



## **Preparing for The Final Journey: The Tahara Ritual and Its Significance**

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Dr. Diamond is the author of a chapter on the rabbinic period in the Schocken Guide to Jewish Books, and entries in the Reader's Guide to Judaism and The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception. He is the author of *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003). The book provides a thorough reassessment of the role that asceticism plays in rabbinic Judaism, suggesting that asceticism is more pervasive than is generally thought. Dr. Diamond has written on prayer, asceticism, and issues of environmental law and ethics. He is currently editing a commentary on Yerushalmi Pesahim written by the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, as well as a book on prayer. The prayer volume will address the problem of cognitive dissonance for the contemporary worshipper and will offer readings of traditional liturgy that use midrashic methodology to find meaning and relevance in these prayers for the modern Jew. Dr. Diamond has taught in a variety of settings, including Stern College, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the 92nd Street Y, and several Ramah camps. Dr. Diamond was ordained at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and received his doctorate in Talmud from JTS.

**The following excerpts are taken from the Park Slope Jewish Center  
Hevra Kadisha Tahara Manual**

**1. Asking forgiveness of the deceased and asking for compassion for the  
deceased**

All recite the following:

\_\_\_\_\_, daughter / son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, we ask your forgiveness for any distress we may cause you during this *taharah*. We will do everything possible to insure that you are treated with respect, and that all the elements of *taharah* are properly completed. Everything we are about do is for the sake of your honor.

Recite Hamol (Prayer for Compassion):

FOR A FEMALE:

Master of the universe, have compassion for \_\_\_\_\_, the daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, this *meitah*, who is the daughter of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, Abraham, Issac and Jacob, Your servants; and may her spirit and soul rest with the righteous, for You give life to the dead and death to the living. Blessed are You Who forgives sins and transgressions of the dead of Your people Israel, upon petition. And also let it be acceptable before You, our Eternal God and God of our ancestors, to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the *meitah*, who is Your servant-woman, daughter of your servant-woman. And You, our Eternal God and God of our ancestors, Who is concerned with the poor, save her from all misery and from an evil day and from the judgment of purgatory. Blessed are You, Great One of kindness and Master of compassion. Blessed are You

(Continued on next page)

רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, חַמּוֹל עַל \_\_\_\_\_  
בַּת \_\_\_\_\_ וְ \_\_\_\_\_, הַמֵּתָה,  
הַלְלוּ, שֶׁהִיא בַת שָׂרָה, רַבֵּקָה, רָחֵל  
וְלֵאָה, בְּלֵהָה וְזִלְפָה אַמְתֵּיךָ, בַּת  
אַבְרָהָם, יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב עַבְדֵּיךָ; וְתַנּוּחַ  
נַפְשָׁהּ וְנִשְׁמָתָה עִם הַצַּדִּיקִים, כִּי  
אַתָּה מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים וּמְמִית חַיִּים.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה מוֹחֵל לַחַטָּאִים וְלַעֲוֹנוֹת  
מִמֵּתֵי עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתַחֲנוּנֵינוּ. וְכֵן  
יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאֲמוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתְּסַבֵּב  
מִלְּאֲכֵי רַחֲמִים לְפָנֵי הַמֵּתָה, שֶׁהִיא  
אַמְתֵּךְ בַּת אַמְתֵּךְ: וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאֲמוֹתֵינוּ מְשַׁכֵּיל  
אֶל דָּל, מַלְטָה מִכָּל צָרָה וּמִיּוֹם רָעָה  
וּמִדִּינָהּ שֶׁל גֵּהֲנָם: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה גְדוֹל  
הַחֶסֶד וּבֵעַל הַרַחֲמִים: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה

Who makes peace in Your heights, for Your servants and those who revere Your name. Blessed is the One who redeems Your people Israel from all kinds of tribulation with compassion. With compassion hide and cause to disappear the wrongdoings of this *meitah*, your servant. From burning fire save her, for she is in need of Your great compassion. And You, our Eternal God, are good and pardon all who call upon you. Blessed are You, great in counsel and Master of achievement in compassion; with the feet of the righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden may she tread, for that is the place of the upright, and God's pious ones will be protected. Blessed are You Who imparts great compassion and forbearance to the dead of Your people Israel. Amen; may this be Your will.

הַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרוֹמָיו לְעַבְדְּךָ  
וּלְיִרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ: בְּרוּךְ פּוֹדֵה עַמּוֹ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּינֵי פוֹרְעָנוּת בְּרַחֲמִים:  
בְּרַחֲמִים הַסֹּתֵר וְהַעֲלֵם פְּשָׁעֵי הַמֵּתָה  
הַזֹּאת אִמְתָּךְ. מִשְׂרַפַּת אֵשׁ תַּחֲלִיץָהּ  
שֶׁהִיא צְרִיכָה לְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים: וְאַתָּה  
יְיָ אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ טוֹב וְסֹלַח לְכָל קוֹרְאֶיךָ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה גְדוֹל הָעֵצָה וְרַב הָעֲלִילָה  
בְּרַחֲמִים, עִם רַגְלֵי צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקִנוּת  
בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תְּדַרּוּךְ, כִּי מְקוֹם יִשְׂרָאִים  
הוּא רַגְלֵי חֲסִדְךָ יִשְׁמֹר: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה  
הַנוֹתֵן רַחֲמִים גְּדוֹלִים וְרוֹב תַּחֲנוּנִים  
לְמֵתֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל: אָמֵן, כֵּן יְהִי  
רְצוֹן:

As the body is uncovered and examined, recite *Vaya'an Vayomer* (Zekhariah 3:4):

And [the angel of God] raised his voice and spoke to those standing before him, saying: "Remove the soiled garments from him"; and said to [the High Priest]: "Behold, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you in fine garments."

וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-לֹהֵי הַעֲמֻדִים לְפָנָיו לְאֹמֶר  
הֲסִירוּ הַבְּגָדִים הַצְּאִים מֵעַלָּיו וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֵלָיו רְאֵה הֵעֵבַרְתִּי מֵעַלְיָךְ עֲוֹנֶךָ  
וְהִלְבַּשׁ אֶתְךָ מַחֲלָצוֹת:

As the body is washed, recite one of the following passages from the Song of Songs:

FOR A FEMALE: *Hinakh Yaffah* (Song of Songs 4:1-5, 7):

How beautiful you are, my beloved friend: your eyes are doves from behind your tresses; your hair as a flock of goats that trail down from Mount Gil'ad. Your teeth like a flock of sheep that rise from the washing-pool, that are all matched with no break among them. Like a crimson ribbon your lips, and your speech is pleasant; like a pomegranate is the curve of your cheek from behind your tresses. Like a tower of David your neck, raised in splendor; a thousand shields hang upon it, shields of the warriors. Your two breasts as two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. You are all lovely, my beloved friend, and there is no flaw in you.

הַנֶּחֱדָה יָפָה רְעִיתִי הַנֶּחֱדָה יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים  
מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתְּךָ שְׁעָרָךְ כְּעֵדֵר הָעֹזִים  
שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ מֵהַר גִּלְעָד: שְׁנֵיךָ כְּעֵדֵר  
הַקְּצוּבוֹת שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הַרְחֻצָּה שְׁכֵלֶם  
מִתְאִימוֹת וְשִׁכְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם: כָּחוֹט  
הַשֵּׁנִי שִׁפְתֹתֶיךָ וּמִדְּבָרֶיךָ נֶאֱוָה כִּפְלַח  
הָרִמּוֹן רִקְתְּךָ מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתְּךָ: כְּמַגְדֵּל  
דָּוִד צְוֹאֲרֶךְ בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת אֶלֶף  
הַמְּגִן תִּלְוֵי עָלְיוֹ כֹּל שֶׁלֹּטִי  
הַגְּבוּרִים: שְׁנֵי שְׁדֵיךָ כְּשְׁנֵי עֲפָרִים  
תְּאוּמֵי צְבִיָּה הַרוּעִים בְּשׁוֹשְׁנִים: כִּלְךָ  
יָפָה רְעִיתִי וּמוֹם אֵין בָּךְ:

Said Rabbi Akiva, "You are fortunate, Israel. Before Whom do you purify yourselves, and Who purifies you? Your Father in heaven, as it is said: 'And I will pour pure water upon you, and you shall be purified' (Ezekiel 36:25), and it says: 'The *mikveh* / ritual bath of Israel is God' (Jeremiah 17:13). Just as a *mikveh* purifies the defiled, so does the Holy Blessed One purify Israel" (Mishnah Yoma 8:9). A fountain for gardens, a well of living waters, flowing from Lebanon (Song of Songs 4:15). And I will pour pure water upon you, and you shall be purified from all of your impurities; and from all of your abominations I shall purify you (Ezekiel 36:25).

אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, אֲשֶׁרִיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל,  
לִפְנֵי מִי אַתֶּם מְטַהְרִין, וּמִי מְטַהֵר  
אֶתְכֶם, אָבִיכֶם שְׁבַשְׁמִים, שְׁנֶאֱמַר,  
(יחזקאל לו, כה) וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִים  
טְהוֹרִים וְטַהַרְתֶּם. וְאוֹמַר, (ירמיה יז,  
ג) מְקוּהַ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִי, מֵהַ מְקוּהַ מְטַהֵר  
אֶת הַטְּמֵאִים, אֵף הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
מְטַהֵר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל: מַעַיִן גְּנִים בְּאֵר  
מִים חַיִּים וְנִזְלִים מִן־לְבָנוֹן: וְזָרַקְתִּי  
עֲלֵיכֶם מִים טְהוֹרִים וְטַהַרְתֶּם מִכֹּל  
טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכֹּל־גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר  
אֶתְכֶם:

## 2. Recitation accompanying the purification process

All team members recite the following three times as the third bucket is emptied:

FOR A FEMALE:

טְהוֹרָה הִיא...טְהוֹרָה הִיא...טְהוֹרָה הִיא

*Tehorah hee...Tehorah hee...Tehorah hee.*

She is pure...She is pure...She is pure.

FOR A MALE:

טְהוֹר הוּא...טְהוֹר הוּא...טְהוֹר הוּא

*Tahor hu...Tahor hu...Tahor hu.*

He is pure...He is pure...He is pure.

**HALBASHAH / DRESSING הלבשה**

Before the *meit/ah* is dressed, recite *Sos Assis*  
(Isaiah 58:11, 61:10-11 and Zekhariah 3:5):

Rejoicing will I rejoice in the Eternal; my soul will be glad in my God; for God has clothed me in the garments of salvation, in a robe of righteousness will God cover me; as a bridegroom puts on priestly glory, and as a bride adorns herself (Isaiah 61:10). And I said, "Let them set a pure headdress on his head," and they set the pure headdress on his head and dressed him in garments, and an angel of God stood by (Zekhariah 3:5). For as the land will bring forth its growth, and as a garden will sprout its seedlings, so will God sprout forth justice and praise in the face of all the nations (Isaiah 61:11). And God will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in times of drought and strengthen your bones, and you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters never fail (Isaiah 58:11).

שׁוֹשׁ אֲשִׁישׁ בַּיהוָה תִּגַּל נַפְשִׁי  
בְּאֱלֹהֵי כִי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי-יֵשַׁע מְעִיל  
צְדָקָה יַעֲטֵנִי כַחַתָּן יִכְתֵּן פָּאֵר וְכִפְלָה  
תַּעֲדָה כְּלִיהָ: וְאָמַר יְשִׁימוּ צָנִיף  
טְהוֹר עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּשְׁימוּ הַצָּנִיף  
הַטְהוֹר עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּלְבְּשֵׁהוּ בְּגָדִים  
וּמְלֶאךָ יְהוָה עֹמֵד: כִּי כָאֶרֶץ תּוֹצִיא  
צִמְחָה וְכִגְנָה זְרוּעֶיהָ תִצְמִיחַ כֶּן |  
אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה יִצְמִיחַ צְדָקָה וּתְהִלָּה נִגְד  
כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם: וְנַחֲךָ יְהוָה תָּמִיד וְהַשְׁבִּיעַ  
בְּצִחְצֻחוֹת נַפְשֶׁךָ וְעִצְמֹתֶיךָ יַחֲלִיץ  
וְהִיֵּית כֶּגֶן רוּחַ וְכִמוֹצָא מֵיִם אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא-יִכָּזְבוּ מִיָּמָיו:

**At the conclusion of the dressing, recite the conclusion of Numbers 16:4,  
as well as the beginning of Genesis 43:14:**

...these are garments of holiness, and [you]  
shall bathe [your] flesh in water and put  
them on. And may the God of nurturance  
give you compassion.

בגדי־קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם  
אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ וּלְבַשֵּׁם: וְאֵל שְׂדֵי יִתֵּן  
לְכֶם רַחֲמִים:

### **3. Hashkavah – Laying the *met* (deceased) in the *aron* (casket)**

**Recite *Vekhiper Admato Amo* (Deuteronomy 32:43):**

...And [God] will effect atonement for [God's] land, [God's] people. **וְכַפֵּר אֲדָמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ:**

Place shards of pottery over the eyes and mouth. Like the *afar*, the shards reflect the vulnerable connection between *adam* (humanity) and *adamah* (earth), to which the body will return in burial.

Wrap the *tallit* (if the *meit/ah* is to be buried in one) over the shoulders. Wrap the *sovev* over the head, the sides of the body, and the feet. Place the bag contained blood-stained materials at the feet of the *meit/ah*.

**Recite *Hinei Mitato* (Song of Songs 3:7-8 and related Biblical verses):**

Behold the couch of Solomon: sixty mighty  
men surround it from the heroes of Israel;  
each of them grasping a sword, learned in  
war; every man his sword upon his thigh,  
from fear in the night (Song of Songs 3:7-8).

הִנֵּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁל־שְׁלֹמֹה שְׁשִׁים גִּבּוֹרִים  
סָבִיב לָהּ מִגִּבּוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כָּל־אֶחָד  
חָרֵב מִלְּמַדֵּי מִלְחָמָה אִישׁ חָרְבוֹ  
עַל־יָרְכוֹ מִפֶּחַד בַּלַּיְלוֹת:

**FOR A MALE:**

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ: יָאֵר יי | פָּנֶיךָ  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ: יִשָּׂא יי | פָּנֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

**FOR A FEMALE:**

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ: יָאֵר יי פָּנֶיךָ  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ: יִשָּׂא יי פָּנֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

May the Eternal bless you and watch over you.  
May the the face of the Eternal shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
May the face of the Eternal be lifted toward you  
and give you peace (Numbers 6:24-26).

[Israel's] branches shall spread out, and like the olive tree will be his beauty; and his fragrance like Lebanon (Hosea 14:7). Who are you, O mighty mountain? before Zerubavel as a plain, and he shall bring forth the cornerstone with shouts of "Grace! Grace!" upon it (Zekhariah 4:7). And now, let the power of my Lord be great, as you have spoken, saying (Numbers 14:17)....But as truly as I live, the honor of God will fill all the earth (14:21).

יִלְכוּ יִזְנְקוּתֵיו וַיְהִי כְזֵית הַיְּדֵד וְרֵיחַ  
 לוֹ כְּלִבְנוֹן: מִי־אַתָּה הַר־הַגָּדוֹל לִפְנֵי  
 זְרֻבָבֶל לְמִישׁוֹר וְהוֹצִיא אֶת־הָאֶבֶן  
 הָרִאשׁוֹה תִשְׂאוֹת חֵן חֵן לָהּ: וְעַתָּה  
 יִגְדַל־נָא כַח אֲדֹנָי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ  
 לֵאמֹר: וְאוֹלָם חַי־אֲנִי וַיִּמְלֵא  
 כְבוֹד־יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

All team members now gather quietly around the *aron*.

Recite *Anu Mevakshim Mekhilah* (Final Request for Forgiveness):

FOR A MALE:

FOR A FEMALE:

אָנוּ מְבַקְשִׁים מְחִילָה מֵאַתָּךְ אִם לֹא  
 עָשִׂינוּ כְּפִי כְבוֹדְךָ, אֲבָל עָשִׂינוּ  
 כְּמִנְהַג הַמָּקוֹם.

אָנוּ מְבַקְשׁוֹת מְחִילָה מֵאַתָּךְ אִם לֹא  
 עָשִׂינוּ כְּפִי כְבוֹדְךָ, אֲבָל עָשִׂינוּ  
 כְּמִנְהַג הַמָּקוֹם.

\_\_\_\_\_, daughter / son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
 we ask your forgiveness if we did not act according to your honor,  
 even though we acted according to our custom.

#### 4. Ushering the deceased on the final journey

Recite *Uvinso'a Hamishkan* (Numbers 1:51 and related Biblical verses):

And in the traveling of the Tabernacle, the Levites shall lower it, and in the pitching of the Tabernacle, the Levites shall raise it; and the stranger who approaches shall be put to death (Numbers 1:51). And it shall be, in the traveling of the *aron*, that Moses will say: Arise, Eternal One, and let Your enemies be scattered; let those who hate You flee before you (Numbers 10:35). No evil shall befall you, and disease will not approach your tent. For [God's] angels will be commanded to guard you in all your journeys. On their hands will they carry you, lest you strike your feet upon a stone (Psalm 91:10-12). God will do battle for you, and you shall hold your peace (Exodus 14:14).

וּבְנִסְעַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹרִידוּ אֹתוֹ הַלְוִיִּם  
וּבַחֲנֻת הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִקְיִמוּ אֹתוֹ הַלְוִיִּם  
וְהַזָּר הַקָּרֵב יוֹמֵת: וַיְהִי בְנִסְעַת הָאָרֶץ  
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה | יְהוָה וַיִּפְצוּ  
אֵיבֹיךָ וַיִּנְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאיֶךָ מִפְּנֵיךָ:  
לֹא-תֵאנָה אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה וְנִגַע לֹא-יִקְרַב  
בְּאֹהֶלְךָ: כִּי מַלְאָכָיו יִצְוֶה-לְךָ לְשִׁמְרֶךָ  
בְּכָל-דְּרָכֶיךָ: עַל-כַּפְּיִם יִשְׁאוּנֶךָ  
פֶּן-תִּגַּף בְּאֶבֶן רַגְלֶךָ: יְהוָה יִלָּחֶם  
לְכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרְשׁוּן:

Wheel the *aron*, feet first, out of the *taharah* room to the place where the vigil-keeper/s will continue with *sh'mirah* until the funeral.