never for the purpose of cleaning or bathing the body.

The *mikvah*/ritual bath was of great importance to the first century Jew. It was understood that if a community or village had only enough money for a synagogue or a *mikvah*, the *mikvah* would be built first. The Torah speaks of numerous things that make a person *Tomeh*/ritually unclean, and a number of processes of purification. **The one act required in all purification processes was immersion in the *mikvah*.**

Life for the average Jew, in the average village, depended on access to the *mikvah*. A man from the tribe of Levi, a son of Aaron could not assume his office as priest until he had gone through a *mikvah*. Before a person could be *tahor*/ritually clean to enter the grounds of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, he must be immersed in the *mikvah*. The severest punishment was imposed on a person for entering the Temple area in the state of *tomeh*/ritual impurity. A woman in her monthly cycle was required to wear special clothing so all would know that she was in a state of *niddah* (ritually unclean due to monthly cycle). She would not be *tahor*/ritually clean until after entering the *mikvah*. Immersion in a *mikvah* is an integral part of conversion to Judaism. Without immersion conversion is not valid. There are many more times an immersion in a *mikvah* is customary, we will endeavor to explore as many as space permits.

There are two basic parts of Torah, one is the written Torah consisting of the first five books of the Bible, with which we are all familiar. The second part of Torah is just as important but not as well known. It is what we call the Oral Torah or unwritten law. This was handed down orally from generation to generation for about 1,500 years. About the third century C.E. Oral Torah was put into writing by

Rabbi Yehudah the Prince and is the foundation of Mishnah. The Talmud was formed after discussion and commentary was added. All Jewish law is derived from this Oral Torah. We might call it the "how to" book. Detail instructions on how to carry out all worship, the festivals, sacrifices, commandments, including ritual purification and preparing the mikvah are in Oral Torah.

The Mikvah is a ritual bath, the Hebrew word *mikvah* means a "pool" or "Gathering" of water. Two direct references in the Bible to Mikvah are in the Bible. In Leviticus 11:36 it is written:

"Only a spring and a pit, a gathering (Mikvah) of water, shall be clean..."

The second is Jeremiah 17:12-13 as it is written:

"A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. {13} O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters".

The word translated *hope* in verse 13 is *Mikvah* thus giving us the understanding that Messiah is the cleansing fountain/*Mikvah* or hope of Israel.

While Messiah still hung, on the cross a Roman "soldier pierced His side, immediately there came out blood and water"; John 19:34 NAS the opening of the cleansing fountain or *Mikvah* for Israel. In Zechariah 13:1 it is written:

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

MIKVAH SPECIFICATIONS

The *mikvah* must meet six special requirements as described in Oral Torah.

1. No other liquid but water may be used in the Mikvah, no coloring or chemicals, etc.

2. The Mikvah must be built into the ground, or be a part of a building attached to the ground. It cannot consist of any vessel that can be disconnected and carried away, such as a tub, vat, or barrel.
3. The water of a Mikvah cannot be running or flowing. The only exception to this rule is a natural spring, or a river whose water is derived mainly from springs.
4. The water of the Mikvah be brought together by natural means not drawn.
5. The water cannot be channeled to the Mikvah through anything that can become *tomeh*/unclean, such as pipes or channels made of metal, clay, or wood.
6. The Mikvah must contain no less than 40 *Sa'ah* of water, that is approximately 150 to 200 gallons.

As you can see the modern baptisteries, in the local church, do not fit the criteria of a clean ritual bath. Many houses in Israel have been excavated and found to have as many as nine *Mikvot* in them. The Holy Temple area had many *Mikvot*, a worshipper could not enter the area without going thru the *Mikvah*. In Masada, the fortress built by Herod the Great, *Mikvot* were found.

Today in the modern "church" there is controversy as to what part immersion plays in our life, and also how is a "Biblical" immersion performed. The three main divisions of this controversy are for the most part as follows;

- a) Is immersion necessary for salvation...is salvation a two-part process
- b) Which is Biblically correct, immersion or sprinkling;
- c) In what name is a person immersed or sprinkled, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or Jesus only?

Ritual purification or immersion is a Hebrew ritual, commanded by G-d and must be viewed in that perspective. Certain guidelines were commanded by G-d to be strictly followed by the person entering the Mikvah.

The method of immersion as practiced by all the Old Testament people and including *Yochanan haMatvil*/John the Baptist was very different from what we do today. The person was to already have taken a bath, washed his hair, pared his fingernails and make sure that he was very clean. The Mikvah was not for the purpose of taking a bath. The person being immersed went into the water by

himself, stretching out his arms, flexing his fingers, fluttering his eyelids he squats down into the water until he is completely covered by water. Flexing the fingers and toes, fluttering the eyelids was to insure that the water touched every part of the body. Normally a person would do this three times. The witness was the person that stood out of the water to make sure that the immersing person was completely covered by the water.

There are three types of immersion;

1. Immersion of the whole body in water
2. Washing of the hands
3. Washing of the hands and feet

Immersion of the whole body will be the first of the three types we will discuss beginning in Part I of this teaching.