

קונטרס וטבל במים

ליקוט דברי רבותינו נשיאנו
בעניני טבילה במקוה



*Teachings of our Rebbeim
about the Importance of
going to the Mikveh*



Forward

It is with great joy that we present to you the Kuntres “*Vetaval Bemayim*”, a collection of teachings of our Rebbeim concerning the importance of immersing oneself in a *Mikveh* before davening.

Immersing in the *Mikveh* before davening is a fundamental practice of Chassidim, and we find many places where the *Rebbeim* speak about its necessity and importance.

This English version is an abridged digest of all those *Maamorim*, *Sichos* and letters; presenting the different facets and highlighting the essential themes of going to the Mikveh.

May we merit to the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.

Yud Shvat, 5772

Takanas Ezra

Ezra Hasofer decreed that men who are in state of impurity are prohibited from learning Torah unless they first purify themselves¹. A later *Beis Din* extended the decree to prohibit *davening* as well without prior purification². This decree is called “*Takanas Ezra*.” The act of immersing oneself in keeping with this *Takana* is called *Tevilas Ezra*.

At a later date, the *Chachamim* abolished the *Takana* completely, on the basis of the following two things: First of all, the *Takana* had never been accepted by the general public, and secondly, it caused *Bittul Torah*, for people would not learn Torah if they had not gone to the *mikvah*.³

There is a dispute among *Rishonim* which part, or perhaps all, of the *Takanah* was abolished. Some *Rishonim* explain that it was abolished entirely, both with regards to learning and davening⁴. Others maintain that it was abolished only in regard to learning, but for *davening*, the *Takana* is still in place⁵. The accepted *halacha* is that *Takanas Ezra* has been completely abolished, and according to the letter of the law, one may learn **and** *daven* in a state of impurity⁶.

Although there is no *halachik* requirement for a person to observe *Takanas Ezra*, we find many *Rishonim* who extol the virtues of observing this *Takana*. They further extol its virtues as a valuable method of preparation for *davening*.

The *Rambam* writes in *Hilchos Tefilla*⁷ “It is widespread custom in Shinar and

1. Bava Kama 82

2. Rambam Hilchos Tefilla 4:4

3. See Shulchan Aruch Harav. Orach Chayim, 88:1

4. Rashi, Rambam, Rosh, Bahag, Rashba etc.

5. Rabenu Chananel, Raavad, Rokeach, Sefer Ha'eshkol etc.

6. Orach Chayim 88

7. 4:6

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Spain that a *ba'al keri* does not pray until he has washed his whole body in water, [based on the command]: "*Prepare to meet your G-d, Israel*" (*Amos 4:12*).

When the *Rambam* was confronted with the question on why he had ruled leniently in regard to *Takanas Ezra* (for he only classifies it as a **custom**, not a **requirement**), he replied⁸ that although he personally never missed a *tevila*, even once, he could only write that which was *halachah*.

The *Talmidei Rabenu Yona*⁹ writes that although there is a dispute whether *Tevilas Ezra* is required for *davening*, all agree that one's *Tefilos* are more accepted after *tevila*.

Likewise, the *Rosh*¹⁰ writes that when one *davens* in a state of impurity, his *Tefilos* will not be accepted.

The *Meiri*¹¹ writes that although there is no *halachik* obligation for *tevila*, it brings one to a great level of *kedusha*, and can save a person from doing *aveiros*.

The *Sha'alos U'Teshuvos Min Hashomayim*¹² writes further that since *davening* today is in place of offering *korbanos*, it is only proper that it be done in a state of purity, just as the *Kohen* was required to purify himself for the *avodah* which consisted primarily of offering *korbanos*.

Likewise, our *Rebbeim* have repeatedly mentioned the *Rif's* opinion that *Tevilas Ezra* is still required for *Tefilla*. They stressed that although the *halacha* is not like the *Rif*, it is still appropriate to be stringent because, as the *Talmidei Rabenu Yona* write, all agree that *tefillos* are more accepted after immersing in the *mikvah*.

The *Tzemach Tzedek* writes to someone "...Another thing that ought to be done, they should heat up the *mikvah* every day, as is done in all the other towns, so that the men can immerse, as this is a requirement according to many great *Poskim*. According to everyone it is a "*midas chassidus bakorov l'din...*"¹³

8. Quoted in the *Talmidei Rabenu Yona* below

9. *Rif Berachos* 13b

10. *Orchos Chayim* 71

11. *Beis Habechirah Berachos* 21a

12. *Teshuva* 5

13. *Igros Kodosh Tzemach Tzedek* #25

The *Rebbe* often quoted the above *teshuvah* where the *Rambam* writes of himself that he never missed this *tevila* throughout his entire life.

The Essence of Tevila

In *Likutei Torah*¹⁴ the *Alter Rebbe* explains the above words of the *Talmidei Rabenu Yona* that “all agree that *tefillos* are more accepted after *tevila*,” and why this is specifically with regards to *tefilla* and not necessarily with regards to learning.

The *Mishna* in *Sotah*¹⁵ says that from when the Jewish people stopped being careful about eating their fruit in a state of *tahara*, the (pleasant) aroma (“*rei’ach*”) went missing from the fruits. The *Gemara* in *Sotah* elsewhere again associates pleasant aroma with *tahara*¹⁶.

Korbanos are called “*rei’ach nichochi* – a pleasing aroma for me.” It says further “*And the Lord smelled the pleasant aroma*,” again referring to *korbanos*. Based on the association above of smell and *tahara*, it follows that the pleasant-smelling *korbanos* were performed in the ultimate state of purity.

Our Sages say that the *tefillos* were instituted to replace the *korbanos*. Therefore, it is appropriate that the *tefillos* be recited in a state of *tahara*.

According to *kabala*, the reason why smell is associated with *tahara* is because they both share the characteristic of “*makif*.” This explains why *tevila* in a *mikva* enhances *tefilla* specifically as opposed to Torah learning, because Torah learning has the *kabalistic* character of “*pnimi*,” the opposite of the above.

On a more *kabalistic* level, immersing in a *mikvah* gives the person an opportunity to attain higher levels than he is naturally able to attain. A person reflects the more “revealed” aspects of holiness, whereas the *mikvah* reflects the more “hidden” aspects thereof. When a person immerses in the *mikvah*, he includes himself in the higher, more hidden aspects of holiness.

14. Parshas Ki Savo

15. 9:14

16. 49a

Preparation for Davening

The *Rebbe* writes¹⁷ another reason according to *Nigleh* why *mikvah* is an important preparation for *davening*:

The *Rashba*, quoted by the *Magen Avraham* in *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁸, writes that a when a person wakes up in the morning he is like the *Kohen Gadol* preparing for the *avodah*.

Halacha states that the *Kohen Gadol* is not allowed to enter the *Beis Hamikdash* and begin the *avodah* until he first immerses himself in a *mikvah*. By extension, it is appropriate that a person immerses in the *mikvah* before beginning his own personal *avodah* in the morning.

The *Friediker Rebbe* said¹⁹ that the earlier *Chassidim* would go to the *mikvah* on *Shabbos* morning as a *segula* that their *davening* should be with proper *hisbonenus* and *dvekus*.

Added Kedusha and Tahara

According to *Chassidus*, there are additional reasons why it is important to go to *mikvah*, even when one is pure and is not obligated with *Tevilas Ezra*.

When one goes to the *mikvah*, even if he is pure, he can achieve higher levels of *tahara*. This, the *Rebbe* says²⁰, is learned from the *avodah* of the *Kohen Godol* on *Yom Kippur*.

The *Kohen Godol* immerses himself five times during the day of *Yom Kippur*. If a *mikvah* merely transforms someone from a state of impurity to a state of purity, why is it that the *Kohen Godol* needs to immerse four times after his initial immersion?

17. Igros Kodesh 11, 400

18. Orach Chayim 4

19. Sefer Hasichos 5702 p19

20. Likutei Sichos 30 p19

Rather, with each additional immersion, the *Kohen Godol* achieves a higher level of *tahara*.

It is stated in *Kesser Shem Tov*²¹ that the reason why the *Ba'al Shem Tov* merited all his *ha'aros* and *madreigos* was because he was accustomed to frequently immersing himself in the *mikvah*.

The *Alter Rebbe*²² writes to someone in a letter, that when he goes to the *mikvah*, he should immerse himself two times, one time to remove the *tumah*, and another time to “receive the *kedusha*.”

Bittul and Yirah

The *Rebbeim* point out that “*tevila*” and “*bittul*” are made up of the same letters. The act of immersing oneself in the *mikvah*, letting the water covers his whole body, affects a *bittul* in the person.

This is reflected strongly in the writings of the Rambam at the end of his treatment of *Hilchos Mikvah*. The Rambam expands on the idea that the complete **immersion** of the person in the waters of the *mikvah* accomplishes “*bittul* in the waters of pure knowledge.” Utter submersion in water is readily understood as a metaphor for *bittul*. These words show yet again that immersing in a *mikvah* is more than just a purification of *tumah*, but a vital step in increasing *kedusha* and *tahara*.

The *Rebbe*²³ quoted the *Friediker Rebbe* as saying that in order to properly learn Torah, with *Yiras Shamayim*, one must be careful to go to the *mikvah*.

21. Siman 219

22. Igros Kodesh Admor Hazakein #86

23. Sichs Lag Be'omer 5711

Removing the Obstacles

The *Alter Rebbe* prescribes a remedy for one who suffers from *timtum ha'moach*, contamination of the mind²⁴. This is a state when the mind had become coarse and dull from interaction with the physical and mundane world. For such a person it is impossible to focus and concentrate on *davening* and learning, unless he first “shakes” off the dust of this world.

The *Alter Rebbe* recommends doing three things before *davening* that guarantee the removal of all “obstacles”: Giving *tzedaka*, immersing in the *mikvah*, and learning *divrei mussar*, especially of the *Zohar*.

The *Rebbe Rashab* expands on why *mikvah* is so important:²⁵

“Another solution is ‘*tunken zich in mikvah* – dipping oneself in the *mikvah*.’ This does not mean to purify oneself from impurity, that is a given; rather, he should view the *mikvah* as a place which is higher than reason. The ‘*Siddur*’ contains *kavanos*, namely, that he should be aware of what the Torah says “*But a spring or a cistern, a gathering of water remains clean.*” (*Vayikra 11:36*) The reference is that he should realize that when he is submerged in the *mikvah*, he is on a very high level, and when he leaves the *mikvah*, he is separating himself from something high and lofty... and this is a solution for *timtum ha'moach*.”

The *Rebbe* explains²⁶ why specifically *mikvah* is required before *davening*:

“Also, it is necessary to immerse oneself in a *mikvah* before *davening*, because ‘*tevila*’ and ‘*bitul*’ are composed of the same words. ‘*Bitul*’ here is the nullification of the mind, nullification of one’s essence, and to quote the *Rebbe Rashab*, ‘*tunken zich in mikvah* – dipping oneself in the *mikvah*...’

That is not only transforming from a state of impurity to a state of purity, but also knowing that the *mikvah* is a realm of purity, as it is written “*But a spring or a cistern, a gathering of water remains clean.*” (*Vayikra 11:36*) When one is in the *mikvah*, he is on a very high level, and when he leaves the *mikvah*, he is no longer on this level, for this is why ‘*tevila*’ and ‘*bitul*’ are composed of the same words, alluding to the nullification of one’s essence...”

24. Likutei Torah, Parshas Ki Savo - Maamorim Ketzorim, p483

25. Toras Sholom, Simchas Torah 5673

26. Maamar ‘לפיכך נקראו הראשונים סופרים’ 5716

People wrote to the *Rebbe* complaining that they couldn't attach themselves to their davening and learning, due to other "obstacles" such as forgetfulness, disrupting thoughts, and lack of concentration. The *Rebbe* advised them, among other things, that they should be careful about going to the *mikvah*.

Taharas Hanefesh

The *Friediker Rebbe*²⁷ writes:

"In my personal diary, I have recorded several stories from our Master the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, that have been passed down and told to me by the *Rebbs* of *Chabad*, about the great importance of *tevilas tahara* – about those who immerse themselves, not simply to purify themselves from *tumah* (a basic *tevila*) rather about those who immerse themselves for *taharas hanefesh*.

- A. A student of the Gaon Reb Shalom Shachna of Lublin had become disoriented, and had either forgotten or muddled his learning. His *Rebbe*, Reb Shalom Shachna, advised him to observe *tevilas tahara*, which strengthens the mind for Torah, and strengthens the heart for *tefilla*.
- B. One of the wealthier men of Padua – during the time of the *Maharam* – was known as a *Yirei Shamayim* and a generous *ba'al tzedaka*. He used to mock the *mekubalim* who observed *tevilas tahara*, and in his capacity of *Rosh Hakohol*, he would not allow any community funds to be used for a men's *mikvah*. One day, he suddenly began suffering loss of memory. As per the advice of the *Maharam*, he was brought to R' Eliyahu Ba'al Shem in Cracow. R' Eliyahu was able to heal him on the condition that he accepts to observe *tevilas tahara* and go to the *mikvah* every day.
- C. During the time of the *Maharal*, there lived in Prague a simple person who would lend money to merchants on market day. After some time, word spread that whoever used the money borrowed from this man would have

27. Igros Kodesh 7,280

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a very successful day in the market. For many years the *Maharal* wondered what special merit this person had, until he heard that this person went to the *mikvah* every day; needless to say, he wondered no longer.

Tevilas Tahara

*In Likutei Dibburim*²⁸ the *Friediker Rebbe* expounds on the concept of *Tevilas tahara*:

Tevilas tahara does not mean that one immerses only for the sake of the purification of the body (“*tabaras haguf*”), nor even for the further refinement of the body (“*zikuch haguf*”).

There is a significant difference between these two concepts. “Purification of the body” signifies that immersion removes impurity. “Refinement of the body” indicates that immersion makes him cleaner than he already was. This concept applies more to a person who is seeking to increase in purity as opposed to one who is impure and seeking to rectification thereof.

The distinction may be understood by a simple material analogy. As long a vessel is dirty, it is not only useless, but it spoils any edible food that may be put in it and must be washed. When it is no longer dirty, but not yet utterly clean, it will no longer spoil food, but it can still affect the taste due to the residue left in the vessel. Only a thorough scouring will fully restore the vessel’s usefulness.

On the spiritual plane, the distinction between “purification of the body” and “refinement of the body” exists at the level of intellect, the level of *middos*, and the level of the so-called “garments of the soul,” namely thought, speech, and action.

As is well known, everything that G-d created comprises a body and a soul. Even the body and the soul of man each comprise a body and a soul of their

28. *Sicha Shevi'i Shel Pesach* 5703

own. The soul may animate the body, and the body may obey the soul's directives, but beyond their symbiotic combination, the soul has its own "body," and the body has its own "soul."

The Holy One, Blessed be He, Who "performs wonders" in linking a spiritual soul with a spiritual body performs the impossible – He combines them in such a way that one cannot distinguish between the soul that animates the body and the body that is animated by the soul. But moreover, He has fitted each soul with its own "body," and He has fitted each body with its own "soul."

The Divine Ordination is that the soul is a spiritual essence and the body is a material essence. This principal pertains not only in relation to body and soul, but to all created beings. Within the soul, for example, every faculty and sense comprises a soul and a body. The faculty of intellect has a soul and body: *chachmah* has its soul and body, and *binah* has its soul and body. These "bodies" are not identical with the physical part of the brain that processes *chachmah* which is cool and moist, as well as the physical part of the brain that processes *binah* which is warm and dry. These bodies are spiritual entities, and they are the essential bodies of the faculties of *chachmah* and *binah*. The same is true regarding the other faculties of the soul.

Herein lies the distinction between the "purification (*tahara*) of the body" and "refinement (*zikuch*) of the body." The cleansing of the organs of the soul's faculties (such as the coldness of the faculty of *chachmah* or the warmth of the faculty of *binah*) is called "**refinement** (*zikuch*) of the body." The cleansing of the "body" of the spiritual faculty of *chachmah* and *binah* (mentioned above) is called "**purification** (*taharah*) of the body." In general terms, this is the meaning of immersion – the purification and refinement of the bodies of the faculties of the soul.

Immersion may also be localized. A particular faculty of the soul may be in need of purification and refinement, and this may take place at a variety of levels. Immersion for the sake of cleansing the intellect will be different from immersion for the sake of cleansing the heart, which will be different in turn from immersion for the sake of cleansing the garments of the soul. And indeed, many particular levels are distinguishable within the levels of the intellect, the spiritual emotions, and the garments of the soul.

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Immersion varies likewise in terms of time. An ordinary weekday immersion is different from immersion on Mondays and Thursdays (the days on which the Torah is publicly read), or on fast days, or the eve of *Shabbos* and festivals, or the eve of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, or on *Shabbos* and festivals themselves.