

## A Pre-Surgery (or any other transition) *Mikveh*\* Ritual

by Max K. Strassfeld and Andrew Ramer, 2009

\*A mikveh is a ritual bath. Ritual immersion in a *mikveh* - a gathering of living water (*mayyim hayyim*) - marks a change in status. The *mikveh* pool recalls the watery state that each of us knew before we were born; the ritual of entering and leaving *mayyim hayyim*, living waters, creates the time and space to acknowledge and embrace a new stage of life. Every religious tradition uses water to denote change and transformation. *Mikveh* is the Jewish ritual that symbolically enacts this kind of profound change. Any flowing body of water can serve as a *mikveh* so long as there is an entrance and exit point for the water, the water touches the air and it is deep enough to fully immerse. Ideally the one immersing is totally naked. There is probably a local *mikveh* near you, either in a building or in nature.

**OPENING:** This morning you will be guided through 3 immersions, one for the past, one for the present, and one for the future. Before each immersion you will be read an intention for that immersion. Then you will immerse. After you immerse, you will be led through a blessing for that immersion.

### IMMERSION 1

*Intention:* In the Babylonian Talmud...

Berachot 54a states: “*Baruch shehechyanu v’kiymanu vi’higianu la’zman hazeh.*” This is a blessing that should be recited when one builds a new house. *Aino ela:* There is no house apart from the body, as we have written: May our tradition become a house for us, and may our bodies be our home within it.

Berachot 54a states: “*Hatzoek al ha-avar, harei zo t’filat shav*” – “The one who calls out about the past, that is a wasted prayer.” Which is to say: the prayer may be wasted, but the act of calling out is never a waste. When we cry out we build a new past, the past-that-should-have-been. And out of our new pasts we shape our future.

— *Immerse Completely* —

Berachot 54a asks: “*Anisa d’rabim m’barchinan, anisa d’yahid m’barchinan?*” – “Do we only say blessings for collective miracles, but not for individual miracles?” We answer: like the waters of the mikveh, miracles cannot be so easily separated. We keenly feel the loss of all individual gendered voices that have been silenced. Each member of our community who can recite with a full heart the shehechyanu performs a collective miracle.

# TRANS TORAH

*Everyone present recites the Shehechyanu to witness this moment of individual and communal miracle:*

Masculine God language:

*“Baruch atah adonay, eloheinu, melech haolam, shehechyanu, v’kiymanu, v’higianu, lazman hazeh.”*

and/or:

Feminine God language:

*“Brucha at Shechina, eloteinu, ruach haolam, shehechyanu, v’kiymanu, v’higianu, lazman hazeh.”*

and/or:

English translation:

Blessed is the one who revives us, sustains us and enables us to reach this moment.

## IMMERSION 2

*Intention:* This immersion is for the present, the time of transition, the in-between time. A time of adjustment, from one perfection to another. This is a liminal time: decisions have been made. Now you can surrender to your choices and be blessed. There is nothing to do but be carried and held by us, the water, and then by a blessing for the holiness of in-betweens.

— *Immerse Completely* —

Blessing:

As the sun sinks and the colors of the day turn, Jewish tradition offers a blessing for the twilight, for twilight is neither day nor night, but in-between. We are all twilight people. We can never be fully labeled or defined. We are many identities and loves, many genders and none. We are in between roles, at the intersection of histories, or between place and place. We are crisscrossed paths of memory and destination, streaks of light swirled together. We are neither day nor night. We are both, neither and all.

May the sacred in-between suspend our certainties, soften our judgements, and widen our vision. May this in-between light illuminate our way to God who transcends all categories and definitions. We cannot always define; we can always say a blessing.

Together: Blessed are you, God of all, who brings on the twilight.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reuben Zellman, “Twilight People”, in Siddur Sha’ar Zahav, ed. Michael Tyler and Leslie Kane (San Francisco: Congregation Sha’ar Zahav, 2009): 149.

## IMMERSION 3

*Intention:* A Very Short Preface to The Book of Genesis

Chapter 0, verse 1:

Before God began to create anything, before there was heaven or earth, night or day, good or bad, in or out, up or down, God said: “I must create myself.”

Chapter 0, verse 2:

And in the vast limitless nothingness of Her allness, with no borders or boundaries, no direction and no distinctions in Her infinite eternal Self, God said: “Let there be Me.”

Chapter 0, verse 3:

Then God stirred and stretched and shrank and strived and sighed and surged until She became who He is. And His isness is who He always was and always will be, in the midst of Her sacred unfoldings. And God called Himself Whole and saw everything that was possible from His radiant wholeness. And there was Someone, and there was somewhen, and from that somewhen, God was finally ready to begin to create a somewhere.

— *Immerse Completely* —

Blessing:

Blessed are You Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, who renews the work of creation every day.

## CLOSING

Here is your intention for your time alone in the water. This is your moment to let go of anything you want to let go of, are ready to let go of, that you have not already released, and your time to invoke and draw anything that you want to carry with you from this ritual, as you bask in the warmth of these embracing waters.