



Carnegie Shul Chatter

April 15, 2021



Zoom in for Services

Our abbreviated Shabbos service begins at 10 am and lasts approximately an hour. Click here to join:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86587450358?pwd=N2VzZ0l5cDRXUStFQWwhcThVVUZaZz09>

Meeting ID: 865 8745 0358

Passcode: 329326

Find the Birnbaum siddur at: <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/hasiddur-hashalem-by-paltiel-birnbaum-1949/>

Appreciating JWV

It was very sad for me to learn that JWV Post 785 had closed (see story, page 6), because even though I am not a vet and was never a JWV member, JWV played a major part in my growing up.

My dad, Bob Roteman, joined East Boros Post 718 when I was in junior high to participate in the Post's weekly bowling league. But soon JWV became much more than just bowling for my dad. He became the Post's Community Service chairperson and was involved in numerous programs ranging from flu clinics to programs at VA hospitals, St. Anthony's School for Exceptional Children and many other events.

Dad eventually became the Post Commander, the Pennsylvania Western Regional Commander, and in 1963 was named JWV's

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Pennsylvania Man of the Year.

Our Jewish veterans served us on the battlefield and they also served us by making the communities in which we live better places through their participation in JWV.

Let us never forget our Jewish War Veterans.



Bob Roteman on the right.

Tazria-Metzora in a Nutshell

Leviticus 12:1–15:33

The Parshahs of Tazria and Metzora continue the discussion of the laws of *tumah v'taharah*, ritual impurity and purity.

A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a mikvah (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat (often mistranslated as “leprosy”) is a supra-natural plague, which can afflict people as well as garments or homes. If white or pink patches appear on a person’s skin (dark pink or dark green in garments or homes), a *kohen* is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the *kohen* pronounces it *tamei* (impure) or *tahor* (pure).

A person afflicted with *tzaraat* must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he is healed. The afflicted area in a garment or home must be removed; if the *tzaraat* recurs, the entire garment or home must be destroyed.

When the *metzora* (“leper”) heals, he or she is purified by the *kohen* with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread and a bundle of hyssop.

Ritual impurity is also engendered through a seminal or other discharge in a man, and menstruation or other discharge of blood in a woman, necessitating purification through immersion in a mikvah.



The Mikvah

This week's parshah talks in part about the mikvah, the ritual bath used not only by women, but sometimes by men, too, and even as a way to purify dishes and utensils.

Many think that the mikvah is something that is primarily for Orthodox women, but the following article from *uscj.org* gives an interesting perspective for Conservative women too.



Demystifying Mikvah

By Rabbi Yael Hammerman
December 4, 2018



As a child, I imagined a *mikvah* to be like the pit into which Jacob's sons threw their brother Joseph—*bur rayk*, an empty pit—dark and deep underground. Ironically, my image of a mikvah was waterless—*ayn bo mayim*—born out of touristy Israel trips to see the ancient *mikva'ot* on Masada and the Burnt House in Jerusalem. These *mikva'ot* may be archeological wonders and historical goldmines, but as a child forming Jewish touchpoints, they sparked fear of slippery stone staircases and exposure to the elements. *Mikvah* was not only foreign—it was terrifying.

Lucky for me, *mikvah* could remain an irrelevant monster hidden under the bed, because it had nothing to do with me. I assumed that *mikvah* only applied to converts and Orthodox Jews—and that, I most definitely was not. Growing up in Toms River—the Jersey Shore town next door to *Hasidic* Lakewood, NJ—I assumed that like *tichels* and *shtreimels*, *mikvah* was “for them.” Not for me. I was an active, highly educated Conservative Jew: Schechter school, Camp Ramah, USY, Nativ, JTS and a rabbi's kid to boot. You name it, I was the poster-child. But in all these institutions, *mikvah* was part of the “null curriculum”—what educational institutions did not teach. I, therefore, had no sense that it could, or should, apply to me.

The first time I heard that *mikvah* could possibly apply to me, was a few months before getting married, when my husband-to-be and I met with a Conservative rabbi (who was not my father) who told us that his wife went to the *mikvah* monthly in observance of *niddah*. Twenty-three years old, on a winding path to becoming a rabbi myself—and my mind was blown. I could not believe that the *mikvah* monster was peeking out from under the bed.

The tug-of-war between my modern, feminist sensibilities and my commitment to Jewish

tradition led me to study and explore *mikvah* in the months leading up to my wedding, and my eyes were opened to a fascinating and dumbfounding facet of Jewish practice. I first went to the *mikvah* before my wedding, at the Conservative *mikvah* at Beth El in Baltimore. It looked nothing like the ancient dreary dungeons I imagined in my youth. It felt nothing like a *boor rayk, ayn bo mayim*—the dark, empty pit of my, and Joseph’s, nightmares. Rather, it was intimate and immaculate, warm and welcoming. I went with my mom, sister and sister-in-law before our pre-wedding mani-pedis—another stop on a day of pampering and transitioning from one life phase to the next.

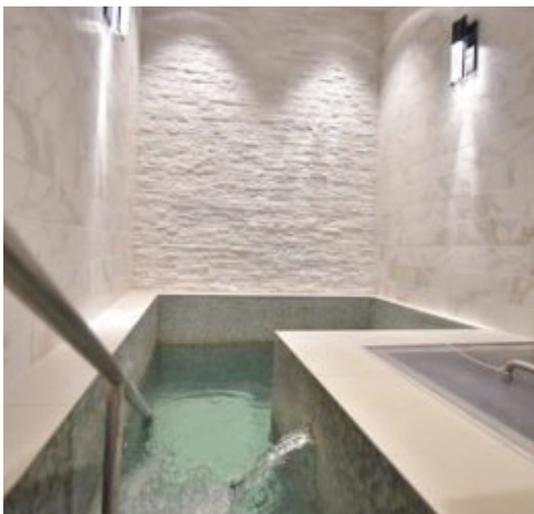


While my *mikvah* practice has waxed and waned over 10 years of marriage, as the feminist/traditionalist tug of war has continued—and as motherhood has intensified the tension over who controls my body and my time—it remains important to me that *mikvah* is an option and an “opt in.” As it goes with performing *mitzvot* regularly, most *mikvah* moments are not all that memorable or meaningful, as is often the case once something becomes habit. But one *mikvah* visit from a few years ago has stayed with me. I went to the *mikvah* after a very early miscarriage (before I became pregnant with my now 2-year-old son). In the taxi, on the way to the *mikvah*, I listened to the song *Elohai Neshama*:

Elohai, Neshama sh’nata’ta bi, tehora hi

My God, the Soul that you put in me, is pure.
My God, the soul you gave to me
— the almost-but-not-to-be-baby —
— that was in me, but now is not — is Pure.
She did nothing wrong. I did nothing wrong.

I sang these words as a mantra while preparing for the mikvah:



Tehora he. She is pure.

I sang these words while washing away the loss, the sadness, the tears:

Tehora he. I am pure.

Atah barata – You Created it.

Atah yatzarta – You Formed it.

Atah nefachta bi – You Breathed it into me.

I sang these words on the way home, a hopeful reminder that God and I are partners in creation, in formation and in breathing life in and out. The cycle of life may wax and wane, but on it goes.

As a rabbi and educator, I have tried to do my own small part to put *mikvah* on the curriculum. Inspired by the groundbreaking work of organizations like Mayyim Hayyim and ImmerseNYC, and progressive *mikvah* pioneers like Anita Diamant, Aliza Kline and Rabbi Sara Luria, I have tried to find ways in my own work to reclaim *mikvah* for the hands and hearts of non-Orthodox women. I have tried to open the hidden *mikvah* door to students of all ages and genders, across different phases of life.

As a college Residence Director, I brought a group of female Barnard and Columbia students to tour Manhattan's West Side Mikvah—opening an entryway and engendering conversation and connection. As a Hebrew School Director, I bring our 5th grade class to tour the local *mikvah*, as part of their Jewish Life Cycle curriculum. Hebrew School students who converted as babies were brought back to see the *mikvah* pictured in their baby books—normalizing the conversion experience for them, and for their classmates. A student whose mom converted at the same *mikvah* just months before was excited to be the *mikvah* expert, able to find the hidden bronze Hebrew sign, tucked away on the brick townhouses of West 74th Street.

As a shul rabbi, I am now leading a diverse group of incredible women in an adult education class called “Demystifying Mikvah: Seven Sacred Steps.” We explore *mikvah* through studying traditional and creative uses of *mikvah*, and we will soon visit the *mikvah* for ritual use. Through *mikvah*, we are creating a supportive community of Jewish women.

I have learned over time that the *mikvah* is not a deep, dark pit. In fact, there are seven steps to support you on the way down—and seven steps to help you on your way back up. It has become my custom to say a seven-word verse when I go to the mikvah—one word on each step:

Atah barata, Atah yatzarta, Atah nefachta bi.

You Created it. You Formed it. You Breathed it into me.



Mikvah provides us with a precious opportunity, in time and space, to get in touch with ourselves, and with God—our partner in creation, in formation and in breathing through life. May you too have the opportunity to claim the *mikvah* and its living waters as your own.

Rabbi Yael Hammerman loves creating dynamic Jewish learning experiences for students of all ages, from toddlers to older adults. She is committed to helping to build a warm, strong and engaged Jewish community at Ansche Chesed. Ordained by The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Rabbi Hammerman also received a degree from its Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education. Before joining Ansche Chesed, she was a student rabbi at Congregation Eitz Chaim in Monroe, New York, and Director of Student Placement at The Jewish Theological Seminary's rabbinical and cantorial schools.

Jewish War Veterans

Last Friday I received the following email from Rick D'Loss telling of the closing of JWV Post 785 that had used our Shul as its meeting place. Then, on Monday, I received an email informing me that Cody Gomberg, who had been the Allegheny County JWV Commander for many years and who, as a member of the Board of Directors of the Jewish Cemetery and Burial Association, had spearheaded efforts to place flags at the graves of Jewish vets on Veterans Day and Memorial Day, had recently passed away. Cody's death and the closing of Post 785 are a loss to all of us.



For many years, even decades, our shul hosted the Sanford Baer Post 785 of the South Hills. Over the years membership has dwindled. This has been typical of all veterans groups, including the American Legion and VFW. Veterans organizations were once filled with WWII, Korea, and Vietnam veterans. There are lots of reasons, but mainly the draft created hundreds of thousands of veterans, and social clubs were very popular in our parents' generation. Obviously those veterans are aging and dying, and many posts nationally have closed. The Legion and VFW have regained some life with Middle East War veterans since the mid 90s, and all veterans clubs augment their membership with non-veteran "social" members. But the JWV has not recovered, nationally or locally.

Post 785 had a large membership even through the 1980s, but but most of the members are passed away. We haven't had an "in person" meeting in 3 years. So, last year I and Mike Averbach, the remaining officers of the post, asked the National Committee to officially close the post. Today the national membership director informed me that our post is now closed.

As we recount in our Yizkor service. "In the morning, the grass grows up and flourishes. In the evening, it withers and dies". Likewise, organizations are created when they are needed and have a purpose, and they die when their purpose is completed. Perhaps this year on Memorial Day, we not only remember our veterans who've passed, but also our Post that has passed along with them.