

מִקְוֵה

The Mikvah

Purifying waters





Purifying Waters

There is nothing more holy in this world, nothing more precious to its Creator, than the union of a man and a woman. It is, after all, the fountain of life. What could be more precious than life—other than the source from which life comes?

And it is holy—because the first, pristine creation of a human being was as male and female as a single whole. That is the way we exist in G-d's mind. And so none of us can achieve wholeness until we regain that original oneness in both body and soul.

Precious things are kept in sealed boxes. Roses hide behind the thorns. There are clothes you wear to work or play, but there are also treasures in your wardrobe so beautiful, of such value, that they come out only at special times, under specific conditions. The union of a man and a woman is so precious that if it is treated casually, without conditions or boundaries, it becomes ugly and even destructive.

Which all goes to explain why in the Jewish way of life there is a cycle of union and separation between husband and wife. And why the most important institution of Jewish life, next to the home, is the mikvah that stands at the vortex of that cycle. Because precious things only stay beautiful when you follow the manufacturer's instructions.



The Rules in Brief:

1. A mikvah is a pool designed around a natural flow of water, such as a spring or rain water.
2. A woman counts seven days after menstruation and then immerses in a mikvah.
3. Before immersing in the mikvah, a woman must wash thoroughly so that nothing separates between the woman's body and the water.



The following blessing is recited:

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

Here's how it sounds:

Baruch Atah Ado-nai E-loheinu Melech ha'olam, asher kideshanu bemitzvosav, vetzivanu al Hatvilah.

Here's what it means:

Blessed are you, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the mitzvah of immersing.

4. From the time of menstruation until immersion, marital relations are forbidden. Certain other precautions are taken as well, to create a sort of “buffer zone.”

Enhancing Marriage

There is a very practical reason, as well, to keeping these rules: They keep things sparkling. After all, even swimming with tiger sharks can become just the daily fare if it's a regular habit. On the other hand, a plain stone, if it's forbidden for a while, becomes a coveted jewel. Modesty and the period of separation keep a relationship alive and exciting.

Very often, couples report their relationships rejuvenated when they start living by the rules of separation and mikvah. Perhaps that's why mikvah parking lots have become so crowded in the past few decades as more and more young couples make it a part of their lives—some who have no other formal Jewish observance.

A Spa for the Soul

Today's mikvah looks more like a fashionable spa than a ritualarium. Luxurious bath and powder rooms, complete with commode, bathtub and vanity have become the standard. Fresh towels, disposable slippers, a comfortable robe, soap, shampoo, nail clippers and all the other essentials necessary are usually provided.



Many women talk about the immersion in the mikvah as a spiritual high, a state in which nothing stands between you and your G-d; a return to the innocence of birth; a sanctification of all that is feminine. In fact, it's not just your soul and body that become spiritually uplifted—it's your entire family and home.

Your Child's Soul

There are three partners in the conception of every child: the mother, the father and the One Above.

The One Above provides the breath of life. But that breath is too lofty, the Kabala tells us, too holy, to be contained within a physical body without protection. Just as an astronaut needs a spacesuit and a deep-sea diver needs an armored diving suit, so the G-dly soul needs an outfit that will allow it to survive and communicate with the body and the outside world.

That survival suit is provided by the mother and father—the other two partners. It is fashioned according to their thoughts and conduct before and during conception, their modesty and their adherence to the rules of separation and immersion.



All the good deeds and thoughts a person accomplishes in a lifetime are through the medium of that suit. Even the life and blessings that a person receives from Above must come through it. The soul itself may be pure and luminous, but if its suit is doesn't match, that light will have great difficulty breaking through.

That is why the Kabbalists say that the spiritual state of the world depends on the sanctity of our relations as men and women.

Where to Begin

The best way to learn about the mikvah is to consult your local rebbetzin or mikvah attendant. Men can talk with a rabbi.



Visit www.mikvah.org for contact info and essays, as well as photographs and virtual tours of mikvahs around the world.



