

Kavod HaMet/Taharah
Honoring the Dead/Ritual Purification
Study and Discussion with Rabbi Nancy Flam
Congregation B'nai Israel • November 8, 2020

1. *Kavod HaMet* – Honoring the Dead

- Release primary mourners from all positive mitzvot so they may attend exclusively to the needs of the *met/metah*.
- Provide *Shomrim*/Guardians to stay with the body from death until burial.
- Treat the body with dignity – Do not leave the body exposed. Do not defile the body through altering it with autopsy or embalming except when necessary. (Organ donation is an exception.)
- Handle the body with utmost care – provide *taharah* (ritual cleansing and purification, and preparation for burial)
- Provide a speedy burial – leaving a body unburied does not protect dignity.
- Same burial practices for all – linen shrouds, plain pine box

2. *Taharah* - Purification

Five Steps:

1. Preliminary Prayers
2. *Rechitzah* – Washing
3. *Taharah* – Purifying
4. ***Halbashah* – Dressing** and *Halanah/Hashkavah* – Laying Down
5. Concluding Prayers

3. *Halbashah* – Dressing

A. The High Priest dressing for Yom Kippur Ritual: Leviticus 16:4

כְּתוּבָה־בְּדָ קֹדֶשׁ וּמְכֻסֵּי־בֶדֶן יִהְיוּ עַל־בְּשָׂרוֹ וּבְאַבְגָּט בֶּדֶן יִחָאָר וּבְמִצְנָפֶת בֶּדֶן יִצָּנֵף בְּגֵדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ הֵם
וְרִתְּץ בְּמַיִם אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ וּלְבָשֵׁם:

He shall be dressed in a sacral linen tunic, with linen breeches next to his flesh, and be girt with a linen sash, and he shall wear a linen turban. They are sacral vestments; he shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.

B. Zechariah's Vision: Zechariah 3: 1 - 5

He further showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the LORD, and the Accuser standing at his right to accuse him.

But [the angel of] the LORD said to the Accuser, "The LORD rebuke you, O Accuser; may the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! For this is a brand plucked from the fire."

Now Joshua was clothed in filthy garments when he stood before the angel.

The latter spoke up and said to his attendants, "Take the filthy garments off him!" And he said to him, "See, I have removed your guilt from you, and you shall be clothed in [priestly] robes."

Then he gave the order, "Let a pure diadem be placed on his head." And they placed the pure diadem on his head and clothed him in [priestly] garments, as the angel of the LORD stood by.

The angel of YHVH solemnly advised Joshua, saying, "Thus says YHVH of Hosts: If you walk in My paths and keep My charge, then You will govern My house and guard My courts, and I will let you move about among these standing here."

C. Taharah Liturgy of Halbashah (from *Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness*, by Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel)

Kavvnah: As we dress this *met/metah*, let us be conscious that we are clothing him/her in the garments of the *Kohen Gadol*.

(As each item of clothing is put on the *met/metah*, the *m'taharim* recite the appropriate phrase from the first half of the verse. This first half is shown here in its entirety, and then appears below, phrase by phrase... in accordance with our order of dressing.)

כְּתוּנַת־בֵּד קָדֹשׁ יִלְבָּשׁ וּמְכַסֵּי־בֶדֶד יִהְיוּ עָלָיו בְּשָׂרָוֹ וּבְאַבְגָּט בֵּד יִתְגַּדַּר וּבְמִצְנַפֶּת בֵּד יִצָּגָר :

He shall be dressed in a sacral linen tunic, with linen breeches next to his flesh, and be girt with a linen sash, and he shall wear a linen turban.

Order of dressing and accompanying phrases:

a. *Kippah*:

For a male: place a kippah on the *met*.

For a female: Place a kippah on the *metah* if she wore one during her lifetime.

b. *Mitznefet* (headdress/bonnet):

For a male: Fit the *mitznefet* over the head, making sure that the face and back of the head are covered.

For a female: Gather the *metah*'s hair loosely off her face. Place the bonnet on the *metah* so that it covers all her hair and the back of her head. Tie the bonnet with a bow or using the method specified for the *michnasayim*.

As step b is done, recite: וּבְמִצְנֶפֶת בֶּדֶד יִצְגָהּ – and wear a linen turban.

c. *Michnasyim* (male and female)

- Put the *michnasyim* on the *met/metah*. Two *m'taharim* then tie the sash at the waist. Each takes one end of the tie, and the two twist the ends four times while counting aloud... Secure the tie with a bow or two slip-knots...

- For a male: Tie a band around each of the *met*'s legs, just above the ankle...

- For a female: Tie a band around each of the *metah*'s legs, just below the knees...

As step c is done, recite: וּמְכַנְסֵי-בֶדֶד יִהְיוּ עַל-בְּשָׂרוֹ with linen breeches next to the flesh

And so on for d) *ketonet* (tunic/large shirt), e) *kittel* (long robe with sleeves and a collar), f. *avnet* (sash/belt), g. apron and face cover (for women).

h. Recite the second half of Leviticus 16:4, followed by Genesis 43:14 בְּגֵדֵי-קֹדֶשׁ :הֵם וְרַתְּצָן בְּמַיִם אֶת-בְּשָׂרוֹ וּלְבָשָׁם: – They are sacral vestments; he shall bathe his body in water and put them on. וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יִתֵּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים. And may El Shaddai give you mercy.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is most interesting or compelling or disturbing or perplexing about what we have just studied?
2. The sages made many statements about the relationship of body and soul after death: some philosophic, some fantastical. But they all affirm some kind of life for the soul after death. What is your own thinking about the relationship of body and soul and about what happens after death?
3. Do you imagine you would want traditional Jewish burial practices performed for you when you die? Why or why not?

D. Another Level! Talmud and Zohar

For all twelve months [after death] one's body endures and his soul ascends and descends; after twelve months, the body ceases to exist and the soul ascends and never again descends. – *BT Shabbat 152b-153a*

In the world that is coming, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads, basking in the radiance of the *Shekhinah*. – *BT Berakhot 17a*

So, too, of Joshua the high priest is written “*Take the filthy garments off him!*” and then, *and they clothed him in garments* – garments of that world. From here, previous words. From here we learn that as long as the body of this world endures in the grave, the spirit is not clothed in the garments of that world, as it is written: *They took the filthy garments off him*, first, and afterwards *they clothed him in garments...*

Two bodies together cannot endure. As long as this one exists, the spirit cannot receive another. When this one passes away, the other is instantly ready, surely! This one exits and that one enters. – *Zohar Rav Metivta 3:169b – 170a*

Happy is the share of one who attains this garment of which we have spoken, in which the righteous are clothed in the Garden of Eden! They are fashioned out of good deeds performed by a person in this world through the commandments of Torah, by which the soul abided in the Garden of Eden and is clothed in those glorious garments.

When the soul ascends through that opening of the heaven, other glorious, supernal garments are presented to her, made out of aspiration and heartfelt intention in Torah and prayer. As this ascends, the one who is crowned is crowned, and a portion remains for that person, out of which garments of light are fashioned for the soul to wear as it ascends. Although it has been established that those garments depend on deeds, these depend solely on aspiration, as has been said, to abide among angels, holy spirits. This is lucidity of the matter, and so did the Holy Lamp learn it from Elijah. Garments below in the earthly Garden, by deeds; garments above, by spirit of the heart. – *Zohar Va-Yaqhel 2:210b*