

October 2014 / Cheshvan 5775

Dear Friends,

There has been much talk recently in the news regarding privacy in and supervision of Mikva'ot. We thought, therefore, that this might be a good time to share with you some comments and information about our Mikveh and, in doing so, address some issues about which there may be some concern.

A Mikveh, by definition, must inspire in the user peace, sanctity and trust. The scrupulous oversight and attention to every detail connected to the Mikveh is necessary in order for our users to feel secure, cared for and respected. Any breach of any of our procedures or guidelines can violate the trust that we have earned, while casting doubt on this Mikveh facility and on the mitzvah of Mikveh itself. It is, therefore, our solemn obligation to assure that all of the aspects of the Mikveh are preserved with the utmost care, sensitivity and modesty so that all who come to our Mikveh have an experience that leaves them feeling purified, uplifted and inspired. The information below reflects the ways in which we have built and operated the Mikveh so that our users can rely on us with full confidence.

When our Mikveh was built, in the spring of 2002, there were basic principles upon which this facility was constructed, principles regarding its design and structural integrity, as well as principles that have been established in order to enhance the experience of every user. These principles continue to be indispensable to the operation of The Mikveh at Temple Beth Hillel–Beth El.

1. Privacy and Discretion: From the outset, a fundamental operating principle of our Mikveh has been the assurance of privacy for our users. To that end, the Mikveh has its own door so that users can go directly outside, to the Mikveh parking lot, and from which people can enter and exit unseen.

2. Scrutiny: Each user may ask that the shomeret/attendant check them for chatzitzot/barriers between the skin and the Mikveh water. Since we view Mikveh as a personal mitzvah, however, each person may request or refuse the offer to be checked by the attendant. No one will be scrutinized against their will or in ways that might make them uncomfortable.

3. Modesty: Our shomer/ot/attendants are also trained to assure the privacy and modesty of each user. Each user is given a wrap, robe or towel to wear as they exit the bathroom and proceed to the Mikveh pool. When the user is ready to enter the water, the attendant holds the user's towel up, over the eye-level of the shomer/et, so that the user can descend without being seen. Only when the user is in the water and gives permission to the shomer/et, does the attendant lower the towel.

We offer, as well, the option of entering and emerging from the water without the presence of the shomer/et. After the user is in the pool, the shomer/et would enter the room. When the user is ready to emerge from the pool, the shomer/et can be asked to leave the room.

4. Immersion: The shomer/et instructs the user on the proper way to immerse. It is the primary function of the attendant to witness the immersions and assure that the immersions have been properly executed. In this way the shomer/et can confirm that the mitzvah of Mikveh, which includes the immersions and the recitation of the blessings, has been performed correctly.

5. Halachic Construction: Our Mikveh was constructed in a way that meets the highest standards of Mikveh construction. Designed by an architect who specializes in designing Mikva'ot, our Mikveh is of the "bor 'al gabbai bor"/cistern-next-to-cistern model. There are two primary opinions regarding the proper method for mixing Mikveh water with regular water. Most Mikva'ot are built according to one system or the other. Our double-cistern construction, however, simultaneously satisfies both requirements and represents the "gold standard" for Mikva'ot. Our Mikveh construction was supervised, during and after the building phase, and was later approved for use by Rabbi Ben Zion Bergman. Rabbi Bergman, who is a licensed civil engineer and a professor of Talmud at the New Jewish University in Los Angeles, is an expert in the construction and proper usages of the Mikveh.

6. Supervision and Oversight: Our Mikveh, a self-supporting 501c3 organization, is overseen by the Board of Directors of the Mikveh Corporation. Since it was built, Director Lori Cooper, with the approval of the Mikveh Board, has created guidelines for usage of, access to, and behavior in our Mikveh. Halachic oversight of the Mikveh and the proper and kosher operation and maintenance of the Mikveh is provided by Rabbi Neil Cooper, Rabbinic Advisor to the Mikveh.

The use of a Mikveh is among the most ancient and time-honored practices of Jewish Life. We are keenly aware of the history of Mikveh and appreciate deeply its sanctity and centrality for any Jewish Community. We are also aware that those who enter the Mikveh, do so in a way that makes them most vulnerable. For these reasons, from the outset, we have pledged to run, manage and operate this facility with a sense of fidelity to Jewish tradition and with the sense of humility, modesty and holiness which is appropriate for a Mikveh. Indeed, any violation of any of these principles would constitute both the desecration of a mitzvah, and a betrayal of the trust that you have placed in us.

We are always available to address any concerns or questions you may have.

B'Shalom U'be'Emunah,

Lori T. Cooper Neil S. Cooper

Director Rabbi

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