Taharah Liturgy for Men

including kavanot—brief statements that may be recited preceding each prayer, explaining the essence of that prayer

taken from

Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness
Exploring the Meaning of Taharah
An Expanded Third Edition

by Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel
I. MECHILAH: We begin the ritual of taharah by addressing the met.

Kavanah: ____________ [name of the deceased], we stand here ready to begin our work. Before we do so, we ask your understanding that we will do our best to prepare you for your final journey.

__________, ben [son of] ____________ v’[and] ____________, we ask your forgiveness for any distress we may cause you during this taharah. We will do everything possible to ensure that you are treated with respect, and that all the elements of taharah are properly completed. Everything we are about to do is for the sake of your honor.

II. CHAMOL: We recite our first prayer to God, speaking to God on behalf of the deceased.

Kavanah: God, we are acting on behalf of the neshamah of ____________ [name of the deceased], asking You for compassion and mercy on his behalf.

Ribono shel olam chamol al ____________ ben ____________
hamet halaz shehu ben Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, v’Leah avadecha, v’tanu’ach nafsho v’nishmato im hatzadikim ki Atah m’chayeh hametim umeimit chayim. Baruch Atah mochel v’solei’ach lachata’im v’la’avonot mimeitei amcha Yisra’el b’tachanunim.

Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for ___________, the son of ___________ and ___________, this deceased, for he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May his soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You revive the dead and bring death to the living. Blessed are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead of Your people, on petition.

Therefore, may it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to encircle angels of mercy around the deceased, for he is Your servant and son of Your maidservant. And You, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save him from all misery, from a day of evil, and from judgment to Gehenna. Blessed are You, great in lovingkindness and provider of mercy. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is the One who redeems the people Israel from all suffering through mercy.
Therefore, may it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to remember the merit of the sacred covenant which is in his flesh, and may it be for him a ransom from the fires of Gehenna, so that You may deliver him. Blessed are You who establishes the covenant through mercy.

Through mercy, hide and ignore the transgressions of this deceased, Your servant. Deliver him from consumption by fire, for he needs Your great mercy. And You, Adonai our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, mercifully great in counsel and mighty in achievement. May he tread with the feet of the righteous in the Garden of Eden, for that is the place of the upright. God protects the feet of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the deceased of Your people Israel. Amen. May such be God’s will.
III. ANA ELOHEI: We ask God to give us strength and keep us from harm.

Kavanah: God, give us the strength to do our work properly, keep us from harm, and give us heightened awareness of what we are doing.

Ana Elohei hachesed v’harachamim, shekol orchotecha chesed v’emet, v’tzivitanu la’asot chesed v’emet im hametim ul’hit’asek bikvuratam, k’mo shekatuv: “Ki kavur tikb’renu.”

Uv’chen y’hi ratzon milpanecha, Adonai Eloheinu, shet’am’tzeinu ut’chaz’keinu la’asot m’lachteinu m’lechet shamayim zo k’ra’ui, hen b’toharat hamet, hen bilvishato uvikkurato, v’tishm’renu mikol nezek ut’kalah, shelo nikasheil b’ma’aseh yadeinu.

L’kayem banu hamikra “Shomer mitzvah lo yeida davar ra.” V’ta’amod lanu z’chut mitzvat g’milut chesed v’emet l’mal’ot yamenu b’tovah.

V’chesed Adonai aleinu l’olam.

O God of lovingkindness and compassion, all of whose ways are lovingkindness and truth, You have commanded us to practice lovingkindness and truth with the dead, and to attend to their burial, as it is written, “you shall surely bury him” (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Therefore, Adonai our God, may it be Your will to give us courage and strength to do our task, this heavenly task, as appropriate, whether in performing taharah for the met, or in dressing him, or burying him. And keep us from any injury or obstacle such that the work of our hands not be disrupted.

Sustain in us the statement: “One who observes a mitzvah encounters no evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:5). Establish for us the privilege of the mitzvah of gemilut chesed v’emet, that it fills our days with goodness. And may God’s lovingkindness be upon us forever.
IV. VAYA’AN VAYOMER: We invoke the mythical context from Zechariah.

*Kavanah:* God, help us to take the first step in preparing __________ [name of the deceased] for this journey. As we do so, may we be conscious to show this mei the same dignity that God’s angels showed to Joshua in preparing him to be Kohen Gadol.

Vaya’an vayomer el ha’omdim l’fanav leimor: 
“Hasiru hab’gadim hatzo’im me’alav.” Vayomer elav: “R’eh he’evarti me’alecha avonecha v’halbeish otcha machalatzot.”

And he [the angel of God] spoke up and said to his attendants, “Take the filthy garments off him [the High Priest],” and he said to him [the High Priest], “See, I have removed your guilt from you and you shall be clothed in [priestly] robes.”

Zechariah 3:4
V. ROSHO KETEM PAZ: We praise the body of the met as we physically cleanse it.

Kavanah: Just as this met was created in God’s image, and beautiful while alive, so may we continue to recognize the beauty of his neshamah.

His head is finest gold; his locks are curled and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by watercourses, bathed in milk set by a brimming pool. His cheeks are like beds of spices, banks of perfumes. His lips are like lilies; they drip flowing myrrh. His hands are rods of gold, studded with beryl; his belly a tablet of ivory adorned with sapphires. His legs are like marble pillars set in sockets of fine gold; he is majestic as Lebanon, stately as the cedars. His mouth is delicious and all of him is delightful. Such is my beloved; such is my darling, O maidens of Jerusalem.

SONG OF SONGS, 5:11-16
VI. AMAR RABBI AKIVA: The reasons for the pouring of water

Kavanah: Help us prepare this neshamah to enter the heavenly kingdom and to witness Your Presence.

Amar Rabbi Akiva: Ashreichehm Yisra’el, lifnei mi atem mitaharin umi m’taher etchem? Avichem shebashamayim, shene’emar: “V’zarakti alechem mayim t’horim ut’hartem.” V’omer: “Mikveh Yisra’el Adonai.” Ma mikveh m’taher et hat’me’im, af haKadosh Baruch Hu m’taher et Yisra’el.

Rabbi Akiva said: You are fortunate, Israel. Before whom do you purify yourselves and who purifies you? Your God in heaven. As it is said: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean...” (EZEKIEL 36:25). And it says: “O hope [mikveh] of Israel! O Adonai” (JEREMIAH 17:13). Just as the ritual bath [mikveh] purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, purify Israel.

Mishnah Yoma 8:9

Ma’ayan ganim b’er mayim chayim v’nozlim min l’vanon.

You are a garden spring, a well of fresh water, a rill of Lebanon.

SONG OF SONGS 4:15

Im rachatz Adonai et tso’at b’not tziyon v’et d’mei Y’rushalayim yadi’ach mikirbah b’ru’ach mishpat w’ru’ach ba’eir.

When Adonai has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and from Jerusalem’s midst has rinsed out her infamy – in a spirit of judgment and in a spirit of purging.

ISAIAH 4:4

V’zarakti alechem mayim t’horim ut’hartem mikol tum’otechem umikol giluleichem ataheir etchem.

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all from your uncleanness and from all your fetishes.

EZEKIEL 36:25
VII. TAHOR HU: The actual moment of transformation

[No kavanah is needed for this two-word chant. It is the one portion of the liturgy that virtually every member of a Chevra Kadisha understands.]

Tahor hu.

טהור הו

He is pure.

VIII. V’HITKADASHTEM: The closing of the ritual of taharah

Kavanah: By pouring of the water, we have completed the process of taharah.

[The words below are recited three times.]

V’hitkadishem vih’yitem k’doshim ki kadosh ani

יוהו

You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I, Adonai, am holy.

Based on Leviticus 11:44
IX. SOS ASIS: We prepare to dress the met in priestly/spiritual garments.

Kavanah: We stand here having completed the pouring ritual of taha\ra, preparing to dress this met in plain linen garments, like the simple linens worn by the Kohen Gadol who served in the Temple.

Sos asis ba’Adonai tagiel nafshi beilohai ki
hilbishani bigdei yesha m’il tzedakah y’atani
kechantan y’chahein p’eir v’chakalah ta’deh cheilehah.

I greatly rejoice in Adonai, my whole being exults in my God. For God has clothed me with garments of triumph; wrapped me in a robe of victory, like a bridegroom adorned with a turban, like a bride bedecked with her finery.

Isaiah 61:10

Va’omar: “Yasimu tzanif tahor al rosho.”
Vayasimu hatzanif hatahor al rosho vayalbishuhu b’gadim umal’ach Adonai omed.

Then he gave the order, “Let a pure diadem be placed on his head.” And they placed the pure diadem on his head, and they clothed him in [priestly] garments, as the angel of Adonai stood by.

Zechariah 3:5

Ki cha’aretz totzi tzimchah uch’ganah zeiru’eha
tatzmi’ach ken Adonai Elohim yatzmi’ach tzedakah
ut’hilah neged kol hagoyim.

For the earth brings forth her growth, and a garden makes the seed shoot up, so Adonai, God, will make victory and renown shoot up in the presence of all the nations.

Isaiah 61:11

V’nachacha Adonai tamid v’hisbi’a b’tzachtzachot
nafshecha v’atzmotecha yachalitz v’hayitta k’gan
raveh uch’motza mayim asher lo y’chas’vu meimav.

And Adonai will guide you always; God will slake your thirst in parched places and give strength to your bones. You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail.

Isaiah 58:11
X. K’TONET BAD KODESH YILBASH, etc.: We do the actual dressing of the met.

[Although the order of the dressing varies slightly among different Chevra Kadisha groups, the model for all is the first half of Leviticus 16:4, which describes the attire of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. As each item of clothing is put on the met, the m’tabarim recite the appropriate phrase from the first half of the verse. The second half of Leviticus 16:4, and the verse here from Genesis, are then recited after the dressing is completed.]

Kavanah: As we dress this met, let us be conscious that we are clothing him in the garments of the Kohen Gadol.

K’tonet bad kodesh yilbash umichn’sei vad yihyu al b’saro uv’avnet bad yachgor uv’mitznefet bad yitznof.

Be dressed in a sacral linen tunic, with linen breeches next to the flesh, and be girt with a linen sash, and wear a linen turban.

Leviticus 16:4a

For the mitznefet:

Uv’mitznefet bad yitznof

and wear a linen turban.

from Leviticus 16:4a

For the michnasayim:

Umichn’sei vad yihyu al b’saro

with linen breeches next to the flesh

from Leviticus 16:4a

For the k’tonet:

K’tonet bad kodesh yilbash

Be dressed in a sacral linen tunic

from Leviticus 16:4a

For the avnet:

Uv’avnet bad yachgor

and be girt with a linen sash

from Leviticus 16:4a
Bigdei kodesh hem v'rachatz bamayim et b'saro
ul'vasham.

They are sacral vestments; and bathe the body in water and then put them on.

LEVITICUS 16:4b

V'El Shaddai yiten lachem rachamim.

And may El Shaddai give mercy toward you.

GENESIS 43:14
XI. V'LO YAVO’U: We place the met into the aron.

*Kavanah:* We stand here at a liminal, potentially dangerous moment. Help us now as we gently lift the met and place him into the aron.

[The following verse is recited as we perform our final physical act with the met: placing him in the aron.]

V’lo yavo’u lirot k’vala et hakodesh vametu.

But let not [the Kohathites] go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary, lest they die.

Numbers 4:20

XII. V’CHIPER ADMATO: We place shards (where practiced) and afar (earth) from Israel on the body of the deceased.

*Kavanah:* As no one is so righteous as to have never sinned, we pray for atonement for ____________ [name of the deceased].

V’chiper admato amo.

And cleanse the land of God’s people.

Deuteronomy 32:43
XIII. **HINEIH MITATO:** We invoke various protections from “terror by night.”

*Kavanah:* We pray that God, in the image of Solomon’s mighty men, will protect ____________ [name of the deceased].

XIIIa. **SOLOMON’S MIGHTY WARRIORS:** Their swords are ready.

*Hineh mitato shel Shlomo shishim giborim saviv lah migiborei Yisra’el:*
*Kulan ahuzei cherev m’lumdei milchamah ish charbo al y’recho mipachad baleilot.*

There is Solomon’s couch, encircled by sixty warriors of the warriors of Israel, all of them trained in warfare, skilled in battle, each with sword on thigh because of terror by night.

**Song of Songs** 3:7-8

XIIIb. **Y’VARECH’CHA:** We pronounce the *Birkat Kohanim* (Priestly Blessing).

*Y’varech’cha Adonai v’yishm’recha:*
*Ya’eir Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka:*
*Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v’yaseim l’cha shalom.*

May Adonai bless you and protect you.  
May Adonai deal kindly and graciously with you.  
May Adonai bestow favor upon you and grant you peace.

**Numbers** 6: 24-26

XIIIc. **YEILCHU; MI ATAH; V’ATAH:** Verses of final conclusion before closing the aron.

*Yeil’chu yonkotav viy’hi chazayit hodo v’re’ach lo kalvanon.*

His boughs shall spread out far; his beauty shall be like the olive trees, his fragrance like that of Lebanon.

**Hosea** 14:7
Mi atah har hadol lifnei Z’rubavel l’mishor
v’hotzi et ha’even haroshah t’shu’ot chen chen lah.

Whoever you are, O great mountain in the path of Zerubavel, turn into level ground! For he shall produce the excellent stone; it shall be greeted with shouts of “Beautiful! Beautiful!”

Zechariah 4:7

V’atah yigdal na ko’ach Adonai ka’asher dibarta leimor:
“V’ulam chai ani v’yimalei ch’vod Adonai et kol ha’aretz.”

Let Adonai’s forbearance be great, as You have declared, saying: “as I live, and as Adonai’s Presence fills the whole world.”

Numbers 14:17, 21
XIV. MECHILAH: We make a closing request for forgiveness from the met.

Kavanah: ____________ [name of the deceased], we stand here having completed our work. We hope we have treated you with dignity. Please know that we have done our best to prepare you for your final journey.

____________, ben [son of] ____________ v’[and] ____________, we ask your forgiveness for any indignity you may have suffered at the hands of this Chevra Kadisha, notwithstanding the loving care and concern that we exercised during this taharah. We ask your forgiveness if we did not act according to your honor, even though we acted according to our custom.
XV. UVINSO’A: We move the met out of the tabarah room, and one step closer to eternity.

Kavanah: God, we now ask for assurance from You that this neshamah will be protected for eternity.

Uvinso’a hamishkan, yoridu oto hal’vi’im,
uvachanot hamishkan, yakimu oto hal’vi’im, v’hazar hakarev yumat.

When the Tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down, and when the Tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up; any outsider who encroaches shall be put to death.

NUMBERS 1:51

Vay’hi binso’a ha’aron vayomer Moshe: “Kumah Adonai v’yafutzu oy’vecha v’yanusu m’sanecha mipanecha.”

When the ark was to set out, Moses would say, “Advance, Adonai! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!”

NUMBERS 10:35

Lo t’uneh eilecha ra’ah v’nega lo yikrav b’oholecha:
Ki malachav y’tzaveh lach lishmarcha b’chol d’rachecha: Al kapayim yisa’uncha pen tigof ba’even raglecha.

No harm will befall you, no disease touch your tent. For God will order the angels to guard you wherever you go. They will carry you in their hands, lest you hurt your foot on a stone.

PSALMS 91:10-12

Adonai ish milchamah Adonai sh’mo.

Adonai, the warrior - Adonai is God’s name.

EXODUS 15:3

Adonai yilachem lachen v’atem taharishun.

Adonai will battle for you, you hold your peace.

EXODUS 14:14