

A *Mikveh* Ritual for Transitioning Gender

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The celebrant should take a moment to reflect on what has brought them to the mikveh today. The following is recited as a meditation (Psalms 6:7–10):

יִגַּעְתִּי בְּאַנְחָתִי, אֲשַׁחַה בְּכָל-לַיְלָה מִטָּתִי, בְּדַמְעָתִי עַרְשֵׁי אֲמָסָה.
עָשָׂשָׁה מִכְּעַס עֵינַי, עָתָקָה בְּכָל-צוֹרָי.
סוּרוּ מִמֶּנִּי כָּל-פְּעֻלֵי אָוֶן, כִּי שָׁמַע ה' קוֹל בְּכִי.
שָׁמַע ה' תַּחֲנָנִתִּי, ה' תִּפְלָתִי יִקַּח:

Yagati be-an'chati, as'chekh ve-chol laylah mitati, be-dimati ar'si am'seh.
Ash'shah mi-ka'as eynei, at'ka be-chol tzor'rai.
Suru mimeni kol po'alei aven, ki shama YHWH kol bich'yi.
Shama YHWH techinati, YHWH tefilati yikach.

I am worn out from my groaning.
All night long I cause my bed to swim in my tears,
and wash my couch in my weeping.
My eyes grow weak from sorrow; they fail because of all my adversaries.
Away from me, all you who do evil works,
for YHWH has heard the sound of my crying.
YHWH has heard my plea; YHWH will accept my prayer.

The following teaching, based on the Midrash, is read as a meditation to affirm the celebrant's name (Kohelet Rabbah 7:3):

תְּנִי ג' שְׁמוֹת נִקְרְאוּ לְאָדָם הַזֶּה אֶחָד שִׁקְרָאוּ לוֹ אֶבְיוֹ וְאֶמּוֹ וְאֶחָד שִׁקְרָאוּ לוֹ אַחֲרָיִם וְאֶחָד שִׁקְרָאוּ לוֹ בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת בְּרִייתוֹ:

It is taught that a human being has three names: one given by their parents, one that others call them, and one that they acquire themselves through their deeds.

A verse beginning and ending with the same Hebrew letters that begin and end the celebrant's name is recited. (For example: for the Hebrew name Aviva, the first letter is aleph and the last letter is heh, so a verse such as Psalms 118:22, אֲבֹן מְאֻסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים הָיְתָה לְרִאשׁ פִּנָּה, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”, could be recited, since it begins with aleph and ends with heh. Lists of example verses can be found in many traditional prayer books, but the celebrant should spend some time beforehand in selecting a name verse that is appropriate and meaningful.)

Immediately before immersing in the mikveh, the following blessing for transitioning gender is recited (elaborated from a berachah by Rabbi Elliot Kukla):

בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים,
אֲשֶׁר נוֹשְׁמֵת בִּי נִשְׁמָה טְהוֹרָה,
וּמַעֲבִירָה אוֹתִי בְּתוֹךְ עוֹבְרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָעוֹלָם.
מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי יְדִידָה,
שֶׁנָּתַתְּ בְּכַחֲךָ לְבְרֹא וּלְהַתְּבַרָא, לִיצוֹר וּלְהַתְּיָצֵר,
וּלְהַשְׁתַּתֵּף אֶתְךָ וְעַם כָּל־הַבְּרִיאוֹת בְּבְרִיאת עוֹלָמִים.
בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ הַמַּעֲבִירָה אֶת הָעוֹבְרוֹת:

B'ruchah at Yah Eloheinu m'kor ha-chayyim,
asher noshemet bi n'shamah t'horah,
u-ma'avira oti b'tokh ov'rot Yisrael ve-ha-olam.
Modah ani lefanayich Elah yedidah,
she-natat be-kochi liv'ro u-l'hit'barei, litzor u-l'hit'yatzer,
u-l'hish'tatef itakh ve-im kol ha-b'ri'ot bi-v'ri'at olamim.
B'ruchah at Yah ha-ma'avirah et ha-ov'rot.

Blessed are You, YAH our God, Source of Life,
Who breathes a pure soul into me,
and helps me to transition among those who transition
in the Jewish people and in the world.
I am grateful to you, dear Goddess,
for having made it within my power
to create and to be created, to form and to be formed,
and to be a partner with You and with all creatures in the creation of worlds.
Blessed are You, YAH, who brings over those who transition.

The celebrant should enter the mikveh slowly, taking one step at a time, letting the warmth of the waters flow over their feet, their legs, their knees, their hips, their chest, and their arms.

The celebrant immerses in the mikveh three times. During each immersion, celebrant should be completely submerged so that every part of the body is covered by water. (If there is a witness to the immersion, the witness should verify that each immersion was complete.)

Upon emerging from each immersion the celebrant recites the following blessings, one for each immersion. The celebrant should reflect on each blessing, and not go through each immersion too quickly:

First immersion

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּטַבִּילָה בְּמַיִם חַיִּים:

Baruch atah YHWH Eloheinu m'kor ha-chayyim, asher kid'shanu bi-t'vilah b'mayyim chayyim.

Blessed are you, YHWH our God, Source of Life,
Who sanctifies us by immersion in living waters.

Second immersion

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים, שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי נֶס בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה:

Baruch atah YHWH Eloheinu m'kor ha-chayyim, she-asah li nes ba-makom ha-zeh.

Blessed are you, YHWH our God, Source of Life,
Who creates a transformative miracle for me in this place.

Third immersion

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים, שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה:

Baruch atah YHWH Eloheinu m'kor ha-chayyim,
she-hecheyyanu ve-kiyyemanu ve-higgi'anu la-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed are you, YHWH our God, Source of Life,
Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this time.

The celebrant should relax and reflect in the warm waters of the mikveh.