

Kavod V'tihur

The Honoring of Body and Soul

**An adapted guide for when the Chevra
Kadisha is unable to physically accompany
the *meit/meitah/metimot*.**

**Tahara liturgy prepared by the
Chevra Kadisha of
Kehilla Community Synagogue
Piedmont, California**

Kehilla Community Synagogue Tahara Service*

**** Notes on gender:**

In one's Hebrew name, *ben* and *bat* are traditional ways to refer to people who are men and women, respectively. However, since we know that there are more than two genders, Dr. Max Strassfeld* has suggested the use of *mi'beit* (translated, "from the house of"), a term that is not gendered, for people who identify outside of the binary.

To avoid a cumbersome listing of pronouns, this liturgy has substituted all pronouns addressing the deceased, and opted in the translation for the broad use of "they." If appropriate, the reader may replace "they" with the deceased's preferred pronoun.

Other words referring to the deceased such as *meit/metah* (the deceased) are inherently gendered in the Hebrew language, and there is no gender inclusive term. However, there are some options for indicating a non-binary gender:

1. The reader switches back and forth between the feminine and masculine forms throughout the service.
2. The reader utilizes the *-imot* ending (which is inclusive of both masculine and feminine forms). For example, where the liturgy reads "*meit*" the reader could say "*metimot*."

* This liturgy may be shared for educational purposes. It should not be reproduced for other purposes without prior consent from the Kehilla Community Synagogue Chevra Kadisha.

**Special thanks to Dr. Jenna Kemp Stover for research and contributions to the gender-inclusive language used in this liturgy.

***Portions of this liturgy were drawn or adapted from the booklet *Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness*, by Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel, EKS Publishing Company, Albany CA, 2000; third edition 2013. Special thanks to Rabbi Kelman and Dan Fendel for their many years of dedication to helping Jewish communities perform the ancient tradition of *tahara* in honor of those who have died.

WHEN TO USE THIS ADAPTED RITUAL

There are times when the Chevra Kadish is not able to attend to the *meit/metah/metimot* in the way we're accustomed to doing so. Nonetheless, we want to use our loving presence to honor them, and to help midwife their soul in this tender and liminal time. This adapted tahara service is intended for that purpose.

May we be guided by the wisdom of our ancestors, and inspired by the call to serve in these moments. May the *neshamot* of those we serve be sheltered under the wings of the Shekhina (Divine Presence), and guided on their way. May we be grounded in our holy task by the light and love of each other, and of being in sacred community together.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

1. 4-6 people online.
2. One leader.
3. If available, one person other than the leader can serve as a reader.
- 4. Each person should have the following on hand:**
 - Empty bowl for handwashing;
 - Pitcher with water for handwashing;
 - A small amount of soil or something else from the natural world to represent Earth, and the physicality of the *meit/metah/metimot*. (Soil is preferable as it can be used for an optional individual ritual following the taharah);
 - A candle to be lit at the beginning of the ritual, to represent the *neshama*.
 - Fragrant spices for closing ritual (fresh or dried, like what's used for *havdallah*).
 - This adapted taharah service guide.

5. LEADER SHOULD TELL PEOPLE BEFORE STARTING WHAT WILL BE INVOLVED IN THE RITUAL, INCLUDING:

- Please keep your audio muted until asked by the Leader or Reader to unmute. The reason for this is to help maintain the cohesiveness of the ritual in this technological environment.
- Most of the prayers and readings are those usually used in a Kehilla tahara, with a few adaptations.
- People can stand or sit during the ritual. Standing is recommended for hand washing if possible, since this is an activity of transition between one section and another.
- Hand washing will occur three times, with each person using their individual pitcher and bowl:
 - Near the beginning, before we imagine washing the *meit/metah/metimot*;
 - Before (simulated) purification;
 - At the end, before closing prayers.
 - The blessing for hand washing will not be said.
 - Be sure to leave enough water in the pitcher so some can be poured into the bowl during purification.
- **We will use guided visualization for key aspects of the *tahara* ritual, including:**
 - washing of the body prior to purification;
 - garments used after purification;
 - placing of *meit/metah/metimot* in casket.

- **We'll do a pouring of water for PURIFICATION, using our own pouring vessels, OR using movement of the arms to simulate a continuous pouring motion.**
 - Each person will envision and simulate pouring water along the body.
 - **POURING OPTION 1:**
Pour a stream of water from your pitcher into the bowl, first with the right hand, then with the left, then with the right, to represent a steady stream flowing on one side then the other.
 - **POURING OPTION 2:**
 - Sweep your arms in front of you from LEFT TO RIGHT, as if pouring water down the right side of the *meit/metah/metimot*;
 - THEN, CONTINUING THE MOVEMENT, Sweep arms from RIGHT TO LEFT, as if pouring water down the left side of the *meit/metah/metimot*.
 - THEN, STILL CONTINUING THE MOVEMENT, sweep arms LEFT TO RIGHT again, as if pouring water down the right side of the *meit/metah/metimot*.
 - **NOTE:** Because everyone will be doing this, and being online means there will be lags in our timing, we can imagine a steady stream of water being poured through our collective action.

BEFORE BEGINNING THE SERVICE

LEADER should share the name of the deceased, and offer whatever information is available about them.

HEBREW NAME OF DECEASED: [_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* _____ *v'* _____]

LEADER may at this point assign in parts of the body for members of the team to envision standing by for visualization portions of the ritual. (e.g.: head, upper right, lower right, upper left, lower left)

I. OPENING SACRED SPACE

1. REMIND PEOPLE TO MUTE audio until asked to unmute. Invite people to read aloud as much or as little as they wish throughout the ritual.
2. LEADER: Invite people to light candle, representing the *neshama*.
3. READ *KAVANNAH*: "May the light that guides in life, illuminate the journey now."
4. LEADER: invite people to lift up symbol of earth, representing the body.
5. READ *KAVANNAH*: "May the earth that sustains in life, ground and bring sustenance to the journey now."
6. LEADER: Invite people to hold up their pitcher, representing the element of water, and the tools we use to wash and purify the *meit/metah/metimot*.
7. READ *KAVANNAH*: "May the water that cleanses and purifies in life, cleanse and purify here today."
8. LEADER: "Take a moment to envision gathering around the *meit/metah/metimot*." (Give a moment to envision this.)
9. ALL: Recite the *Shema* together:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael, Yah/Adonai Eloheynu, Yah/Adonai echad.

Hear, O Israel, Yah/Adonai is our God, Yah/Adonai is One.

ALL READ:

Source of All Life, we are gathered to help usher the *neshama* of [_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* ____ *v'* ____] on their journey at this tender and liminal time. May we receive the clarity and strength to perform this holy task with clear sacred intention, and in loving connection to this *neshama*. May we be protected from harm or fault, and may we not fail in our work. May you be with us as we embark on this holy task.***

Just as [_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* ____ *v'* ____] was created in God's image, and perfect while alive, so may we continue to recognize the perfection of his/her/their *neshamah*.

10. **FIRST HAND WASHING:** Each participant washes hands (R-L-R), without reciting the blessing, using the pitcher and bowl they've brought for this purpose.

WASHING OF THE *MEIT / METAH / METIMOT*

11. LEADER INSTRUCTS GROUP:

"We address the *meit/metah/metimot*, and then the Source of Life."

12. (READER or LEADER reads the following text. Others also read, but remain muted.)

[_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* ____ *v'* ____], it is our *kavannah*, our holy intention, that everything we are about to do is for your honor. We're not able at this time to perform the customary ritual of washing, purification, and dressing you in *tachrichim*. We trust those who have tended to you until now have done their best to honor you and your *neshama*. Please forgive us for any harm we may cause. We are here in love and respect.

Source of Life, in the tradition of our ancestors, we ask for mercy on [_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* _____v'_____], remembering that they are a child of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. May the Shekhina, Divine Presence, accompany their *neshama* at this time. May their soul find perfect rest.

13. LEADER INSTRUCTS THE GROUP FOR VISUALIZATION OF WASHING:

“Close your eyes, and imagine that we are gently and meticulously washing and cleaning the *meit/metah/metimot* together...taking time to look for areas that need attention, and attending to them...pouring water carefully on one side then the other, covering the nose and mouth to avoid water from entering...perhaps washing and combing the hair...cleaning the nails...Imagine this going smoothly, as we competently and compassionately carry out our task...”

“Once this task is completed, and the table has been thoroughly washed and dried, imagine stepping back from the *meit/metah/metimot* to conclude this part of the ritual...”

“When you are ready to move on, please let us know by holding your hands open in front of you, visible on your screen.”

14. LEADER OR READER says the following:

אַתְּ בְּרוּכָה יְהוָה מְקוֹר חַיִּים וּמְוֹת שְׂכָכָה לָּהּ בְּעוֹלָמָהּ

Aht brucha YaH, makor chayim u-meivot, shecachah lah ba-olamah.

Blessed are You YaH, Source of Life and Death. This is how it is in Your world.

15. SECOND HAND WASHING: Each participant washes hands, using their own pitcher and bowl, in the same manner as previously.

TAHARA / PURIFICATION

16. “Imagine again we are gathered around the covered *meit/metah/metimot*.”

17. **READER OR LEADER** says the following:

כִּי־תַעְבֵּר בַּמַּיִם אֶת־אָנִי וּבְנֵהֲרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּךָ

*Ki ta-avor ba-mayim it'chah ani,
u-va-n'harot lo yishtphoocha.*

When you pass through water, I will be with you;
and streams shall not overwhelm you. (Isa. 43:2)

מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוּה

Mikveh Yisrael YaH.

“YaH is the *mikveh* of Israel.” (Jer. 17:13)

וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וְטִהַרְתֶּם

V'zarakti aleichem mayim tehorim u-tehartem.

“And I shall sprinkle pure water upon you and you will be transformed.”
(Ezekiel 36:25)

18. LEADER OFFERS GROUP INSTRUCTIONS FOR “POURING”

- a. REQUEST THAT PEOPLE UNMUTE audio now for this portion of the ritual.
- b. EACH PERSON will envision and simulate pouring water along the body, using one of the two options described earlier. (Leader may repeat the options at this point.)
- c. AFTER pouring, please recite the gender appropriate verse in ‘d.’ below.
- d. OPTIONS FOR POURING (as a reminder):
 - OPTION 1:

Pour a steady stream of water from your pitcher into the bowl, first with the right hand, then with the left, then with the right, to represent a steady stream flowing on one side then the other.

- OPTION 2:
 - i. Sweep your arms in front of you from LEFT TO RIGHT, as if pouring water down the right side of the *meit/metah/metimot*;
 - ii. THEN, CONTINUING THE MOVEMENT, Sweep arms from RIGHT TO LEFT, as if pouring water down the left side of the *meit/metah/metimot*.
 - iii. THEN, CONTINUING THE MOVEMENT, sweep arms LEFT TO RIGHT again, as if pouring water down the right side of the *meit/metah/metimot*.

NOTE: Because everyone will be doing this, and being online means there will be lags in our timing, we can imagine a steady stream of water being poured through our collective action.

- e. LEADER: “Please situate yourself where you want to be for this part, and when you are ready to begin, say “ready.”
- f. LEADER: Signal people to begin pouring
- g. **As each person finishes pouring, they say the gender appropriate verse below:**

For a male:

טהור הוא

Tahor hu

He is pure.

For a female:

טהרה היא

Tehorah hee

She is pure.

Gender inclusive:

טהרו

Taharu

They are pure.

10. LEADER:

- After purification allow a moment of quiet before moving to the next portion of the ritual.
- REQUEST THAT PEOPLE MUTE their audio again.

DRESSING

11. LEADER OR READER, ADDRESSING THE *MEIT/METAH/METIMOT*:

“[_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* ____ *v'* ____], as your *neshama* moves through this time, we envision you being dressed in the garments the high priest wore when entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.”

בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי גְדֻלַּת מְאֹד הוֹד וְהַדָּר לְבִשְׁתָּ עֹטֶה־אֹר כְּשִׁלְמָה
נוֹטָה שָׁמַיִם כִּי־רִיעָה

Barchi nafshi et YHVH: YHVH elohai gadalta me'od, hod v'hadar lavashta, oteh or kasalmah, noteh shamayim ka-yiriyah

“My soul blesses the Source of Life. You are vast.
Your clothing is splendor and beauty itself.
You wear light as a garment.” (Psalm 104:1-2)

בְּגֵדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְרָחֵץ בַּמַּיִם אֶת בְּשָׂרוֹ וְלִבְשָׁם

Bigdei kodesh heim v'rachatz ba-mayim et b'saro u-l'veisham.“

And these will be holy garments. And (the priest) will wash their own body in water and put them on.” (Lev. 16:4)

LEADER:

REQUEST THAT PEOPLE UNMUTE FOR THE NEXT SECTION

LEADER: For each garment below, leader or reader should read the Hebrew, and invite all to read the English together.

A. Pants:

READER OR LEADER:

“וּמִכְנֵסֵי־בָד יְהִיוּ עַל בְּשָׂרוֹ”

U-michn'sei vad yih'yu al b'saro.

ALL:

“Simple linen breeches will cover their flesh.” (Lev. 16:4)

B. Shirt and Kittel:

READER OR LEADER:

כְּתוּנַת־בָּד קֹדֶשׁ יִלְבָּשׁ

K'tonet–bad kodesh yilbash.

ALL:

“They will wear a sacred linen tunic.” (Lev. 16:4)

C. Belt:

READER OR LEADER:

וּבְאַבְנֵיט בֶּד יִחְגֹּר

U-v'avneit bad yachgor.

ALL:

“They will be girded with a linen belt.” (Lev. 16:4)

D. Headdress:

READER OR LEADER:

וּבְמִצְנֶפֶת בֵּד יִצְנֹף

U-v'mitznefet bad yitznof.

ALL:

“They will wear a linen turban.” (Lev. 16:4)

PLACEMENT IN THE CASKET

12. LEADER: “We place the *meit/metah/metimot* tenderly in the casket.”

LEADER OR READER:

“Soil from Israel is placed on the body. A tallit has been laid out at the shoulders, and we wrap it over the head in the manner used for donning a *tallit* during prayer. The sheet is wrapped around over the *metimot*, beginning with the foot, then the left side, then the right side, then the head. The lid is placed on the casket with the Star of David on the lower half.”

We place our hands on the casket to comfort the *meit/metah/metimot*.”

13. LEADER: “We read together.”:

- a. “For dust we are, and unto dust we return. (Genesis 3:19)
[_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* ____v'____], forgive us for anything we have done here that has offended you.
May you be blessed and protected.
May you be filled with light and grace.
May you be filled with divine presence and peace.”
- b. Go dear [_____ *ben/bat/mi'beit* ____v'____] as Shechina takes your hand.
She is beside you.
She will guide you.
You are blessed.
You are safe.

Surely the gracious Spirit of the Universe is shining all over you, surrounding you with peace.”

14. FINAL HAND WASHING, DONE IN THE SAME MANNER AS PREVIOUSLY.

15. ALL READ:.

“Blessed are you, our Source of Life and Death,
for enabling us to fulfill this sacred *mitzvah*.
Having just completed our holy work, to the best of our ability, in
accordance with our tradition,
may we now go out and rejoin our day’s activities,
carrying with us an even greater reverence for Your gift of life.
Amen.”

(Adapted from a prayer by Laurie Kurs)

16. LEADER: “We imagine leaving the *meit/meath/metimot*, backing out of the room in our customary way.”

17. OPTIONAL CLOSING RITUAL

Recite the following kavannah and blessing, then each person smells the fragrant spices they assembled for this purpose.

KAVANNAH: “May we breathe in life’s many blessings.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא מיני בשמים.

Baruch atah YaH, eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei minei b’samim.

Blessed are you YaH, creator of Life’s fragrant spices.”

RECOMMENDED POST-TAHARA RITUAL (for after group disperses)

After leaving the ritual, each person is encouraged to take the soil and water used during the tahara outside for blessing.

1. Place the soil in a location that feels appropriate.
2. Recite the blessing below, then pour the water over the soil.

3. **Blessing for the Circle of Life**

Let us bless the well,	<i>N'vareykh et hama'yan</i>	נְבַרְךָ אֶת הַמַּעַיִן
eternally giving,	<i>adey-ad m'fakeh---</i>	עַד־יָעַד מְפַכֶּה
the circle of life,	<i>ma'gal hahayim</i>	מַעְגַל הַחַיִּים
ever-dying, ever living.	<i>hameymit um'chayeh.</i>	הַמַּמִּית וְהַחַיֶּה

— Based on Hebrew liturgy. English and Hebrew by Marcia Falk.
Music by Linda Hirschorn.