Taharah Liturgy for Women

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 metah.

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.

__________, bat [daughter 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 her behalf.

Ribono shel olam chamol al
______________________ bat ___________________ hametah
halazo shehi bat Avraham, Yitzhak, Ya’akov,
Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, v’Leah avadecha, v’tanu’ach
nafshah v’nishmatah im hatzadikim ki Atah
m’chayeh hametim umeimit chayim. Baruch Atah
mochel v’solei’ach lachata’m v’la’avonot mimei
amcha Yisra’el b’tachanunim.

Uv’chen y’hi ratzon milfaneca Adonai Eloheinu
v’Elohei avoteinu v’imoteinu shet’sabev
mal’achei rachamim lifnei hametah, shehi amatcha
bat amatecha. V’Atah Adonai Eloheinu v’Elohei
avoteinu v’imoteinu maskil el dal malteha
mikol tzarah umiyom ra’ah umidinah shel
Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for __________, the daughter of __________ and __________, this deceased, for she is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May her 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, on petition, the sins and trespasses of the dead of Your people.

Therefore, may it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to encircle angels of mercy around the deceased, for she is Your servant and daughter of Your maidservant. And You, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save her 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 mercifully redeems the people Israel from all suffering.

Through mercy, hide and ignore the transgressions of this deceased, Your servant. Deliver her from consumption by fire, for she 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 she 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.

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_Anah 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 milfanexcha, Adonai Eloheinu, shet’am’tzeinu ut’chaz’keinu la’asot m’lachteinu m’lechet shamayim zo k’ra’ui, hen b’tohorat hametah, hen bikvishatah uvikvuratah, v’tishm’renu mikol nezek ut’kalalah 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 metah, or in dressing her, or burying her. 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 *metah* 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. HINACH YAFAH: We praise the body of the *metah* as we physically cleanse it.

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

Ah, you are fair, my darling, ah, you are fair. Your eyes are like doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, climbing up from the washing pool. All of them bear twins, and not one loses her young. Your lips are like a crimson thread, your mouth is lovely, your brow behind your veil like a pomegranate split open. Your neck is like the tower of David, built to hold weapons, hung with a thousand shields—all the quivers of warriors. Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, browsing among the lilies. When the day blows gently and the shadows flee, I will betake me to the mount of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense. Every part of you is fair, my darling, there is no blemish in you.

Song of Songs, 4:1-7
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:** Ashreichem Yisra’el, lifnei mi etem mitaharin umi m’taheer etchem? Avichem shebashamayim, shene’emar: “V’zarakti alechem mayim t’horim ut’hartem.” V’omer:

“Mikveh Yisra’el Adonai.” Ma mikveh m’taheer et hat’me’im, af haKadosh Baruch Hu m’taheer 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’nazo lim 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 tzo’at b’not tziyon v’et d’mei Y’rushalayim yadi’ach mikirbah b’ru’ach mishpat uv’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’har tem 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 all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes.

**Ezekiel 36:25**
VII. T’HORAH HI: 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.]

T’horah hi.

She 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’hitkadishtem vih’yitem k’dosim ki kadosh ani

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 *metah* in priestly/spiritual garments.

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

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

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

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

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 *metah*.

[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 *metah*, the *m’taharim* 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 *metah*, let us be conscious that we are clothing her 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.

V’El Shaddai yiten lachen rachamin.

And may El Shaddai give mercy toward you.

Leviticus 16:4b

Genesis 43:14
XI. _V’LO YAVO’U_: We place the _metah_ into the _aron_.

_**Kavanah:**_ We stand here at a liminal, potentially dangerous moment. Help us now as we gently lift the _metah_ and place her into the _aron_.

[The following verse is recited as we perform our final physical act with the _metah_: placing her 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.

Hinei mitato shel Shlomo shishim giborim saviv
lah migiborei Yisra’el:
Kulam achuzei 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’VARECHEICH:** We pronounce the *Birkat Kohanim* (Priestly Blessing).

Y’varcheich Adonai v’yism’reich:
Ya’eir Adonai panav eilayich vichuneich:
Yisa Adonai panav eilayich v’yaseim lach 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
Taharah Liturgy—Women

Mi atah har hagadol lifnei Z’rubavel l’mishor v’hotzi et ha’even haroshah t’shu’ot ch’en ch’en 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 *metah*.

*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.

____________, bat [daughter 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 **metab** 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,  
wachanot 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.  
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 sh’mo.  
Adonai, the warrior - Adonai is God’s name.

**EXODUS 15:3**

Adonai yilachem lachem v’atem tacharishun.  
Adonai will battle for you, you hold your peace.

**EXODUS 14:14**