



PREPARATION FOR THE MIKVEH

Jewish wives and daughters; it is you who can guarantee that the home will be a Jewish home, a warm home—a home full of light!

—The Rebbe, *Likutei Sichos* vol. 2, p. 580



Most books on the subject of immersion are directed exclusively to the wife, discussing how she prepares for immersion in the mikveh. Of course there are many details involved in order to prepare for the mikveh properly, and they are discussed in this chapter.

It is specifically for this reason that a word should be dedicated to the husband. Because she has so many responsibilities, it is only natural that he has an obligation to help her fulfill them. This can be summed up in one word—consideration—on a night when his wife needs and deserves it.

There are a number of reasons for the husband to make an extra effort to help his wife....

Separation from the family

If her preparation is performed at home and there are children, the husband's intervention can prevent much of his wife's tension. She requires a quiet time to prepare herself in a composed manner. Young children crying or demanding attention are an unnecessary distraction. The husband should therefore assist by caring for the children more than usual. This may require taking them out of the house or supervising their homework. Since it is preferable to keep the immersion a secret, he should exercise discretion if they ask where their mother is going.

If the preparations are done at the mikveh, then the husband should ensure there is proper transportation. If he drives her, an excuse to keep their destination hidden from children and family may be in order, as well as suitable arrangements to keep the children supervised and occupied.

There are two goals accomplished by his consideration on this evening. The first is practical. Simply put, the wife requires calm, undisturbed time to prepare herself properly in a tranquil manner. Second, the message to send to the wife is that her immersion is important to him. Remember, she has been waiting for this evening just as long as he has and she has her emotions, as well as many halachic responsibilities, prior to immersion.

Although it is an individual matter, some women prefer that their husbands escort them to and from the mikveh. As mentioned, the wife requires tranquility while preparing for the mikveh. Therefore, if his presence is calming for her, he should escort his wife.

Secrecy

Besides the husband's efforts in keeping this night confidential from their own children, he should be sensitive, alert and resourceful regarding others. If his friends are on hand, just at the time when she is preparing or leaving for the mikveh, this can cause her distress and such a situation should be avoided.

When the time of her immersion falls on Friday night, forethought is necessary to avoid situations where guests are aware of her leaving, causing her tension.

To the Wife

Experience shows that for many women preparation for immersion is accompanied by emotional stress. Too often they overtrim their nails, causing bleeding or become overly anxious removing scabs, sometimes causing more harm than good.

Of course, it is important to review this chapter so as to do the best one can to clean the body and remove all extraneous substances. However, after doing this, one should rest assured that, with Hashem's help, the proper outcome has been achieved. "One who comes to purify himself is helped from Above."

If you have any questions regarding treatment of dry skin, scabs or anything else, freely question the woman supervisor (balanit) available for this purpose. Most likely, she has extensive communication with the supervising Rabbi and unnecessary tension can often be avoided by simply asking a question at the appropriate time.

Free your mind of all external worrying thoughts while preparing for immersion. Preparing properly for the immersion is an extremely important element in the purification process and, like all mitzvahs, should be done calmly with sincere contentment and joy.

Note: *This chapter deals with preparing the body for immersion. Substances found on the body after immersion and their consequences are discussed in Chapter Eight. These chapters are complementary and details regarding any particular subject may be found in both.*

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She must carefully examine her entire body close to the time of the *mikveh*, making sure nothing is left on her body. To do this, she must completely scrub her entire body and hair in warm water.

—*Shulchan Aruch* 199:1

OVERVIEW

Prior to immersion in the *mikveh*, the entire body and hair is carefully washed and examined for intervening foreign substances. This is to ensure that no intervening substances *which could invalidate the immersion* are present on the woman's body.

This process of cleansing and inspection is called *bafifab*.

Our sages¹ interpreted the verses “... and he shall not eat of any sacred offering until immersing in a *mikveh*. At *sunset* he becomes ritually clean²,” to mean that just as there is a specific moment when the sun has “set,” so too must the immersion in the *mikveh* be at one exact moment, i.e., the entire body simultaneously³. In other words, the whole body must be immersed at one time and there must not be any intervening substances on the body such as dirt, stains, or dry dough during immersion. Even one unsubmerged hair invalidates the immersion⁴.

The *biblical* requirement⁵ is to inspect the body for any obstruction to the water⁶. The parts of the body not visible to the eye are checked by feeling with the hand⁷.

Ezra the Scribe⁸, in his campaign to strengthen Torah observance in his generation⁹, ordered¹⁰ that in addition, a woman must perform a meticulous and thorough washing¹¹ on the afternoon prior to and in preparation for immersion in the *mikveh*.

If the wife did not inspect her body prior to immersion or comb her hair, even if she did so afterwards and found there to be no intervening substances whatsoever, nonetheless her immersion is invalid¹². If the night passed, however, an orthodox Rabbi expert in these laws should be consulted.

Following are the laws governing preparation before the *mikveh*.

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- 1 *Sifrei*. See *Beis Yosef* beginning of 198 and *Beer Hagolab* 198:1.
 - 2 Leviticus 22:6, 7.
 - 3 Therefore, removing an intervening substance and immersing just that part of the body again would not suffice, since the entire body must be immersed simultaneously, *Beis Yosef* beginning of 198. See *Sidrei Tabara* 198:1.
 - 4 On a scriptural level, *Sidrei Tabara* 198:1.
 - 5 *Baba Kama* 82:a.
 - 6 *Mehaber* 199:8.
 - 7 *Taz* 199:4. *Bodei Hasbulchan* 199:1.
 - 8 And his *beis din*, around the year 3370 (390 B.C.E.).
 - 9 After returning from the Babylonian exile and seeing the plight of religious observance.
 - 10 *Baba Kama* 82:a.
 - 11 Some opinions say this decree covered all the hair on the body including combing and fluffing, *Sbach* 199:1. Some say that the original decree referred to the entire body, *Tur* in the name of *Rasbi*. There are many other opinions as well, Talmudic Encyclopedia: entry *batzitza*.
 - 12 *Mehaber* 199:8.