

Returning from the COVID-19 Pandemic Using Immersion to Prepare for our New Normal

During Covid-19 many of us ceased marking time. One day looked much the same as the one before and the one that would come after. Time moved forward, but there came with it a numbness. We were unable to attend family events in person. Birthdays and holidays were celebrated via zoom. Funerals, memorials, shiva and yahrzeits were attended in person by only the immediate family. And that was on the communal level. Our personal plans were, at best, put on hold and, at worst, eliminated completely. While we may not have been touched directly by Covid-19, we have all been affected. Many of us grieve for those things changed and lost.

As we move forward, we will become more aware of the individuality of our days. Hopefully our numbness will begin to lift and our wounds will begin to heal. The grief that we have felt will begin to let go and we will enter the long-term period of healing. We will begin to unpack the trauma that the virus and the shut down of the world has caused.

Covid-19 continues to have a significant impact on our lives. But, we are resilient and we will recover even as we create a new normal. Historically, we have seen water as a creator of significant changes in the world and life. Creator of a new normal. From the story of creation, to the birth of a child and eventually the washing of a body following death, water surrounds us our entire lives. It is the powerful flash flood, the gentle lapping wave, the all encompassing embrace of submersion. Water is in our life force and is a symbol of renewal for many people around the world. We can harness some of the power and beauty of water to intentionally create our path forward.

In Judaism, water is often associated with the *mikvah*, or ritual bath. The *mikvah* can be any source of water which is considered to be 'living water.' Water naturally obtained - via rain, river, lakes and oceans. Water which can support life. Although the use of the *mikvah* has changed overtime its purpose has not. It has always marked time and prepared us to enter moments of sacredness. The *mikvah* precedes the sacred entrance to marriage, conception, Judaism and holidays. Today, the *mikvah* is also used to mark the distinction between, or separation from, difficulties of the past and the move toward healing.

As one who believes that water and the use of *mikvah* are powerful and embracing forces in life, I offer this *mikvah* ceremony for those who are ready to mark their transition toward a post Covid-19 new normal. A marking of the end, a marking of the beginning of the end. Through it I honor the emotional, physical and financial tumult we have experienced. I honor our personal struggles and strengths and the many people who supported us during this time. Finally, I offer this ceremony as an acknowledgement that we are entering a new phase that will hold both joy and hope as well as sadness. We have been forever changed, individually and communally. But we are strong and resilient. A visit to the *mikvah* or local 'living source' of water can be a powerful step in that process.

Post COVID-19 Mikvah Ceremony

On your way to the Mikva

Take some time to identify and name some of the most difficult parts of the past weeks of COVID-19 and the necessary physical and social isolation. How did you react? What did you learn? What are the good things you discovered that you hope to maintain?

It may also be helpful to name those things which are in the future. How will you rejoin the community in person? Will it be hard to touch and be touched?

At the Mikvah

לְכֹל־זְמַן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֶפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: - Kohelet

Everything has a time -

A time for staying home and a time for physical distancing.

A time for masks and gloves and protections.

A time for buildings, parks and beaches to be closed.

There is a time for life to happen on-line. And a time to remain apart.

This does not mean that we have returned to life as it was. We can not. The world has changed and we have changed with it. Immersing in the waters of life is a way to mark the sacredness of time. A way to move forward in creating a new normal. A step toward rejoining the physical community.

I want to name and honor my reactions during this difficult time.

To know that my reactions, though different from those around me, were OK.

To recognize that my trauma and grief are real and honest. That each of us is different.

To honor the challenges I have experienced and those I may continue to have.

By honoring all that has been, I choose to let go and move forward. To acknowledge anew my trust in God, and God's control. With that, I pray to be open to my return to life as it will be and all the opportunities it will present.

If there are others who are joining you for your immersion:

There have been times when each of you has been a blessing to me during this time of difficulty. For your place in my life, for your loving kindness and support, I thank you and offer you my love.

Entering the Mikvah/Beach/

Recite at the mikveh steps:

As I step toward these waters of healing and preparation, I recognize the period where my life was turned upside down by outside forces. Where some days were easier than others but through it all I underwent a transition from who I was to who I will become. As I prepare to step into the healing waters of the mikvah I choose also to let go. I allow it to envelope me in a way that only the waters of God can envelope. To cradle and hold me as I prepare to step back into life. I remind myself that though people have been physically distant, I am always loved, held, and protected. That I am strong and I will be OK.

Enter the Mikvah

Enter the mikvah and immerse yourself completely. Allow the waters to surround you, to penetrate your skin, your heart and your soul. You have made the decision to step into the sacred space of life-giving water. Feel the water on each part of your body and be open to any thoughts and feelings that might surface. Step into the love and acceptance that only you can give yourself. Take your time.

When you are ready, surface and recite out loud or internally:

ברוך אתה אֱדוֹנֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל הַטְּבִילָה
*Barukh atah Adonay Eloheynu melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu al ha-t'vilah.*

Blessed are you, Eternal God, ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us through *mitzvot* and has enjoined us concerning immersion.

Once again immerse yourself completely in the waters, take your time. When you are ready, surface and recite out loud or internally:

ברוך אתה אֱדוֹנֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהִקְדִּישָׁנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַּן הַזֶּה
*Barukh atah Adonay, Eloheynu melekh ha-olam, shehekheyanu, v'kiy'manu,
v'higianu, la-z'man ha-zeh.*

Blessed is the Eternal, the God of all creation, who has blessed me with life, sustained me, and enabled me to reach this moment.

Immerse yourself a third and final time, take your time. When you are ready, surface. Take a moment to be with yourself, to meditate or to recite/read something that is meaningful to you.

As you exit the mikvah:

Adonai, my God who heals the brokenhearted and restores the body, I stand here before you. My heart has been broken and my pain is profound. I look to you for healing and strength as I return to the world we build it together. I know not what tomorrow will bring, but place my trust and my life in your hands. Together. You and I together with community and the world. May my days be filled with preserving the past and creating the future filled with your guidance, love, tolerance, peace and humility. Amen.