



BIRKAT EMUNAH

A Mikvah Resource

Thoughts and tefillot to guide women facing
the challenges of infertility or loss

In memory of Miriam Yaffa bas Avigdor Shraga and Devorah Leah
לעילוי נשמת רחל בת זרח

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yesh tikva
supporting Jewish people facing infertility

**Nechama
Comfort**

Emunah National Religious
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גפן | FERTILITY

**נשמת
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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Practical Tips for Your Mikvah Visit And Sarah Laughed	6
Traditional Tefillot	10
Hannah's Prayer	10
Prayer for Children	12
Tefillat HaShlah	14
Contemporary Tefillot and Poems	16
Fertility Prayer by Yesh Tikva	16
<i>Neshama Yetera</i> -- Another Soul	17
You Hold the Key	18
No Choice	18
The Day After Immersion	19
Don't Pretend	20
<i>Mi SheAna</i> -- The One Who Answers	21
Husband's Compendium	22
Mindfulness in Immersion	25
Personal Reflections	30
Erica Brown	30
Debbie Derby	31
Cheryl Burnat	32
Ellie Haller	34
Leah Herzog	36
Dassi Jacobson	39
Tehillim To Say Along the Fertility Journey	41

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Introduction

by **Dr. Naomi Marmon Grumet**, Founder & Director of The Eden Center

The mikvah represents the intersection of *halakha*, ritual, femininity, spirituality, prayer, grief and hope. For a woman trying to conceive and struggling with infertility, or after a pregnancy or infant loss, the mikvah can elicit a range of emotions. It can be a place to daven (pray) and cry out for Hashem's (God's) help, or it may trigger negative and painful emotions such as frustration, anger, embarrassment, inadequacy or loss. The mikvah can be the space for introspection, hope and personal pampering, yet it can also be a reminder of pain, disappointment and the "unsuccessful" attempt to bring a child to the world. All of these feelings are legitimate and have a place, both in the mikvah, and in our relationship to God.

Many women find that personalizing the way they immerse can help express their emotional and physical needs. Since *halakha* doesn't limit what can be done for emotional healing, you should feel free to use the mikvah in ways that are personally meaningful to help in your process. Each visit may differ, and of course, for each woman the experience varies. In this guide, we hope to provide practical suggestions and tools, based on women's experiences, for positively transforming the mikvah experience during periods of infertility or after a pregnancy/infant loss. It may also be helpful to speak about your loss with a professional. Seek a safe space where you can share your fertility journey and get support.

Practical Tips for Your Mikvah Visit

1. You can call in advance to arrange a special appointment time or room. This can ensure you won't feel rushed, ensure privacy, and provide the opportunity to share what you are going through (if you want). The mikvah is intended as a welcoming place, so there's no need to feel that you are asking for something extraordinary.

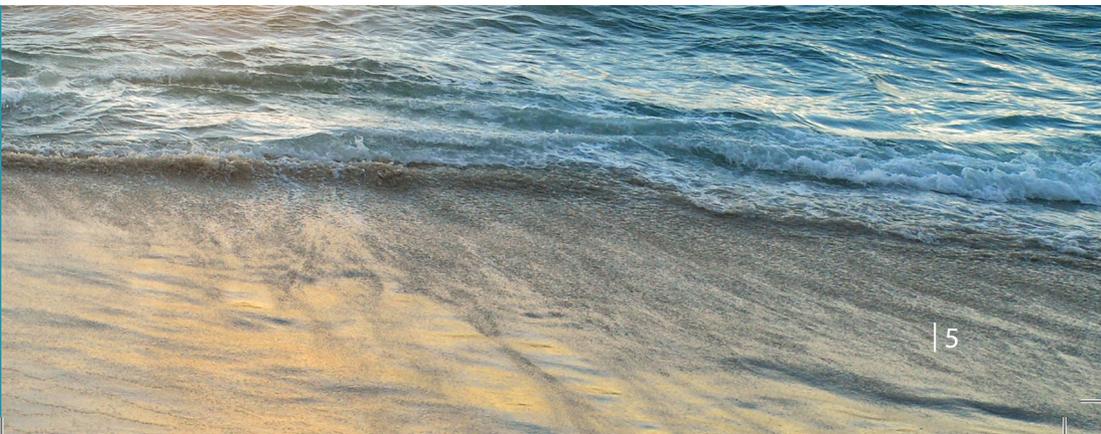
2. Think about inviting someone to come with you – especially after a loss – to drive you there or possibly to be with you in the mikvah. A companion can speak with the mikvah attendant before or when you arrive to let her know your needs and situation. Alternatively, you can ask if she can serve as the mikvah attendant, or just be with you so you feel you are not going through this alone. This is a wonderful way that your friends, family and community can support you if you feel it can be helpful.
3. After a loss, you can bring tangible objects like pictures, candles, or a letter which can help you to mourn for your loss.
4. Consider adding an immersion. If you feel you need a “miracle” to conceive and birth a child, an extra immersion can be a way to invoke/request the “supernatural.” Immersing an extra time (permanently or for a limited amount of time) in memory of a fetus or baby can add a sense of closure or act as an expression of hope/prayer for future pregnancy.
5. Please don’t assume that the mikvah attendant knows what you are going through. Even in a small community, the mikvah attendant may not know your circumstances. If you feel comfortable sharing with her, do so. If you don’t want to share specifics, find language that helps her know that you are feeling especially vulnerable. It can be as simple as: “I am going through a hard time. I don’t want to talk about it, but I might cry a lot and need my privacy, time, and space. Thank you for respecting that.”
6. Know that it’s okay to ask the attendant (or your companion) to give you a few minutes alone in the mikvah post-

The translation of Birkat Emunah from Hebrew to English
is dedicated by Karine and David Morris in loving memory
of our grandmother Ruzia Grunbaum

לעילוי נשמת רייזל בלימה בת מכל ז"ל

immersion. Many women find this time, alone with their thoughts, to be a meaningful, even holy opportunity to reflect, pray and emote. There's no need to feel rushed; even if there is a line, you are entitled to those extra moments, without feeling guilty or bad for taking them. Let the waters envelop you and your tears. This is your time.

7. Infertility and pregnancy loss can bring up complicated feelings about physical intimacy. It's okay to take a few moments to process those feelings. Remember that using the mikvah has a spiritual value of its own, not connected to whether or not physical intimacy will follow.
8. Both you and your spouse are facing these challenges, and each of you may experience them in a different way. Acknowledging his pain/loss can be important.
9. Mikvah night can present the opportunity to recognize and express your individual needs and partnership in this process. It can be a time to share complex feelings, or have a "night off" to simply reconnect as a couple. Asking him to daven for your shared fertility journey or davening for him while you are at the mikvah may feel helpful. We encourage you to find what works in your relationship.
10. Feel free to use the *tefillot* (prayers) in this booklet. They are resources for you, some of which have accompanied women throughout Jewish history. If they speak to you, find the time that feels right for you (before, during or after immersion) and use them as a starting point for your personal reflections and *tefillot*.



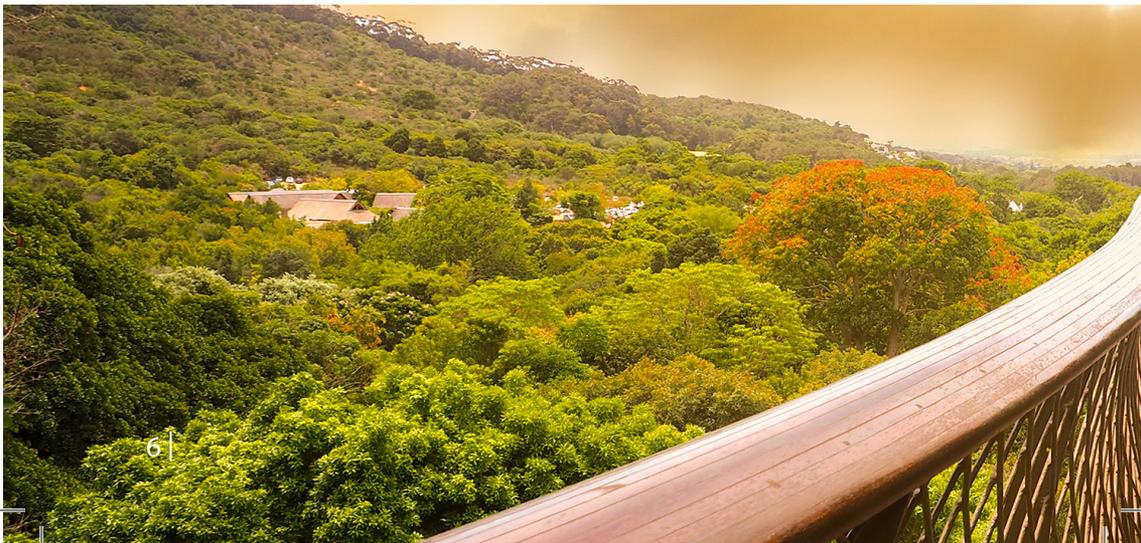
| And Sarah Laughed

by Nili Arbel, Editor of *Unlocking the Gates, Prayers for the Journey to Fertility*

Immersion in the mikvah unleashes a flood of emotions which are intensified by fertility challenges. Immersion is the moment of transition from what has yet to transpire, to hope for what could potentially happen. It brings a combination of emotions: pain, sorrow and sometimes grief for what has been lost, along with hope and expectation for what is possible in the future.

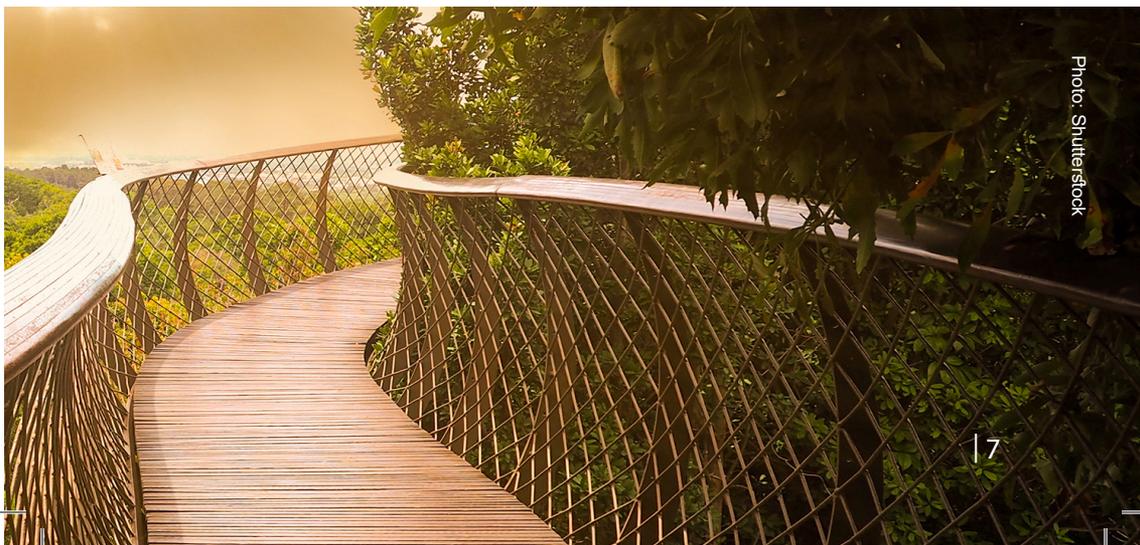
On the one hand, entering the mikvah is a piercing reminder of emptiness, of *still* standing in the all-too-familiar place, longing for the month when we will no longer be here. On the other hand, going to the mikvah opens a new door, bringing us to the living waters that can wash away the past and bring with them blessing and abundance, renewal and limitless potential.

Sometimes both these aspects co-exist harmoniously in a visit to the mikvah. But, there are months when we arrive at the mikvah devoid of strength, listless and stunned that we are here again, and nonetheless... And there are months when we are joyous and grateful for a new chance, a new beginning. We accede to the conflicting yearnings of body and soul that converge as we stand in the mikvah.



Anyone who is on the fertility journey recognizes these pendulum swings. They are with us in the two weeks of anticipation in which every physical twinge in our body hints at pregnancy, while a moment later, another sensation actually hints at the disappointment we were so afraid of. The swirling emotions shadow us in the weeks that follow a loss as well: during those first few days when we need to withdraw and grieve for what, again, is not to be, while, at the same time, our bodies, or our souls, the medical process, the external voices of those who surround and support us, or possibly our own inner voice encourages us to look forward and start anew. Because maybe this time ...

When Sarah Imeinu stood at the opening of the tent and heard the message of the harbinger angel, “At this time next year, your wife Sarah will have a son (Genesis 18:10),” she laughed internally. “Sure, sure,” she laughed, “they have promised me this often enough. I have hoped and believed, and each time my hope has been shattered. I can no longer allow myself to believe or to expect. I would rather not hope than hope and be disappointed.” How well we identify with those sentiments! How persuasively she validates our desire for emotional self-protection. Better to expect the worst, and perhaps we will be pleasantly surprised.



Yet Sarah does not just laugh; she laughs, and then she denies laughing. She is afraid. Simply put, she is human; she is a normal woman. God reacts to her laughter and asks, “Why did Sarah laugh? Is there anything that is beyond My ability? At the designated time next year, I will return to you and Sarah will have a son (Genesis 18:14).” I choose to read these Divine words as Sarah’s internal voice, a voice vacillating between despondency and hope. After she laughs, she pauses and says *to herself*: “Is anything beyond Hashem’s ability?!” Perhaps this is really possible?? Perhaps this time it will come true? These are the same feelings that can wash over us as we immerse in the mikvah, at the moment when we stop and reflect. And despite all of the past disappointments, despite the promises we have made not to expect anything, we may suddenly find ourselves suffused with faith! “Is anything beyond Hashem’s ability?!”

As the biblical narrative continues, Sarah denies that she laughed: “I did not laugh!” (Genesis 18:15).” According to the midrash in Bereishit Rabbah (53:3) Sarah continued, “How can I doubt my Creator? Rather “I will rejoice in God and I will praise the God of my salvation! (Chabakuk 3:18).” Contrary to the majority of classical commentaries, who are critical of Sarah and her words of denial, this midrash depicts Sarah Imeinu’s restoration of faith as intertwined with Sarah’s need to hide – even contradict – that she had lost faith in the ability to conceive. It is as if Sarah is afraid that admitting to having lost faith would detract from her renewed faith. And perhaps in our own moments of self-criticism – “Why wasn’t I more optimistic? Maybe I ruined my chances because I wasn’t positive enough?” – we experience the same doubts as Sarah, thoughts that are an inextricable part of this journey.

But Hashem answers Sarah, “No, my precious Sarah, you did laugh.” You laughed, but it is alright. You were in a very difficult

place, of despair and pain. And now you are in a place of optimism and hope.” This is how I like to read Hashem’s insisting that Sarah laughed; He is neither arguing with nor rebuking her. Rather, He comforts her by insisting that she need not hide the disbelieving laughter or times of weakness. Indeed, the cycle of doubt and hope are embedded in our very nature.

Anyone who has experienced challenges in fertility inherently understands the feeling of complete despair that can be transformed into complete faith in Hashem all in a brief moment. It is so natural, so completely human.

Enter the mikvah from where you are now. It doesn’t matter where you were before. And perhaps, this moment, the moment of entering the waters of the mikvah, will be the moment when everything opens anew – your heart, your hope, your prayers and your womb...



Photo: Connie Garlitz

Traditional Prayers

Hannah's Prayer Samuel 1, Chapter 2

1. And Hannah prayed. She said: My heart glories in the Lord, my horns raised in pride by the Lord, my mouth wide in scorn for my foes: for my joy is in Your salvation.
2. There is none so holy as the Lord, for there is none but You, there is no Rock like our God.
3. Stop speaking high and mighty, on and on, these swollen words that leave your mouths - for the Lord is the God of knowledge, His acts precisely measured;
4. the bows of strong heroes are broken, while those who once stumbled gird greatness.
5. Those who were once full of bread go to hire, while the hungry rest; while the childless woman births seven children, the mother of so many sons falls desolate.
6. The Lord kills, and He brings life, He throws us down to hell and He lifts us.
7. The Lord makes destitute, enriches, debases; He raises -
8. He lifts the poor out of the dust, and raises abject men from the dunghills to seat them up there with princes, to bequeath them chairs of honor, for the earth's precipices are the Lord's and upon them He balances all the world.
9. He will guard the steps of His followers, while the evil are silenced in darkness, for it is not by strength that men master.
10. The Lord - His opponents are broken, He thunders the skies above them, the Lord will judge to the ends of the earth, will grant His own king strength, He will raise proud the horns of His anointed.

Women add:

Master of the Universe, just as you listened to Hannah in her prayer, please listen and answer my prayers.



תפילת חנה שמואל א', פרק ב'

- א ותתפלל חנה ותאמר עלץ לבי בה' רמה קרני בה' רחב פי
על אויבי כי שמחתי בישועתך:
ב אין קדוש כה' כי אין בלתה ואין צור כא-להינו:
ג אל תרבו תדברו גבחה גבחה יצא עתק מפיהם כי א-ל דעות
ה' ולו נתכנו עללות:
ד קשת גברים חתים ונכשלים אָזְרו חיל:
ה שְׂבָעִים בְּלָחֶם נִשְׁכְּרוּ וְרַעֲבִים חָדְלוּ עַד עָקְרָה יְלָדָה שְׂבָעָה
וְרַבַּת בָּנִים אִמְלָלָה:
ו ה' מַמִּית וּמְחַיֶּה מוֹרִיד שָׁאוֹל וַיַּעַל:
ז ה' מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר מִשְׁפִּיל אֶף מְרוֹמָם:
ח מְקִיִּם מַעֲפָר דָּל מְאַשְׁפֵּת יָרִים אֲבִיוֹן לְהוֹשִׁיב עִם נְדִיבִים
וְכֹסֵא כְבוֹד יִנְחֵלֶם כִּי לֵה' מִצְּקֵי אֶרֶץ וַיִּשֶׁת עֲלֵיהֶם תִּבְּל:
ט רַגְלֵי חֲסִידָיו יִשְׁמֵר וְרַשְׁעִים בַּחֲשָׁה יִדְמוּ כִּי לֹא בָכַח
יִגְבֵּר אִישׁ:
י ה' יַחַתּוּ מְרִיבָיו עֲלָיו בְּשָׁמַיִם יִרְעֵם ה' יְדִין אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ וַיִּתֵּן
עַז לְמַלְכוֹ וְיָרֵם קֶרֶן מְשִׁיחוֹ:

נשים מוסיפות:

רבנו של עולם, כשם ששמעת לחנה בתפלתה, כן תשמע ותענה לתפילתי.



Prayer for those Without Children

Likkutei Tefillot 1:53

Merciful Father, hear our prayer and listen to our cry. Let all childless women be remembered for good, and may they become pregnant quickly and easily, and may they give birth – through Your compassion – to viable, enduring children. May Your people, the children of Israel, number as many as the sand by the sea, which cannot be measured and cannot be counted.

Just as you had compassion for our first forefather, Abraham and his wife Sarah, our mother. You remembered them for good and blessed them in their old age by giving them Isaac and you promised to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens. So too have compassion on all the

childless women of Your people, the House of Israel, who look expectantly to You alone to grant them enduring offspring to serve and fear You.

Have mercy on them for Your sake, and remember them for good. Fulfill their requests with compassion; consider them and hear their prayer. Help them become pregnant quickly and with ease, and may they be privileged to give birth to enduring offspring, who will be a source of joy to their father and mother, who should have the merit to raise them to Torah, marriage and good deeds, to a full and happy life. Amen.

“{And specifically, for me (name), daughter of (mother and father’s name).}”

תפילה לחשוכי בנים

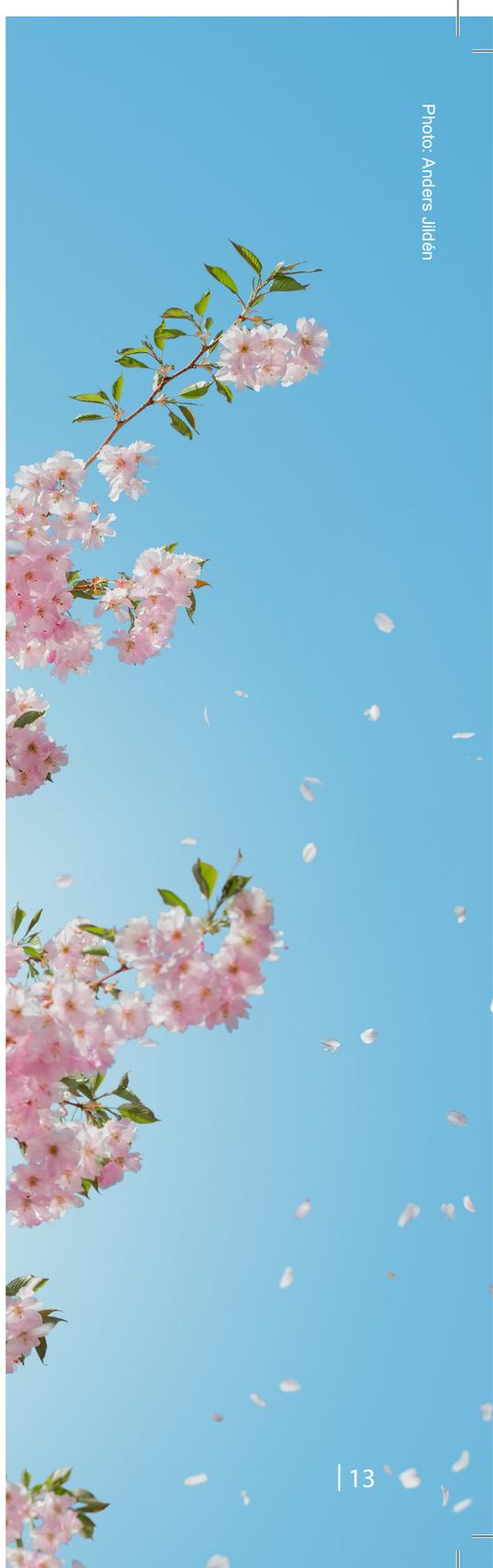
ליקוטי תפילות חלק א' סימן נ"ג

אבינו אב הרחמן שמע תפלתנו
 ותאזין שועתנו, שיהיו כל
 העקרות נפקדות לטובה חיש
 קל מהרה, ויולידו ברחמיך
 בנים חיים וקמים. ויתרבו עמך
 בני ישראל כחול הים אשר לא
 ימד ולא יספר.

וכשם שגברו רחמיך על אבינו
 הראשון, אהד ה'ה אברהם אבינו
 ואשתו שרה אמנו אשר זכרתם
 לטובה, ותפקדם לעת זקנותם
 ונתת להם את יצחק, והבטחתם
 להרבות זרעו ככוכבי השמים.
 כן יהמו נא מעיך ורחמיך על כל
 עקרות עמך בית ישראל אשר
 עיניהם תולות אליה לבד, שתתן
 להם זרע של קימא לעבודתך
 וליראתך.

רחם עליהם למענה, ופקדם
 לטובה ומלא משאלותם
 ברחמים, ותעתר להם ותשמע
 תפלתם, ותתן להם הריון
 חיש קל מהרה. ויזכו להוליד
 זרע של קימא וישמחו אביהם
 ואמם בהם ויזכו לגדלם לתורה
 ולחפה ולמעשים טובים לארה
 ימים ושנים טובות.

{ובפרט אני פלוני/ת בן/ת פלוני/ת}



Prayer by the “Shnei Luchot Habrit” (Shla)

Rabbi Yeshiya HaLevi Horowitz, 16th and 17th c.

You, Hashem, our God, were here before Creation and You have been here since Creation. From this world to the world to come You are God. You created this world in order to make your Godliness known through your holy Torah, as the Sages of blessed memory said, “In the beginning (Gen. 1:1) the world was created for the sake of Torah and for the sake of Israel, because they are your nation and your heritage, whom you chose from all the nations of the world, and You gave them your holy Torah, and brought them close to your great name. To insure the continuation of the world and the continuation of your Torah, You, God, our Lord, gave us two commandments. You wrote in your Torah, “Be Fruitful and Multiply” (Gen. 1:28) and You wrote in your Torah “Teach them to your children” (Deut. 11:19). These two commandments have a single purpose; you did not create the world to be desolate, but rather to be inhabited by people. It is for your honor that you created, fashioned and made the world, so that we and our children, and our children’s children, and your entire nation the house of Israel, should know your Name and learn your Torah. And therefore, I come to you, God, the supreme King of Kings, and cast my supplication before you. My eyes dependently look to You, until you are gracious to me and hear my plea to grant me sons and daughters, and they too should be fruitful and multiply –they and their children, and their children’s children, until the end of all generations – so that they and I, and your whole people, can be engrossed in your holy Torah, to learn and teach, guard, perform and fulfill all the words of your Torah’s teaching with love. Enlighten our eyes with your Torah and attach our hearts to your commandments, to love and fear Your Name. Our father, merciful father, grant us all a long and blessed life. Who is like you, Merciful father, who recalls his creatures mercifully for life. Remember us for eternal life just as Abraham our father prayed, “If only Yishmael could live before You” (Gen. 17:18) – and our sages of blessed memory explained “with fear of Heaven.” It is for that reason that I come before you to ask and plead that my children, and my children's children be upright forever.

תפילת השלייה (שני לוחות הברית) הקדוש

רבי ישעיה הלוי הורוויץ, המאה ה-17-16

אתה הוא ה' א-להינו עד שלא בראת העולם, ואתה הוא א-להינו משבראת העולם, ומעולם ועד עולם אתה א-ל. ובראת עולמך בגין לאשתמודע א-להותך [=כדי שתפורסם מלכותך] באמצעות תורתך הקדושה, כמו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה.

"בראשית", בשביל תורה ובשביל ישראל, כי הם עמה ונחלתה אשר בחרת בהם מכל האמות, ונתת להם תורתך הקדושה, וקרבתם לשמך הגדול. ועל קיום העולם ועל קיום התורה בא לנו ממך ה' א-להינו שני צוויים. כתבת בתורתך "פרו ורבו", וכתבת בתורתך "ולמדתם אותם את בניכם", והכונה בשתייהן אחת, כי לא לתהו בראת כי אם לשבת, ולכבודך בראת, יצרת אף עשית, כדי שנהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי כל עמה בית ישראל יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך.

ובכן אבוא אליה ה' מלך מלכי המלכים, ואפיל תחנתי, ועיני לה תלויות עד שתחנני ותשמע תפילתי להזמין לי בנים ובנות, וגם הם יפרו וירבו הם ובניהם ובני בניהם עד סוף כל הדורות לתכלית שהם ואני ואנחנו כולנו יעסקו בתורתך הקדושה ללמד וללמד לשמר ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה, והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצוותיה לאהבה וליראת את שמך. אבינו אב הרחמן, תן לכלנו חיים ארפים וברוכים, מי כמוך אב הרחמים זוכר יצוריו לחיים ברחמים, זכרנו לחיים נצחיים כמו שהתפלל אברהם אבינו "לו יחיה לפניך", ופרשו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה, "ביראתך". כי על כן באתי לבקש ולחנן מלפניך שיהא זרעי זרע זרעי עד עולם זרע כשר. ...

This tefilla is a request for good and upright children, and a prayer that Hashem will provide for their needs. The Shla said that the most auspicious time to recite it is Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan.

Contemporary Prayers & Poems

Fertility Prayer by Yesh Tikva

May it be Your will God, our Lord and the Lord of our forefathers, who answers prayers, hear my prayers and bless me [(name), daughter of (mother's name)] and all those who struggle to have children. Remember us for good, and with Your mercy may we be blessed to have sons and daughters, and grant us enduring offspring.

We lift up our eyes to You in heaven, pour forth our hearts before You as water. Strengthen us and give us courage, grant us abundant kindness, heal us and help us find peace.

As you remembered Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Hannah, and You have heard the voices of the righteous men and women when they beseeched You, so too please listen to our outcry (to help the men and women of our community). Fulfill our wishes for good, and accept with Your mercy and desire our prayers. And so may it be Your will, and let us say Amen.

The Hebrew prayer was edited by
Dr. Yael Levine

בקשה לפוריות של "יש תקוה"

יהי רצון מְלַפְנֵיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ
וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה,
שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי, וּבָרַךְ אֶת כָּל
חַשׁוּכֵי הַיָּלָדִים, וְאֲנִי (פב"פ)
בְּתוֹכָם. פְּקַדְנוּ לְטוֹבָה, וְנִלְד
בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת, וְרַעַא
חַיָּא וְקִמָּא.

עֵזוּ נוֹשָׁאִים אָנוּ לָךְ לְשָׁמַיִם,
לֵב שׁוֹפְכִים אָנוּ נִכְחֶךָ כַּמַּיִם.
חַזְקֵנוּ וְאֲמִצְנוּ, וְגַמְלֵנוּ חֲסָדִים
טוֹבִים, וְשַׁלַּח לָנוּ רַפּוּאָה
שְׁלֵמָה וְתֵן לָנוּ שְׁלוֹת נֶפֶשׁ.
וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁפָּקַדְתָּ אֶת שָׂרָה,
רַבֵּקָה, רַחֵל וְחַנָּה, וְשָׁמַעְתָּ
לְקוֹל הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַצַּדִּיקָנוֹת
בְּשׁוֹעַם אֱלֹהֵי, כֵּן תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל
תַּחֲנֻנֹתֵנוּ. מִלֵּא מִשְׁאֲלוֹת לְבָנוּ
לְטוֹבָה, וְקַבַּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצוֹן
אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ. וְכֵן יְהִי רָצוֹן,
וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

הנוסח העברי של התפילה נערך בידי ד"ר יעל לוין

נִשְׁמָה יִתְּרָה
מֵאֵת הַדָּר לְשֵׁם

Another Soul
by Hadar Leshem

אֱ-לֹהִי
נִשְׁמָה שְׁנִטַּעְתָּ בִּי
טְהוֹרָה.
אֵתָה בְּרָאֵתָה
אֵתָה יְצַרְתָּה
וְאֵתָה לָקַחְתָּ לִּי.
וְעַתָּה עֲתִיד נֹטֵל מִמֶּנִּי
וְאֵין עֲתִיד לָבוֹא.
אֵה אֵין זְמַן
שֶׁהַנִּשְׁמָה אֵינָנָה בִּי.

My God
The soul you planted in me
Is pure
You created it
You formed it
And You took it from me.
And its future has been taken from me
For there is no future to come.
And yet there is never a time
When that soul is not within me.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ
אֱ-דֹנָי
אֱ-לֹהִי
וְאֱ-לֹהֵי יְלָדַי.
עַל נִשְׁמָה יִתְּרָה
שֶׁנִּפְחַתָּ בִּי
אֵתָה בְּרָאֵתָה
אֵתָה יְצַרְתָּה
וְאֵתָה מְשַׁמְרָה בְּקִרְבִּי.

I thank You
My Lord
My God
And the God of my children
For the additional soul you breathed
into me.
You created it
You formed it
And You preserve it within me.

כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנִּשְׁמוֹת בְּקִרְבִּי
מוֹדָה אֲנִי.

For the time these souls are in me
I thank you.



Photo: Nathaniel Marmoron

בְּיָדְךָ מִפְתַּחַּךְ You Hold the Key מֵאֵת טַהַר כְּהֵן by Tohar Cohen

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: Rabbi Yochanan taught:
ג' מִפְתַּחוֹת בְּיַד שֶׁל הַקֶּב"ה There are three keys God holds that
שֶׁלֹא נִמְסְרוּ בְיַד שְׁלִיחַ וְאֱלוֹהֵי: He does not give through a messenger:
מִפְתַּח שֶׁל גְּשָׁמִים, וּמִפְתַּח שֶׁל חַיִּה, the key for rain, the key for life and
וּמִפְתַּח שֶׁל תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים. the key for resurrection.
(תְּלֻמוֹד בַּבְּלִי, תַעֲנִית ב, א) (Talmud Bavli Taanit 2a)

אֵלֹהֵי My God,
שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי נֶשְׁמָה - Who gave me a soul,
תֵּן בִּי נֶשְׁמָה. Place a soul within me.
נָתַתָּ לִי רֶחֶם You gave me a womb
וְנָתַתָּ לִי גְעֻגוּעַ, And You gave me yearning
בְּיָדְךָ מִפְתַּח חַיָּה - You hold the key to life-
תֵּן בִּי חַיִּים. Place life within me.
פּוֹרְשֵׁת כַּפַּי אֵלֶיךָ I lift my arms to you in prayer,
מִתְפַּלֶּלֶת אֶת כְּמִיּוֹתַי הַכְּמוּסוֹת - Yearning from my deepest recesses -
הוֹרֵד עָלֵינוּ גְּשָׁם Shower us with rain
שִׂצְמִיחַ that will fertilize
אֶת הָאֲדָמָה שְׁבִי. the soil within me.

No Choice By Ellen Krischer

I drag my footsteps from place to place.
I carry a weight no one can see. I stumble down paths
of twisted fog. I cry in the corners of my days.
Because I have no choice.

I cloak myself in everyday chores. I seem to know
the faces I meet. I greet my anger over breakfast.
I juggle my secrets - guilt and blame.
Because I have no choice.

I try to close the bottomless empty.
And fill myself with life's other blessings.
Because there is no other choice.

מִמַּחֲרַת הַטְּבִילָה **The Day After Immersion** מֵאֵת חַנָּה לֵוִי **by Chana Levy**

אָנָּא ה', בְּרַךְ I Beseech you God - Please bless
אֶת הַחַיִּים הַחֲדָשִׁים שֶׁ the new life that is
(אוּלַי) (perhaps)
בְּקִרְבִּי. within me.

אֶת הַנִּקְדָּה הַזְעִירָה שֶׁעִין אָדָם That tiny speck that a human eye
לֹא תִרְאֶנָּה cannot see
אֶת דְּבַקַּת הַתַּאִים הַחֲפְשִׁית The bundle of free cells
הַמְשׁוֹטְטִים, הַשְּׂטָה Wandering, floating
נְחֵה אוֹתָהּ לְעֹגֵן בְּבִטָּחָה Guide it to anchor safely
לְדַבֵּק To adhere
לְפָרוֹת To implant

הָאֵר פְּנֵיךְ אֵל הַחַיִּים הָאֵלֶּה, God, lift up Your face to me,
א-לִי to this life,
שִׂיִּחֲוִלְלוּ To form
שִׂיִּתְגַּשְׁמוּ To develop
שִׂיִּתְרַקְמוּ To come to fruition
שִׂיִּהְיוּ And to be
זֶרַע שֶׁל קַיָּמָא. A sustainable being -
a Zera shel Kayama

מתוך: שער הרחמים, תפלות למסע הפוריות, From Unlocking the Gates, Prayers for the
נילי ארבל, תשע"ט Journey to Fertility, edited by Nili Arbel, 2019



אַל תִּנְסִי **Don't Pretend**
מֵאֵת עֲדָנָה וַיֵּג by Edna Veig

אַל תִּנְסִי Don't attempt
לְשֹׁמֵר פָּאסוֹן To pretend
לְאֶרֶךְ כָּל הַיּוֹם. All day long.

לֹא יִקְרָה No disaster
שׁוֹם אֶסוֹן Or tragedy
וְשׁוֹם דְּבָר אֵינִם Will occur

אִם תִּרְשִׁי לְעֲצֹמָה לְהִרְגִישׁ If you let yourself feel
כָּל רִגְשׁ שֶׁיִּגִּיעַ Any emotions that arise
גַּם אִם הוּא אוֹתָהּ מִפְתִּיעַ. Even those that surprise you.

זֶה מְאֹד מְתִישׁ It's so exhausting
לֹא לְשַׁתֵּף וּלְהִבְיֵעַ. Not to share nor express
לְשֹׁמֵר הַכֹּל בְּתוֹכָהּ But rather to suppress

וּלְשַׁדֵּר "עֶסְקִים כָּרְגִיל", And broadcast "all is well"
כְּשֶׁכָּלֵל לֹא בְרוּר לָהּ אֵיךְ When it is obvious to you
וּמֵאִיפֹה אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְחִיל. That you have no idea how
Or where to begin (again)...

Mi SheAna - The One Who Answers

By Leah Herzog

The One Who addressed Avraham's doubts	Please answer us.
The One Who promised Sarah a son	Please answer us.
The One Who answered Yitzchak's prayer that he prayed while facing his wife	Please answer us.
The One Who promised Rivka living twins	Please answer us.
The One who heard Leah's pain and opened her womb	Please answer us.
The One Who gathered in Rachel's despair and gave her a son	Please answer us.
The One Who gave Yocheved courage	Please answer us.
The One who turned Chana's cries into praise	Please answer us.
The One Who holds the keys to all Creation	Please answer us.

מי שְׁעָנָה

מֵאֵת לֵאָה הַרְצוּג

הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁעָנָה לְאַבְרָהָם עַל סִפְקוֹתָיו
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁהִבְטִיחַ לְשָׂרָה "כִּעֵת חִיָּה"
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁעָנָה לְעֵתִירַת יִצְחָק לְנוֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁפָרַשׁ לְרִבְקָה שֵׁשׁ "שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם" בְּבִטְנָהּ
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁרָאָה שְׁשֻׁנוּאָה לֵאָה "וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ"
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁאַסַּף אֶת חֲרַפַּת רָחֵל וְהוֹסִיף לָהּ בֵּן
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁאַמְצָ אֶת לֵב יוֹכָבֵד אוֹדוֹת בְּנָהּ
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁהִפִּיד אֶת יְגוֹן חַנָּה לְשִׁירָהּ
הוא יִעֲנֵנוּ	מי שְׁאוּחַז אֶת מִפְתַּחוֹת הַבְּרִיאָה

I Husband's Compendium

Mikvah night marks a transition for a couple and can bring up a host of emotions. For some, it elicits positive excitement, desire, and the anticipation of being together after a break. For others, it is fraught with tension, frustration and even apprehension. The expectation for physical intimacy that often accompanies mikvah night can also evoke many complex and complicated physical and emotional aspects.

For couples experiencing infertility or loss, “mikvah night” can be particularly difficult, filled with painful reminders, nervousness and conflicting expectations. Intimacy may bring up feelings of inadequacy; it may be a reminder of the inability to get pregnant and come with a significant amount of pressure. After loss, intimacy may elicit feelings of guilt or betrayal: “How can I enjoy myself after losing a baby”? Rather than being pleasurable, sex may feel like a chore and affect your level of arousal. Your wife may have reduced sexual desire because of the hormones she is taking. She may experience sensory overload as a result of the endless litany of physical examinations, ultrasounds, blood tests and hormone stimulation throughout her cycle. Additionally, ovarian stimulation may make intimacy more painful. All of these can take a significant toll and make mikvah night more challenging for both of you.

Photo: Jude Beck



Your feelings, expectations and role in this evening are no less important than your wife's. It is crucial to acknowledge the emotions and challenges that might come up, which are often not articulated or discussed. We have prepared this list to help you understand and prepare for the complexities that can arise:

1. Talk to your wife ahead of time! Ask her how she is feeling, what she wants from you and what she expects when she comes home from the mikvah.
2. Share with her what you are feeling and what you would like. Try not to be alarmed, scared or hurt by her reaction. Think and plan together about what will be the most comfortable for both of you.
3. You and your wife may experience fertility challenges differently. Recognizing that you are each feeling pain/loss can be important. Mikvah night can present the opportunity to express your individual needs. It can be a time to focus on your sense of partnership in this process, share complex feelings, or have a "night off" to simply reunite as a couple.
4. Try to find ways to show appreciation and love for your wife. Mikvah preparation demands a lot. So do fertility treatments. Use mikvah night as a time to acknowledge your wife's part in these processes by buying gifts, cooking dinner, writing a note, cleaning the house, planning a special date night, etc.
5. Consider non-sexual ways to engage in physical touch with your wife that foster connection, support, and intimacy: snuggling on the couch to watch a movie, dancing together, long full-body hugs or a full body massage. Adding oils, candles or music can further enhance the experience.
6. It is important to remember that your relationship came before, and will, please God, remain after the fertility struggles! Make sure you set aside time for fun, and for talking about things that aren't related to your fertility journey.
7. The time of immersion is an auspicious time for prayer. While your wife is at the mikvah, you can daven for her and your shared fertility process.

A husband's prayer for his wife and family

Master of the Universe, in Your benevolence You created Your world and gave me my dear wife. I beseech You to protect her and us (and our children), from any mishap or sorrow and ensure that love will always prevail between us, and even if, God forbid, there is a misunderstanding between us, help us resolve it quickly and easily. Please help my wife to feel happy and satisfied, help her to be loving, and protect her from harm, sorrow, and sadness. Help me know how to satisfy her spiritual and material needs, and may our home always be filled with abundance. May we merit to be able to influence and provide joy to others with that which You have given us. May we merit to always believe in You and Your constant providence in every moment and in every aspect of our lives. May we merit to accept everything with joy and the knowledge and understanding that everything You direct to us is for our eternal good. We are thankful for the opportunity to pray and supplicate to You. May our prayers be accepted. Amen.

תפלת הבעל על אשתו ומשפחתו

רבוננו של עולם בחסדך הגדול יצרת
עולמך ונתת לי את אשתי היקרה,
יהי רצון שתשמר עליה ועלינו ועל
ילדינו, שלא יארע דבר תקלה ושום
צער לאשתי ולי ושתמיד תשרה
האהבה ביננו וגם אם חס ושלום
תהיה אי הבנה ביננו, עזור שנזכה
להתפייס במהרה ובקלות, עזור
לאשתי להיות שמחה ומאשרת
ואוהבת, שלא יהיה לה שום פגע
או צער או עצבות חס ושלום,
עזור לי לדעת לספק את צרכיה
הרוחניים והגשמיים ותמיד יהיה
שפע בביתנו ונזכה להשפיע ממה
שאתה נותן לנו לאחרים ולשמחם,
וזכנו להאמין בך תמיד ובהשגחתך
עלינו בכל רגע ובכל מצב ונזכה
לקבל כל דבר בשמחה ולדעת
ילהבין שהכל אתה מכוון לטובתנו
הנצחית ותודה רבה שאתה מזכה
אותנו להתפלל אליך ולבקש ממה
ויהי רצון שיתקבלו תפלותינו אמן
סלה ועד.

Mindfulness In Immersion

by Dr. Naomi Marmon Grumet, Director of The Eden Center

When we are suffering from infertility or have experienced pregnancy or infant loss, we can feel emotionally, physically and spiritually wounded. The mikvah is a place where those three parts of our lives intersect most poignantly; the range of emotions is vast and fluctuates. Mikvah night can be especially raw and difficult, a time we may feel anger toward our bodies, God, or our spouses. Likewise, we can feel distant from the womb that has disappointed us, distant from God, distant from ourselves and our partner. At the same time, the mikvah can be a positive space to mourn and put closure on our loss, helping to acknowledge, accept, and endure.

It can be a place of unifying the elements of body, soul and emotion, and it can provide a healing time to concentrate on ourselves and our prayers.

It can be helpful to use each immersion in the mikvah waters as a way to focus thoughts and prayers. A mindful immersion is easily divided into past, present and future and can be worked into varying number of immersions (i.e. each of three immersions or (2-2-2-1) when immersing seven times):

The following pages offer a framework to help your immersion gain a mindful focus. Feel free to insert your own thoughts, and/or use the *tehillim* provided to frame each immersion.

First Focus – Acknowledgement/mourning – Immerse with a focus on the difficult process you went through or are currently going through. Praying does not need to include a request; simply acknowledging the pain and the sorrow, mourning the lost opportunity or the loss of this child is completely acceptable. Allow yourself to feel the pain.

Psalms 102

Translation by The Eden Center based on the 1917 JPS Bible translation

- 1 A Prayer of the afflicted, when he faints, and pours out his complaint before the LORD.
- 2 O LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry come to You.
- 3 Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my distress; Turn Your ear to me; in the day when I call – answer me speedily.
- 4 For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as a hearth.
- 5 My heart is smitten like grass, and withered; for I forget to eat my bread.
- 6 As a result of my loud groans, my bones cleave to my flesh.
- 7 I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I have become like an owl of the ruins.
- 8 I watch, and have become like a sparrow that is alone upon the housetop.
- 9 My enemies taunt me all day; those who rail against me use my name as a curse.
- 10 For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,
- 11 Because of Your indignation and Your anger; because You have taken me up, and cast me away.
- 12 My days are like a lengthening shadow; and I am withered like grass.
- 13 But You, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; and Your name remains for all generations.

תהילים קב

- א תִּפְלֶה לְעַנִּי כִּי יַעֲטֹף וְלִפְנֵי
ה' יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחוֹ:
ב ה' שָׁמְעָה תִּפְלָתִי וְשׁוֹעֲתִי
אֱלֹהֵי תְבוֹא:
ג אֵל תִּסְתַּר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי בַיּוֹם
צָר לִי הִטָּה אֵלַי אֲזַנְךָ בַיּוֹם
אֶקְרָא מִהֵרָ עֲנֵנִי:
ד כִּי כָלוּ בְעֵשׂוֹן יָמַי וְעֲצֻמוֹתַי
כְּמוֹ קֹד נִחְרוּ:
ה הוֹכֵחַ כְּעֶשֶׂב וַיִּבֶשׁ לִבִּי כִּי
שָׁכַחְתִּי מֵאֲכַל לֶחֶמֶי:
ו מְקוֹל אֲנַחְתִּי דָבְקָה עֲצָמַי
לְבָשָׁרִי:
ז דְּמִיתִי לְקֶאֱת מְדַבֵּר הָיִיתִי
כְּכוֹס חֲרָבוֹת:
ח שָׁקַדְתִּי וְאַהֲיָה כְּצַפּוֹר
בוֹדֵד עַל גֵּג:
ט כָּל הַיּוֹם חָרַפּוּנִי אוֹיְבֵי
מְהוֹלְלֵי בֵּי נִשְׁבָּעוּ:
י כִּי אֶפֶר כְּלָחֶם אֶכְלֹתִי
וְשָׁקוּי בִּבְכֵי מִסְכָּתִי:
יא מִפְּנֵי זַעֲמָה וְקֶצֶפָה כִּי
נִשְׁאַתַּנִּי וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי:
יב יָמַי כְּצֹל נְטוּי וְאַנִּי כְּעֶשֶׂב
אִיבֵשׁ:
יג וְאַתָּה ה' לְעוֹלָם תֵּשֵׁב
וְזָכְרָה לְדֹר וָדֹר:



Second Focus – Acceptance – Immerse for where you are right now. Accept your body, your loss, your emotional state (whatever the feelings: anger, sorrow, hope, emptiness or any other). Before you move on to hoping and contemplating next steps, accept the place you are now and hug yourself – literally and figuratively – as you immerse in the embrace of the mikvah waters. Try to feel present and allow yourself to speak your feelings to Hashem.

Psalms 103

- 1 By David. Bless the LORD, my soul; with all my being I bless His holy name.
- 2 Bless the LORD, my soul, and forget none of His benefits.
- 3 He forgives all your sins. He heals all your ills.
- 4 He redeems your life from the pit. He crowns you with love and compassion.
- 5 He satisfies your soul with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6 The LORD is righteous in all He does; He brings justice to all the oppressed.

תהילים קג

א לְדוֹד בָּרַכְי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־ה' וְכָל־קִרְבֵי אֶת־שֵׁם קִדְשׁוֹ:
 ב בָּרַכְי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־ה' וְאֶל־תִּשְׁכַּחִי כָּל־גְּמוּלוֹ:
 ג הַסֶּלַח לְכָל־עֲוֹנוֹכִי הַרְפֵּא לְכָל־תַּחֲלָאִיכִי:
 ד הַגּוֹאֵל מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּיכִי הַמַּעֲטָרְכִי חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים:
 ה הַמְשַׁבֵּיעַ בְּטוֹב עֲדִיךָ תַתְּחַדֵּשׁ כַּנֶּשֶׁר נְעוּרֵיכִי:
 ו עֲשֵׂה צְדָקוֹת ה' וּמְשַׁפְּטִים לְכָל־עֲשׂוּקִים:



Third Focus – Your hopes for the future – Open yourself up to the potential that the future holds, and allow yourself to look ahead and embrace the next stage. This can be a time to daven for yourself, your spouse, and the future of your family. This moment may be a time to embrace the uncertainty of your situation and consider letting in the "freedom" that may come with surrendering. It is an opportunity to reach out to God with requests for your full healing, for a healthy baby, or for the strength to accept whatever the future will bring.

Psalms 126

- 5 May those who sowed in tears, reap in joy.
6 May one who goes out weeping, carrying a bag of seed, come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.

תהילים קכו

ה הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בְּרִנָּה
יִקְצְרוּ:
ו הַלֹּוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבֹכֶה נֹשֵׂא
מִשְׂרָה־הָרָע בְּאֵיבֹוּא
בְּרִנָּה נֹשֵׂא אֶלְמֹתָיו:



Personal Reflections

The following are some ideas and personal stories to provide you with strength and empathy.

“Faith demands patience in the face of a future we cannot see and the determination to make good things happen. If we could know the future with certainty, we would not need faith. But because we cannot know, we have to trust in powers greater than ours to guide us. Our faith is not the passive faith of Hagar’s tears but the active joy of Abraham’s laugh. We admire his propulsion forward, his drive to create a dream-worthy vision even if all the particulars comprising that future were beyond his immediate understanding. Faith demands that we engage in a delicate dance of both relinquishing control to an authority above us and acting within our full human capacity to realize our dreams.”

Reprinted with permission, **Return: Daily Inspiration for the Days of Awe**, Erica Brown, Maggid Press, p. 21

Prayer in Judaism originated with Hannah, an infertile woman whose fervent entreaties for a child were mistaken for public drunkenness.

The most revered women in Judaism – our Matriarchs – were barren, as the pain of infertility is chronicled in the Torah over three succeeding generations through the lives of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. Their offspring were the result of miracles, of God’s direct intervention. Immersing in the mikvah each month provided me with an opportunity to pray for a miracle to occur in my own life, and a concrete way to grieve for each cycle that did not result in a pregnancy. Judaism acknowledged the loss I felt each month of the unrealized potential of my future children, and allowed me to feel that each new cycle was a fresh start.

By Debbie Derby, 2017, Education Chair and Board Member, Jewish Fertility Foundation, Atlanta

Photo: Scott Ruzzene

"שִׁפְכִי כַמַּיִם לַכַּף נִכַח פְּנֵי ה'..."

איכה ב', ט"ט

Pour out your heart like water; for you are in the presence of Hashem

Lamentations 2:19

By Cheryl Burnat

The mikvah. The waters. The place we are supposed to pour out our hearts and ask for renewal.

While I struggled with infertility and subsequent neonatal loss, the mikvah experience was a scary, emotional, overwhelming, and often confusing one. It was a place that at my most broken moments I often felt unsure of what to say or think or feel or do in those waters. The waters that are supposed to represent rebirth – and yet they were not the birth I had been hoping for. The waters that I knew to be symbolic of the womb – yet served as a reminder of the stark emptiness of my womb. How

was I to invoke the *tefillot* of a “shaat harachamim (time of mercy)”? And yet I so yearned for the renewal of those waters.

Recently, someone told me that sometimes the most important things to daven for are the things we “want to want,” because in our moments of crisis it’s often the best we can hope for and the most we can ask from ourselves. I think in a certain way this is ultimately how I related to the mikvah and found it to be a healing experience during my journey. In the times that I didn’t know how or what to say or daven for – or even if I wanted to immerse at all – I prayed for a day that I would want to be there again. And it was thinking about the waters that helped me do this.

I would close my eyes and let the tears stream down as

I hoped that somehow my tears would be translated into prayers as they fell into the mikvah. These were tears that I never knew before and could have never imagined I would know how to cry. As I watched my tears converge with the waters of the mikvah, I was overcome with the magnitude of what this small pool of water represented. It held not only my tears but the tears and hopes and prayers of all of the women who came into the mikvah before me and will come after. For me, this is what made the waters I immersed in so powerful and ultimately healing. Suddenly, it was the waters themselves that allowed me to feel less alone and find the strength to move on.

שִׁפְכֵי כַמִּים לַבַּרְ – sometimes we are able to pour out our hearts like water... and sometimes I need the waters to speak for me...

**Added
Writings**



Waiting for a New Whisper

By Elie Haller Salomon

When I began my fertility journey, I looked at the mikvah matter of factly, as part of my routine: Get your period, call the doctor on day three of the cycle, and begin shots. Wake up early, head to the doctor's office to monitor your bloodwork and ultrasound, wait for the phone call from your nurse, tweak your dosage, and somewhere in that mix is gearing up for the mikvah and going. Not far behind the mikvah experience was usually, for me, IntraUterine Insemination (IUI) or later, an InVitro Fertilization (IVF) retrieval or transfer.

The Gemara talks about the mikvah waters signifying rebirth from the state of tumah. The impurity of women's niddah is actually referred to as "a whisper of death." When I sat in the mikvah prep room I realized that every month that I had to go to the mikvah it was because my body didn't give

life, and it was a whisper, a small shot that it could have happened, but it didn't. My body had failed me in the past. Would this month be different? I sought my own moment, when I whispered to Hashem, 'I guess You have a plan for me, and I trust in You, but please help me now.' Finally, I got the call – you are pregnant!

Two days later — It was a miscarriage, and I had to take a powerful shot that would force me to wait another three months before trying to conceive again. My trip to the mikvah that next month was different from those of the previous months. I was not allowed to try to get pregnant for two months. There was no pressure this month to try to conceive a baby. I therefore had no special request picked out for my time alone in the waters. I didn't know what to pray for. Sitting in the prep room this time, I again thought about the “whisper of death” that

had rendered me impure. A “whisper” because I knew I had a loss, but not one that was tangible and easily comforted, and not one that would affect my future children's halachic status. It really would be a rebirth for me, one of wiping the slate clean and beginning again. I didn't know how to deal with this private moment or what to pray for. I was confused.

So I stepped out of my comfort zone, and being completely vulnerable in my robe, I confessed my pain to the complete stranger, the woman who would render me “kosher.” With tears streaming down my face, she gave me a bracha that she may tell all the women who are under her care. However, at this point in my journey, I needed someone else's words to request what I couldn't this month. And from that woman, on that day, it was just what I needed to wash away all my sorrow and begin again.

Step by Step - Reflections on *Emunah* (Faith) and Mikvah during Infertility Treatment

By Leah Herzog

I always wanted children, even before I learned that having children is a mitzvah, that being a mother is among the highest of honors a Jewish woman can achieve. When I met my husband, one of the first things we discussed was how many children we would like; the minimum, we agreed, was six.

I expected to get pregnant quickly: my cycles were regular and the timing seemed to match up. I davened every day, kept all the mitzvot strictly, especially *taharat hamishpacha*, and had complete *emunah* that Hashem would reward my fervor and commitment with the ultimate gift. Children.

God had other plans. Or, at the very least, our combined reproductive biology engineered a different trajectory.

After more than a year of monthly disappointment, I sought medical attention. These were the early days of reproductive medicine: diagnostic procedures were very painful, the drugs left me convulsing with anxiety attacks, and the doctors were interested in statistics rather than people. The tension between faith and science – or Divine Providence and DNA – increased in direct proportion to our fertility treatments.



It took us nine years to have our son, and another four for our daughter. Along the way we endured numerous losses including a stillbirth, loss of twin fetuses, early and late term miscarriages. After the first loss, we broke some rules of taharat hamishpacha; my husband's hugs were the only thing that kept me steady enough to continue. Each time I took his hand, each time I reached for his embrace, I felt guilt and fear: would God punish me for this? Was our infertility because I lacked devotion and strict adherence to halacha? Would God forgive me for my weaknesses, my need for human touch and comfort, for the anger and grief that drove me to break some of the rules? Simultaneously, I felt anger; if God was not following the "rules", then neither would I.

I never stopped going to the mikvah. Even when I had to go on a frigid Friday night, even when I had to go during the day so that I was *tehora* for the artificial insemination that would possibly give us a child. I went to the *mikvah* after all the failures and losses, and finally, after each of my two children were born. Each time I stepped down into the *mayim hayim* (living waters), I thought about my losses, my gifts and my relationship with God. Each time I took the final step into the water, crossed my arms, and closed my eyes, I thought about the *bracha* (blessing) I was saying and hoped that I truly meant each word. As I immersed myself in the *mikvah*, making sure all of me was under the water, my limbs fully

surrounded by the hallowed water, I heard my *neshama* (soul) cry out to Hashem and felt it wrestling with all of my doubts, anger and grief.

When my son was 2, I miscarried twins. When I went back to work, I stood at the door of the science lab and gazed at all the equipment—the nozzles, the shiny counters, the cabinets, the paraphernalia of sciences. I knew science. I understood genetics and endocrinology. A colleague and friend, who is a brilliant scientist, an incredible *talmid hacham* and a superior mensch found me there, tears streaming down my face. “Is the answer in there?” I choked out. “Because I don’t think it’s in there,” I said pointing to the Beit Midrash down the hall. He went to his office next to the lab, and quietly handed me a *sefer* (book). It was Sefer Iyov with the commentary of the Malbim. “Read the introduction,” he advised.

My time was taken up by teaching, our toddler son, more infertility treatments, and finally, by our daughter. But each visit to the mikvah marked another step in the journey of reconciling faith and science, and accepting conflicting emotions—doubt and fear, grief and gratitude, awe and joy. The Malbim explains that Iyov is about our struggle to understand what is, ultimately, a cosmic mystery: we were not there when Hashem created the universe. Because we inhabit physical bodies, we will never take that final step to total clarity. That is the essential tension of being, body and soul, corporeal and infinite.

I think of all of this as I take the final step into the mikvah—breaking the surface tension, and entering the enveloping embrace, of the mikvah’s waters.

“My Portion in the Land of the Living”

By Dassi Jacobson

In the Talmud, the womb is referred to using the Hebrew word *kever*, which also means grave. This wordplay seems odd; the womb is meant to nurture life. Fittingly, another word for womb is *makor*, which also means source. The womb can be both a grave and a source of life. Philosophically, and even experientially, using the mikvah can be a contradictory experience. We are taught that immersing in the mikvah and emerging represents potential; the waters surround us and we are reborn into a cycle full of possibility. The mikvah also marks the end of the previous cycle, whose potential was unrealized. How can we reconcile this contradiction? Contemplating this leads me to the following reflection.

On a hot and sunny Friday, I sat on a flagstone pathway under a big pine tree in Eretz HaChayim cemetery in Beit Shemesh, to mark the 19th

yahrzeit of my daughter Eliana, of blessed memory. Every 19 years the Gregorian and Hebrew calendars coincide, so this year, it is 11 Sivan and June 14, as it was the year she died.

June 14 is also the Gregorian birthdate of my son, who last year celebrated his bar mitzvah on 11 Sivan. This is not the only time Eliana's *yahrzeit* has intersected with our family's joyous life cycle events. It seems that God has ordained that we celebrate life-affirming milestones on the very day that we mark Eliana's passing. In some ways, it is a strange juxtaposition. Mostly, it feels just right. We light a candle for Eliana's soul, and it feels to me like she is right there with us in the family circle, eating a festive meal, smiling for photos, dancing, and kvelling.

That day in the cemetery, I was reciting Tehillim (Psalms). Over the previous few weeks I had been praying for the gravely ill child of a dear friend, reciting Psalms 141-150 as part of a group that finishes Psalms daily. As I was reading chapter 142, verse 6 jumped out at me: "וְעָקַתִּי אֵלַיָּהּ יְהוָה אֲמַרְתִּי" "אֶתָּה מְחַסֵּי חַלְקִי בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים" I have cried out to you, O Lord, I have said You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living (Eretz HaChayim)." There I was in Eretz HaChayim, the cemetery, reading about God as a safe space, a portion in Eretz HaChayim, the land of the living. Chapter 142 in Psalms is headlined, "a prayer by David when he was in the cave." It describes the journey of a person who has struggled beyond measure. David cries out his troubles to God. He declares his faith, "God, when my spirit is fainting within me, You know my path, You know where I have been ensnared in traps." He struggles with deep loneliness and desperation. Finally he cries out to God, his safe haven, "my portion in the land of the living." He supplicates God to hear him from the depths and deliver his soul from prison.

In the ten psalms I read, the first four describe grappling with serious challenges, internal demons, and even mortal physical danger. They beseech God for personal redemption, and express hope that it can be within reach. The last 6 psalms are pure thanks and praise of God. Their juxtaposition reminds me of the ways these dates coincide in our family. There is great pain - the pain of losing a beloved child never fully goes away. But, it does not only cast a shadow. I can make space for the emptiness and devastation, and at the same time make space for joy- to celebrate life's triumphs and milestones, and the blessing of a budding teenager, one year after his bar mitzvah. The pain and the joy can coexist, and even intermingle. To me, this is **חֵלְקִי בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים**, my portion in the land of the living. In the land of the living, we face challenge and pain and embrace blessing and joy. Being able to hold both at the same time is not a contradiction. It is the richest way to live. God can both wipe our tears and inspire us to laugh.

Tehillim That Can Accompany Your Journey

In Sefer Tehillim David HaMelech shares a myriad of emotions ranging from anger to joy, abandonment to connection and despair to hope. The following is a list of suggested tehillim you may find helpful:

Despair:

Psalms 13, 39, 69, 102, 142

Beseeching God:

Psalms 4, 23, 57, 86, 123, 143

Hope:

Psalms 91, 120, 121, 126,
130, 147

Sponsoring Organizations



Nishmat's Yoatzot Halacha Fertility Counselors, in conjunction with Gefen Fertility provide free personal consultations to women and couples who seek halachic guidance, from diagnosis through treatment. Having completed an advanced course in the halachic, medical and psychological aspects of fertility, Fertility Counselors offer counseling about diagnostic and fertility procedures (IUI, IVF, PGS, PGD), ovulation before immersion, sexual issues, fertility preservation, pregnancy loss, termination and third-party reproduction possibilities.

"When we were going through fertility treatments, the medical appointments were very stressful but the halachic issues that arose made it more complicated. For example, how to get a sperm sample, whether I was niddah from all the procedures and when to go to the mikveh. My husband and I sat with the Yoetzet Halacha Fertility Counselor, and she helped us understand the halachic ramifications and gave us support and understanding for what we were dealing with in our community and our family. We're grateful for her unwavering support."

 www.yoatzot.org/melavot-poriut/mp/

 fertility@nishmat.net

 +972-2-6404330



Gefen Mind-Body Fertility Organization provides emotional and mind/body support to fertility-challenged women in Israel and is a home for healing where fertility is encouraged and women are empowered.

 www.kerengefen.org

 info@kerengefen.org



Emunah of America drives social change by leading, mobilizing, and engaging volunteers to raise the necessary funds to change and impact lives. Emunah of America's activities focuses on supporting education, social welfare programs aiming to strengthen the Jewish family, supporting women and children at-risk, advancing women's status, and Holocaust and anti-bias education in Israel and the United States. Emunah of America's primary beneficiaries are Emunah Israel and other non-profits that partner with Emunah of America to further our reach and impact.

 www.emunah.org

 info@emunah.org

 212-564-9045



Please reach out to any of the organizations listed here for support. In addition, if you have family or friends who could benefit from receiving a copy of Birkat Emunah, or would like to order copies for your local mikvah or shul, please contact us at info@theedencenter.com.



JScreen educates and provides access to genetic testing through an easily accessible online form, at-home test, with telehealth genetic counseling included. JScreen offers reproductive carrier screening for diseases that could impact a couple's future children, such as Tay-Sachs and cystic fibrosis, as well as testing for hereditary cancer risk for the BRCA genes and 60 other cancer susceptibility genes. Through genetic testing, JScreen helps people plan for their health and the health of their future families.

 jscreen.org
 info@jscreen.org
 [getjscreened](https://www.instagram.com/getjscreened)



Yesh Tikva provides free professional psycho-social services, resources and tools to those struggling with infertility and raises awareness and sensitivity on the subject throughout the Jewish community.

 YeshTikva.org
 support@yeshtikva.org
 [yeshtikva.org](https://www.facebook.com/yeshtikva.org)
 [yesh_tikva](https://www.instagram.com/yesh_tikva)

I WAS
SUPPOSED
TO HAVE A
BABY   

I Was Supposed To Have A Baby

utilizes social media to support Jewish individuals and families struggling to have a baby.

 iwassupposedtohaveababy.org
 info@iwassupposedtohaveababy.org
 [iwassupposedtohaveababy](https://www.instagram.com/iwassupposedtohaveababy)



Emunah, The National Religious Women's Organization was founded 1935, with the purpose of operating within the community. Its activities focus on education, welfare, volunteer work and acts of charity, strengthening the Jewish family and promoting the status of women in Israel.

- [emunah.org.il](https://www.emunah.org.il)
- emunah@emunah.co.il



NechamaComfort supports families of all Jewish backgrounds through the trauma of miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant/toddler loss through individual and family counseling, support groups, and training for medical personnel, clergy, workplaces and communities.

- www.nechamacomfort.org
- info@nechamacomfort.org
- [nechamacomfort](https://www.instagram.com/nechamacomfort)
- 833-NECHAMA (632-4262)



SVIVAH Inspiring, Supporting, Connecting, & Celebrating Jewish Womanhood. Creating a more nourishing communal faith experience for a powerful collective of Jewish women.

- www.svivah.org
- info@svivah.org
- [wearesvivah](https://www.instagram.com/wearesvivah)
- [wearesvivah](https://www.facebook.com/wearesvivah)



Tahareinu provides medical solutions for taharat hamishpacha and women's reproductive health through hotlines, educational seminars and individual case management.

- tahareinu.com
- Office@tahareinu.com
- +1 888-565-3628

Partnering Organizations

Machon Puah

is devoted to helping the greater Jewish community fulfill their dreams of building a healthy family.

🏠 www.puahfertility.org
✉ hotline@puahfertility.org
☎ 718.336.0603

Fruitful

is a Phoenix-based support group for those navigating the challenges of infertility.

🏠 www.fruitfulaz.org
✉ chani@fruitfulaz.org
☎ 602-301-1124

Priya Kansas City

provides emotional, financial and educational support to Jewish families in Kansas City facing infertility and family building challenges.

🏠 priyakc.org
✉ Priya@jfskc.org
☎ 913-327-8250

Priya Fund, Dallas

provides grants to help with medical or adoption costs and emotional support for Dallas Jewish couples.

🏠 www.jfsdallas.org/priya
✉ cpeiser@jfsdallas.org
☎ (972) 437-9950 x336

Jewish Fertility Foundation

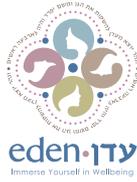
provides financial assistance, emotional support, and education to individuals experiencing medical infertility. Branches in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Birmingham, and Tampa.

🏠 www.jewishfertilityfoundation.org
✉ info@jewishfertilityfoundation.org
📷 [jewishfertilityfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/jewishfertilityfoundation)
☎ +1 678-744-7018

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Photo: Bari Nirenberg





The Eden Center works to improve the experience of mikvah and promote the spiritual, emotional, intimate and physical health of Jewish women and families. We address the needs and challenges of couples today through educational programming, the creation of resource materials, and by providing training for mikvah attendants, kallah and chatan teachers.

The Eden Center invites your participation:

- Training Courses for Mikvah attendants and Kallah teachers
- Online Classes and Workshops including Taharat Hamishpacha Refreshers, Labor & Delivery Through the Halachic Lens, Menopause, Intimacy and Marital Communication
- Blogs
- Parsha podcasts
- Printed resources for Mikvah and weddings
- Hope & Healing Guide to Mikveh and Breast Cancer

Please contact us to order more copies of Birkat Emunah.

We invite you to connect and support our work:

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