

TIKVAT YISRAEL MESSIANIC JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

Why We Mikveh

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The following teaching is a Messianic Jewish approach to the practice of water immersion, why it is practiced, and when the Mikveh is used. It is intended for those who are considering immersion so that they can fully understand the spiritual implications of their decision to immerse, and what that means from a Messianic Jewish theological understanding and Biblical interpretation.

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I. Why Mikveh?

Believers in Yeshua (Jesus), who have been Born Again, whether Jewish or Non-Jewish have a Biblical Obligation to be immersed in water after they have confessed their faith in the Messiah, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

The Christian practice of “Baptism” has its roots and origins in the Jewish practice of T’vilah (immersion) in a pool of water known as a “Mikvah”.

The purpose of this teaching is to clarify to the believer what the purpose of Messianic Jewish Mikvah is, and where it comes from. Also, it is important that the believer understands the theology of immersion and what the Bible says about it.

First, *Theology*:

John 3:5

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

While we have an obligation to be immersed in water, the act of immersion or “T’vilah” does not provide “Salvation” in and of itself. In other words, “Baptism”, “Mikveh”, does not provide atonement for our sin. The act of immersion is practiced “After” the salvation experience.

The Bible is clear; it is the Blood of Messiah only that provides atonement.

Being “born of water” can be attributed to either the Mikveh, as well as the Womb.

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According to Kaplan, “... *We see that the Mikvah represents the womb. When an individual enters the Mikvah, he is “re-entering the womb, and when he emerges, he is as “born anew....The identification of the Mikvah with the womb becomes somewhat clearer in view of the fact that the Torah describes the world’s most primitive state as water. “The earth was empty and desolate, with darkness on the face of the deep and G-d’s Spirit fluttering on the face of the water.”* (Kaplan, 1976)

Man is born of water in his first birth when emerging from the womb, when the “water breaks”. The second birth is of the Spirit.

This is why Yeshua said to us:

John 3: 3 “Yes, indeed,” Yeshua answered him, “I tell you that unless a person is born again from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

4 Nakdimon said to him, “How can a grown man be ‘born’? Can he go back into his mother’s womb and be born a second time?”

5 Yeshua answered, “Yes, indeed, I tell you that unless a person is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

6 What is born from the flesh is flesh, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit.

It is the Spirit of G-d that leads us to repentance and convicts us of our sin.

John the Baptist (cousin of Yeshua the Messiah) practiced water immersion for repentance, he said of Yeshua’s Mikveh...

Matthew 3: 11 It’s true that I am immersing you in water so that you might turn from sin to God; but the one coming after me is more powerful than I - I’m not worthy even to carry his sandals - and he will immerse you in the Ruach HaKodesh and in fire.

It is only through the Spirit of G-d that one may be lead to confess sin and accept the atonement provided by Yeshua the Messiah.

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Romans 10:9 that if you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be delivered.

Therefore, if a person confesses his/her sin and believes in their heart that Yeshua rose from the dead, they shall be saved. (Regardless if they ever had the chance to undergo a “Mikveh”.

I Corinthians 12:3 Therefore, I want to make it clear to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, “Yeshua is cursed!” and no one can say, “Yeshua is Lord,” except by the Ruach HaKodesh.

It is by the Spirit that we are able to be saved. However, it is appropriate after this confession and “Born Again” experience, that the new believer goes through the Mikvah.

II. When Mikvah is used

Kaplan says, *“On the simplest level, we usually think of water as a cleansing agent. If one is bodily unclean, it is natural to wash with water. Therefore, when we think of purification and cleansing in the spiritual sense, we would also use water as the purifying agent.”*

(Kaplan, 1976)

When G-d saw how wicked the entire world had become, the Torah says that He regretted creating man on the earth. The world had become so polluted with sin, that G-d chose to destroy all creatures on the earth and purify the earth with water.

Genesis 6: 17 “Then I myself will bring the flood of water over the earth to destroy from under heaven every living thing that breathes; everything on earth will be destroyed.

In a sense this really was the first Mikveh. The Jewish and Biblical rule of thumb when answering the question of “when to use a Mikvah” basically involves anytime you have a “Change of Status”.

A. Change of Status

One example of a Change of Status is when G-d gave Moses the commandments to consecrate the sons of Aaron into the service of the Priesthood (Kohanim). We see that these men underwent a “change of status” and were required to be immersed.

Leviticus 16: 1 ¶ ADONAI spoke with Moshe after the death of Aharon’s two sons, when they tried to sacrifice before ADONAI and died;

2 ADONAI said to Moshe, “Tell your brother Aharon not to come at just any time into the Holy Place beyond the curtain, in front of the ark-cover which is on the ark, so that he will not die; because I appear in the cloud over the ark-cover.

3 “Here is how Aharon is to enter the Holy Place: with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering.

4 He is to put on the holy linen tunic, have the linen shorts next to his bare flesh, have the linen sash wrapped around him, and be wearing the linen turban— they are the holy garments. He is to bathe his body in water and put them on.

According to Kaplan, “*On this most sacred of days, (Yom Kippur), the Kohen Gadol would enter the Holy of Holies two times. This, in turn, would require that he change his vestments five times, since he would begin and end in his ‘golden’ ones. Each time before he changed, he would have to immerse himself in a Mikvah.*” (Kaplan, 1976)

B. Niddah

Another time Mikvah is used is for Ritual Purification. The Torah gives many examples of what would make a person ritually unclean (Tumah) and ritually clean (Tahor). These commandments involve who is permitted to enter the Temple. Today, the Temple does not exist and these requirements do NOT pertain to the synagogue. However, these laws do have physical hygiene value especially when it comes to the laws of Niddah, which involve women during the menstrual cycle.

Leviticus 15: 19 ¶ “If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she will be in her state of niddah for seven days. Whoever touches her will be unclean until evening.

20 Everything she lies on or sits on in her state of niddah will be unclean. 21 Whoever touches her bed is to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water; he will be unclean until evening. 22 Whoever touches anything she sits on is to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water; he will be unclean until evening.

C. Conversion

Biblically speaking, all nations and peoples including Israel are “converted” through the Mikvah.

When Israel was taken as a nation out of the bondage of Egypt (where we once served Egyptian gods), and brought to the foot of Mt. Sinai where Hashem was to enter into a covenant with Israel, we were commanded to immerse ourselves.

Deuteronomy 29: 10 ¶ (29:9) “Today you are standing, all of you, before ADONAI your God—your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers—all the men of Isra’el,

11 (29:10) along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water.

12 (29:11) The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of ADONAI your God and into his oath which ADONAI your God is making with you today,

13 (29:12) so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God—as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz’chak and Ya’akov.

14 (29:13) “But I am not making this covenant and this oath only with you.

15 (29:14) Rather, I am making it both with him who is standing here with us today before ADONAI our God and also with him who is not here with us today.

16 (29:15) For you know how we lived in the land of Egypt and how we came directly through the nations you passed through;

17 (29:16) and you saw their detestable things and their idols of wood, stone, silver and gold that they had with them.

Exodus 19: 10 so ADONAI said to Moshe, "Go to the people; today and tomorrow separate them for me by having them wash their clothing;

11 and prepare for the third day. For on the third day, ADONAI will come down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the people.

Therefore, the commandment to wash the clothes also applied to our bodies.

The Mikvah can even be attributed to the crossing of the Red Sea by the B'nai Yisrael...

I Corinthians 10: 1 ¶ For, brothers, I don't want you to miss the significance of what happened to our fathers. All of them were guided by the pillar of cloud, and they all passed through the sea,

2 and in connection with the cloud and with the sea they all immersed themselves into Moshe,

3 also they all ate the same food from the Spirit,

4 and they all drank the same drink from the Spirit—for they drank from a Spirit-sent Rock which followed them, and that Rock was the Messiah.

A Word about Conversion

I am using the word "conversion" in a very strict biblical definition referring to the experience of "turning from sin" out of idolatry and polytheism, into an embrace of the one and only monotheistic faith. In this definition all peoples are "converted" when they repent and turn to Yeshua (Jesus), and therefore, go through the Mikveh.

I am NOT however, using conversion to describe the Rabbinical Jewish practice of converting Non-Jews into Jews. In Messianic Judaism, the practice of Mikveh, is NOT to convert non-Jews into Jews.

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Going through a Mikveh in a Messianic Jewish service, does NOT make a person Jewish. Messianic Jews do not and should not practice this type of conversion, because there is Biblical precedence against it.

I Corinthians 7: 17 ¶ Only let each person live the life the Lord has assigned him and live it in the condition he was in when God called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the congregations.

18 Was someone already circumcised when he was called? Then he should not try to remove the marks of his circumcision. Was someone uncircumcised when he was called? He shouldn't undergo b'rit-milah.

19 Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God's commandments.

20 Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called.

21 Were you a slave when you were called? Well, don't let it bother you; although if you can gain your freedom, take advantage of the opportunity.

22 For a person who was a slave when he was called is the Lord's freedman; likewise, someone who was a free man when he was called is a slave of the Messiah.

23 You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of other human beings.

24 Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called.

Ephesians Chapter 2 also discusses the purpose of the "One New Man" in Messianic Judaism. In order for the One New Man to exist you have to have both Jews and Non-Jews co-existing.

If you were born a Jew, Paul tells us here then you should not become a "Non-Jew" when you become a believer in Jesus. Likewise, the Non-

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Jew should not change their identity in order to follow Jesus and be Born Again. Our status as “sinners” changes, not our “identity”.

Therefore, we do NOT practice conversion in Messianic Judaism.

Both Jews and Non-Jews have a calling and a purpose in MJ.

The purpose of a Jew is to be a Light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42)

The purpose of a Non-Jew in M.J. is to “provoke the Jew to jealousy” (Romans 11:11)

If we convert Non-Jews into Jews or Jews into “Christians” then we are destroying their identity and their callings and actually nullifying Ephesians Chapter 2 as well as the other New Covenant Scriptures that prohibit these practices.

D. Pots & Dishes

The last area when a Mikvah is used is regarding the use of utensils in the Jewish community. This too was commanded by the Torah regarding ritual purification of these items because they could eventually be used in the service of the Temple. While this remains an “Orthodox” practice today in many households, it has largely lost its biblically intended purposes and mainly retains its hygiene value.

Numbers 31:21 El‘azar the cohen said to the soldiers who had gone to the front, “This is the regulation from the Torah which ADONAI has ordered Moshe. 22 Even though gold, silver, brass, iron, tin and lead

23 can all withstand fire, so that you are indeed to purify everything made of these materials by having them pass through fire; nevertheless they must also be purified with the water for purification. Everything that can’t withstand fire you are to have go through the water. 24 On the seventh day you are to wash your clothes, and you will be clean; after that you may enter the camp.”

III. Final Thoughts

Many people come to a Messianic Jewish Synagogue from various and differing backgrounds. Some are Jewish and have recently accepted Yeshua and have been saved. Others are Christian, already knowing Jesus but are learning about the Jewish roots of their faith. Still, others are Non-Jews but have never heard or known the Good News of eternal life in Yeshua and receive salvation in a Messianic Synagogue.

Regardless of your background, there are some universal and Biblical principles that apply to all of us.

One main universal truth is that all human beings are affected by the fall of Adam and Eve, our ancestors; we are all sinners from the moment we are born.

Psalm 51: 5 (51:7) True, I was born guilty, was a sinner from the moment my mother conceived me.

Isaiah 64: 6 ¶ (64:5) All of us are like someone unclean, all our righteous deeds like menstrual rags; we wither, all of us, like leaves; and our misdeeds blow us away like the wind.

7 (64:6) No one calls on your name or bestirs himself to take hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us and caused our misdeeds to destroy us.

According to Kaplan, *“Man was given on commandment, not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil...Once man partook of this tree...at that moment, evil became an intrinsic part of his being. He now had a Yetzer Hara (an Evil Urge) – that was part of his psyche, and no matter what he would do, he could not escape it...Man’s spiritual nature and animal nature became two opposites in contrast and conflict, causing mental anguish and imperfection. When man sinned and ate from the Tree, he lost this opportunity to gain immortality. God*

therefore, said regarding the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 21:17 'On the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.' (Kaplan, 1976)

This is why Paul the Apostle said,

Romans 7: 14 ¶ For we know that the Torah is of the Spirit; but as for me, I am bound to the old nature, sold to sin as a slave. 15 I don't understand my own behavior - I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate!

16 Now if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the Torah is good. 17 But now it is no longer "the real me" doing it, but the sin housed inside me. 18 For I know that there is nothing good housed inside me - that is, inside my old nature. I can want what is good, but I can't do it! 19 For I don't do the good I want; instead, the evil that I don't want is what I do! 20 But if I am doing what "the real me" doesn't want, it is no longer "the real me" doing it but the sin housed inside me.

21 So I find it to be the rule, a kind of perverse "torah," that although I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me! 22 For in my inner self I completely agree with God's Torah; 23 but in my various parts, I see a different "torah," one that battles with the Torah in my mind and makes me a prisoner of sin's "torah," which is operating in my various parts. 24 What a miserable creature I am! Who will rescue me from this body bound for death?

25 Thanks be to God,(he will) - through Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord! To sum up: with my mind, I am a slave of God's Torah; but with my old nature, I am a slave of sin's "Torah."

These are spiritual truths that apply to all of us, whether we are Jewish or Non-Jews, we all have this Yetzer Hara that we struggle with.

The Good News is that the Atonement that Messiah Yeshua provides is applied to your souls. Regardless of how you feel physically about

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yourself. Your salvation is not dependant on your emotions (Baruch Hashem).

While living on this earth in these unredeemed bodies we all will continue to fight and struggle against sin. However, we are being sanctified daily and we can keep our souls pure and grow in purity with the word of G-d.

Ephesians 5: 25 As for husbands, love your wives, just as the Messiah loved the Messianic Community, indeed, gave himself up on its behalf,

26 in order to set it apart for God, making it clean through immersion in the mikveh, so to speak,

27 in order to present the Messianic Community to himself as a bride to be proud of, without a spot, wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without defect.

It is not in our own power to make ourselves pure. If we continue trusting in Messiah and seeking Him, and living lives of sincere repentance, we will remain in Him.

And if we remain in Him and grow in Him, then we will be found faithful to Him when He returns.

May your Mikveh be your first step into growing deeper and deeper in love and faith with the Messiah Yeshua, for all eternity.

Amen.

Kaplan, A. (1976). *Waters of Eden*. New York: OU/NCSY Publications.