

Transgender Affirmation in the Mikveh: A Proposal for a New Ritual

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Introduction

Transgender* Jews are beginning to speak our minds regarding our relationship with Jewish institutions and practices, particularly those that have historically or traditionally been seen as “gendered” activities. There has been an admirable movement in the last few decades, and especially in the 21st century, to include queer Jews in more and more aspects of Jewish communal life. But the need for a Judaism that actively affirms, rather than merely includes, those of us who feel disenfranchised by certain elements of our community, has only grown in strength as people with these needs continue to come forward. One of the most fruitful areas of discussion and innovation is in the area of ritual.

Why ritual? Ritual can be a force of great affirmative power, for the celebrant, but also for the community, if it exists, that celebrates with the individual. One of the beautiful things about Judaism is the communal and collective nature of ritual, prayer, and culture. Thus can ritual itself be a

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*I use the term “transgender” in a very broad sense in this essay, following the broadest constructions of such authors as Plaskow [8] and Serano [9], to mean something like people with non-normative gender self-identifications. By using this term I do not mean to erase anyone or deny any individual’s lived identity, or imply that they may or may not be interested in anything I have to propose in this essay.

transformative experience, not simply for the celebrant, but for the larger community, even in the case of rituals that are performed by an individual and not a group. Speaking about a ritual he created and undertook to celebrate and affirm his own transition, Aaron Devor says:

At the time, my wife and I thought that the ceremony was just for our benefit. Everyone else was there to help us along our path. It had never occurred to us that it would mean anything for anyone who had not been there. In the weeks and months that followed we learned many things about the value of that ritual honoring the traditions of our new people and our revision of those rituals for a new future. We learned that invoking ritual proved to be surprisingly helpful in easing the transformation for all of us. [1]

The process of transition itself seems uniquely suited to some kind of ritual marking those milestones that a person wishes to celebrate, or simply as a way to affirm one's identity in as private or as public a setting as one wishes. Though the mikveh itself is not a public space *per se*, it offers a number of possibilities for ritual that lend themselves to creative interpretation from a transgender perspective.

For my own part, I am compelled to create a ritual to affirm my own identity as a transgender person for a few reasons. Firstly, there are very few such ceremonies currently in existence, and even fewer that involve the institution of the mikveh. I feel that I can bring some perspective to the conversation of innovative mikveh rituals as a queer, transgender Jew from a fairly traditional background. My hope is not to create the One True Ceremony that will become a community standard, but rather to offer my own proposal for a ceremony that works for and speaks to me, in the hopes that it can provide a model for inclusive rituals for those who might wish to employ it or build upon it.

This essay consists of four sections. First, I wish to discuss the institution of the mikveh itself, and outline some of the challenges that it poses to transgender individuals who wish to incorporate it into their own ritual practice. Next, I would like to place my own ceremony in its proper context by outlining some attempts by other Jews in the transgender community to incorporate the mikveh into their ritual practice, or to create other explicitly transgender-affirming rituals, and to discuss some other sources that have been inspirational to me. Finally, I attempt to explain each of the affir-

mative choices I have made in my own mikveh ceremony and provide some alternatives, after which I will give the text of the ritual I have created.

1 Mikveh and transgender experience

The mikveh is the Jewish ritual bath. It is an institution that dates back to ancient times, with an incredibly rich history. Traditionally, its construction is seen as even more crucial to a Jewish community than a synagogue, such that if a community possesses neither, *halachah* (Jewish law) requires that the mikveh should be built first, followed by the synagogue, and that if necessary even Torah scrolls should be sold to fund its construction. The Torah itself prescribes ritual immersion for various purposes relating to purification of the body. To these, the rabbis of Mishnaic times and later added other prescribed uses. Immersion in the mikveh is obligatory according to Orthodox interpretations of *halachah*, but it is not seen as a commanded requirement, of either women or men, by liberal Jewish denominations.

For our purposes, I will pass over exclusively ancient or rare uses of the mikveh, and instead focus on the main uses of the mikveh in modern Jewish practice, which are as follows:

- Ritual purification after the menstrual period or childbirth (women)
- Ritual purification after having a seminal emission (men)
- Ritual purification on other occasions (e.g. before Shabbat, holidays, marriage)
- As part of the formal process for conversion to Judaism
- Immersion of cooking and eating utensils purchased from a non-Jew for purposes of rendering them kosher

The first few points comprise the main streams of experience of the mikveh, though somewhat ironically many Jews, especially non-Orthodox ones, who do not make the mikveh a regular part of their lives through observance of *taharat ha-mishpachah*, the regulations of familial and domestic purity, will be more familiar with it in the context of the conversion ceremony. The final point, regarding the immersion of utensils, does not seem immediately relevant, but I hope to connect it to a larger understanding of how we can

apply the mikveh to the experience of transgender Jews. For the moment, though, suffice it to note that the first use, that of ritual immersion following the menstrual period, is the most common use of the mikveh in Jewish practice, and dictates a lot about how the mikveh is understood as a space for (cisgender) women.

I cannot hope, in the scope of this essay, to offer a complete history of queer and transgender experiences of the mikveh, but I hope to explore some ways that speak to me as to how we might reclaim the mikveh and its rituals. Traditional experiences of mikveh are, like almost all other “traditional” Jewish experiences, firmly grounded in cisgender and heterosexual normativity. As traditionally construed, the mikveh is an extension of the sanctioned religious policing of bodies. Since it is so tightly connected with the “natural” reproductive cycles of women and the reproductive processes of men, the experience for a transgender individual who wishes to enter and make use of the mikveh is necessarily a transgressive one.

Tucker Lieberman summarizes the problem this way, from his perspective as a transgender man:

Accounts of the mikveh usually address fertility cycles and rules for heterosexual marriages. These do not present an ethic I can even attempt to live by, nor do they make sense out my intuitions and experiences with the mikveh. Traditionally, the most common frequenters of the mikveh are women, who must ritually bathe after their menstruation and childbirth before they can be sexually available to their husbands again. Men are also supposed to bathe if they have had an emission (Lev. 15:16). For someone who is gay and sterile—my body produces neither eggs nor semen—the mikveh is bereft of its traditional framework. [6]

Indeed, the very space of the mikveh itself is a gendered one. Nearly all Orthodox mikvehs (and most exist in that world), if there are not completely separated facilities for men and women, the mikveh will almost certainly designate available hours exclusively for immersions of men and women. And because most users of the mikveh will be women, this dictates that most of the available time will usually be allotted to women, with exceptions for times like Friday afternoons before Shabbat. This gives the mikveh, as an institution, a distinctly female-gendered quality. Again, Lieberman puts it succinctly: “Most mikvehs are women’s spaces” [6]. There are some, like the mikveh of

Rabbi Isaac Luria in Safed, Israel, which are restricted exclusively to men, but these are definitely the exception rather than the rule. And needless to say inclusive mikvehs with amenities like gender-neutral changing rooms are not exactly a dime a dozen (though to be sure their number is growing: the Mayyim Hayyim community mikveh in Auburndale, Massachusetts is one notable exception, which I will discuss further below.) So a transgender individual who wishes to make use of the mikveh must necessarily transgress a gender boundary in order to do so.

As the mikveh's *raison d'être* is the maintenance and reinforcement of standards of ritual purity, these issues must be addressed from the perspective of transgender experience as well. Traditional notions of ritual purity are still seen as binding in the Orthodox world, but the trend in modern feminist reinterpretations of Jewish tradition has been to attempt to understand these notions in the context of the society in which they were formed. The central theme is one of *kedushah*, "holiness" but perhaps better "separation" or "distinction", specifically enabling and empowering the identity of a distinct community of people.

A more useful way to look at the mikveh, for the purpose of affirmation in a transgender context, is from the point of view of inclusion in the Jewish community. Consider the uses of the mikveh that at first glance did not appear to be relevant: those of being used in the conversion process and *kasher-ing* utensils purchased from a non-Jew. Through the process of immersion, the boundary between excluded and included in the Jewish community is crossed. Forbidden becomes permissible; what was previously *treif* becomes *kosher*. Indeed, we can even see this in the traditional uses of the mikveh to "readmit" (cisgender) women and men, after the discharge of their reproductive functions, into the Jewish community. The mikveh is a place of boundary-crossing. Viewed this way, it is a fundamentally transgressive institution, whose purpose is to permit the crossing of boundaries rather than necessarily imposing separation. From this point, we can begin to adapt it to affirm transgender identities as well, to include them in the *kedushah* of the Jewish people.

It is somewhat paradoxical that a space whose purpose is to permit inclusion into a community would engender rituals that are performed alone. In fact, the mikveh is one of a very few Jewish rituals that are specifically not performed communally, the presence of an attendant in most mikveh situations notwithstanding. The idea that social re-entry requires a period of absence before being permitted back in is not unique to Judaism. Whether

one is absent from a relationship because of ritual impurity as a result of being in a menstrual period, or absent from a community because of that community does not (yet) affirm an individual's identity is immaterial: the absence and re-entering, enabled by the permeability of the mikveh, is the crucial point. In some degree, aloneness may be required before acceptance can occur.

The word mikveh literally means “collection”, most often a collection of water. It first appears in the biblical creation story, which revolves around themes of separation and liminality. On the third day of creation, God separates water from ground to create dry land and seas: “God called the dry land ‘ground’, and he called the collection of water (*mikveh ha-mayyim*) ‘seas’, and God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10). This is reflected in the construction and function of the mikveh as a Jewish institution: the collection of water that comprises the mikveh is a barrier, but a permeable one.

Again, Tucker Lieberman elaborates on this point, drawing inspiration from the sensory effects surrounding the experience of the mikveh:

Water, too, has unique properties that blur edges literally and figuratively. Water in the mikveh is used as a tool to separate clean from unclean, workweek from Shabbat, men from women. Yet water itself is amorphous, concealing our bodies in refracted light and shadow and a rush of sound, making it difficult to distinguish male from female. Where we seek clarity and definition, we find boundaries beginning to soften and join us together. [6]

This is not the first, nor will this be the last, time someone has remarked on the transformative power of water, in Judaism or in other faiths. As a medium for transformation, it becomes transgressive in its essence. When we look at the mikveh through this lens, we can see a proposal for how to reinterpret it. Rather than erecting barriers, the mikveh helps us to transgress them. Rather than reinforcing distinctions, the mikveh allows us to queer identities.

2 Sources of inspiration

While I cannot give a complete history of every transgender or queer person's attempt to use the mikveh or create a meaningful ritual ceremony, I wish to highlight a few things that have been important in shaping at least

my own understanding of this process and helping me to figure out what might be involved in my own such ritual.

As for precedent, someone who wishes to create a liturgy for transgender Jews is very much on their own. There are vast literatures of liturgies and prayers that have been overlooked throughout history, especially from Jewish women, such as has been collected by Aliza Lavie [5]. Sadly, though, as all too often, “women” here means cisgender women, and the content of such prayers—especially where they touch upon the mikveh and related observances—is often inapplicable at best, and highly triggering at worst. If we wish to avoid the language of blood, the moon, cycles, and other references to the cisgender experience, we must create and deploy our own language of transgender experience.

To my knowledge, there are not very many ritual observances that have been created so far by transgender Jews for themselves and/or other members of the transgender community, and only one of these explicitly involves the mikveh. The website *TransTorah*, a wonderful repository of such resources, has some blessings and observances to mark transition and celebrate a transgender identity [4, 11]. I have also found a wealth of useful material, including innovative ritual, theory, and personal essays, in the anthology *Balancing on the Mechitza*, edited by Noach Dzmura [2].

Of the relevant rituals on *TransTorah*, one is a mikveh ceremony created by Max K. Strassfeld and Andrew Ramer in 2009, intended for a pre-surgery immersion ritual but in truth suitable for any event marking transition [11]. This is the only transition ceremony I am aware of that involves the mikveh. Strassfeld and Ramer’s ritual involves three separate immersions, with a *kavanah* (meditation) before and after each. It is not a particularly structured ceremony, and following traditional assumptions about who will be present for an immersion in the mikveh, does not require any participants other than the celebrant. (Though the text refers to “guiding” through the ritual, no other participant or witness to the immersion is technically needed, as there are no *berachot* (blessings) which would require a response of *Amen*, and the immersion itself is not mandated by *halachah*, so its *kashrut*, or legality, need not be verified by an observer.) In broad outline, this is the ceremony that serves as a model for the ritual that I am proposing.

As a contrast, the ritual created by Catherine Madsen and Joy Ladin is quite differently structured [7]. It is written specifically for a person transitioning from male to female, but could be adapted for a female to male transitioner, and perhaps with some more difficulty for someone wishing to

affirm a third-gender or androgynous identity. It is not meant to be performed in a mikveh. This particular ritual is built around a metaphor of letting go of a previous identity and embracing a new one, and draws its inspiration from the ritual practices surrounding death. The celebrant is washed as for *taharah*, that is, in the manner of a deceased person before burial, gives the responses to the Mourners' *Kaddish* which is recited by the family, and recites for them the traditional line *Ha-makom y'nachem etchem b'toch sha'ar aveilei tziyon vi-yerushalayim*, "May the Omnipresent comfort you amongst the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem", which is traditionally spoken to individuals and families in mourning. The explicit goal of this ritual is, in the words of editor Noach Dzmura, to have created a ceremony that "doesn't omit negative emotional states", since "much innovative and new Jewish ritual avoids pain and loss" [7]. While the desire to acknowledge the negative emotions and experiences of transition can certainly be a strong one, and clearly this ceremony's creators did not desire a more upbeat, joyous ceremony, such a ceremony as this does not speak to a transitioner such as myself, or to my own transition. Nevertheless, I have followed Madsen and Ladin's lead and looked in the direction of acknowledging negative emotional states in the *kavanah* (meditation) that precedes my own ceremony.

Rabbi Elliot Kukla has created a blessing for transitioning genders, which is not explicitly intended for use with a mikveh but could be adapted to that ritual context [4]. His innovation of the *berachah* (blessing) ending *ha-ma'avir le-ov'rim*, "Blessed [are You] ... who brings over those who transgress", or perhaps better "who transforms those who transition", is a beautiful addition to the Jewish liturgy, and I have incorporated it as well into my own ceremony.

I have already referred to Tucker Lieberman's experience in the mikveh of Rabbi Isaac Luria (the "Ari") in Safed, Israel [6]. His essay on this subject is a powerful account of crossing gender barriers to experience the transformative, blurring power of the immersion itself. Much of the details of what ritual observances he actually performed at the mikveh are elided, and one is left with the feeling that such matters are not important as far as the larger point of the essay goes.

Though the ceremony of his devising does not include immersion in water, the theme of crossing a bridge over water is acted out literally in Aaron Devor's transition ritual [1]. His ritual is far more communally oriented in nature than a ceremony utilizing the mikveh must of necessity be, but his thinking on issues of community and ritual have greatly informed my own.

One other source of inspiration for me has been modern feminist interpre-

tations of the Simchat Bat ceremony, which celebrates the birth of a daughter. The ritual celebrated and described by Joseph Kaplan [3] has added some perspective from an Orthodox feminist perspective, as well as providing an instance of the practice of reciting verses that reflect the Hebrew name of the celebrant.

3 Creating a mikveh ritual

No act of creation is without its dangers. Pitfalls for the mikveh ceremony itself that I have created broadly fall into two categories: the practical and the liturgical. By practical I mean issues that are related to the actual practice of the mikveh ritual, as carried out by human beings; by liturgical I mean issues relating to what is said and done during the ceremony itself. I will discuss each in turn.

3.1 Practical issues

“There is something profoundly humanizing about being welcomed into a font of renewal as if your nude body and your bare life were something very precious,” says Tucker Lieberman [6]. Nevertheless, the first problem I encountered in trying to create my own mikveh ritual is one of body. There is something of a tendency in modern mikveh ceremonies to idealize the body, to consider nakedness the most perfect state of the body, and the ideal expression of human individuality and relationship with the divine. In no way is this a universal sentiment, but as a transgender person, it is very difficult for me to identify with my body this way. Therefore, I would suggest that a ritual that affirms transgender identities must also acknowledge and affirm the body, recognizing its imperfections and flaws as part of a complete individual. Not all transgender people will feel the same way about their own bodies, but the issue must at least be approached with caution and respect.

This is tied to a second practical issue, specifically that of sensitivity by the various participants in the ritual. It is crucial to keep in mind that the concept of participants needs to be construed as broadly as possible here: I do not simply mean the attendant and any witnesses to the immersion itself, if applicable, but we must include everyone connected with the mikveh, such as institutional staff and clergy. Furthermore, this does not excuse those who do not come into contact with the celebrant: everyone is responsible for ensuring

that the mikveh is a safe environment. It is hard to overstate how critical this point is: the mikveh must be made into a safe space, or people who would otherwise use it will not use it. Gabriela Spitzer, affiliated with the Mayyim Hayyim community mikveh, highlights this problem in her research into how queer Jews use the mikveh in practice:

One of the ways queer Jews are filling this gap is through the mikveh—and many of them credit Mayyim Hayyim for making a safe space for them to do so. One of the respondents to my survey shared how she went to the mikveh before coming out to her parents in high school. She wanted to wash away the feeling of being in the closet and lying to so many people. She told me that she felt totally comfortable coming to Mayyim Hayyim for this purpose, but other respondents to my survey were not so lucky to have a mikveh with such a safe environment. One woman described how she was told that she was not “really married” and should not return to her local mikveh. She drove forty five minutes to the next closest mikveh so that she could observe *taharat hamishpacha* (monthly immersion after menstruation). Other respondents really connected with outdoor mikvaot. One, a transman recovering from top surgery, was looking for a natural body of water to use as a mikveh as soon as his bandages were off to mark the transition. [10]

Mikvehs would do well to look to examples like Mayyim Hayyim, which makes a special commitment to the inclusion and affirmation of historically and traditionally disenfranchised people in the Jewish community.

As for the ceremony I have devised, I have followed the lead of Strassfeld and Ramer [11] by not requiring the presence of an attendant to verify the *kashrut* of the immersion, since the immersion is not required by the *halachah* (more on this presently), and none of the liturgy that I have compiled requires anyone to be present to respond *Amen*. However, despite the fact that this ritual does not require anyone to verify that the immersion was *kosher*,

3.2 Liturgical issues

Liturgy is extremely personal and idiosyncratic, touching on issues of upbringing, preference, and style. As for me, I have a difficult time with a lot of modern liturgy that strays far from what I became comfortable

with as a child, and therefore wanted to construct a ceremony with as little “innovation” as possible.

In an immersion in a mikveh that is “commanded” by the *halachah*, one says the *berachah*: *Baruch ... asher kid’shanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu al ha-t’vilah*, “Blessed [are You ...], who has sanctified us with the commandments, and commanded us regarding immersion”. The problem with this blessing is the word “commanded”, since technically this mikveh ritual is not commanded by the *halachah*. If we allow ourselves to innovate new *berachot*, something traditionally frowned upon by Jewish law, we can make some headway in addressing this and other sticking points (for a classical source, see e.g. b. *Berachot* 40b).

The ceremonies developed by Mayyim Hayyim use the blessing *Baruch ... asher kid’shanu bi-t’vilah b’mayyim chayyim*, “Blessed [are You ...], who has sanctified us by immersion in living waters”, which I have employed as the *berachah* over the first immersion. This allows the ceremony to retain a somewhat traditional link to its origins in the Jewish liturgy, and incorporates the theme of *kedushah* as well.

The second immersion is a point of focus, a fulcrum around which the ceremony pivots. The *berachah* I have chosen here is *Baruch ... she-asah li nes ba-makom ha-zeh*, “Blessed [are You ...], who has created a miracle for me in this place”. This *berachah* is of ancient origin, traditionally understanding a *nes* (miracle) as a miraculous occurrence of having been saved from disaster. I propose that we interpret *nes* as a transformation or a transition, and that the mikveh enables this to be recognized. This is not to say that going into the mikveh magically transforms one’s identity, but rather that we may recognize one’s transition as a miraculous and beautiful phenomenon. By custom, one who has had occasion to say this *berachah* in the past appends a list of other places they have experienced a *nes*, and I encourage that usage here, if the celebrant feels it is warranted. Perhaps someone who has occasion to use multiple inclusive mikvehs for a ceremony such as this would wish to do this.

The third and final immersion is marked by the *Shehecheyanu*, the blessing traditionally said to mark very important, special occasions. Traditionally, this *berachah* is said last, after all others, others a given event or observance. Therefore, the basic structure of blessings to be said during this ceremony parallels that found in the observances for, say, Hanukkah or Purim: first, blessing over the *mitzvah* (commandment) related to the event itself (which enables the inclusion of *asher kid’shanu [be-mitzvotav]*, “who has sanctified us [with the commandments]”); second, blessing over the miracle (*nes*)

commemorated by the occasion; third, the *shehecheyanu* blessing over the occasion itself. Thus, this progression also creates a temporal movement, from ancient to present, allowing the tradition to flow from the source to the current occasion.

3.3 Outline of the ritual

My goal is not to create a ritual that is constricting, but rather one that could function either on its own or as a base or outline for an expanded ceremony.

The ritual itself is in two parts: a prefatory meditation, followed by the immersions in the mikveh itself.

As an opening meditation, four verses from Psalm 6 are recited. If the celebrant desires a non-theistic version, the mentions of God’s name could be omitted and the verbs replaced with passive equivalents (“my voice is heard”, etc.), or “God” could be substituted with “my community”, or whatever the participant feels is appropriate.

Following this, the *berachah* for transitioning genders composed by Rabbi Elliot Kukla [4] is recited. For this *berachah*, as for all that follow, if the celebrant desires a non-theistic version, a phrase such as *Nevarech et eyn ha-chayyim*, “Let us bless the source of life”, or similar could be substituted for the first two clauses.

The name of the celebrant is then affirmed, following a short meditation, by the recitation of one or more verses beginning and ending with the same Hebrew letters that begin and end the celebrant’s name. (Some such verses may be found in the back of some traditional *siddurim* (prayer books), but for best results the celebrant may wish to undertake a search for such a verse by hand.) For example, my Hebrew name is Aviva, which begins with *aleph* and ends with *heh*, so the verse that I use is *Even ma’asu ha-bonim hay’tah le-rosh pinah*, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalms 118:22).

Following this meditation, three immersions in the mikveh are performed, with accompanying *berachot*.

I have chosen to omit additional *kavanot* (meditations) between the immersions, preferring to let each *berachah* resonate, but these could be added by the celebrant if desired.

The ritual concludes with a period of silent, free meditation after the final immersion. If an attendant is present, the *berachah* could be recited so that

the attendant may respond *Amen*, but then the attendant should make sure to allow the celebrant some time for personal reflection alone.

4 The ritual

Meditation to prepare for immersion

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

יָגַעְתִּי בְּאַנְחָתִי. אֲשַׁחָה בְּכָל־לַיְלָה מִטָּתִי. בְּדַמְעֹתַי עָרְשִׁי אֲמָסָה:

Yagati be-an'chati, as'chah ve-chol laylah mitati, be-dimati ar'si am'seh.

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.

עָשָׂה מִכַּעַס עֵינַי. עָתָקָה בְּכָל־צוֹרָרַי:

Ash'shah mi-ka'as eynei, at'ka be-chol tzor'rai.

My eyes grow weak from sorrow; they fail because of all my adversaries.

סוּרוּ מִמֶּנִּי כָל־פְּעֻלֵי אָוֶן. כִּי שָׁמַע ה' קוֹל בְּכִי:

Suru mimeni kol po'alei aven, ki shama Adonai kol bich'yi.

Away from me, all you who do evil works, for Adonai has heard the sound of my crying.

שָׁמַע ה' תַּחֲנָתִי. ה' תִּפְלֵתִי יִקַּח:

Shama Adonai techinati, Adonai tefilati yikach.

Adonai has heard my plea; Adonai will accept my prayer.

Berachah for transitioning genders

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמַּעֲבִיר לְעוֹבְרִים:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, ha-ma'avir le-ov'rim.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who transforms those who transition.

Affirmation of the name

The following, based on Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:3, is read as a meditation:

תְּנִי ג' שְׁמוֹת נִקְרָאוּ לְאָדָם הַזֶּה אֶחָד שֶׁקְרָאוּ לוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְאֶחָד שֶׁקְרָאוּ לוֹ אַחֵרִים
וְאֶחָד שֶׁקְרָאוּ לוֹ בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת בְּרִייתוֹ: (קֵהֶלֶת רַבָּה ז ג)

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.

First immersion

The celebrant should enter the mikveh and immerse completely so that every part of the body is covered. Upon emerging, the following *berachah* is recited:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּטַבִּילָה בְּמַיִם חַיִּים:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu bi-t'vilah b'mayyim chayyim.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us by immersion in living waters.

Second immersion

The celebrant should enter the mikveh and immerse completely so that every part of the body is covered. Upon emerging, the following *berachah* is recited:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי נֵס בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, she-asah li nes ba-makom ha-zeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who has created a miracle for me in this place.

Third immersion

The celebrant should enter the mikveh and immerse completely so that every part of the body is covered.

A period of silent, free meditation is encouraged here for personal reflection.

Upon emerging, the following *berachah* is recited:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיָּנוּ וְקִיַּמָּנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, she-hecheyyanu ve-kivyemanu ve-higgi'anu la-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this time.

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