

To Midwife A Soul:

Guidelines for Performing Taharah

With Chanting by Rabbi Shefa Gold

To Midwife A Soul:
Guidelines for Performing Taharah

Expanded 6th Edition

With Chanting by Rabbi Shefa Gold

Now with Taharah Ruchanit and Non-Binary Liturgy

Richard A. Light

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The gender pronouns of the liturgy come from the forward-thinking, respectful and appreciated work of Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater and the Community Hevra Kadisha of Greater Boston. These are used with their permission and the intention to honor all genders. I want to express my deep gratitude to Rabbi Avivah Erlick, who spent significant time reviewing and helping me refine the gender-related text.

My implementation of the *Tabarah Ruchanit* ritual arose by learning from several simultaneous creative endeavors arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Sharon Fendrich and the Chevra Kavod haMet of Portland, OR, published a beautiful manual called, *Tabarah l'Nefesh*;
- Malke Frank and the New Community Chevra Kadisha of Greater Pittsburgh, PA, created a lovely different approach to *tabarah* at a distance;
- Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman and the Chevrah Kadisha of Kehilla Community Synagogue, Piedmont, CA, also birthed a new non-physical *tabarah* ritual; and
- Rabbi Lynn Greenhough created a marvelous gravesite ritual to happen subsequent to burial, perhaps months later, when it is safe to again gather together.

I considered all of these approaches in writing my own, including ideas from their concepts. These contributions are very much appreciated, acknowledged, and used with the intention of honoring their innovations, love, and deep commitment to this work.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Contents | vii |
| Foreword | ix |
| Preface to the 6th Edition | x |
| Introduction and Scope | 1 |
| What is a <i>Chevrah Kadisha</i> , and Why Should We Care? | 1 |
| The Intended Use of This Document..... | 1 |
| A Comment About the Leader of the <i>Tabarab</i> | 2 |
| Let's Talk About <i>Kavanab</i> | 2 |
| The Prayers and Readings | 3 |
| A Note about Transliteration..... | 3 |
| The Layout and Colors in This Document | 3 |
| Gender Considerations..... | 3 |
| To Chant Perchance to Dream..... | 6 |
| Preparation and Setting Intentions | 7 |
| Pre-Briefing and Preparation for <i>Tabarab Ruchanit</i> | 7 |
| Pre-Briefing and Preparation for an <i>In-Person Tabarab</i> | 12 |
| Tasks for Team Members for an <i>In-Person Tabarab</i> | 13 |
| Chanting for Preparation..... | 15 |
| Preparations for <i>In-Person Tabarab</i> | 16 |
| <i>Chamol</i> for a Male Pronoun Person | 18 |
| <i>Chamol</i> for a Female Pronoun Person | 20 |
| <i>Chamol</i> for a Non-Binary Pronoun Person | 22 |
| <i>Vaya'an Vayomer</i> | 24 |
| Physical Washing of the Deceased | 25 |
| <i>Rechitzab</i> for <i>Tabarab Ruchanit</i> | 25 |
| Chanting for Washing the Deceased | 26 |
| Washing the Deceased..... | 28 |
| <i>Rosbo Ketem Paz</i> | 29 |
| <i>Hinakb Yaffab</i> | 30 |
| <i>Shir Hama'alot</i> | 31 |
| The Taharah | 32 |
| <i>Tabarab Ruchanit</i> Spiritual Washing..... | 35 |
| Chanting for <i>Tabarab</i> | 36 |
| The Spiritual Washing..... | 37 |
| Clothing the Deceased | 39 |
| <i>Tabarab Ruchanit</i> Dressing..... | 42 |
| Chanting for Dressing the Deceased | 43 |
| Dressing the Deceased | 44 |
| Rabbi Schlingenbaum's Approach to Knots | 46 |
| Casketing the Deceased | 47 |
| Casketing for <i>In-Person Tabarab</i> | 47 |
| Casketing for <i>Tabarab Ruchanit</i> | 48 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Chanting for Moving the Deceased into the <i>Aron</i> | 49 |
| Moving the Deceased into the <i>Aron</i> | 51 |
| Ending for <i>Tabarah Ruchanit</i> | 55 |
| Cleaning Up | 56 |
| Restoring Order to the Room and Supplies..... | 56 |
| Participant Debriefing and Ritual Closing..... | 57 |
| Additional Information for <i>Chevrah Kadisha</i> Members | 58 |
| Assistance Asked of the Funeral Home..... | 58 |
| Questions to Be Asked of the Family..... | 59 |
| Taharah Supplies Provided by the <i>Chevrah Kadisha</i> | 59 |
| Index to Chants | 63 |
| Selected Bibliography | 64 |
| About the Author | 65 |

Foreword

There I was, lying on the table pretending to be dead. Six intensely focused people were huddled around me reciting specific liturgy from Scripture and dressing me in burial shrouds. I tried to just be “dead weight” – loose, relaxed, and present. As I followed their progress, I soon found myself in a bright white light. Soon, reality was gone; all that existed for me was the light. That’s all I could see, hear, feel, experience. Time stopped. Place stopped. Voices stopped. Life stopped. I was suspended in pure, brilliant “beingness” – aware, but not limited in time, space or personality. Everything was pure white light.

Earlier that week in the Spring of 1996, a friend of mine who was our “lay rabbi” at the local shul, had called me, suggesting that I attend a training in a nearby city about an “esoteric side of Judaism that we should check out to see if we want to do it here”. So I went, and it turned out to be training for the *Chevrah Kadisha*, the Jewish team whose job it is to prepare the dead for burial. We had a verbal training in the morning. Now, we were doing a role-play experiential training in which the team practiced the entire procedure of the *Tabarah*, the ritual of washing and dressing the dead. I was playing the role of the deceased. Luckily, this time they were simulating the washing of the body and the spiritual pouring of water. I was, after all, not dead.

Suddenly, I was “awakened” by one of the team. I slowly opened my eyes and tried to adjust to the real world again. It was a hard transition. They said, “We could tell by the look on your face that you were somewhere else!” When I explained what had happened, everyone was amazed, including me. Where I went and what happened to me are still unexplained phenomena. It was an extraordinary experience for all of us – so much so that I returned home to start a local *Chevrah Kadisha*. If a dry run could be so transformative, how much more powerful must be the real thing!

This is how the *Chevrah Kadisha* in Los Alamos, NM, came into being. Today it is part of the Chevrah Kadisha of Northern New Mexico, and this is the manual we use. The first edition of this manual was written in 1998. Since then it has been revised twice, and now this new edition is here, updated and reformatted for easier use both as an educational text and in the *Tabarah* room. I am honored to include chanting written by the noted Hebrew chant scholar, Rabbi Shefa Gold, to further enhance the beauty and *kavanah* of this profound ritual.

May your use of this manual be a blessing for both the living and the dead.

Rick Light
Santa Fe, NM
May 2013

Preface to the 6th Edition

As I write this, we are in the midst of the worst world-wide pandemic in recent history, with many communities in lock-down, over 100,000 dead world-wide, and thousands of every-day people infected. *Chevrot Kadisha* are instructed to refrain from *tabarah* and *shmirah* during this pandemic so as to not endanger team members. That is, to honor *pekuach nefesh*, preserve human life as the first priority by performing these rituals online or not at all.

When challenges present themselves, the higher nature of human beings prevails, inspiring creativity on all levels to meet and overcome the difficulties of the times. In this case, many dedicated people have come together to create new liturgies to allow us to honor the dead, with whom we are not allowed to be present, while also honoring the living, the team members who are not allowed to come within 6 feet of each other.

This manual includes one such liturgy, to perform what I am calling “*Tabarah Ruchanit*” – the ritual of midwifing a soul without being near the body of the deceased. *Tabarah Ruchanit* can be translated as a *tabarah* ritual focused primarily through and for Spirit, *b’shem haNifjar*, on behalf of the one who has departed. In this ritual, we do not have a body for which to perform the ritual of *tabarah*; hence we must use visualization techniques and (1) use modern technology that allows us to video- or tele-conference together in order to perform the new ritual for this soul, or (2) perform the ritual together simultaneously without electronic connections.

I do not consider here why the team cannot be near the body of the deceased. The new ritual is appropriate for any situation in which physical co-location of the team and the deceased is not possible. The *Tabarah Ruchanit* ritual can be used during pandemic, as is our current situation, or perhaps if a person is lost at sea or the body is never found from an avalanche situation or other devastating accident. It is now recognized that the spiritual non-physical intentions and words of the team can create the vessel in which the soul of the deceased can be held tenderly and supportively as they leave this world, without physical contact.

The second aspect of this new edition is gender respect. For over 500 years Jews around the world have used *tabarah* liturgy based on *Ma’avar Yabbok*, with the male/female binary of the Hebrew language. In today’s changing world, we now deal with a more complex mix of gender understandings, including non-binary, transgender, gender-fluid, and any number of points on the continuum of gender identities. This manual offers an option of a “non-binary” liturgy, for people who see themselves as falling outside the traditional categories of she/her and he/him, or for when the gender preference of the deceased is not known.

Please note that the readings after casketing are left in their original gender as they have been structured as part of the Kabbalistic underpinning that supports the soul’s journey. This powerful structure and its influence transcend gender, supporting all souls as they move beyond gender into the *olam habah*.

Rabbi Avivah W. Erlick, RBC, is quoted here as an introduction to the topic of gender identity and why this liturgy is important today. Rabbi Erlick provides inclusive *taharah* rituals, both direct and indirect, through her Los Angeles-based professional *Chevrah Kadisha*, Sacred Waters.

Taharah has always had a strict division along gender lines, with “women washing women and men washing men.” Times are changing, however, and this presents interesting issues for the people who perform this holy ritual to address.

The traditional Western approach to gender, that is, limiting the options to “men” and “women” based on what a person was labeled at birth, leaves out a whole lot of people. Throughout human history there have been people who identified outside this bifurcation. Some cultures had a place for this, called “third gender” for example. Other societies have been more repressive, forcing people to lie about themselves so as to fit in and be safe.

People today are at last becoming free to live in the gender that is truest to their heart, whether or not it is consistent with the one that their body might suggest. A range of terminology has arisen to help people put words to these identities.

The word “cisgender” was recently coined to describe people who feel a match between their innate identity and what they were labeled at birth – either a boy or a girl.

“Transgender” describes a person who identifies best with the opposite of their birth gender. Advances in modern medicine are allowing transgender individuals – either trans men or trans women – to consider the option of undergoing hormone treatment and surgery to more closely align their body with their gender identity. Some may not be able to go this route, while others may not want to alter their bodies. Instead, they choose to live as they always have, but dressing and identifying in a way that feels more authentic to their truest selves.

Beyond “men” and “women” (cis or trans) is the area of non-binary. Some people do not strictly identify with only one gender. These individuals may choose to be called “gender non-binary”, “bi-gender”, “genderqueer” and other identifiers. While some non-binary individuals were born with a physical manifestation of this known as “intersex” (previously known as hermaphroditism), most were born with gender-differentiated bodies, and came to understand their more nuanced identity over the course of growing up. Surgery and hormones are also available to people in this category, who may wish to physically express their dual identity with the markers of more than one gender.

Some people reject the idea of gender altogether and may use the term a-gender. Some see themselves as gender fluid, not feeling firmly locked into any one identity.

Gender identity is a separate matter than sexual identity. While gender identity is about who you feel you are, sexuality asks to what sort of person you are attracted. Sexual identities can be based on the gender binary (heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual), or on a non-binary assumption (using such terms as pansexual and queer). Pansexual includes attraction to men, women and non-binary people. Queer is broader, suggesting anything outside of heterosexuality.

I see two main uses for nonbinary liturgy:

First, it allows a *chevrah* to more closely match a given *meit/meitah* with holy words to suit them. Everyone should be honored appropriately, in death as in life, no matter their gender identity.

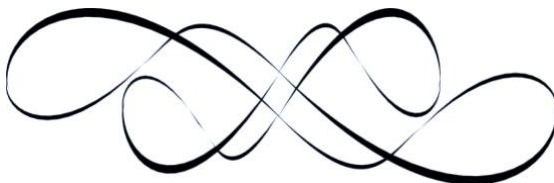
Admittedly, this may cause challenges for *Chevrot Kadisha*. Who should wash a trans woman with male genitals? A non-binary person? The Community Hevra Kadisha of Greater Boston has considered these questions at length because it includes a number of LGBTQ members. Its manual offers detailed guidelines, some of which are included on pages 3-5.

The second reason we wish to explore the idea of non-binary *taharah* liturgy is that it is not always possible for a *chevrah* to know what gender an individual *meit/meitah* considered themselves. It may be more appropriate to use non-binary liturgy, rather than run the risk of mislabeling and offending the still-present *neshama*.

My hope is that this manual will be respectful and applicable in many new situations, allowing the *chevrah* to handle them all with humility, respect, beauty, and kindness, without having to wonder if they are doing the appropriate thing.

Your involvement in this holy work is a great blessing. Thank you for being here.

Rick Light
Santa Fe, NM
May 2020



Introduction and Scope

What is a *Chevrah Kadisha*, and Why Should We Care?

What is this work, and why does it matter? The short answer is that we care because death is a part of life, and we are honored to have a *Chevrah Kadisha* (the “sacred society” in Judaism that prepares the bodies of the dead for burial) in our community. The entire structure of Jewish custom concerning death and dying is based on respect for both the deceased and those left among the living. It seeks to maintain the dignity of the dead while easing the grief of the mourners.

Jewish custom includes a specific traditional manner to prepare a body for burial. It is the *Chevrah Kadisha* that performs this very special *mitzvah*. This ritual is for all Jews, observant or not, affiliated or not.

What is it? The ceremony performed by the *Chevrah Kadisha* volunteers is called *Tabarah*, and under normal conditions, is composed of five parts:

- (1) preparations and opening prayers,
- (2) cleansing the body physically,
- (3) washing and purifying the deceased spiritually,
- (4) dressing the body in the burial garments and placing it in the casket, and
- (5) the closing prayers.

When there is a death, the *Chevrah Kadisha* members are called upon to arrive anonymously, perform this ceremony quietly and with greatest respect, and then, just as anonymously, disappear. The ceremony is very sensitive to the sacredness of the task and the modesty of the deceased. It can be thought of as midwifing the dead from this world into the next. It includes a number of prayers and readings in both English and Hebrew. In general, to preserve modesty, only men perform a *Tabarah* for a dead man, and women for a deceased woman, with variations in today’s world for gender inclusivity. The burial shroud is generally a white, hand-sewn linen garment that is designed to mimic the clothes of the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest of Temple times, for in death we are all as holy as the holiest of our People.

The Intended Use of This Document

This book is to guide the preparation of a body for burial according to traditional Jewish practices. Written originally for Chevrah Kadisha of Northern New Mexico (CKNNM) to guide procedures during the *Tabarah* ritual itself and for educational purposes, it is not intended to cover universal needs or customs. It is assumed that those using these guidelines are familiar with the rituals involved, either through formal training or reading materials, and hence understand the context and performance of the rituals, procedures and activities described herein.

A Comment About the Leader of the *Tabarah*

The performance of the *Tabarah* is a holy act. Maintaining an atmosphere of respect, dignity, and reverence is paramount during the entire time the *Chevrab Kadisha* members are in the *Tabarah* room. With this in mind and considering the many possibilities for variation in custom and details in the performance of these procedures, as well as the variation in experience and knowledge of the members performing the *Tabarah*, it is our local convention (*minbag*) to appoint a leader for each *Tabarah*. The primary responsibility of the leader is to make all decisions, thereby avoiding possibilities for conflict, confusion, or disrespect during the ritual. If there are disagreements as to if or how something should be performed, such discussions should be held before the group enters the *Tabarah* room, never in the presence of the deceased. The leader should decide ahead of time how the *Tabarah* is to be performed, who is to do what, and if there are special circumstances requiring specific changes to normal procedures, etc. This must be communicated ahead of time to the team performing the *Tabarah* so everyone understands how the ritual will be performed and minimize questions and unnecessary talking during the procedure. In general, a briefing of the *Tabarah* team prior to *Tabarah*, and a debriefing afterward are recommended.

Furthermore, the leader is the one who will make decisions during the procedure if unexpected situations arise. The leader coordinates all activities, working closely with the reader. The reader delineates what is to be done, while the leader ensures it is done properly. If there are new members who have not done this before, it is the leader who guides and shows them how it is to be done.

Let's Talk About *Kavanah*

This is sacred work. When we perform *Tabarah* we are midwifing a soul, the image of the Divine, from one realm to another (from this world to the next). This is not everyday kind of activity for most of us. So when we do this work we should specifically remind ourselves of the holiness of our task and the responsibilities we undertake to show respect and dignity to this Divine soul as we do this work. Not only are we to treat the body of the deceased with respect and care, we must keep in mind that the soul is in the room, aware of all we do, and usually quite appreciative of our efforts. We should address the deceased as if they are still in the room, tell them what we are going to do, and when our task is complete, remind them that we did our best to honor them. If team members can keep the soul in mind at every phase while doing *Tabarah*, the team's *kavanah* and reverence will be magnified, their awareness will expand, and the entire procedure will be enhanced because of it.

The Prayers and Readings

Prayers (*tefillot*) and readings that are part of the *Tabarah* itself are noted in both Hebrew and in English. The prayers have both intellectual and vibrational value for both the deceased and the members of the *chevrah* who are involved. Hence it is recommended that unless all persons in the room (including the deceased) are fluent in Hebrew, all prayers should be said in both languages, and at a speed that shows respect and allows all present to understand and appreciate their content. In some cases there might be more than one reader. For example, one person may read the English clearly and slowly while another person chants the Hebrew more softly simultaneously. Or all team members can read aloud together. If you are uncomfortable with any of the Hebrew, just read the English.

A Note about Transliteration

With the exception of chanting, his manual does not include transliterations of the Hebrew text. This is done deliberately, as I feel Hebrew is a powerful and beautiful holy language. And when used in a sacred ritual such as *Tabarah*, it has intent and purpose. Thus those reading it should understand what they are saying. I feel transliteration is superficial and does not support this fundamental principle. Therefore, I chose to include only English and Hebrew for all of the ritual readings. Chanting is different in that music has its own power and richness that does not require one to understand every word of the Hebrew. In addition, music that accompanies *Tabarah* is distinct from the Kabbalistic underpinnings of the ritual liturgy, and hence does not follow the same rules.

The Layout and Colors in This Document

This document includes a special outline in a box at the top of each section, with the current activity in bold. This outline is to remind the reader(s) and leader where we are in the overall process at any given time. In addition, although this work is primarily for use in the *Tabarah* room itself, an appendix is provided at the end of this work with additional information useful outside of the *Tabarah* room.

Please note that **text color** is now included to simplify the reading of the liturgy for each type of *tabarah* (male, female, non-binary, *Tabarah Ruchanit*), with black text used for items that apply to all situations. Note that all Hebrew text is also printed in black ink to remind us that all genders are equal in the eyes of God.

Gender Considerations

It is important for the *tabarah* team to understand how to appropriately deal with the spectrum of genders when performing this holy ritual. The following two pages of text are quoted with permission from a ground-breaking document on gender and *tabarah* by the Community Hevra Kadisha of Greater Boston, called **Toward A Gender-Inclusive Hevra Kadisha**, published in 2019, pages 17-18:

Outline of Practical Guidelines

1. Transgender status does not disqualify one from receiving *taharah*.

A Jewish transgender individual, regardless of the state, completeness, direction, or any other quality of their transition, is entitled to a full Jewish burial including *taharah*, *sh'mirah*, and all the attendant rituals. This applies to trans men, trans women, and non-binary Jews.
2. Regarding the genders of the participants in the *taharah* of a transgender Jew and participation of transgender Jews in the *hevra kadisha*.
 - a. A *taharah* for a trans man should be performed by men and a *taharah* for a trans woman should be performed by women.
 - b. A *taharah* for a non-binary individual *lechatchila* should be performed by non-binary individuals or by women. If a man participated it is *kasher b'diyevad*.¹ This applies whether the non-binary individual was assigned male at birth or assigned female at birth.
 - c. A trans woman may participate in performing a *taharah* for anyone: trans or cis, male, female, or non-binary.
 - d. A trans man may only participate in performing a *taharah* for a male, cis or trans. *Lechatchila* he should not participate in performing a *taharah* for a non-binary individual, but if he did so, is *kasher b'diyevad*.
 - e. A non-binary individual may participate in performing a *taharah* for a man, a woman, or for a non-binary individual. This applies regardless of whether the individual in question was assigned male or female at birth.
3. Regarding a *taharah* that was begun but the decedent is discovered to have unexpected anatomy.
 - a. If a *taharah* was begun for an individual who was presumed to be a woman, and therefore women were performing the *taharah*, and the individual was discovered to have a penis, the *taharah* should be completed by the women. The penis should be washed as part of the *taharah*.
 - b. A trans woman who, during the course of *taharah*, was discovered to have a penis and was uncircumcised, should not be circumcised before burial.

¹ Note: Small communities may find themselves frequently in the “b’diyevad” category. This work is written from a point of view where “lechatchila” indicates the ideal case, when there are plenty of trained, experienced members of various genders available. In the work of tahara, we always aim for the most complete undertaking possible in the given circumstances. (*B’diyevad* = in the realistic case; *Lechatchila* = at the outset, ideally, in the most stringent case.)

- c. If a *taharah* was begun for an individual who was presumed to be a man, and therefore men were performing the *taharah*, and the individual was discovered not to have a penis, the *taharah* should be completed by the men.
 - d. Implants in the body, particularly in the breasts for women or in the neophallus for men, should not be removed before burial.
4. The decedent should be wrapped in *tachrichim* appropriate for their lived gender.²
- a. A trans man should be wrapped in *tachrichim* appropriate for a man. He should be buried with a *tallit* and *kippah*.
 - b. A trans woman should be wrapped in *tachrichim* appropriate for a woman. If she wore a *tallit* and/or *kippah* in life as a woman, she should be so buried.
 - c. A non-binary individual should be wrapped in *tachrichim* according to the following schema:
 - i. A *mitznefet* to cover the face and the back of the head to the neck. It is not necessary to use a two-piece *mitznefet* as one would use for women.
 - ii. The bands of the *michnasayim* should be tied midway between the knee and the ankle.
 - iii. If the decedent wore a *tallit* and/or *kippah* in life as a non-binary individual, they should be so buried. If the individual is not wrapped in a *tallit*, the body should be wrapped in an apron around the *kittel*. (Traditions vary about tying the *tachrichim*; in particular wrapping the body in a final sheet: some might actually be doing this already for all individuals and calling it a *ketonet*.)
5. *Pesukim* appropriate for the lived gender of the decedent should be said.
- A *taharah* for a trans man should use the liturgy, verses, etc. for men. A *taharah* for a trans woman should use the liturgy, verses, etc. for women. A *taharah* for a non-binary individual may use some combination, or some other verses entirely.

Footnote from page 27: In Hebrew, an individual's name is traditionally given as "X, son/daughter of Y". Since there is no neutral Hebrew word for "child", a number of solutions have emerged. One is to use the neutral בֶּת *bet* as proposed by the Nonbinary Hebrew Project; another is to use מִבֵּית *mi-beit* "from the house of" (though this presents additional sticking points with regards to blended households, absent parents, etc.). The phraseology by which the decedent was known during their lifetime should be honored, if known to the *hevra kadisha*.

² Traditions surrounding *tachrichim* vary around the world. A *hevra* should take these recommendations under consideration and adjust them in accordance with their received practices for men and women.

To Chant Perchance to Dream

Chanting, humming, and singing can enhance the beauty and *kavanah* of *Taharah* in a number of ways. Often, the use of these in the ritual can transform a difficult situation into a blessed one and can uplift more mundane actions to become inspired. Rabbi Shefa Gold has been teaching chanting techniques for many years and has written specific chants for *Taharah* (published in her book, *The Magic of Hebrew Chant*). We are blessed to include these (with permission) in this book at the beginning of each section and may be used as you feel appropriate to add beauty and grace to the already inspiring work of midwifing a soul through *Taharah*. The sheet music for each chant (along with a link to a recording) appears prior to the liturgy for each part of the ritual.

Introduction to Chanting During *Taharah*

by Rabbi Shefa Gold

The Ritual of *Taharah* requires us to step into The Between, that sacred space between Life and Death, in order to escort the soul on her journey. Performing *Taharah* is like being a midwife to that soul. We do this soul-midwifery by coming into a state of heightened awareness and reverence.

The practice of Chant can help us cultivate that state in which our reverence for the life that has been lived merges with our awareness of the great expanse that is opening beyond death. Chant can clear away any fear or reactivity, so that we can be fully present to both honor the body and celebrate the awesome journey of the soul. The chant helps to transcend our individual stories and personalities, in order to connect the *Chevrah Kadisha*, the Holy Friends, to each other in shared intention and purpose.

With a chant, we can use a kernel of the liturgy to focus that shared intention so that the words of the liturgy lift us up into sacred space. We use the words to go beyond the place of words. The sacred sounds of Hebrew, the melodies, harmonies, rhythms and our concentrated attention help to expand our awareness of the import of this awesome moment. Chant works to clear the mind of distraction, open our hearts, deepen our love and focus our attention on the task at hand.

Chanting has the power to open the inner dimensions of our being and connect us to the reality and radiance of our own soul. If we are identified only with our bodies, then we'll only see and relate to the body before us. If we are identified with the great expanse of our own souls, then we can be in communication and communion with the soul before us, who is embarking on an amazing journey.

Ideally, the *Chevrah Kadisha* will practice and know these chants well.

Preparation and Setting Intentions

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparations• Washing the Deceased• The Purification• Dressing the Deceased• Moving the Deceased into the Casket• Cleaning up | <p>We begin by setting our intentions while we prepare ourselves, the room, and the deceased for what is to follow. As shown to the left, this is the first phase of this ritual.</p> |
|---|---|

For *In-person Taharah*, skip to **page 12**.

Pre-Briefing and Preparation for *Taharah Ruchanit*

Even though we are not touching a body, it is still important that the team participants be chosen to honor the gender identity and modesty of the deceased.

Before any *taharah*, there should be a meeting of the team members to review the procedure about to be performed, and to make sure everyone is okay to do what has to be done, both physically and emotionally. For *Taharah Ruchanit*, the team is not co-located in a funeral home or other ritual space normally used for preparation for burial. Instead, team members are assembled “virtually” using technology such as computers or cellphones to connect through non-physical means. The non-physical connection also includes our heart-space – we connect through love, intention, *kavanah*, and common focus to midwife a soul between realms of existence.

It is therefore even more important for the *Taharah Ruchanit* situation to hold this pre-ritual briefing to ensure everyone is on the same page. This briefing is similar to the *In-person Taharah* pre-briefing in that its content includes the following:

- Overview of the ritual procedures
- Checking in to be sure everyone participating is okay emotionally and physically

What is different about the *Taharah Ruchanit* pre-briefing is that it also includes the following elements not included in an *In-person Taharah*:

- Every participant must assemble specific items at their location in order to participate in the ritual (described below)
- All participants need appropriate technology (if using it to connect the team in real time), everyone needs to know how to mute and unmute themselves, and when to do that, and of course, everyone must have internet connections or phone service with sufficient speed to allow flawless communication
- Specific visualizations (much like guided meditation) are included to set the tone and enable and connect the focus of love and intentions that empower this “ritual at a distance”

During this pre-briefing the leader reminds participants to locate themselves in a space where they will not be disturbed during the ritual, a place where they can pour water and light candles, and where they can comfortably remain for the duration of the ceremony. Participants should be dressed respectfully.

The team leader ensures each member has the decedent's name in Hebrew and English. The leader or another member is assigned to be the designated reader during the ritual, or the group decides to read simultaneously together. As in *In-Person Tabarah*, the leader reminds everyone of the importance of respect and the holiness of what is about to happen, and then the leader summarizes for the team the power of the visualization and the spiritual connection with the deceased that they are about to create. This is the time for the leader to answer any questions or concerns that might arise.

This kind of ritual is new; we are birthing a new approach to *tabarah*. There is no one way to do this, and as taught to us by the Portland *chevrah*, visualization is key to helping team members focus their intentions. Physical movement in conjunction with heart-felt intention can significantly improve connection with the deceased and the holy ritual we are performing. Thus, some teams choose to use pantomime to accompany different actions during the ritual (eg., air-tying knots as if they were tying *tachrichim* strings). Some teams also rotate the tasks of reading, so everyone is involved. Your team must find the way that works best for you.

I've included here an additional structure that I find meaningful. Your team can adapt it as needed. In my approach, we use physical items to help create a sacred circle within the space of each participant, amplifying and extending the sacred circle created by the team itself. This must be set up along with appropriate technology such that participants can see and hear each other as needed.

We create this sacred space by having each team member arrange a plain white sheet on a table, or choose a clean table to use without a sheet, with five candles in candleholders arranged in a large circle on the table, with a bowl in the center of the circle (into which water will be poured during the ritual). Several clean small rocks (or perhaps something that belonged to the deceased) should be handy to ritually connect us to the body of the deceased. Matches or a lighter should be handy, as well as a full pitcher of clean water for the ritual. To the side of this, each participant should have a hand washing pitcher full of water (preferably two-handled like for *n'tilat yadayim*), an additional bowl to catch the water, and a clean hand towel.

Participants wash hands using the hand washing pitcher, pouring into the bowl on the side, pouring just like we do for *n'tilat yadayim*, alternating hands. The washing is done in silence, while participants put forth the intention of purifying their own hearts for the work to be done.

Say the following prayer asking for guidance and courage together as a group:

Source of kindness and compassion, whose ways are ways of mercy and truth, You have commanded us to act with lovingkindness and righteousness towards the dead, and to engage in their proper burial. Grant us the courage and strength to perform this work properly: this holy task of assisting the soul of the dead as they transition from this world to the next. Guide our hands and hearts as we do this work and enable us to fulfill this commandment of love. Help us to be aware of Your divinity in the soul of the deceased, even as we see Your holiness in the faces of those who share this task with us, for we were all created in Your image. Source of life and death be with us now and always.

The group says the following together as a reminder that we are all holy souls:

אֱלֹהִי, נְשָׁמָה שְׁנַתַּת בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא. אַתָּה בְּרֵאתָה,
אַתָּה יִצְרַתָּה, אַתָּה נִפְחַתָּה בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָה בְּקִרְבִּי,
וְאַתָּה עֲתִיד לְטָלָה מִמֶּנִּי, וְלִהְיוֹתִי בִּי לְעֲתִיד לְבֹא.

Oh, God, the soul you have placed within me is pure. You created it. You shaped it. You breathed it into me. And You will yet take it from me for eternal life.

The leader or designated reader says the following as each participant gently enfolds both hands around the rocks representing the body of the deceased, holding them out in front of their heart with outstretched arms:

As we enter the space of this Taharah Ruchanit today we are reminded of the sanctity of our work, the respect we show to any deceased for whom we perform *taharah*, and the holiness of the soul we intend to assist, as well as the holiness of each of us as Divine beings created in the image of the Holy One. We are mindful that the soul of the deceased is aware of our efforts, fully present with us as we do this ritual, and in connection with All That Is. We cradle these rocks in our hands inviting the soul of _____ *mi-beit* _____ to join us here as we create this sacred space. Placing the rocks into the central bowl we now invite the Divine to wrap this soul in a blanket of love supporting and comforting its transition.

We use this visualization to set the tone and create the fabric upon which our ritual will rest today. We light one candle to represent the soul of the deceased as we close our eyes to see ourselves surrounded by sanctity:

We are joined in a lovely forest bathed in sunshine, accented by a chorus of birdsong and a slight breeze. The air is crisp and fresh. Nearby is a running mountain stream whose gurgling song reminds us that these living waters, *Maiyim Chaoyim*, are the lifeblood of the wilderness and the purifying agents for all of life. The energy of this forest supports us, engages us, enlivens us. We feel the souls of our ancestors with us here along with a chorus of angels.

Bathing in this energy we now create a sacred circle with the holy *Shekhinah* in the center, cradling the holy soul of this deceased, guarded and guided by the four Archangels, *Michael* on the right, *Gabriel* on the left, *Uriel* before, and *Raphael* behind. We request the blessing of these angels as we light a candle to the right, left, before, and behind the central bowl in our circle.

Together the group addresses the deceased to let them know why you are here:

_____ (name of deceased), we are here to comfort you and uplift your soul at this tender time. Before we begin our work, we ask that you please forgive anything we might do today that does not preserve your dignity through respect. We are here to perform this *Taharah* to the best of our abilities and for your maximum benefit. Please forgive us if we do not do this perfectly. Everything we do today is for the sake of your honor.

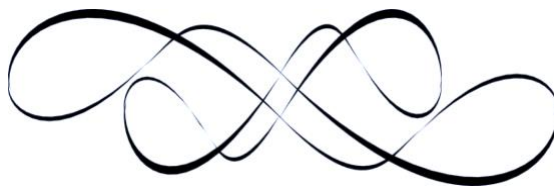
Continue on **page 15** if chanting is desired, then with *Chamol* on **these pages**:

Page 18 for a person with male pronouns

Page 20 for a person with female pronouns

Page 22 for a person with non-binary pronouns

Then continue on **page 24** and imagine removing the clothing from the deceased while saying *Vaya'an Vayomer*.



Pre-Briefing and Preparation for an *In-Person Taharah*

The team should meet in a side room of the funeral home to go over what is about to happen, who will be responsible for what during the ritual and to review the process for those who might be new. This pre-briefing partners with the post-ritual debriefing in which the team reviews what happened and discusses any issues that might have come up. During the pre-briefing for an in-person *Taharah*, in addition to the overview of the ritual and liturgy, do the following two things:

1. Decide who will be the leader of the *Taharah* ritual to coordinate and focus all activities and participants (see introduction for further information on the leader's responsibilities).
2. Assign the tasks and be sure each person knows what is expected of them for this particular ritual and these specific tasks. Sometimes one person may take on more than one role. The tasks are listed on the following pages.

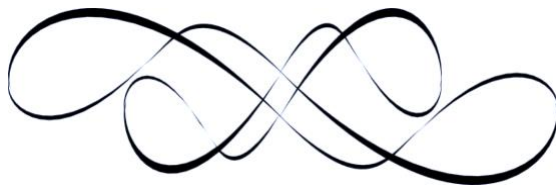
Note:

The most important thing during the performance of *Taharah* is to have intentions of kindness, dignity and respect. There should be no unnecessary talking or activity. Some of the ways we show respect are the following:

- Never walk behind the head of the deceased.
- Never pass items over the deceased.
- Speak softly and only as necessary.
- Remember that the soul of the deceased is in the *Taharah* room with you.

Tasks for Team Members for an *In-Person Taharah*

- ❖ Tasks marked with this symbol are preparatory tasks.
- **Leader**
 - ❖ Ensures room is properly organized, deceased covered with clean sheet and in proper position with feet facing the door if possible, table properly tilted and locked in place (wheels too), extra table for spreading out supplies and *tachrichim*, etc.
 - ❖ Lights candle (yartzeit candle or other long-burning candle); this candle will be placed on the *aron* after the *Taharah* is completed.
 - Handles overall coordination and all decision-making.
 - Guides others.
 - Interfaces with funeral home personnel.
- **Reader(s) and shroud checker(s)**
 - ❖ Lays out the shrouds (*tachrichim*) ensuring all parts are there and can be found easily in the order required.
 - Follows the outline and directs the order of events.
 - Reads all prayers/readings (or leads and everyone reads together). Might be the lead reader of a team of readers as appropriate.
- **Casket (*aron*) organizer**
 - ❖ Places *aron* in proper position in the room, positioning it so the transfer of the body will be most easily managed (feet facing door, etc.).
 - ❖ As appropriate:
 - Removes straw or padding from the *aron*, leaving enough for support of the head; placing extra straw along sides to hold the body in position.
 - Drills holes in bottom of the *aron*, if not already done by funeral home. (Note that it shows more respect if you move the *aron* into another room to drill holes.)
 - Sprinkles earth from Israel (*afar*) into the *aron* (save some of the *afar* for later).
 - Arranges the burial sheet (*soven*) into position, diagonally across the *aron*.
 - For a man, cuts one *tzitzit* off of the *tallit* and places the *tallit* into the *aron* on top of the *soven*. The removed *tzitzit* is tucked into the belt (*gartel*) when the deceased is placed into the *aron*.
- **Bucket filler**
 - ❖ Fills 2 buckets or washing bowls with warm water for washing the body, placing them near the head of the deceased.
 - ❖ Ensures small pitchers are in place for hand washing.
 - Fills 3 buckets with cold water at the beginning of the *Taharah* portion of these procedures (after physical washing is completed).
- **Supplies organizer**
 - ❖ Lays out necessary supplies in an orderly manner so things can be found quickly and easily.
 - ❖ Locates sheets and towels, moves them closer if needed.
 - ❖ Ensures paper batting or equivalent is available for washing the deceased.
 - ❖ Notes if supplies are getting low, so they can be replenished after this *Taharah*.



Chanting for Preparation

The first challenge is to prepare ourselves by coming in to the Presence of a great mystery.

כִּי אַתָּה מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים וּמְמִית חַיִּים.
Ki Atah m'chayay hamaytim, umaymit chayyim
For You revive the dead and bring death to the living.

<https://www.rabbishefagold.com/life-death/>

The musical score is written in 3/2 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line for Voice 1 and a vocal line for Voice 2. The second system includes a piano accompaniment line and a vocal line. The lyrics are written below the notes. The score features several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes) and a fermata over the final note of the first vocal line.

Voice 1
ki A - tah m'cha - yay ha-may-tim ki A - tah m'cha -

Voice 2
ki A - tah m'cha - yay ha-may-tim ki A - tah

yayhamaytim u-may-mit-cha-yim u - may - mit cha - yim

m'chayayhamaytim u-may-mit cha - yim u - may - mit cha - yim

Preparations for *In-Person Taharah*

1. Say the following prayer asking for guidance and courage together as a group:

Source of kindness and compassion, whose ways are ways of mercy and truth, You have commanded us to act with lovingkindness and righteousness towards the dead, and to engage in their proper burial. Grant us the courage and strength to perform this work properly: this holy task of cleaning and washing the body, dressing the dead in shrouds, and burying the deceased. Guide our hands and hearts as we do this work and enable us to fulfill this commandment of love. Help us to be aware of Your divinity in the soul of the deceased, even as we see Your holiness in the faces of those who share this task with us, for we were all created in Your image. Source of life and death be with us now and always.

2. Enter the *Taharah* room in silence and begin to focus on the task at hand.
3. Put on protective clothing (face shield, one-piece clothing, jacket, or smock, mask if necessary, gloves, etc.) provided by the funeral home or from the *Chevrah Kadisha* supplies.
4. Wash hands (like *n'tilat yadayim* but without a blessing), hands are dried, then double gloved.
5. Perform preparation tasks discussed previously.
6. Say the following together as a reminder that we are all holy souls:

אֱלֹהֵי, נְשַׁמָּה שְׁנַתַּתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא. אַתָּה בְּרֵאתָה,
אַתָּה יִצְרָתָה, אַתָּה נִפְתַּתָּה בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָה בְּקִרְבִּי,
וְאַתָּה עֲתִיד לְטָלָה מִמֶּנִּי, וְלִהְיוֹתִי בִּי לְעֵתִיד לְבֹא.

Oh, God, the soul you have placed within me is pure. You created it. You shaped it. You breathed it into me. And You will yet take it from me for eternal life.

Further state your intentions by praying:

Blessed God, help us to take the first step in preparing this deceased for their last journey. As we do so, may we be conscious to treat this holy vessel with great dignity and respect. And may it be Thy will to protect us as we perform this holy work.

Address the deceased to let them know why you are here:

_____ (name of deceased), we are here to prepare your body for disposition and uplift your soul at this tender time. Before we begin our work, we ask that you please forgive anything we might do today that does not preserve your dignity and modesty through respect. We are here to perform this *Taharah* to the best of our abilities and for your maximum benefit. Please forgive us if we do not do this perfectly. Everything we do in this room is for the sake of your honor.

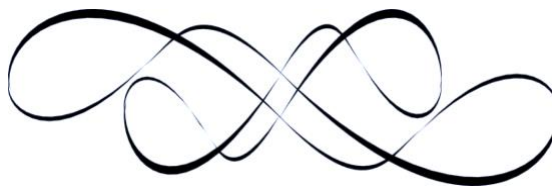
7. Say the *Chamol* prayer on the following pages:

Page 18 for a person with male pronouns

Page 20 for a person with female pronouns

Page 22 for a person with non-binary pronouns

Then, cut clothing off while keeping the deceased covered with a sheet. While this is performed, say the *Vaya'an Vayomer* prayer, **page 24**.



For men the following *tefilla* is said after washing hands and getting ready.
The names of the *met* and his parents are inserted in the spaces.

רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם חָמוּל עַל _____ בֶּן _____ הַמֵּת
הִלְזוּ שֶׁהוּא בֶּן אֲבֹרָהֶם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל
וְלֵאָה עֲבֹדָיָה, וְתַנּוּחַ נַפְשׁוֹ וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ עִם הַצְּדִיקִים כִּי
אַתָּה מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים וּמְמִית חַיִּים. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה מִזְחֵל
וּסוֹלֵחַ לַחַטָּאִים וְלַעֲוֹנוֹת מִמֵּתֵי עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּתַחֲנוּנֵינוּ: וּבְכֵן יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּסַבֵּב מִלְּאֲכֵי רַחֲמִים לְפָנֵי הַמֵּת, שֶׁהוּא
עֲבֹדְךָ בֶּן אֲמָתְךָ: וְאַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵנוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
מִשְׁכִּיל אֵל דָּל מִלְטָהּ מִכָּל צָרָה וּמִיּוֹם רָעָה וּמִדִּינָה
שֶׁל גִּיהֶנָם: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה גְּדוֹל הַחֶסֶד וּבַעַל הַרַחֲמִים:
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרוּמָיו לְעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלִירְאֵי שְׁמוֹ:
בְּרוּךְ פּוֹדֶה עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּינֵי פּוֹרְעַנְיּוֹת בְּרַחֲמִים:
וּבְכֵן יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵנוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שֶׁתְּזַכֹּר זְכוֹת בְּרִית קֹדֶשׁ שֶׁבְּבִשְׂרוֹ וַיְהִי פְדִיּוֹן לוֹ
מִשְׁרַפַּת גִּיהֶנָם וְתַחֲלִיצָהּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה כּוֹרֵת הַבְּרִית
בְּרַחֲמִים: בְּרַחֲמִים הַסֵּתֵר וְהַעֲלֵם פְּשְׁעֵי הַמֵּת הַזֶּה
עֲבֹדְךָ, מִשְׁרַפַּת אֲשֶׁר תַּחֲלִיצָהּ שֶׁהוּא צָרִיךְ לְרַחֲמֶיךָ
הַרְבִּים: וְאַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ טוֹב וְסֹלֵחַ לְכָל קוֹרְאֶיךָ. בְּרוּךְ
אַתָּה גְּדוֹל הַעֲצָה וְרַב הַעֲלִילָה בְּרַחֲמִים. עִם רַגְלֵי
צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנִיּוֹת בְּגֵן עֵדֶן יִדְרוּךְ, כִּי מְקוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא
רַגְלֵי חֲסִידָיו יִשְׁמֹר: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַנּוֹתֵן רַחֲמִים גְּדוֹלִים
וְרַב תַּחֲנוּנִים לִמֵּתֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל: אָמֵן, כֵּן יְהִי רְצוֹן:

Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for _____, the son of _____, this deceased, for he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May his soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You revive the dead and bring death to the living. Praised are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead and your people, Israel, upon petition. Therefore, may it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the deceased, for he is your servant and son of your maidservant. And You, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save him from all misery and from a day of evil and from banishment. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is the one who mercifully redeems the people Israel from all kinds of suffering. Therefore, may it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to remember the merit of the sacred covenant, which is in his flesh. May this covenant be a redemption from banishment. Blessed are You who establishes the merciful covenant with mercy. Through mercy, hide and disregard the transgressions of this departed, your servant. Deliver him from consumption by fire, for he needs your great mercy, and You, Adonai our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, great in council and mighty in achievement in mercy. May he tread with righteous feet into the Garden of Eden, for that is the place of the upright, and God protects the feet of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the departed of the people Israel. Amen. May such be Your will.

For women the following *tefilla* is said after washing hands and getting ready.
The names of the *metah* and her parents are inserted in the spaces.

רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם חָמוּל עַל _____ בַּת _____ הַמֵּתָה
הַלְלוּ שְׁהִיא בַת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל
וְלֵאָה עֲבֹדֶיךָ, וְתַנּוּחַ נַפְשָׁהּ וְנִשְׁמָתָה עִם הַצְּדִיקִים כִּי
אַתָּה מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים וּמְמִית חַיִּים. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה מוֹחֵל
וְסוֹלֵחַ לַחַטָּאִים וְלַעֲוֹנוֹת מִמֵּתֵי עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּתַחֲנוּנֵינוּ: וּבְכֵן יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתֵנוּ שֶׁתְּסַבֵּב מִלְּאֲכֵי רַחֲמִים לְפָנֵי הַמֵּתָה שְׁהִיא
אַמְתָּךְ בַּת אַמְתְּךָ: וְאַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
מִשְׁכִּיל אֵל דָּל מִלְטָה מִכָּל צָרָה וּמִיּוֹם רָעָה וּמְדִינָה
שָׁל גִּיהֵנוּם: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה גְּדוֹל הַחֶסֶד וּבַעַל הַרַחֲמִים:
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו לְעַבְדֶּיךָ וְלִירְאֵי
שְׁמוֹ: בְּרוּךְ פּוֹדֶה עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּינֵי פּוֹרְעָנִיּוֹת
בְּרַחֲמִים: בְּרַחֲמִים הַסֵּתֵר וְהַעֲלֵם פְּשָׁעֵי הַמֵּתָה הַזֹּאת
אַמְתְּךָ. מִשְׁרַפֵּת אֵשׁ תַּחֲלִיצָה שְׁהִיא צְרִיכָה לְרַחֲמֶיךָ
הַרְבִּים: וְאַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ טוֹב וְסֵלַח לְכָל קוֹרְאֶיךָ. בְּרוּךְ
אַתָּה גְּדוֹל הַעֲצָה וְרַב הַעֲלִילָה בְּרַחֲמִים, עִם רַגְלֵי
צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקִיּוֹת בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תִּדְרֹךְ כִּי מְקוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא
רַגְלֵי חֲסִידֶיךָ יִשְׁמֹר: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַנּוֹתֵן רַחֲמִים גְּדוֹלִים
וְרוֹב תַּחֲנוּנֵינוּ לְמֵתֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל: אָמֵן, כֵּן יְהִי רְצוֹן:

Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for _____, the daughter of _____, this deceased, for she is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May her soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You revive the dead and bring death to the living. Praised are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead and your people, Israel, upon petition. Therefore, may it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the deceased, for she is your maidservant and daughter of your maidservant. And You, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save her from all misery and from a day of evil and from banishment. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is the one who mercifully redeems the people Israel from all kinds of suffering. Through mercy, hide and disregard the transgressions of this departed, your maidservant. Deliver her from consumption by fire, for she needs your great mercy, and You, Adonai our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, great in council and mighty in achievement in mercy. May she tread with righteous feet into the Garden of Eden, for that is the place of the upright, and God protects the feet of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the departed of the people Israel. Amen. May such be Your will.

For gender non-binary *taharah* the following *tefilla* is said after washing hands and getting ready. The names of the deceased and their parents are inserted in the spaces.

רבונו של עולם תמול על _____ מבית _____ המתה הלזת
שְׁהָא בְּת אַבְרָהָם, יִצְחָק, יַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה, רַבְקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה
עֲבָדֶיךָ, וְתַנּוּחַ נִפְשָׁה וְנִשְׁמָתָה עִם הַצְּדִיקִים כִּי אַתָּה
מַחֲזִיחַ הַמֵּתִים וּמְמִית חַיִּים. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה מוֹחֵל וְסוֹלֵחַ
לְחַטָּאִים וְלַעֲוֹנוֹת מְמַתִּי עִמָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתַחֲנוּנִים. וּבְכֵן יְהִי
רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵנוּ שֶׁתְּסַבֵּב
מִלְּאֲכֵי רַחֲמִים לְפָנַי הַמֵּתָה, שְׁהָא דִּידְדִּיקָךְ מִימֵי עוֹלָם.
וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵנוּ מְשַׁכֵּיל אֶל דָּל
מִלְּטָהּ מִכָּל צָרָה וּמְיֻחַם רְעָה וּמְדִינָה שְׁלַ גִּיהֵנָם. בְּרוּךְ
אַתָּה גְּדוֹל הַחֶסֶד וּבַעַל הַרַחֲמִים. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם
בְּמְרוֹמָיו לְעַבְדֶּיךָ וְלִירְאֵי שְׁמוֹ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה פּוֹדֵה עַמּוֹ
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּינֵי פּוֹרְעָנוֹת בְּרַחֲמִים. בְּרַחֲמִים הַסֵּתֵר וְהַעֲלֵם
פִּשְׁעֵי הַמֵּתָה הַזֹּאת דִּידְדִּיקָךְ. מְשַׁרְפֵּת אֲשֶׁר תַּחֲלִיצָהּ שְׁהָא
צָרִיכָה לְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים. וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ טוֹב וְסֹלֵחַ לְכָל
קוֹרְאֶיךָ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה גְּדוֹל הָעֶצֶה וְרַב הָעֲלִילָה בְּרַחֲמִים.
עִם רַגְלֵי צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנוֹת בְּגוֹן עֵדוֹן יְדְרוּכָה, כִּי מְקוֹם
יְשָׁרִים וַיִּשְׁרוֹת הוּא רַגְלֵי חֲסִידֶיךָ וְחֲסִידוֹתֶיךָ יִשְׁמֹר.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַנּוֹתֵן רַחֲמִים גְּדוֹלִים וְרוֹב תַּחֲנוּנִים לְמַתִּי
עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמֵן, כֵּן יְהִי רְצוֹן.

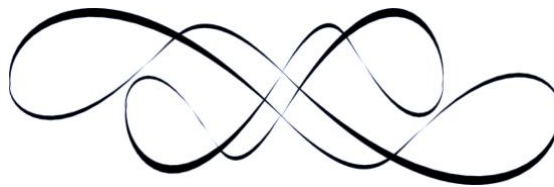
Ruler of the universe! Have compassion for _____, from the household of _____, this deceased, for they are a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your servants. May their soul and spirit rest with the righteous, for You revive the dead and bring death to the living. Praised are You who pardons and forgives the sins and trespasses of the dead and your people, Israel, upon petition. Therefore, may it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors to bring a circle of angels of mercy before the deceased, for they are your servant and member of your household. And You, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, who is concerned with the poor, save them from all misery and from a day of evil and from banishment. Blessed are You who makes peace in the heights for Your servants and for those who revere Your name. Blessed is the one who mercifully redeems the people Israel from all kinds of suffering. Through mercy, hide and disregard the transgressions of this departed, your servant. Deliver them from consumption by fire, for they need your great mercy, and You, Adonai our God, are good and forgiving to all who call upon You. Blessed are You, great in council and mighty in achievement in mercy. May they tread with righteous feet into the Garden of Eden, for that is the place of the upright, and God protects the feet of the pious. Blessed are You who gives great mercy and abundant grace to the departed of the people Israel. Amen. May such be Your will.

As the deceased is being unclothed, the following is said:

וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי הַעֲמֻדִים לְפָנָיו לֵאמֹר הִסִּירוּ הַבְּגָדִים הַצְּאִים
מֵעַלָּיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו רְאֵה הֵעֲבַרְתִּי מֵעַלֶיךָ עֲוֹנֶךָ וְהִלְבֵּשׁ אֶתְךָ
מִחֻלְצוֹת:

And he (the angel of God) raised his voice and spoke to those who were standing before him, saying, “Remove the soiled garments from him (the High Priest).” And he said to him, “Behold, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you in fine garments.” (Zechariah 3:4)

8. Cover the deceased with a clean dry sheet.



Physical Washing of the Deceased

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparations➤ Washing the Deceased• The Purification• Dressing the Deceased• Moving the Deceased into the Casket• Cleaning up | Now we begin the physical washing of the deceased. Approach this task as you would wash a newborn baby. Wash gently and thoroughly all parts of the body. |
|---|---|

For every Jewish life-cycle event in our lives we get cleaned up. From *bar* and *bat mitzvah* celebrations to weddings to birth events and even death-related events. Being clean and presentable is a way of honoring those with whom we celebrate. It shows respect for all who are involved in the event. When we die it is no different. One of the purposes of the *Taharah* is to do for the deceased what they no longer can do for themselves, namely, to help them be presentable for this life-cycle event.

Just as a baby requires our help when they come into the world, we bathe the deceased as they leave this world. This physical washing is performed in the same gentle and caring way we would bathe a newborn.

Rechitzah for Taharah Ruchanit

Begin the physical washing stage of *taharah* by saying the following:

If we could, we would now gently wash this deceased with care and respect preserving modesty and dignity. Let us remember how we do this and put forth the intention that their body be cleansed by the angels while we recite the appropriate readings for this *neshamah*.

If chanting is desired, continue to **page 26**, followed by these readings; otherwise recite:

Rosho Ketem Paz for a person with male pronouns, page 29

Hinakh Yaffah for a person with female pronouns, page 30

Shir Hama'alot for a person with non-binary pronouns, page 31

Chanting for Washing the Deceased

During the washing, we chant words of comfort and confidence to the soul, who is now expanding beyond the confines of her incarnation and stepping into its more expansive dimensions. Knowing and affirming the Presence of God is a way of sanctifying this time of transition.

We also bring the words of The Song of Songs to this sacred act of washing. These words of love create an atmosphere of reverence for our embodiment, while luring the soul into the place of pure love. Rabbi Akiva said that while all the writings of Torah are holy, The Song of Songs is The “Holy of Holies.” We wash the body and through our chant, call in the memory of The High Priest. It is only the High Priest (the *Kohen Gadol*) who enters the Holy of Holies to encounter the Divine Presence. The Song of Songs reminds the soul of the gift of love that life has given... the only gift that matters as we leave everything else behind.

כִּי תַעְבֵּר בַּמַּיִם אֶתְּךָ אָנִי וּבִנְהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטַפּוּךָ

Ki ta'avor bamayyim itcha ani, u'va'n'harot lo yishtafucha (Isaiah 43:2)

When you pass through the waters, I am with you, yes, I am with you,
I won't let the rivers overwhelm you. I will be with you.

<https://www.rabbishefagold.com/through-the-waters/>

The image shows a musical score for the Hebrew chant. It is written in a single system with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is simple and repetitive, with a clear emphasis on the words. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words in English and some in Hebrew. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 24, and 29 indicated. The lyrics are: ki ta-a-vor ba - ma - yim it - cha - a - ni it - cha - a - ni (5); ki ta-a-vor ba - ma - yim it - cha - a - ni it - cha - a - ni u - va - n' - ha - rot - (10); lo yish - ta - fu - cha lo yish - ta - fu - cha u - va - n' - ha - rot - lo yish - ta - fu - cha (15); lo yish - ta - fu - cha When you pass through the wa - ters I am with you Yes (20); I am with you. When you pass through the wa - ters I am with you Yes (24); I am with you. I won't let the ri - vers o - ver - whelm you I will be with you I (29); won't let the ri - vers o - ver - whelm you I will be with you.

זֶה דּוֹדִי וְזֶה רַעִי

Zeh Dodi v'zeh ray-ee (Song of Songs 5:16)
This is my Beloved; this is my Friend.

<https://www.rabbishefagold.com/loving-this-zeh-dodi/>

Melody

zeh do - di v' - zeh ray - ee zeh do - di v' -

7

zeh - ray-ee zeh - do-di v' - zeh ray - ee

13

zeh - do - di v' - zeh - ray - - - ee

הִנֵּךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הִנֵּךְ יָפָה

Hinach Yafa Rayati, hinach yafa (Song of Songs 1:15)
How beautiful you are my friend! How beautiful!

(Found on Rabbi Shefa's CD, Shir Delight: A Journey through the Song of Songs)

Hi-nach ya - fa ra-ya-ti hi - nach ya - fa hi - nach ya -

6

fa ra-ya-ti hi - nach ya - fa hi - nach ya - fa ra-ya-ti

11

hi - nach ya - fa hi - nach ya - fa ra-ya-ti hi - nach ya - fa.

Washing the Deceased

1. Set the intention:

Just as this deceased was created in God's image and beautiful while alive, so may we continue to see the Divine beauty present in this person's body and in their soul.

2. Examine the body area by area, exposing only what needs to be exposed for cleaning. Clean the right side first, then the left, in this order: head, arm, hand, torso, legs, feet. Clean the entire body, focusing especially on areas that need more cleaning, using a small amount of warm water and a cotton ball or cloth or cotton batting or paper towel.
3. Wash outside but not inside the nose, mouth, and eyes.
4. Upon completion of washing, water is poured the length of the body to rinse, as specified below. When washing the head, pour over the head but not over the face.
5. Remove any nail polish.
6. Clean under fingernails and toenails.
7. Use skin sealer or tape on any punctures or wounds to prevent fluid flow.
8. Remove dried blood with cotton ball and place ball into a special sack to be included in the *aron*. (All blood that is present should be preserved in this way, except for unusual conditions that require special actions determined by the leader. The sack comes with the *tachrichim*.)
9. All loose hairs should be saved for inclusion in the sack, along with nail clippings.
10. The palms of hands and feet are carefully washed to remove any perspiration.
11. While the deceased is being washed, say:

Rosho Ketem Paz for a person with male pronouns, page 29

Hinakh Yaffah for a person with female pronouns, page 30

Shir Hama'alot for a person with non-binary pronouns, page 31

While washing a deceased man, the following is said:

ראשו כְּתָם פָּז קְנֻצוֹתָיו תִּלְתְּלִים שְׁחָרוֹת כְּעוֹרֵב: עֵינָיו
כְּיוֹנִים עַל־אֶפְיָקִי מַיִם רְחֻצוֹת בְּחֶלֶב יִשְׁבּוֹת עַל־מְלֵאֵת: לְחִי
כְּעָרוּגַת הַבָּשָׂם מְגֻדְלוֹת מְרֻקְקִים שְׁפֹתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשְׁנִים נֹטְפוֹת
מִזֶּרַע עֵבֶר: יָדָיו גְּלִילֵי זָהָב מְמֻלְאִים בַּתְּרֻשֵׁי מַעֵי עֲנֹשֶׁת לָשׁוֹן
מְעֻלְפֹת סַפִּירִים: שׁוֹקָיו עֲמוּדֵי לָשׁ מִיִּסְדָּים עַל־אֲדָנִי־פָז
מְרֵאֵהוּ כְּלִבְנוֹן בְּחֹר כְּאַרְזִים: חִכּוֹ מְמֻסָּקִים וְכָלוּ מִחֻמְדִּים
זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רַעִי בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָּם:

His head is burnished gold,
The wave of his hair
Shiny black as the raven,

His eyes like doves
By the flowing rivers
of milk and plenty.
His cheeks are a bed of spices,
Treasures of sweet perfume,
His lips red lilies
Wet with myrrh.

His hands are rods of gold,
Studded with topaz,
His body is polished ivory,
Inlaid with sapphire,
His thighs are marble pillars
On pedestals of gold.
Majestic as Lebanon,
A man like a cedar!

His mouth is luscious,
He is all delight.

This is my beloved
And this is my friend
Oh daughters of Jerusalem.
(Song of Songs 5:11-16)

While washing a deceased woman, the following is said:

הַנֶּה יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הִנֵּה יָפָה עֵינֶיהָ יוֹנִים מִבַּעַד לְצַמְתָּהּ שְׁעָרָהּ
כְּעֵדֶר הָעוֹזִים שְׁגָלְשׁוּ מִתֵּר גִּלְעָד: שְׁנֵיהָ כְּעֵדֶר הַקְּצוּבוֹת שְׁעָלוּ
מִן־הַרְחֻצָּה שְׁכָלָם מִתְאַיְמוֹת וְשִׁכְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם: כְּחוּט הַשָּׁנִי
שִׁפְתֶיהָ וּמִדְּבָרֶיהָ נֶאֱוָה כְּפֶלַח הָרָמוֹן רִקְתָּהּ מִבַּעַד
לְצַמְתָּהּ: כְּמַגְדֵל דָּוִד צִנְאוֹרָהּ בְּנוֵי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת אֶלֶף הַמַּגֵּן תִּלְוִי
עָלֶיו כָּל שְׁלִטֵי הַגְּבוּרִים: שָׁנֶיהָ כְּשָׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם תְּאוֹמֵי צִבְיָה
הָרוּעִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים: כְּלָהּ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי וּמוֹם אֵין בָּהּ:

How beautiful you are, my friend,
How beautiful!
Your eyes are doves behind the thicket of your hair,

Your hair
Like a flock of goats
Trailing down Mount Gilead.

Your teeth like a flock of ewes
That come up white from washing,
All of them alike, all shining and present.

Your lips like a scarlet ribbon
And your voice so sweet.

The curve of your cheek
like a pomegranate
hidden behind the thicket of your hair,

Your neck is a tower of David
Built to perfection,
A thousand shields hang upon it,
All the armor of heroes.

Your breasts are two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle,
Pasturing among the lilies.

You are all-beautiful, my friend,
There is no blemish in you.
(Song of Songs 4:1-5,7)

While washing a non-binary deceased, the following is said:

שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת. אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים, מֵאֵין יְבֹא עֲזָרַי:
עֲזָרַי מֵעַם יי, עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ: אֵל־יְהוָה לְמוֹט רַגְלֶךָ,
אֶל־יָנוּם שְׁמֹרֶךָ: הִנֵּה לֹא־יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:
יי שְׁמֹרֶךָ, יי צִלְךָ עַל־יַד יְמִינֶךָ: יוֹמָם הַשָּׁמֶשׁ לֹא־יַכְכָּה
וְיָרַח בַּלְיָלָה: יי יִשְׁמְרֶךָ מִכָּל־רָע, יִשְׁמַר אֶת־נַפְשֶׁךָ: יי
יִשְׁמַר־צִאתֶךָ וּבֹאֶךָ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:

A Song to the Ascents:

I lift my eyes up to the mountains; from where will
my help come? My help is from Adonai, Maker of
heaven and earth.

God will not allow your foot to stumble; your
Guardian will not slumber.

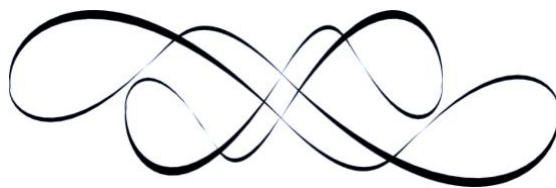
Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers
nor sleeps.

Adonai will guard you. Adonai is your protection at
your right hand.

The sun will not strike you day, nor the moon by
night. Adonai will guard you from all evil; God will
guard your soul.

Adonai will guard your comings out and your
goings in, from now until forever.
(Psalms 121)

12. Once washed, with one person holding the head, turn body on right side to expose the back and pour water the length of the body. Place body onto the back again and pour water the full length over the exposed front.
13. Again holding the head, turn the body on the left side to expose the back and pour water the length of the body. Place body on back again to expose the front and pour water the full length again.
14. After completing the previous step, cover the body with clean sheet and discard remaining water.
15. Gloves are removed and discarded.



The Taharah

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparations• Washing the Deceased➤ The Purification• Dressing the Deceased• Moving the Deceased into the Casket• Cleaning up | <p>This is the key ritual element necessary to midwife the soul from this world to the next. Here we cleanse the deceased spiritually to help them on their journey.</p> |
|---|--|

For *Taharah Ruchanit*, skip to [page 35](#).

To midwife a soul is the purpose of *Taharah*. As the central element of this ritual, the spiritual cleansing phase is perhaps one of the simplest of tasks, yet also, one of the most important. It is accomplished in one of several ways, with the goal to purify the deceased through the transformative power of water. If a *mikvah* is available, immersion into the water three times is preferred. If no *mikvah* is available, we simulate the immersion into a flowing mountain stream – *mayim hayim* – living waters, by pouring 24 quarts of water (an approximation of 9 *kevim*) in a continuous flow from the head towards the feet.

Many *chevrot* today use three 8-quart buckets to accomplish this task; pouring one bucket almost the complete length of the deceased, and as that pourer nears the feet, a second pourer begins pouring the second bucket. When the second pourer nears the feet, the third bucket is poured. Thus there is no break in flow of water.

The deceased may be placed in one of several possible positions for this pouring:

- Supine.
- Sitting on the edge of a table.
- Standing.

Since respect for the dignity of the deceased is paramount, and the support necessary to hold the deceased in the latter two positions is awkward, it is recommended that the body be placed in the supine position, with the table tilted slightly downward toward the feet to promote drainage of the poured water. In addition, the foot of the table should be positioned near a drain so that the poured water will immediately drain away rather than pool on the floor.

Boards are placed between the deceased and the table to ensure flow of water to all parts of the body. The boards are generally pieces of sealed two-by-four pine or redwood (or equivalent), cut into 18-inch lengths, with edges sanded smooth. These must be dipped into the pouring water prior to being placed under the deceased. Care must be taken when inserting and removing the boards, so as not to tear the skin of the deceased.

During the pouring of the *Tabarab* water, all of the team members repeat the Hebrew words for “he/she/they are pure” at least three times aloud. When the pouring is completed, a clean sheet is placed over the body to begin the drying process. It stays there until the deceased and the table are both completely dry, when a new clean dry sheet replaces it.

Our local *minbag* is to hold a clean sheet over the deceased like a *chupah* while the *Tabarab* water is poured. When the pouring is completed, the sheet is simply lowered directly onto the body. Those holding the sheet should face away from the table with their hands above their heads holding the corners of the sheet. It works best to hold the sheet such that its long side is perpendicular to the table. This gives room for the pourers to walk between the sheet holders and the table while they pour. In order to include this beautiful *minbag*, the team must have at least four people present.

As a means to physically and spiritually separate the physical cleansing and the spiritual cleansing, we take off the gloves used in the previous stage of physical washing, ritually wash our hands again like we would for *netilat yadayyim* but without a blessing, dry the hands, and reglove. As we do this our intention should be focused on midwifing a holy being between realms – helping this soul move from this world into the next.

Continue with chanting on **page 36**.

Taharah Ruchanit Spiritual Washing

As the central element of the ritual of *taharah*, the pouring of water is the spiritual cleansing of this deceased. We emulate the pouring over the body by pouring over what we envision to be the soul being cradled by the holy *Shekhinah* in the center of our sacred circle.

Pour the water in a continuous flow, slowly and deliberately. The amount of water poured in this case is less important than how it is poured, and with what intention. We put forth the intention that this soul be uplifted, cleansed, and purified of the now static and inappropriate energies related to the physical world.

We continue by chanting on **page 36** (if desired) followed by saying *Amar Rabbi Akiva* on **page 37**. Then we pour our water together as a team on **page 39**.

Chanting for *Taharah*

During the ritual pouring, this chant affirms the essential purity of the soul. While assigning the water the power to break up rigid life-patterns and clear the way for the soul to move forward on her path.

כָּל־מְשַׁבְּרֵיךָ וְגַלְיֵךָ עָלַי עָבְרוּ
טָהוֹר הוּא, טָהֳרָה הִיא

Kol Mish'barecha v'galecha Alai avaru (Psalm 42:8)

Tahor Hu, T'horah Hi, Tahoreh He

All of Your breakers and Your waves have swept over me.
He is pure; she is pure.

<https://www.rabbishefagold.com/pure/>

Voice 1
hor hu t' - ho - rah hi t' - hor

Voice 2
ta - hor hu t' - ho - rah hi t' - hor

Voice 3
Kol mish'-ba - re - cha v'-ga - le - cha A - lai a - va - ru

Voice 4
Kol mish'-ba -

Voice 1
hu t' - ho - rah hi t' - hor hu t' - ho - rah hi t'

Voice 2
hu t' - ho - rah hi t' - hor hu t' - ho - rah hi t'

Voice 3
Kol mish'-ba - re - cha v'-ga - le - cha A - lai a

Voice 4
re - cha v'-ga - le - cha A - lai a - va - ru

The Spiritual Washing

1. Wash hands again (exactly as before), and again double glove.
2. Fill three buckets with fresh cold water, at least 8 quarts in each.
3. In preparation for the *Tabarab* ritual itself, *Amar Rabbi Akiva* is said:

אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָה אֲשֶׁר־יְכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנַי מִי אַתֶּם
מְטַהְרִין וּמִי מְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם-אֲבִיכֶם שְׁבַשְׁמִים שְׁנֵאמַר
וְזַרְקָתִי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיִּם טְהוֹרִים וּטְהַרְתֶּם מִכֹּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם
וּמִכָּל-גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם: (יחזקאל לו:כה) וְאוֹמֵר מִקְוֵה
יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוּה: (ירמיה יז:ג) מַה הַמְקוּוֹה מְטַהֵר אֶת הַטְּמֵאִים
אַף הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְטַהֵר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל: גְּנִים בְּאֵר
מֵיִם חַיִּים וְנִזְלִים מִן-לְבָנוֹן: (שיר השירים ד:טו)
אִם רַחֵץ אֲדֹנָי אֶת צוֹאת בְּנוֹת-צִיּוֹן וְאֶת דְּמֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם
יְדִיחַ מִקְרָבָהּ בְּרוּחַ מְשַׁפֵּט וּבְרוּחַ בָּעֵר: (ישעיהו ד:ד)
וְזַרְקָתִי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיִּם טְהוֹרִים וּטְהַרְתֶּם מִכֹּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם
וּמִכָּל-גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם: (יחזקאל לו:כה) יוֹמָא הַט:

Rabbi Akiva said, “You are fortunate, Israel. Before whom do you purify yourselves and who purifies you? Our father in heaven. As it is said: ‘And I will pour upon you pure water and you will be purified of all your defilements, and from all your abominations I will purify you.’ (Ezekiel 36:25). And it says: ‘God is the *mikvah* of Israel.’ (Jeremiah 17:13). Just as the reservoir of the ritual bath purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, purify Israel. (Yoma 8:9). ‘A fountain for gardens, a well of living waters and flowing streams from Lebanon.’ (Song of Songs 4:15). ‘And Adonai shall have washed away the turmoil of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by a spirit of judgment and with a searing breath.’ (Isaiah 4:4). ‘And I will pour upon you pure water and you will be purified of all your defilements, and from all your abominations I will purify you.’ ” (Ezekiel 36:25).

For *Tabarab Ruchanit*, continue on [page 39](#).

4. Place the deceased into the position desired for the *Tabarab* cleansing:
 - The deceased may be placed in a standing position, on a board placed on the floor.
 - The deceased may be placed in a sitting position, sitting on a board on the edge of the table.
 - The deceased may be placed in a supine position, lying on the table with boards under it, one under the head, the shoulders, the hips, and the calf.
 - Boards should be dipped into the *Tabarab* water in one of the buckets before being placed under the deceased.

➤ *Note: our custom is to lay the deceased in supine position on the boards on the table. This is the most respectful position in our opinion.*
5. If enough *Chevrah Kadisha* personnel are present, create a canopy over the deceased by holding a clean sheet above the table. Those holding the canopy face away from the table to show respect.
6. Remove the covering sheet placed on the deceased after washing (this should not be the sheet used for the canopy). Water is now poured in a continuous flow, two or three people alternating buckets, until a full 24 quarts of water have been poured in an uninterrupted flow. One person begins pouring and as that bucket is almost empty, the second person begins pouring, and when that bucket is almost empty, the third bucket is poured, so there is no break in the flow.
7. If the deceased is *sitting or standing*, the water is poured over the head so it automatically falls on the rest of the body. If the deceased is *supine*, the water may be poured in one of two ways:
 - a. Begin at the head and pour down the entire length of the right side, begin at the head and pour down the entire length of the left side, begin at the head and pour down the entire front, until the 24-quart flow has been fulfilled. (*Our minhag is this approach.*)
 - b. One person pours slowly over the head, while two others pour down the sides of the deceased the full length of the body.

Note that sometimes a pourer does not empty a bucket in one pass. When this happens, alternate buckets until all buckets have been emptied and there has been a continuous flow. If there is a break in the flow, simply stop, cover the deceased, refill the buckets, remove the sheet, and start the pouring again. Repeat until the full 24-quart flow has been fulfilled. Do not rush. Hold your intention to midwife the soul in a beautiful way. This is most important.

8. As the water is poured, all participants say the following at least 3 times each:

For *Tabarah Ruchanit*, we say this while we pour and visualize a pure soul. (Teams using technology to hear each other might want to unmute so they can join together to chant this.)

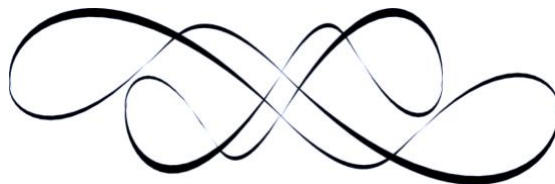
For a person with male pronouns: טהור הוא He is pure!

For a person with female pronouns: טהורה היא She is pure!

For a person with non-binary pronouns: טהורה הֵא They are pure!

For *Tabarah Ruchanit* continue on **page 42**.

9. After the pouring, the deceased is covered with a clean sheet to begin the drying process. If a canopy is used, this is simply lowered onto the deceased to become this new cover. Some people put a dry sheet on the table under the deceased, to help dry the back of the body and the table. Boards are removed. The table is dried. Do not use towels on the deceased that have been used to dry the table; however, you may use towels used on the deceased to dry the table.
10. Dry the deceased thoroughly while continuing to show respect with the covering sheet.
11. When the table and body are both dry, place a clean dry sheet over the deceased.



Clothing the Deceased

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparations• Washing the Deceased• The Purification• Dressing the Deceased• Moving the Deceased into the Casket• Cleaning up | Now the clean body is dressed for burial in simple respectful garments that mimic the clothes worn by the <i>Kohen Gadol</i> when he would enter the Holy of Holies in the days of the Temple. |
|---|--|

Death is the great equalizer. In death we are all equal before our God. Each of us is a holy soul. Hence, today we dress our deceased in clothes resembling those worn by the most holy of our people, the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest during the time of the Temple service. This has not always been the case. Rabban Gamliel lived in the first century CE. He was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel and it was his now well-known words that established the Jewish principles of simplicity and modesty of burial:

Formerly, they used to bring food to the house of mourning, rich people in baskets of silver and gold, poor people in baskets of willow twigs; and the poor felt ashamed. Therefore, a law was passed that everybody should use baskets of willow twigs, in deference to the poor...

Formerly, they used to serve drinks in the house of mourning, the rich serving in white glasses and the poor in colored glasses [which were less expensive]; and the poor felt ashamed. Therefore, a law was passed that everyone should serve drinks in colored glasses, in deference to the poor...

Formerly, they used to bring out the deceased for burial, the rich on a tall bed ornamented with rich covers, the poor in a plain box; and the poor felt ashamed. Therefore, a law was passed that all should be brought out in a plain box, in deference to the poor...

Formerly, the expense of burying the dead was harder for a family to bear than the death itself, so that sometimes family members fled to escape the expense. This was so until Rabban Gamliel ordered that he be buried in a plain linen shroud instead of expensive garments. Since then, people have buried their dead in simple shrouds (*Talmud, Moed Katan 27 a-b*).

Thus we bury everyone in the same clothing: simple cotton or linen *tachrichim* (burial shrouds) composed of closed-foot pants with a tie at the waist, a shirt with a tie at the neck, a jacket with a collar and tie at the neck, sometimes an apron for women, a face-cover and bonnet for women, and a head cover for men and non-binary. There are ties around the legs and a belt around the waist. These simple garments are plain, unostentatious, respectful, and beautiful clothes, that are often hand-sewn. They have no pockets, buttons, snaps, or other fasteners. The cloth is white or off-white. Usually the burial sheet (*sovev*) is made of the same cloth. In recent centuries, elders

often sewed their own *tachrichim*, which the family provided when the time came for use.

When we dress our dead, we tie special knots into the ties representing names of God. Everything we do during this ritual is to honor the dignity and holiness of the deceased.

Note: If the condition of the body is such that the *Tabarab* ritual cannot be performed, the body is placed into the casket and wrapped in the burial sheet, then the shrouds are placed over the body on the parts of the body they would normally have covered.

How to Don the Shirt and Jacket

Often, the most challenging part of clothing the deceased comes when it is time to put on the shirt (and jacket). There are a number of ways to do this, however, one common way that will eliminate much frustration for the team is the following:

1. Lay the shirt onto the chest of the deceased face down, with the neck opening of the shirt near the abdomen and the bottom of the shirt near the head.
2. Two people on either side of the table each insert their hand through the end of a sleeve of the shirt, pulling the sleeve and shirt up onto their own arm as they push their own hand through the sleeve and body of the shirt to come out the bottom of the shirt (near the head of the deceased).
3. The same team members now simultaneously each grab a wrist of the deceased with the hand they have pushed through the shirt, and pull the arm through the garment until the hand of the deceased emerges from the sleeve.
4. Team members now raise the arms of the deceased into the air above the head, while holding onto the sleeves of the shirt.
5. The other team members pull the bottom of the shirt over the head, while supporting the head, and then pull the entire shirt down the torso until the shirt is fully in place as it would be when worn by a living person.
6. Arms are lowered back to their relaxed place on the sides of the body, the shirt is straightened and tucked into the pants. The string at the neck is tied.
7. For the jacket it is the same procedure with two exceptions:
 - In step 3 above, team members must be sure to grab both the wrist of the shirt and the wrist of the deceased before pulling the hand through. This keeps the shirt in place.
 - The jacket is not tucked into the pants. It extends below the hips on the outside of the pants. The gartel is tied around the waist of the jacket once the jacket is fully in place and straightened.

Continue with chanting on **page 43** (if desired) followed by the reading of *Sos Asis* on **page 44**.

Taharah Ruchanit Dressing

For dressing the deceased, the ritual continues with our imaging our dressing them in the garments of the High Priest, the *Kohen Gadol*. The leader says:

We envision that you are now covered with a clean dry sheet as we prepare to dress you in garments that represent those worn by the *Kohen Gadol*, on the one day of the year when he entered into the Holy of Holies to pray for all of the people. Your clothes are lovely: simple, pure, and white.

Continue with chanting on **page 43** (if desired) followed by the reading of *Sos Asis* on **page 44**, and all of the individual garment readings that follow. Picture gently dressing each part of the body as it is mentioned.

(A beautiful variation of *Taharah Ruchanit* is to arrange when possible for a member of the funeral home staff to participate by actually placing *tachrichim* garments onto the body bag as appropriate when each part of the garment is mentioned.)

Chanting for Dressing the Deceased

As we dress the body in the clothes of the High Priest, we rejoice in the imminent journey. As we dress the body, we are preparing the soul for her passage into the Beyond... and into the realization of Salvation.

שׁוֹשׁ אֶשְׂיֵשׁ בְּיַי תְּגַל נִפְשִׁי בְּאֵלֹהֵי
כִּי הִלְבִּישָׁנִי בְּגָדֵי יֵשׁוּעַ

*Sos asis badonay tagayl nafshi belohai,
ki hilbishani bigday yesha (Isaiah 61:10)*

I will rejoice in God who has dressed me in the garments of Salvation.

<https://www.rabbishefagold.com/garments-salvation/>

Round

1.

Sos a - sis ba - do - nay ta - gayl naf - shi - be - lo - hai

5

2.

ki hil - bi - sha - ni big - day ye - sha ye - sha

Dressing the Deceased

1. If the burial shrouds (*tachrichim*) were not laid out in proper order during the preparation time (perhaps due to space restrictions), it should be done now.
2. Before beginning to dress the deceased, *Sos Assis* is said:

שׁוֹשׁ אֶשְׂיֵשׁ בְּיְהוָה תִּגְלַל נַפְשִׁי בְּאֱלֹהֵי כִּי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי-יֵשׁוּעַ מְעִיל
צְדָקָה יַעֲטֵנִי כְּחַתָּן יִכְהֶן פָּאֵר וְכִפְלָה תַעֲבֶדָה כְּלִיָּהּ
וְאָמַר יִשְׂיִמוּ צְנִיף טְהוֹר עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּשְׂיִמוּ הַצְּנִיף הַטְּהוֹר עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ
וַיִּלְבַּשְׁהוּ בְּגָדִים וּמִלְאָף יְהוָה עֲמֵד
כִּי כְאֶרְץ תּוֹצֵיא צְמֻחָה וְכִגְנָה זְרוּעֶיהָ תִצְמַח כֵּן אֶדְנִי יְהוָה יִצְמַח
צְדָקָה וְתִהְיֶה נֶגֶד כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם
וְנִחַם יְהוָה תָּמִיד וְהִשְׁבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצְחוֹת נַפְשִׁי וְעֲצַמֹתַי יִחַלְיץ וְהָיִיתׁ כְּגֹן
רֹהַ וְכַמוֹצָא מַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִכָּזֵבוּ מִיָּמָיו:

I will greatly rejoice, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation; God has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom puts on priestly glory and as the bride adorns herself with jewels. (Isaiah 61:10) And I said, "Let them set a pure headdress upon his head," and they set the pure headdress upon his head, and they clothed him with garments, and the angel of Adonai stood by. (Zechariah 3:5) For as the earth brings forth her growth, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so Adonai will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:11) And Adonai will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in time of drought, and make strong your bones, and you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters never fail (Isaiah 58:11).

As the dressing begins, the following intention is stated as the face is covered with a soft cloth:

As we dress this deceased, let us be conscious that we are clothing them in garments appropriate for the next stage of their spiritual journey.

The following order of dressing and the associated Hebrew phrases come from Leviticus 16:4, where it is described how Aaron is to be dressed as the High Priest, (the last one is from Genesis 43:14). We cover the face with a soft cloth while dressing the deceased, then put on the head covering last. (This face cover is temporarily removed and then replaced when the shirt and later the jacket are each slipped over the head.)

3. Garments should be placed onto the deceased in the following order, and each prayer is said while the garment is being installed:

- a. **shirt** (*k'tonet*, has no collar) – tie at neck is two loops, tied by only one person. Recite:

כְּתֹנֶת־בֵּד קֹדֶשׁ יִלְבָּשׁ
You shall don a holy linen tunic.

- b. **pants** (*michnasayim*) – place pants on, tuck in shirt, and then tie knots as follows:

Tying the knots for the pants:

- Two people tie the band at the waist, it is twisted four times while counting aloud as *alef, bet, gimmel, dalet*, then tied with a bow or as **shown on the next page**, resulting in two loops pointing toward the head of the deceased.
- Bands are similarly tied around each leg by two people, for a man they are tied just above the ankle, for a woman they are tied just below the knee.
- Recite:

וּמְכַנְסֵי־בֵד יִהְיוּ עַל־בְּשָׂרְךָ
And linen breeches shall be upon your flesh.

- c. **jacket** (*kittel*, has collar) – not tucked in, tie at neck is identical to the above and again tied by only one person.

- d. **belt** (*gartle* or *avnet*) – is place around the waist outside of *kittel* and tied by two people, this time with three loops making a shin (**see next page**). Some traditions (including our own) add a fourth upside-down loop to make a *dalet* (thus with the string ends this spells *Shaddai*). The *tzitzit* cut from the *tallit* should be tucked into this belt. Recite:

וּבְאַבְנֵט בֵּד יִחְגֹּר
And a linen sash you shall tie.

- e. If a woman is not buried in a *tallit*, place the apron on her and tuck it into the *avnet*.

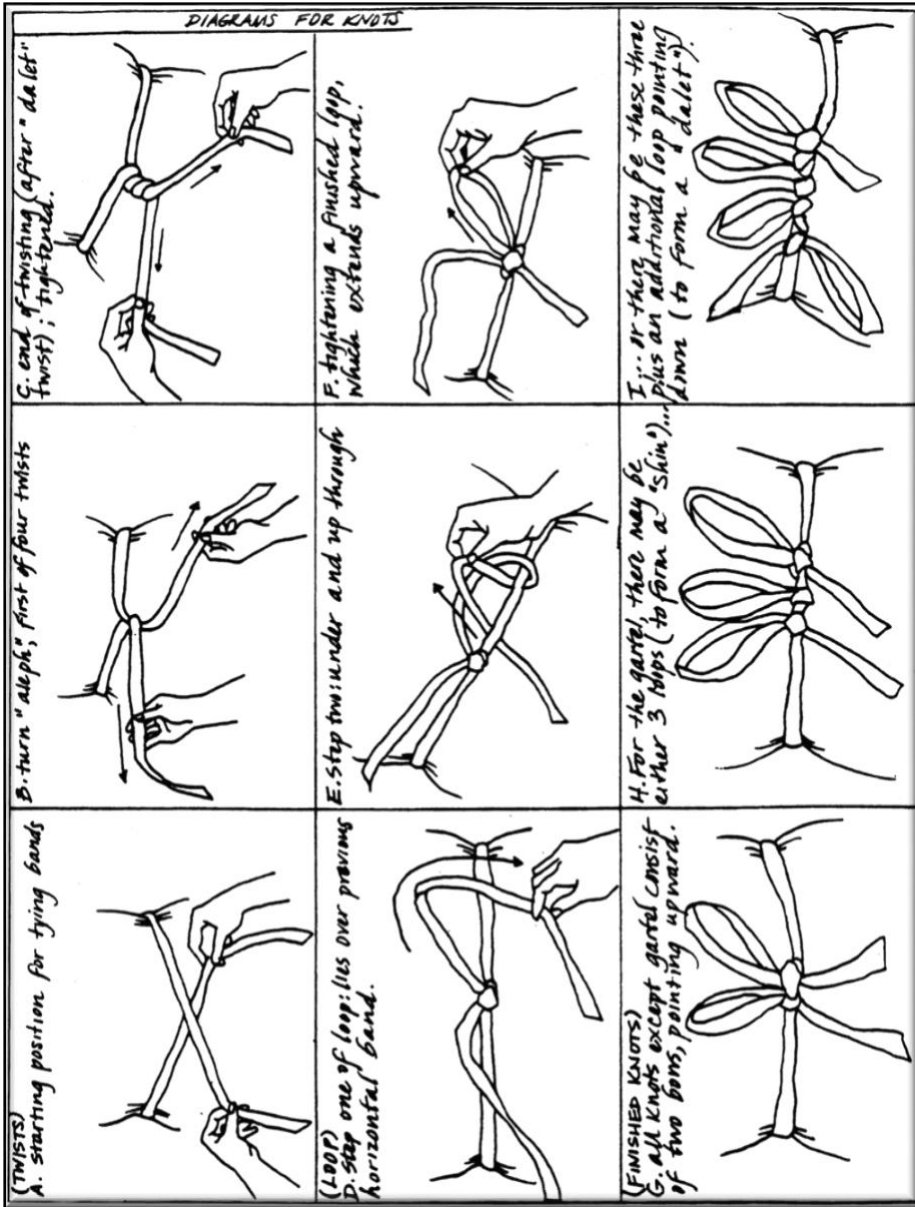
- f. **headdress** (*mitsnefet* for a man and **non-binary**, bonnet for a woman) – place *kippah* on the deceased if they wore one in life, before installing the *mitsnefet* or bonnet. Then place the lace face cover on the *metab*. Recite:

וּבְמַצְנֶפֶת בֵּד יִצְנָף
And a linen headdress ye shall wear.

h. For all genders, recite:

וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יִתֵּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים
 And God Almighty give you mercy.

Rabbi Schlingbaum's Approach to Knots



Casketing the Deceased

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparations• Washing the Deceased• The Purification• Dressing the Deceased➤ Moving the Deceased into the Casket• Cleaning up | <p>The casket is prepared and now receives the body in a gentle way. The team then asks for forgiveness for any action that might not have shown enough respect.</p> |
|--|--|

Casketing for *In-Person Taharah*

At this point the deceased is fully clothed but is still in need of our assistance. The casket (aron) must be properly prepared, the body placed gently within, and holy soil from Israel (afar) sprinkled upon the deceased and into the casket. There are other common ritual practices that are included in this phase as well, such as placing pottery shards (sherbloch) onto the eyes and mouth (representing this broken vessel and the now broken life of the deceased), and the use of an egg and vinegar mixture to paint the forehead, heart, and inner thighs. Some chevrot use all of these procedures, others choose a subset. Our local minhag is to use the afar and sherbloch always, and the vinegar/egg mixture only if the team chooses to do it. All of these together complete the work of preparing this holy vessel for its last journey.

If the deceased is male, or if a woman wore a tallit during her life, we wrap a tallit around them in the aron. Since they cannot do mitzvot any more we remove one of the tzitzit and tuck it into the gartel (outer belt). During the preparation phase you should cut off the tzitzit, place the sovev and tallit into the aron, but reserve the tzitzit until the body is placed into the aron. Then tuck the tzitzit into the belt before wrapping the body up in both the tallit and sovev. Note that we wrap the tallit around the shoulders just as they wore it in life, then wrap the sovev around them in a manner similar to wrapping a baby in a blanket: fold over the feet, then the right side, then the left side, then the head. The sovev is placed into the empty casket diagonally as shown below. Sometimes the sovev is not square, but rectangular, so there are not equal length corners to wrap. You do the best you can to ensure there is enough to at least wrap some on all four corners.



There are many ways to move the body from the table into the waiting casket. However, there are just three that are commonly used since they are the most respectful and easiest to accomplish. Note that in all three of these, one of the team members must be sure to support the head of the deceased during transit.

The first approach is to arrange the casket parallel to the table with the head of the casket at the foot of the table. Team members then stand on opposite sides of the table placing their arms under the deceased, lift and walk sideways until they are beside the casket, then gently lower the body. This requires strong enough team members to properly handle the weight of the deceased in a respectful manner.

The second approach, now less commonly used, is to place the casket parallel to the table, but this time beside it. Team members stand on opposing sides of the table and casket, those on the casket side reach across to support the body, those on the table side must reach across the table with the body, as the body is gently moved from the table into the aron.

The third process is becoming more and more common today. It involves the use of a hydraulic lift. Most funeral homes have these available. They use four or sometimes five cotton canvas straps placed under the deceased (shoulders, hips, thighs, ankles). Team members support the head while the silent pumping of the handle creates fluid pressure inside the lift to elevate the body in a gentle manner. The table is then rolled away, the casket rolled in to take its place, and the body is then slowly lowered into its home.

The leader of the Taharah must determine what is the best approach based on the team members present, the weight and size of the deceased, and the availability of a lift.

Casketing for *Taharah Ruchanit*

This is a powerful transitional moment for the deceased. The soul is now about to witness their earthly vessel being placed into a coffin, to be later buried. That's quite a shock if you are still in transition. So we offer our love, calm support, and reassurance as we recite the readings traditionally used during casketing and afterwards. We hold our sacred space through our intention to uplift this soul and assist them as they navigate their way from this world to the next.

We imagine the body placed into the *aron*, fully dressed in *tachrichim*, shoulders wrapped in *tallit*. There is a lovely radiance coming now from this body sprinkled with holy earth from Israel, and now it is wrapped in the *sovev*. We see the casket closed now and we place a virtual candle on top.

Continue with chanting on the next page (if desired) and all of the readings that follow.

Chanting for Moving the Deceased into the Aron

We acknowledge the completion and fulfillment of a Life lived to its conclusion, and we send the soul to her journey with the Priestly Blessing.

כִּי מָלְאָהּ צְבָאָהּ
Ki Malah tz'va'ah (Isaiah 40:2)
Her time of service is fulfilled.

<https://www.rabbishefagold.com/divine-congratulations/>

(Add parts one at a time)

Voice 1
ki mal - ah tz' - va - ah

Voice 2
ki - mal - ah tz' - va - - -

Voice 3
ki mal - ah tz' - va ah - - -

³
ki mal - ah tz' - va' ah
ah ki - mal -
ki mal - ah tz' - va - ah - - -

בְּרַכָּךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ
 יְאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְדֶּךָ
 יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

*Yivarech'cha Adonai v' yish'm'recha,
 Ya'er Adonai panav elecha vichunekha
 Yisa Adonai panav elecha, V'yasem l'cha shalom. (Numbers 6:24-26)*

May God bless you and guard you,
 May God shine his faces upon you and grace you,
 May God lift up his face to you and give you Peace.

Found in the *Magic of Hebrew Chant*, by Rabbi Shefa Gold:

<https://smile.amazon.com/Magic-Hebrew-Chant-Transforming-Backgrounds-ebook/dp/B01HT6DJHS/>

10

18

25

Moving the Deceased into the Aron

1. If not done during the Preparations stage, sprinkle some Israeli earth (*afar*) into the *aron*, and drape the *sovev* across the *aron* diagonally so it overlaps the sides of the casket on all four sides.
2. Place the deceased into the *aron*. (Our *minhag* is that the feet should go at the end where the *Magen David* will go on the lid. See note in step 13 below.) Recite:

וְלֹא-יָבִיאוּ לִרְאוֹת כְּבֹלַע אֶת-הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּמָתוּ:

And they shall not come in to see the covering of the holy objects, lest they die. (Numbers 4:20)

3. Place pottery shards (*sherblach*) directly on each eye and on the mouth. If necessary, a dab of Vaseline may be used to stick the shards in place. (The headdress is pulled back just enough to do this, and then replaced.)
4. Place *afar* on the eyes, heart, and genitals of the deceased – first on the eyes, then the heart inside the shirt, then on the genital area inside the pants. Each time dirt is sprinkled the following is said:

וּכְפָר אֲדָמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ:

And God's earth shall atone for God's people.
(Deuteronomy 32:43)

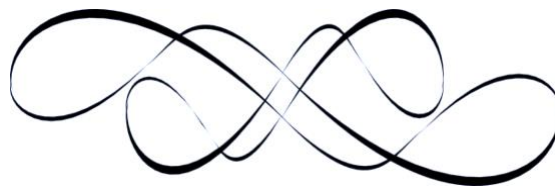
5. The *tallit* is wrapped around the deceased at this point. (If not done earlier, the *tzitzit* that was cut off the *tallit* should be tucked into the *avnet*.)
6. The burial sheet (*sovev*) is now folded over and around the deceased in the following order: feet, right side, left side, head.
7. Straw is placed under head for a pillow, and on both sides to support the head upright.
8. Check the room and tables for any hair or bloody items to be included in the sack to be placed in the *aron*. Place sack at foot of deceased in the casket.
9. Double check that all is complete – remove gloves and if bloody, include them in the sack, otherwise discard them.

10. Team members now quietly individually ask that the deceased forgive them for any act or omission that did not show respect or in any way might have caused offense. Some may wish to recite the following aloud together:

_____ (name of deceased), please forgive us for any indignity that you may have suffered at the hands of this *Chevrah Kadisha* in our efforts to usher you from this world to the next. We acted in good faith and did this work for the sake of all that is holy.

11. The *aron* is closed and is not to be reopened for any reason. Our custom is to place the wooden star at the foot of the casket. See note below.
12. The candle lit during Preparations is now placed on the head of the casket.

[Note: Placement of the star and candle is a local *minhag*. The leader should direct these placements according to local customs (for example, some place a candle at both ends). The placement of the star tells the funeral staff how to place the casket during transit and in the grave, so the local custom must be communicated between the *chevrah* and funeral home staff. Our *minhag* is to place the **star at the foot and the candle at the head** of the casket.]



14. Recite the following readings:

הַזֶּה מִטַּתוֹ שֶׁל שְׁלֹמֹה שְׁנַיִם גְּבָרִים סָבִיב לָהּ מִגְּבָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כָּלֶם
אֲחֵזִי חֶרֶב מִלְמָדֵי מִלְחָמָה אִישׁ חֶרְבוֹ עַל־יָרְכוֹ מִפֶּחַד בַּלַּיְלוֹת

Behold, it is the bier of Solomon.
Sixty mighty men are about it, of the mighty men of Israel.
They are all swordsmen and expert in war.
Each man has his sword on his thigh
because of the dread in the night. (Song of Songs 3:7)

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ
יְאָר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְּךָ
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשָּׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם

May Adonai bless you and protect you.
May Adonai's face shine unto and be gracious to you.
May Adonai's countenance be lifted unto you
and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

יִלְכּוּ יִזְנֻקוֹתָיו וַיְהִי כַנֹּחַת הַדָּוָד וַרִיחַ לֹו כַּלְבָּנוֹן:

His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive
tree, and his fragrance as Lebanon. (Hosea 14:7)

מִי־אַתָּה הַר־הַגָּדוֹל לִפְנֵי זֵרֻבָבֶל לְמִישָׁר וְהוֹצִיא אֶת־הָאֶבֶן
הָרִאשֹׁנָה תִשָּׂאוֹת תָּן תָּן לָהּ

Who are you, Oh great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you
shall become a plain! And he shall bring forward its
headstone, shouting Beautiful! Beautiful! (Zechariah 4:7)

וְעַתָּה יִגְדַל־נָא כֹחַ אֲדֹנָי כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לֵאמֹר:
וְאוּלָם חִי־אֲנִי וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹד־יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

And now, may the might of Adonai be great as you have
spoken (Numbers 14:17), saying, "But as truly I live, the glory of
Adonai shall engulf all the earth." (Numbers 14:21)

15. Move the casket out of the *Tabarah* room, feet first, to a quiet place that is not connected with the *Tabarah* room. Then recite:

Until the day is over and the shadows flee,
Go quickly, and be like deer or gazelles
In the clefts of the hills.

Until the day is over, shadows gone,
I'll go up the hills of fragrant bloom.
How fine you are, my love, my perfect one.
(Song of Songs, 2:17)

16. Recite the following readings:

וּבְנֹסַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹרִידוּ אֹתוֹ הַלְוִיִּם וּבְחִנּוּת הַמִּשְׁכָּן
יִקְיִמוּ אֹתוֹ הַלְוִיִּם וְהִזְרָה הַקָּרֵב יוֹמֶת:

And when the tabernacle sets forward,
the Levites shall take it down,
and when the tabernacle is to be pitched,
the Levites shall set it up,
and the stranger who approaches shall be put to death.
(Numbers 1:51)

וַיְהִי בְנֹסַע הָאָרוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה יְהוָה
וַיִּפְצֹזוּ אֹיְבָיֶיךָ וַיִּגְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאָיֶיךָ מִפְּנֵיֶיךָ:

And when the ark set forward Moses would say,
“Rise up, Oh Adonai, and let Your enemies be scattered,
and let those who hate You flee before You.” (Numbers 10:35)

לֹא־תֵאָנֶה אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה וְנֹגַע לֹא־יִקְרַב בְּאֹהֶלֶךָ:
כִּי מִלְּאֲכָיו יִצְוֶה־לָּךְ לְשֹׁמְרֶיךָ בְּכָל־דְּרָכֶיךָ: עַל־כַּפְּתַיִם
יִשְׂאוּנֶךָ פְּוַת־תִּגְרִי בְּאֵבֶן רִגְלֶךָ:

No evil shall befall you,
nor shall any plague come near your tent.
For God will give angels charge over you to watch you in all your
paths. They shall bear you upon their hands,
lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Psalms 91:10-12)

יְהוָה אֵישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ:

Adonai is a warrior, Adonai is God's name. (Exodus 15:3)

יְהוָה יִלְחָם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרְשׁוּן:

Adonai will fight for you and you shall hold your peace. (Exodus 14:14)

17. Casket is left with candle(s) burning, *shomrim* or a member of the *chevrah* may sit with it while the *Taharah* room is cleaned up and restored to order.

Ending for *Taharah Ruchanit*

The leader now says:

We envision that the closed casket is being carried upwards by a troop of holy angels. Our task is completed.

We return our thoughts to the lovely forest and running mountain stream that underlies our sacred space. We breathe the fresh crisp air and allow it to reinvigorate each of us. We touch hands in this sacred circle and bless each other as holy beings doing holy work.

We put forth gratitude for the presence of this forest and the blessing of the angels who helped us in this task.

As each angel is thanked, we dip our fingers into the water in the central bowl and pinch out each candle.

Thank you, *Michael*, may you be blessed on your path.
Thank you, *Gabriel*, may you be blessed on your path.
Thank you, *Uriel*, may you be blessed on your path.
Thank you, *Raphael*, may you be blessed on your path.

Now wash hands again, like *n'tiyat yadayyim* without a blessing, one last time.

The *Taharah Ruchanit* ritual is completed through holding an after-*tabarah* **debriefing**, followed by the recitation of the **blessing over hands** on **page 57**. The water in the central bowl should then be poured outside onto the ground, preferably to help the growth of a tree, or into the ocean or a stream.

Cleaning Up

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparations• Washing the Deceased• The Purification• Dressing the Deceased• Moving the Deceased into the Casket➤ Cleaning up | <p>The ritual is now complete. We now restore order to the preparation room and our supplies, and take care of the emotional health of team members.</p> |
|---|--|

Please note: We are fortunate to work with funeral directors who are very cooperative and try their best to accommodate our needs.

- We should make certain that when we leave after a ritual, that the preparation room is as neat and clean as when we arrived (but with a wet floor, etc.).
- We should cooperate with the funeral directors in every way we can. If there are problems encountered in the funeral home facilities, these should be communicated to the funeral home director in a polite and cooperative manner.

Restoring Order to the Room and Supplies

1. Preferably all participants help restore order to the *Tabarah* room.
2. Ensure all trash is picked up and properly disposed of, all sheets, cloth towels, etc., are deposited into proper laundry repositories, any batting or other materials used in cleaning the deceased should be disposed of in proper biohazard containers.
3. All appropriate items should be restored in an orderly fashion to the *Tabarah* supplies cabinet – items should be washed if need be, and notes should be made of items that have been depleted during the performance of the *Tabarah*. Buckets, washing bowls, hand-washing cups should be dried thoroughly before restoring them to the cabinet.
4. The wooden boards used in the *Tabarah* should be thoroughly rinsed and carefully dried, then placed back into the supplies cabinet.
5. All participants wash hands twice:
 - Once more like *n'tilat y'dayim* without the *bracha*, and
 - Once thoroughly with disinfectant soap and warm water.

Participant Debriefing and Ritual Closing

All participants gather in a comfortable room where they will not be disturbed, a quiet room where all can sit together for a few minutes of discussion.

Participating in *Tabarab* can be beautiful or it can be traumatic. Facilitated by the leader of the *Tabarab*, participants examine themselves in relation to what just happened, what they just participated in. It is the *Tabarab* leader's responsibility at this point to check in with each person to be sure they are ready and able to reintegrate into daily life. Each person is given the opportunity to share any deep feelings, personnel issues, adverse reactions, or other sensitive emotions or physical symptoms going on. These may be beautiful spiritual experiences or anything else. If help is needed, this is the time to arrange for it. It is not unusual for participants to have delayed symptoms that come up at the end of the ritual.

And, of course, it is possible that a participant could have problems early on during the procedures – we have seen allergic reactions to the smells in the room, as well as physical revulsion to the state of the deceased on occasion. The team may have to excuse a member and do the procedure with one less person under these circumstances. Have the excused member wait in the funeral home in a comfortable place until the entire procedure is completed. Then be sure that person participates in the debriefing.

When the debriefing is completed, team members stand in a circle touching hands in the center of the circle; then all **recite together**:

For *Tabarab Ruchanit*, all participants recite together:

Blessed are these hands that do this sacred work. As we go now back into daily life, let us carry with us heightened awareness of the amazing grace that is the gift of life. May we always walk in gratitude for the wondrous miracle of breath within us. Blessed is the Source of Life who has granted us life and enabled us to do this holy mitzvah.

After this, participants are encouraged to re-engage in life. Sometimes it is healing and appropriate for team members to go out for coffee, a meal, or just to take a walk in the fresh air together. Some team members prefer to be alone to integrate what just happened. Everyone is encouraged to notice the beauty and fragility of life around us and be in a state of gratitude for the opportunity to be alive and for the privilege to do this work.

Additional Information for *Chevrah Kadisha* Members

Assistance Asked of the Funeral Home

The *Tabarab* is a ritual preparation of the body for burial. It includes a physical washing of the body along with spiritual rituals. The *chevrah* will provide much of what is needed for this process, however they need help in the areas listed below.

- Please provide a Jewish burial garment (*tachrichim*) set for the appropriate gender of the dead. If you don't have these, please let the *chevrah* know so they can obtain one ahead of time.
- Please provide one-piece zip-up personal protective clothing, jackets, aprons, or smocks for the *Tabarab* team to wear (usually four to six people are needed). A supply of heavy-duty rubber gloves should be on hand.
- The body should be lying on his/her back with eyes closed on a table that tilts with the table tilted just slightly toward the feet. The body should be covered with a clean sheet. All catheters in the body should be removed before the *chevrah* arrives.
- The table on which the body is resting should be locked into position, both the tilt and the wheels.
- The casket should be in the room or available nearby.
- The casket should be simple wood, not metal or other material. It should have holes cut into the bottom and be free of fancy linings or other embellishments.
- There should be an empty table available in the room for spreading out shrouds and supplies, etc.
- There should be plenty of clean, dry sheets available (twin size, non-fitted), along with plenty of clean cloth towels (hand towel size).
- A roll of cotton batting or paper towels should be easily accessible in the room.
- A water source should be close at hand – a sink big enough to fill buckets in, wash hands, etc.
- The room should have a working drain in the floor or at the end of the table on which the body is resting. A table drain into a urinal is not usually sufficient to contain the volume of water poured, so water will need to drain from the floor appropriately.
- There should be a biohazard trashcan in the room, along with a regular trashcan for disposable trash.
- There should be a laundry bin for used sheets and cloth towels somewhere handy.
- Arrangements should be made to turn off any buzzers, phones, or alarms that are in the room where the *Tabarab* takes place.
- Once the *Tabarab* is completed, the casket with the body inside will need to rest in a different room from where the washing occurred. It should be a place safe for a candle to be lit and have space for a person to sit near the coffin. Please make arrangements for family members or others to sit with the body until burial. This could easily be through the night or over a weekend.

- At the gravesite, please ensure that there is a mound of dirt near the grave, and several shovels available. Part of the burial service includes family members shoveling some dirt into the grave onto the casket.

Questions to Be Asked of the Family

- What is the full Hebrew name of the deceased?
- What is the full English name of the deceased?
- What should be done with the wedding band (if any), buried with the dead or given to the family? What about any other jewelry found on the body?
- Does the family want to participate in *shmira*? (Sitting with the casket, reading psalms.)
- Does the deceased have a *tallit* (prayer shawl)? Do the family members want him (or possibly her) buried in it?

Taharah Supplies Provided by the *Chevrah Kadisha*

The following are supplies that the *chevrah* may need to provide in addition to those things provided by the funeral home. The supplies should be stored in a dedicated cabinet in the funeral home – we built our own wooden cabinets and with their permission, placed one in each funeral home. Within the cabinet, the supplies are stored in an orderly and logically arranged manner. While there are no set requirements that every *Chevrah Kadisha* group must keep a supply of these items, experience has shown these items to be very useful when readily available. Comments are provided in brackets [] to clarify the usage or reason for each item. NOTE: The funeral home should usually provide the items noted with asterisk (*), but it is useful to have extras.

Administrative and Preparatory

- Supply list (to track usage) [This list is used to maintain the supplies. If we know how much is supposed to be there, it's easy to order more when the supplies are used up.]
- Tupperware or similar plastic containers to organize small items (materials should be laid out on a table covered with a sheet or disposable cloth and organized prior to beginning *Tabarah*.) [Organizing all of the small items in the supplies cabinet can be simple if such containers are used. Label the lids with a marker.]
- Disposable tablecloths to place items on [To keep kit contents clean, place kit contents on one of these when you begin the *Taharah* and throw it away after the *Tabarah* is completed and kit contents have been put away. Often, a cloth sheet provided by the funeral home is used, but if not available, tablecloths work nicely.]

- A bolt of muslin cloth - for creating larger *sovevim* (need about 3 yds of 90 inch wide for a *sovev*) and/or head coverings, etc., needed [Sometimes the shrouds come with a *sovev* (the sheet laid into the casket) that is too small for the size of the body, sometimes the head covering or bag are missing, or a piece is torn or gets soiled. This cloth is easy to use to create substitutes when needed.]
- *Yahrzeit* candles and matches [If the funeral home has not lit a candle in the room, light one of these before you begin. It is placed on or near the finished coffin after completion of the *Tabarah* and kept there until burial.]

Worker Protection

All of the items in this category are to protect *Chevrah Kadisha* members and their clothes from water, blood or other liquid splashing. Gloves and face shields are the most important items for safety of the team members' health while performing *Tabarah*.

- Personal protective suits (one-piece, zip-up, with feet are best), or smocks with full sleeves*
- Surgical gloves* (small, med, large, and xlarge) - non-allergenic
- Non-skid Booties*
- Caps*
- Anti-fog, air-born particulate masks*
- Face shields*

Tefilah

The items in this category are used by *Chevrah Kadisha* members while doing *Tabarah*, *shmira* (sitting with the deceased before and after the *Tabarah* is performed), teaching these topics, or related work. Members who do many *Tabarot* each year may not need these, while those who do few usually need them to remind them of the order of the work and the words to the prayers.

- *Tabarah* Manual
- *Tabarah tefilah* wall posters as appropriate
- 8-10 *kippot* (for *chevrah* members as well as for deceased) - black
- Book of Psalms

Cleaning and Washing

These items are used during the phase of *Chevrah Kadisha* work in which the deceased is washed physically from head to toe. It is important that we carefully clean the body and seal any wounds so they will not leak. Some are concerned that the containers used during this phase get contaminated, hence the recommendation to use disposable containers like Tupperware instead of metal or glass bowls, etc. Clean sheets are used

to cover the body throughout this work. They should be rectangular, white, simple cotton sheets. They are usually provided by the funeral home.

- Wooden nail-cleaning sticks
- Nail polish remover
- Scissors
- Cotton balls, gauze pads*
- Skin sealer tape or surgical tape (preferably paper rather than plastic)
- Pierce seal powder or liquid bandage or Monsels solution
- Large bandages or surgical pads
- Medical quality antiseptic spray
- Superglue, rubber cement
- Disposable containers to hold water for washing the body (large “tupperware” containers or equivalent)
- Large roll of cotton batting or heavy-duty disposable paper towels*
- 10 bedsheets (twin size, non-fitted)*
- 2 dozen or so cloth towels (hand-towel size)*

Taharah

- One 8’ redwood 2x4 cut into four 18” lengths and one 14” length, edges sanded smooth. [During the spiritual purification phase of the *Taharah* the body needs to receive the full flow of the purifying waters. There are a number of methods used during this phase including lowering the body into a *mikvah*, standing the body or sitting it upright and pouring over it, and laying the body on boards and then pouring water over it. These boards are used for the latter of these methods. The boards are placed under the neck, shoulders, hips, legs and feet, as a means to separate the body from the table.]
- A double-handled plastic hand-washing pitcher [*Chevrab Kadisha* members wash the hands with this in the same way washing is done for *netilat yadayim*, but without the blessing.]
- Three 8- to 10-quart rubber or durable plastic buckets with measurement marks on the side and a good pouring handle [It is required to pour an uninterrupted flow of at least 24 quarts of clean water over the body to simulate the purifying effects of a running stream or immersion into a *mikvah*. These buckets are used for that pouring. Usually one person begins pouring at the head and continues down the right side of the body. When they almost reach the feet, a second person begins pouring at the head with a second bucket pouring down the left side of the body. When they almost reach the feet, the first person again pours down the right side or down the middle of the body.]
- Egg and vinegar (optional and must be renewed often) [There is a tradition that some teams still use today that comes from the middle ages. It is to paint the body with an egg and vinegar mixture. The traditions vary. However, it is common to

paint a bit on the forehead, chest, and inner thighs. This was done to allow others to recognize a dead Jew from gentiles by smell.]

- Cups (for mixing eggs and vinegar if needed)
- Earth from Israel* [All Jews in the Diaspora get symbolically buried in Israel by having Israeli soil sprinkled into the casket.]
- Broken pottery shards (simple natural clay flowerpot, broken into 1” pieces) [Pieces of pottery are placed over the eyes and mouth. There are three common explanations: 1) These pieces of a broken vessel represent the now broken life of the deceased. 2) When using caskets, it is one way of having earth come in direct contact with the body, as is considered most desirable. 3) It is a sign of *teshuvah* – penitence – for any possible sin the mouth or eyes may have been responsible for in life. These shards should not be glazed or colored, just plain Terra Cotta.]

Halbashah

- Burial Garments (*tachrichim*) for a male and a female (the number needed to have in stock will vary with the volume processed each year) [All Jews are equal in death, so all Jews are dressed alike – in a manner simulating the clothes of the High Priest. The shrouds include pants closed at the bottom, a shirt, a jacket, a head covering, and for a woman, an apron and sometimes the head covering is in two pieces. There are also one-piece shrouds that can be used. A strip of cloth is also provided as a belt and there are strips tied around the legs as well. They are usually made of simple white linen but can also be white cotton.]
- *Tallitot* [All men and some women today are buried with a *tallit* wrapped around the outside of the *tachrichim*, around the shoulders. One of the *tzitzit* (fringes) is removed from the *tallit* and tucked into the belt. Some families want to use the *tallit* of the deceased, others don't. Having some on hand provides for those families who do not wish to use the *tallit* of the deceased.]
- Disposable diapers for adults [Sometimes the body tends to continue leaking. Diapers are only used when necessary.]

Aron

The items in this category are necessary to prepare the casket if the funeral home has not done so. Holes are drilled into the bottom of the coffin to promote immediate decomposition. In some cases the lid is missing dowels or they don't fit or they break off. It's easy to glue another dowel in place with woodworking glue. Be sure to purchase the regular glue that dissolves in water.

- 3/8” electric drill and a 1” quick-boring bit
- 10’ standard extension cord able to handle the current specifications of the drill
- Some 1/4” standard woodworking gluing dowels
- Titebond or Elmer's wood glue

Index to Chants

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Ki Atah Mechayeh Hameitim</i> – For You Revive the Dead | 15 |
| <i>Ki Ta'avur B'Mayim</i> – When you Pass through the Waters | 26 |
| <i>Zeh Dodi</i> – This is My Beloved | 27 |
| <i>Hinach Yafa Raiti</i> – How Beautiful You Are My Friend | 27 |
| <i>Kol Mishb'recha /Tabor Hu</i> – All of Your Breakers/He is (She is, They are) Pure | 36 |
| <i>Sos Asis</i> – I Will Rejoice | 43 |
| <i>Ki Mala Tz'va'ah</i> – Her Time of Service | 49 |
| <i>Y'varech'cha</i> – May God Bless You | 50 |

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About the Author

Richard A. Light has been teaching spiritual development for more than 30 years, and started the *Chevrah Kadisha* in Los Alamos, NM, in 1996. In 1998 he published the first edition of this book, then titled, *Guidelines for Performing Tabarab*, as a manual to guide the new *chevrah* doing this holy work. In 2006, he co-founded the Chevrah Kadisha of Northern New Mexico, a community *chevrah* that includes members from 6 shuls, encompassing all branches of Judaism. Rick is a Vice President of the North American educational organization, *Kavod v'Nichum* (Honor and Comfort, see www.jewish-funerals.org), and continues to teach and raise awareness about Jewish death and burial practices at the local, state, and national levels. He has written seven books, including the award-winning *Jewish Rites of Death, Stories of Beauty and Transformation*. His full biography and information about his books can be found online at:

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