

Mikvah Kavannos — Intentions for Ritual Immersion

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Bathing & Grooming

The Gemarah tells us that on *Erev Shabbas* in honor of *Shabbas* we should bathe and physically cleanse ourselves, and we should do so with hot water. The simple reason is for cleanliness. Hot water in specific needs to be used, not only because hot water cleans better than cold, but because *Shabbas* is rest, the absence of tension, strife, and taking a hot bath literally softens the body and releases built up tensions. We have to prepare to enter *Shabbas* by untangling ourselves from the world of tension. We aspire to remove even the “healthy tension” of the work week and receive the weekly gift of a world of perfect harmony and peacefulness.

Cutting the Nails

Cutting ones nails is also a part of grooming and should be done on *Erev Shabbas* in honor of *Shabbas* (??). Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, before they needed external garments to cover their newly found sense of shame, were entirely covered with nail. (Meiri??) Today, in contrast, our nails are symbolic of aggression, as in “sinking ones nails into another”. Nails are like claws and trimming them before *Shabbas* is symbolic of curbing aggressiveness and our go-getting nature; to become more internally focused and quiet, resting from work week consciousness.

Nails which extend past the finger can also be viewed as a source of separation, as something that comes between the outside world around the person themselves. Trimming finger nails is symbolic of cutting away all separations and allowing our consciousness to be readied to enter the place of Unity, the space of the Holy *Shabbas*.

Cutting the Hair

Also, if a person’s hair is quite long there is then an obligation for them to cut their hair in honor of *Shabbas*. (Tannis 29b.) Hair is considered a “garment” of the weekday. Wild, unkempt, long hair represents the reality of the weekday, aggression, brute force. *Esav*, a skilled hunter and powerful warrior, is associated with hair (*Bereishis* 25:25). And so, if one needs a hair cut they should endeavor to do so on *Erev Shabbas*, early in the day. Because of this there is a custom of some *Tzadikim*

to snip a small amount of hair from their heads every *Erev Shabbas* in honor of *Shabbas*; this is similar to the *Cohen Gadol*/High Priest who would take a hair cut every *Erev Shabbas*. (*Taanis* 17a.)

Bathing, cleansing and trimming one’s nails and hair are elements of physically and mentally preparing for *Shabbas*. Additionally, there is the custom to spiritually cleanse oneself — in a *Mikvah* on *Erev Shabbas*.

Mikvah — Water Reality

Overall, the idea of fully entering a body of water is highly appropriate as a transition from weekday reality into *Shabbas* reality. Water serves as a place of transition, much like the transition away from Egypt, when nation of Israel totally and completely pass through the Sea of Reeds.

On a deeper level, water itself is intimately connected with *Shabbas*; there is a fire reality, and a water reality; fire is weekday, and water is *Shabbas*.

Water represents the primordial state of creation, the state where earth was “covered with water.” Water is wisdom. Rambam writes that the water of the *Mikvah* and the immersion in those waters are symbolic of immersing in “waters of pure awareness.” (*Hilchos Mikva’os*. ??)

Water is also an image undifferentiated seamless unity. The nature of water is to “connect” and bring closer. In contrast, fire splits apart, splinters, disconnects, breaks. Water connects and joins. The utility of fire, as a tool, is a human invention.

Fire suggests growth, productivity and progress. Fire “completes” objects, as in cooking raw foods. The beginning of human civilization is Adam’s creation of fire and thus the power of manipulation — to create, to cook and to meld tools.

Weekday is a fire reality, where we are advancing, materially progressing and creating. *Shabbas* is a water reality, in which we are unifying and bringing together.

On *Shabbas* there are many prohibitions, 39 “father” — main prohibitions, and yet the Torah singles out only one: the act of lighting fire as a work we are not to do on *Shabbas*. On *Shabbas* we don’t need to “create” we don’t

need to “do”, we just “are.” *Shabbas* we are home, we are resting because we have arrived. *Shabbas* is a state of being, not a state of doing. *Shabbas* is water reality.

Shabbas — *Shin*-300-ש, *Beis*-2-ב, *Tof*-400-ת — in small numeric value — $300+2+400=702=7\text{Ø}2$ — equals 72. The word *Chesed*/kindness also equals 72. *Shabbas* is a unity, a kind, harmonious, water consciousness.

And so, to help transition out of a weekday/fire reality, we immerse ourselves in the waters of the *Mikvah*.

The basic amount of immersions in the *Mikvah*, according to the AriZal, is twice — the first to remove the garments of weekday consciousness, and the second to become fully enveloped with *Shabbas* consciousness.

In order to cleanse ourselves of ritual impurity the Torah requires us to immerse our entire bodies in water. Even if a strand of hair remains outside, the partial and the purification incomplete.

Thus, in the Torah and Midrash (*Midrash Rabba Bereishis*) water is employed as a metaphor for *Teshuvah*, change and transformation.

We are land creatures. Where naturally inhabit the earth, not under the seas. Underwater represents, for us, a non-being reality. If land is the place of where we exist, underwater is the place where we cease to be. So in order to shed a old negative “existence”, whether a spiritual impurity or an emotional negative attachment, we need to be fully enveloped by a reality of non-being; only then we can emerge into a new and healthier being. We need to shed the old before we can become new. The old becomes non-existent underwater, and then we can emerge as a new being.

Immersed in the *Mikvah* we shed the garments of the weekday, “the old me”, and are readied to emerge renewed.

Number of Immersions & Their Kavannos

1 The simple one dip in the *Mikvah* fulfills the basic requirement. The Baal Shem Tov guarantees that if someone needs the *Mikvah* and immerses themselves only once, that one time will not harm them in any way.

2 As mentioned, the AriZal speaks of immersing (at least) twice in the *Mikvah*: once to remove the garments of the weekday, and once to become en clothed with the garments of *Shabbas*. (*Pri Eitz Chaim. Sha'ar Hakavannos*)

3 The Ben Ish Chai writes that we should immerse three times on *Erev Shabbas*. First to cleanse *Nefesh*/our actions, then to cleanse *Ruach*/emotions and speech, then the third time to cleanse *Neshamah*/intellect. (Ben Ish Chai. Parshas Lech Lecha.) Once these are cleansed, we are ready to receive the *Nefesh/Ruach/Neshamah* of *Shabbas*. So with each immersion we should have this intention. In general, immersing three times in a *Mikvah* is appropriate practice for *Teshuvah*. (*Shulchan Aruch Harav. Orach Chaim. 606:11-12*)

4 *Shabbas* is called “*Yom L'Hashem* – day to G-d.” As we are about to enter Hashem’s world, in a revealed way, we dip into the *Mikvah* four times, corresponding to the four letters of Hashem’s Name, the *Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei*, with each dip becoming enveloped with another letter of the Name of Hashem. This was once a wide spread practice. (R. Alexander Ziskind. *Yesod Shores* Ha'avodah. Ha'Elyon)

5 Five corresponds to the levels of Soul. In addition five times is the amount of times the *Cohen Gadol* high priest immersed in the *Mikvah* on Yom Kippur, and, overall the Mishnah (*Chagigah 2:6*) mentions that there are five levels of immersion, five degrees of purity. (*Lubavitcher Rebbe. Sha'arei Halacha U'Minhag*) We can have the intention of garbing ourselves with another dimension of soul, and reaching a higher level of purity with each dunk.

R. Avraham, the son of the Maggid, teaching from the tradition of the Baal Shem Tov (*Pri Ha'aretz. Lech. Baal Shem Tov. Torah. Yisro. Note: 25. Likutei Yekarim. 27-28. Siddur Alter Rebbe. Kavanas Ha'Mikva*) suggests immersing five times with particular intentions of Divine Names for each immersions.

1. Meditate during the first immersion on the Name *E'heye*/I am, (I will be), *Aleph-Hei-Yud-Hei*, when these letters are spelled out as in Aleph: Aleph/1, Lamed/30, Pei/80=111. Hei: Hei/5, Hei/5=10. Yud; Yud/10, Vav/6, Dalet/4= 20. Hei: Hei/5, Hei/5=10. $111+10+20+10=151$, as the word *Mikvah*; Mem/40, Kuf/100, Vav/6, Hei /5= 151. They both have the same numeric value.
2. Before the Second immersion meditate on the Name *Ag'lah* – a name of *Gevurah*/restriction and concealment, as found in the first letters of the words in the *Amidah* “*Ata Gibor Le'olam Ado-noi*/You are Mighty, (*Gibor/Gevurah*) forever Hashem.” Immerse and then have Kavanah that from the Name *Ag'lah* it becomes the Name *Aleph-Lamed-Dalet*, which is

one of the 72 Names of Hashem. (Both these Names have the same numeric value of 35) The Name *Aleph/Lamed/Dalet* is associated with the quality of *Chesed*/lovingkindness, literally the word *Ei'led* means “giving birth”, a new reality. (Baal Shem Tov. Torah. Yisro 14)

3. Immerse a third time and meditate on the Name *Aleph-Lamed-Dalet*. Giving birth to a new reality, braking and sweetening all the *Gevurah* in your life.
4. Immerse a fourth time and when your head is under water create a *Shiluv*/unity between the Name *E'heye* and *Ei'led*, that is imagine the letter sequence of *Aleph-Lamed-Pei – Aleph – Hei-Hei-Lamed – Yud-Vav-Dalet-Dalet – Hei-Hei*.
5. Immerse a fifth time and have intention to create a *Shiluv*/unity between the name *E'heye* (not written out in full, just the four basic letters, *Aleph-Hei-Yud-Hei*) with the letters of the Name *Ei'led*, as such *Aleph-Aleph-Hei-Lamed-Yud-Dalet-Hei*.

6 On *Shabbas* we receive an extra measure of *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshamah*, and so we can immerse ourselves six times in the *Mikvah*, first three to remove the *Nefesh/Ruach/Neshamah* of the work week, which also corresponds to removing the three garments of our way of acting/feeling-speaking/thinking of the weekday, and the second group of three to assume and become enveloped with the new *Shabbas Nefesh/Ruach/Neshamah*, with a higher and deeper way of doing/feeling/thinking, the garments of *Shabbas*.

7 *Shabbas* is the seventh day. So we dip seven times, six times to remove the garments of the six weekdays (one dip for Sunday, one for Monday, and so forth) and the seventh dip to become enveloped with the *Kedusha*/holiness of *Shabbas*. (Note: Kaf Ha'Chaim 260:4-6)

8 On *Shabbas* we celebrate the past, the creation, the present, the going out of Egypt and the receiving of Torah, but also the future, a time when all days will be like *Shabbas*. Eight is a number deeply associated with the World to Come. As seven represents the natural, the cycle of time, eight represents above the cycle, the Transcendence, the World of Freedom, and so immersing eight times in the *Mikvah* before *Shabbas* would suggest enveloping oneself with the *Shabbas* of the present and the *Shabbas* of the World to Come. So we first remove with the first six immersions the garments of the week that past, the seventh dip to become enveloped with the *Kedusha* of *Shabbas*, and the

eight to become ready to be garbed in the *Kedusha* of the World to Come.

9 The word *Shabbas* — *Shin*-300-ש, *Beis*-2-ב, *Tof*-400-ת — in small numeric value — $300+2+400=702=7+0+2$ — equals 9. Nine is the number of *Emes*/Truth— *Aleph*-1-א, *Mem*-40-מ, *Tof*-400-ת — $1+40+400=441=4+4+1=9$. Nine multiplied equals Nine. $9 \times 2 = 18$, $1+8=9$; $9 \times 3 = 27$, $2+7=9$; $9 \times 4 = 36$, $3+6=9$; this is true for every multiple of nine. *Shabbas* is a time of truth, even someone who is normally not trusted on *Shabbas*, the Gemarah tells us is trusted, because he too says the truth on *Shabbas*. As we immerse ourselves in the *Mikvah* nine times, we can have *Kavanah*/intention to remove the garbs of falsehood, of the weekday reality and garb ourselves with the garb of truth and holiness of *Shabbas*. As we are moving into the water removing the falsehood of the weekday and as we are emerging out of the water assuming the garments of truth, authenticity, *Shabbas*.

10 The Chasam Sofer would dip ten times in a *Mikvah* on *Erev Shabbas*.

The Chidah (*Avodas HaKodesh. Moreh Be'Etzvah. 1:10*), explains the ten immersions: 1) The first is to remove the negativity, and perhaps impurity, from the wasteful ejection of seed. 2-3-4-5) These immersions correspond to the four forms of death expressed in the Torah, which correspond to the four letters in the name of Hashem, which may have been damaged by our actions during the week. So with every dip we intend to experience a minor form of death, breaking down; the destruction allows for a rebuilding in the future. 6) To create unity within the Name of Hashem. 7) To annul all negativity that may have been created through anger. 8) To remove the garments of the weekdays. 9-10) To accept upon ourselves and become enveloped with light and holiness of *Shabbas*.

General Intentions and Meditations

In a *Mikvah* there are three basic elements; 1) the ground you are standing on, the floor, 2) the water that is surrounding you, within the four walls, and 3) and when you immerse in the *Mikvah* there is the water above your head, the crown, the roof of the waters of the *Mikvah*.

There are three prominent Names of G-d:

- Havaya — the Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei, also called Hashem/the Name, or the Tetragrammaton.
- Ado-noi — the Name of Havayah as it is pronounced today.
- Ehe'yeh — “I am” or “I will Be” the Name Moshe experienced at the burning bush.

The Name Havayah represents Infinity. The four letters of the Name, Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei spell the words, *Haya!* it was, past, *Hove!* it is, present, and *Yehiye!* it will be, future. Embodying these four letters represents that it is a (the) Name of Hashem that expresses The Infinite.

The Name Ado-noi represents the Creator's mastery of creation. The name Havayah is pronounced today as Ado-noi, in this way Ado-noi is the container that contains Havayah, the “finite” that contains and gives us access (as we pronounce this name, not the name Havayah).

The Name Ehe'yeh represents a Name related to the future, as in becoming.

Inwardly these names are reflected in our own life, meaning, the reflection of these Names in our life is that Havayah is “our soul.” *Ki Chelek Havayah Amo* (Devarim) we are One with Hashem. This is our infinity, so to speak. The name Ado-noi, also called Adnus in our life is our ground of being, the reality we are in. The name Ehe'yeh is our future, what we are becoming.

Infinity/ Empty of Form/ Soul
Finite/ Image of Self/ Being
Potential/ Future/ Becoming

These three names are reflected in the three dimension of the *Mikvah*.

A) The floor that you are standing on is your Adnus –that is the image of self in this present moment. Your identity, for better or worse, the image of self you connect with, at least up until this point.

B) The walls, the water swirling around you in the *Mikvah* is a reflection of the element of Hashem, Infinity, beyond any possible image or contextualization. Water is impermanent, free flowing, ungraspable with the hands.

C) The water above your head, the roof of the water, the waters through which you will emerge from as you rise out from your dip under water, is a reflection of the name Ehe'yeh. *

*The word *Mikvah* in numeric value is 151, as the full name of Ehe'yeh. There are Four letters in the Name Ehe'yeh. Aleph, Hei, Yud, Hei.

Aleph: Aleph/1, Lamed/30, Pei/80=111

Hei: Hei/5, Hei/5=10

Yud: Yud/10, Vav/6. Dalet/4= 20

Hei: Hei/5, Hei/5=10

111+10+20+10=151

Another variation is to multiply the numbers, as such; Aleph is 1=1. Hei is 5, so 5 times 5=25. (1+25=26) Yud is 10, so 10 times 10= 100 (1+25+100=126) Hei is 5, so 5 times 5=25 (1+25+100+25= 151. (R.

Chaim Vital. Shar H'pesukim. Parshas Pinchas.)

- Havaya- Emptiness/Infinity -Water around us in the *Mikvah*
- Ado'noi- Ground of Being- The Floor of the *Mikvah*
- Ehe'yeh- Potential /Future- The Roof of *Mikvah* water.

These three elements of the *Mikvah* are related to the essential three ingredients we need to grow and move forward in our life, in all situations.

A) First step is *Hachna'ah*/submission, acknowledging where we are at, at the present moment, what is our image of self, what is our ground of being. This is our “floor.”

B) The second stage is *Havdalah*/separation, letting go, unburdening ourselves from all attachments and all image of finite self. Let go of the old self, and feel enveloped in Infinity, Hashem.

C) Third stage is *Hamtakah*/sweetening, recollecting and reconnecting from a healthy space with an image. This corresponds to the name Ehe'yeh.

These three names are also connected with the sacred Name of *Yavak*. The Name *Yavak* is an acronym for Yichud/Unity, Beracha/Blessings, Kedusha/holiness. In numeric value the Name *Yavak* is 112, the same as these three Names of Hashem.

Havayah: Yud/10-Hei/5-Vav/6-Hei= 26

Ado-noi: Aleph/1- Dalet-4- Nun/50- Yud/10= 65

Ehe'yeh: Aleph/1- Hei/5- Yud/10- Hei/5= 21

26+65+ 21= 112

In order to remerge a new you, with a healthy, positive image of self we need to reconnect with a healthy image, perform a Yichud/unity with self, than see that as a Beracha/ blessing in our life, and thus reach Kedusah / holiness.