

## Mikva letter – Restoring the Honor of the Jewish Woman

All that is holy in the nation of the G-d of Avraham and is fundamental for the House of Israel - in establishing and raising an upright generation, *kashrut* of food, the lofty holiness of Shabbos - **was entrusted and endowed by the revered and awesome G-d Almighty to the woman of Israel to guard and to cultivate.**

The woman who fulfills her obligation and destiny in the life of the family, in conducting the home, and in seeing that the education be according to Torah, this woman is the subject of the verse, "The wisdom of women constructed her home."

Regarding efforts to ensure and increase the observance of taharas hamishpachah (sanctity and purity of the family) in your locale, contemplate on this: If G-d enabled you to save an entire Jewish community from destruction, you would certainly be willing to sacrifice your life to do so. Moreover, you would praise and laud Him for His kindness in granting you this great merit. Now, such a merit, and even greater than that, is accrued by ensuring the laws of family purity. **This is literally saving lives. (שהיא הצלת נפשות ממש)**

To the esteemed Rabbonim and Community Leaders, שליט”א:

The Jewish women in all generations have fulfilled G-d’s vision of the world teeming with good human beings (pru urvu) with faith, dedication and persistence, even when the men were overwhelmed, distracted and demoralized.

The Jewish women have been gifted with responsibility of the special mitzvah of taharas hamispocha, which is not a technical set of rules, but rather an expansive and loving world-view that honors the woman’s central role in elevating her home with the spirit of holiness and purity and closing the door to foreign and distracting ideas that take the Jewish person away from growing and increasing in the world. This ownership of the mitzvah of taharas hamispocha and dedication to it is reflected in the writing of our Sages that record extra careful measures that were adopted by the women of their own accord.

Central to our lives as Jewish women is the mikva (ritual bath). It belongs to the women. It belongs to all the women of the community. It does not belong to the donors, to the rabbis who oversaw its construction, to the supervising rabbi, to the rabbi on call who answers questions, nor to the rabbis of the community. It belongs only to the Jewish women.

In recent month we have seen horrifying violation of the honor of the Jewish woman by public health declarations made by rabbis in deference to doctors and public health

authorities. These have varied in each community but have included dissuading or preventing women from immersing in the mikva, scaring women and mikva attendants into thinking they were in danger by going to the mikva, encouraging women to delay going to the mikva out of fear instead of reassuring them there was nothing to be afraid of, barring women whose husbands prayed with a minyan from using the mikva, and so forth.

We write to re-assert that ownership of the mikva belongs to the Jewish women. This should be self-evident, but unfortunately it needs re-stating: a rabbi may be consulted as to certain areas of expertise in Jewish law as to the construction of a mikva and the understanding of certain details of the laws of taharas hamispacha, but he may not under any circumstances close the mikva nor may he bar any woman from using the mikva.

We do not permit the mikvas to become tools in the public health campaign to reshape our lives. We remind you that the public health authorities have long sought to close mikvahs under various scientific and health arguments. These are the foreign ideas that we as Jewish women are entrusted to block from entry into our communities. A delayed immersion is likely a missed conception in addition to the difficulties and complications that it poses to a couple. That violates the fundamentals of our Judaism and relationship with G-d Almighty.

We do not consent to the closure of the mikvas. They were built with communal funds and are the first communal structure that a community must build. They cannot be closed, not even closed to one woman.

We do not consent to women being barred from the Mikva for any reason including but not limited to symptoms or a positive test for any condition or virus or the prayer activities of her husband. We will not accept a requirement that we must take a test before coming to the Mikva or consent to having our temperature taken as a condition of entry. Regardless of the varying opinions on mask wearing, mask wearing may not be a condition of mikva use.

We do not consent to the change of attitude from honoring our desire to be careful in all details, each woman according to her personal service of Hashem, by answering all our questions and concerns to being told by Mikva attendants that the Rabbonim have said just keep moving and not ask questions.

We do not consent to the closure of the preparation rooms. These are for some the only available appropriate facilities to prepare for immersion and there can be no reason to close them. Every effort must be made to encourage the use of the mikvas and make it as pleasant as possible and easy as possible.

We do not consent to the unnecessary delays in tevilah such as 30-minute spacing.

If a current Mikva attendant is afraid to serve under traditional terms, let them step aside and we will provide and train our own Mikva attendants.

Our position applies regardless of the alleged danger of any disease and the rabbis may not lock the mikva, nor bar a woman, no matter how scary the doctors make the world to be and the rabbis may not lock the mikva, nor bar a woman, in response to an order of the government or of the public health officials. It is not within the powers of the rabbis nor the community leaders to comply with an order regarding something that belongs, not to them, but to the women. If G-d forbid there is to be such an order, the only response the rabbis and community leaders may give to those issuing the order is that “it is not ours to close.”

Nothing in this letter prevents you from advising your congregants personally but is intended to remind you that we do not agree to decrees that interferes with our responsibility for our own health and bodies and fertility.

Signed respectfully but with unwavering determination,

The Jewish Women of \_\_\_\_\_

Signatures: