



# MIKVEH: A PURIFICATION RITUAL

## FOR PERSONAL & COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

Hello,

Welcome to the Simple Mikveh Guide. This work comes out of many years of reclaiming and re-visioning mikveh. The intention of this guide is to acknowledge and give some context to what mikveh is, provide resources related to mainstream understanding of mikveh and also provide alternative mikveh ideas. Blessings for enjoyment of this wonderful, simple Jewish ritual!

Zohar Lev Cunningham & Rebekah Erev

### INTRO TO MIKVEH

Mikveh is an ancient Jewish ritual practice of water immersion, traditionally used for cleansing, purification and transformation. It's been conventionally used for conversion to Judaism, for brides, and for *niddah*, the practice of cleansing after menstruation. For Jews, water signifies the transformative movement from slavery in Egypt, through the parted Red Sea, and into freedom. There is also a mystical connection to mikveh as a metaphor for the womb of the divine. Entering a mikveh is a transformative and healing experience and we have long wondered why it is not available to more people, including the significant trans and queer populations in Jewish communities.

When we make ritual, we are working with the divine forces of presence and intention. The magic of mikveh comes in making contact with water. Contact with water marks a threshold and functions as a portal to bring closer our ritual intention/the world to come.

### WHO GETS TO DO MIKVEH?

Everyone! Mikveh practice is available to all of us as a healing tool at any time. You don't need any credentials. Your own wisdom is all the power you need to be a Jewish ritual leader. We do mikvahs in lakes, rivers, bathtubs, showers, outside in the rain, from teacups and in our imaginations.

Mikveh has been continually practiced since ancient Judaism. It is an offering of unbroken Jewish lineage we have claimed/re-claimed as our own. We want to make mikveh practice available as a tool to all Jews and non-Jews who want to heal wounds caused by white supremacy and colonialism. We want to make mikveh practice available for healing our bodies, spirits and the earth.

We acknowledge that not all beings have consistent access to water, including Palestinians. A lack of water does not make mikveh practice inaccessible. The spirit of water can be present with us if we choose to call for water, so even when water is not physically available to us we can engage in mikveh practice.

Like all material resources, the ways water is or is not available to us is shaped by our geographic and social locations. The ways we relate to water, what we decide is clean, *treyf* (dirty), drinkable, bathable, how much we use, how much we save, varies depending on our experiences. Traditional mikveh practice calls for clean and naturally flowing water. We invite you to decide what is clean and holy for your own body and spiritual practice.

## WHAT IS QUEER MIKVEH?

To us, a queer mikveh welcomes anyone, regardless of spiritual background or not. As Jews in diaspora we want to share and use our ritual practices for healing the land and waters we are visitors on for the liberation of all beings.

We have come up with this working definition and welcome feedback!

Queer mikveh is a ritual of Jews in diaspora. We believe the way we work for freedom for all beings is by using the gifts of our ancestors for the greatest good. We bring our rituals as gifts. It acknowledges that our path is to live on lands that are not historically our peoples and we honor the Indigenous ancestors of the land we live on, doing mikveh as an anti-colonialist ritual for collective and personal liberation.

Queer mikveh is a physical or spiritual space that uses the technologies of water and the Jewish practice of mikveh to mark transitions. Transition to be interpreted by individuals and individual ritual. Queer mikveh in it's essence honors the story of the water. The historical stories of the water we immerse in, the stories of our own bodies as water and the future story we vision. Queer mikveh is accessible physically and spiritually to any and all people who are curious about it. You don't have to be a practicing Jew to enter queer mikveh. You don't have to be Jewish. Queer mikveh is an earth and water honoring ritual.

Queer mikveh exists whenever a queer person or queers gather to do mikveh. Each person is their own spiritual authority and has the power to create their own ritual for individual or collective healing.

## SOME IDEAS FOR MIKVEH PREPARATION

The most important part of mikveh preparation is setting an intention. Because mikveh is a ritual most used to mark transitions, you can frame your intention in that way. You can do journaling or talk with friends to connect with the Jewish month, Jewish holidays, Shabbat, the moon phase and elements of the season that would support your intention.

Divination: A lot can be said about divination practices and Judaism. We will keep it brief for this section. Using divination can assist you in setting your intention. Oracle and tarot decks are both helpful tools. There is a great deck based on the Hebrew alphabet called [The Kabbalah Deck](#). Others we like are Rebekah Erev's [Moon Angels Oracle Deck](#) which includes yiddish and uses the cycle of the moon as inspiration and the [Slow Holler Tarot](#) which includes images of queers and lots of different bodies.

Another practice that's been used in Judaism for centuries is bibliomancy. You can use a book you find meaningful (or the torah) and ask a question. Then, close your eyes, open the book to a page and place your finger down. Interpret the word or sentence you pointed at to help guide you to answer your question.

Sit with your general intention or if you aren't sure, pose a question to the divination tool you are using. "What should be my intention for this mikveh?" "What needs transforming in my life?" "How can I transform my relationship with my body?"

## HOW TO PREPARE PHYSICALLY FOR MIKVEH

Some people like to think about entering the mikveh in the way their body was when they were born. By this we mean naked, without jewelry, with clean fingernails and brushed hair. This framing can be meaningful for many people. We suggest that you do mikveh in the way you feel comfortable for you and your experience. The idea is to feel vulnerable but also to claim your body as a powerful site of change that has the power to move us closer to our now unrecognizable futures.

For some people, doing mikveh in drag will feel most vulnerable, with all your make-up and best attire. For some, wearing a cloth around your body until just before you dip is meaningful. If you were born intersex and your genitalia was changed without your consent, thinking about your body as perfect, however you were born, can be loving.

## WHERE TO DO MIKVEH

There is much midrash around what constitutes a mikveh. Most mikvot currently exist in Orthodox synagogues but there is a growing movement to create more diverse and inclusive spaces for mikveh. [Mayyim Hayyim](#) is a wonderful resource with a physical body of water mikveh space. [Immerse NYC](#) is a newer organization training people of all genders to be mikveh guides. They also work to find gender inclusive spaces for people to do mikveh in NYC.

Mikveh can be done in a natural body of water. Some people are also making swimming pools holy places of mikveh. In Mishnah (the book that makes commentary on the torah) there are arguments as to what constitutes a mikveh and how much water from a spring or well or rainwater must be present. We are of the school that says you decide for yourself what works. If you are concerned about Jewish law, the ocean is always a good choice. There are no conflicting arguments about the ocean as mikveh. As the wise maggid Jhos Singer says in reference to the ocean, “It’s becomes a mikveh when we call it a mikveh.” Done.

We recognize immersion in water does not work for every body. Therefore, a guiding principle for where to do a mikveh is: do mikveh in a place that is sacred to you. Your body is always holy and your body is made of mostly water. Later in this guide there is more information on mikveh with no immersion required.

## WHO TO DO IT WITH

Do mikveh with people you feel comfortable with and supported by. Do a solo mikveh and ask the earth body to be your witness. Do mikveh with people who share some of your vision for collective healing.

## WHAT TO BRING TO A MIKVEH:

1. Intentions for the ritual for yourself and/or the collective.
2. Items for the altar from your cultural background (please do not bring appropriated items from cultures that are not yours).
3. Warm clothes, towels, warm drinks
4. Your spirit of love, healing and resistance

## HOW TO MAKE MIKVEH A NON-ZIONIST RITUAL

Reject all colonial projects by learning about, naming & honoring, and materially supporting the communities indigenous to the land where you hold your mikveh. Name and thank the Indigenous people of the land you are going to do your mikveh on.

Take time to vision our world to come in which Palestine and all people are free. Hold and explore this vision intimately as you prepare to immerse. What is one action you can take to bring this future world closer? Trust that your vision is collaborating with countless others doing this work. Use mikveh practice to ground into your contribution to the abundant work for liberation being done. We are many.

## IDEAS FOR MIKVEH RITUAL

Mikveh ritual is potentially very simple.

Generally people consider a mikveh to be a full immersion in water, where you are floating in the water, not touching the bottom, with no part of the body above the surface (including hair). This works for some people. It doesn't work for everyone and it doesn't work for all bodies. Because of this, mikveh ritual can be expanded outside of these traditional confines in exciting, creative ways.

### SOUND MIKVEH:

One way that's felt very meaningful for many is a "sound mikveh." This can be a group of people toning, harmonizing or chanting in a circle. One person at a time can be in the center of the circle and feel the vibrations of healing sound wash over their body. Another method of sound mikveh is to use a shofar or other instrument of your lineage to make sounds that reach a body of water and also wash over you.

### TEA CUP MIKVEH:

Fill a special teacup. If you want, add flower essence, a small stone, or other special elements. Sing the teacup a sweet song, dance around it, cry in some tears, tell the cup a tender and hopeful story, hold the teacup above the body of your animal friend for extra blessing, balance it on your head to call in your highest self. Use the holy contents of this teacup to make contact with water. Mikveh to go. We've always been people on the move.

### FERMENTATION MIKVEH:

Some food goes through natural changes by being immersed in water. If we eat that food, we can symbolically go through a change similar to the one the food went through.

## PRAYERS FOR MIKVEH

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/traditional-mikveh-blessings>

Shehecheyanu is a good prayer to say for mikveh immersion.

בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיִּיתָנוּ וְקִיַּיַּמְתָּנוּ וְהִגִּיעַתָּנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה

B'rukha At ya Eloheynu Ruakh haolam shehekheyatnu v'kiyimatnu v'higiyatnu lazman hazeh.

You are Blessed, Our God, Spirit of the World, who has kept us in life and sustained us, enabling us  
.to reach this season

B'rucha at shekhinah eloteinu ruach ha-olam asher kid-shanu bi-tevilah b'mayyim hayyim.

Blessed are You, Shekhinah, Source of Life, Who blesses us by embracing us in living waters.

-Adapted by Dori Midnight

Some traditional mikveh prayers:

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/traditional-mikveh-blessings>

## RESOURCES AND OUR SOURCES:

Learnings we've gotten from our work in Kohenet with Jill Hammer and Taya Shere

<http://www.kohenet.com/>

On setting intentions for mikveh in a conventional framework:

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/7-kavanot-mikveh-preparation>

Some more thoughts on mikveh:

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/rising-ritual-bath>

Basic overview of common modern mikveh:

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/what-mikveh-introduction-jewish-ritual-bath>

## MAYYIM HAYYIM

<http://www.mayyimhayyim.org/>

## IMMERSE NYC

<http://www.immersenyc.org/>

### **Mikveh related projects:**

**Information about the project and documentary film: Queer Mikveh Project. As well as their crowd fundraiser and Instagram:**

<https://www.generosity.com/community-fundraising/queer-mikveh-project--2>

@queermikvehproject

## GAY BATHHOUSE

Zoh Lev & Shelby Handler's mikveh project on Duwamish & Coastal Salish Territories

<https://vimeo.com/189410678>

faygele666@gmail.com

## Radiodress

Orev Katz's work in Toronto

[Shekinah Ministries](#)

## Materials genealogy

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