



Jewish Doula
Labour & Birth Services

Motherwell Ceremony

(NB: Divide the text up so each woman can read).

Welcome everyone! This ceremony is about endings and new beginnings. We are the women who are most important to _____. It's my pleasure to welcome you as we celebrate _____ and her special moment, and our interwoven experiences as the women in her life.

Recalling the amniotic water of the womb and the rivers of Eden, the mikvah taps into a sense of rebirth and a new world that begins. A mikvah is a natural body of water, like a lake, ocean or pond fed by natural springs. Or it is a small in-ground pool mixed with water from a natural source like a well, rainwater, melted snow or melted ice. In Judaism, water commonly symbolizes a new or altered status. Jews-by-choice complete their conversion by immersing in a mikvah. Hands are washed after returning from a cemetery. When a bride immerses herself in a mikvah, she is connecting with the profound change marriage will bring. (Rivka C. Berman, "The Mikvah: The Ritual Bath").

Before, during, or after birth, water is used for a mother's comfort and also connection to her ancestral past. Her baby is immersed, and then so is she. The story of the Jewish people, born out of Exodus (a story which starts with a birth, brave midwives, and a mother's will to protect her child), is one of rebirth and redemption. We find both in the symbolic waters.

In Judaism, it is common to recite the "Shehekheyanu" – a prayer for new beginnings. As the time of a birth marks a new beginning for a couple, let us recite the Shehekheyanu together: Barukh haor baadam shehekheyanu, v'keemanoo v'higgiyanoo lazman hazeh

Blessed is the light in humanity which has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this happy season

The mikvah is also a symbol of life, sustenance, and a new moment – a new beginning. I feel grateful for this moment and to be here with all of you. The Shehekheyanu is a prayer that implores us, as one contemporary rabbi says, to "Be alive. Be grounded. Be here. Now!" (Rabbi Micah Hyman)

Let us allow ourselves to be fully present this morning (afternoon/evening), thrilled to be alive and to be together.

The mikvah is an aspect of traditional Judaism that reflects the sexism of the tradition. Women are commanded to enter the mikvah after menstruation because they need to be "purified." This has to do with revulsion for the female body and also the linking a lack of conception with death.



Today we take the traditions and transform them. The mikvah is a symbol of transformation, and we transform its symbolism. As these waters move, they move our interpretation of mikvah as a symbol of the need to purify the body to a need to purify the heart, mind, and spirit.

Sometimes the tradition leads to unforeseen consequences. From the sexist tradition grew female-only spaces. The mikvah is a women-identified space and we celebrate that space together, today.

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein started a women's mikvah movement right here in Toronto that became international. This is part of what she wrote about it:

From "Take Back the Waters" – Elyse Goldstein

There we were, a strange-looking group -- I and four of my closest women friends naked and singing, splashing around with glee. I would dunk into the water, come up and hear a beautiful wish, or a poem, or a prayer. The water was sweet and warm, and my tears flowed and mixed with it. For this was my night as a kallah, a Jewish bride, and I was in the mikveh, the ritual bath.[...] It was a moment I shall never forget. It was a moment of taking back what was mine a long time ago, offering a new wisdom of the water that can be uplifting for all women. The mikveh has been taken from me as a Jewish woman by a history of superstitions and fear of menstruation. I was going to take back the waters.

To take back the waters means to see mikveh as a wholly female experience. Just as Miriam's well gave water to the Israelites, so too will the mikveh give strength back to Jewish women. Water is the symbol of birth -- and now it can be a symbol of rebirth. Immersion and submersion each have their own particular meanings. Today we wish for _____ to immerse herself in our love. We want her to feel immersed in the joy of her pregnancy and birth. We all immerse ourselves in celebration along with her. Submersion can also have multiple meanings...

Give Way to the Way (Adapted from a poem by Leigh Wilk)

To be reborn anew, I must remove the old.
I remove fear of what I do not understand.
I remove vanity and unnecessary self-importance.
Stripped to nothing to become one with everything,
I humble myself through submersion.
I give way to the way.
The way of purity of purpose,
to sanctify the gift given to me.
As a woman



As a mother
As a friend
As a child
As a creator
As a bride
I am transformed.
May my soul join together with all that is
And release what is not.
Let my mind body and soul be cleansed
by the purifying Mikvah

Immersion in water can symbolize birth and rebirth. It is about connection to the natural world and to those held within its depths. It can also be about release. As those of us who choose to go in the water immerse ourselves, it is an opportunity to consider what we'd like to let go of – to let float away. And as we emerge we can find new completeness that centres around new positivity.

As some people dunk in the mikvah they think about what they long for and use it as a wishing space or a wishing well. We can think of what we wish for _____ in her birth and motherhood journey. We can think of what we wish for in our own lives. As some people dunk in the mikvah they think about what they are excited about – it is a space to centre on our deepest hopes and aspirations, as well as to remind ourselves of what we are thankful.

Waters flow in and out – representing continuity and process. Water is cleansing, supportive, life-sustaining. May your birth be meaningful. May your baby be healthy. May your body heal and your heart open to this new mothering. May your home be a house of peace, love and closeness. And may you find the precious balance between taking care of yourself and taking care of each other. (Charlotte Goldberg, adapted).

Blessings:

Wine/ grape juice:

Baruch ha-or ba-o-lam
Baruch ha-or ba-adam
Bo-ray p'ree ha-ga-fen
Blessed is the light in the world
Blessed is the light of humanity
That brings forth the fruit of the vine

Bread:



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Bread is a symbol of a meal, as well as abundance. May your home be full of an abundance of food, and just as importantly, an abundance of love. Always remember that so many people lack the basic necessities of life, and that there is much injustice and suffering in the world. If you can dedicate some of your time to the less fortunate, you will obtain great satisfaction and happiness. (Charlotte Goldberg).

B'roo-kheem ha-mo-tsee-eem le-khem meen ha-artets – Blessed are those who bring forth bread from the earth (Share the bread)

Candles:

This candle is usually used on havdallah – the end of the Sabbath. The havdallah is a time to mark the difference between the day of rest and the work-week. It is a time to acknowledge that the passing of times of great joy to the everyday. The havdallah candle is lit and its light reminds us of the joy of special times. The symbol is appropriate today because, as a braided candle, it reminds us of the intertwining of families.

Not everyday will be bliss – but to find the joy in the everyday, the small moments, the building of memories – is also part of the special nature of a family. May this candle remind us that both the special and the ordinary are part of parenting, and both valuable as parts of all our lives.

Blessed is the flame of creation.

Blessed is the spark of the imagination.

Blessed be those who weave threads of light throughout the generations,

Who turn our longing for peace into illumination. (adapted from Charlotte Goldberg).

(Light the candle and pass it around the circle. As it goes around everyone says whatever she feels – a wish for _____, something she is grateful for on that day, a personal thought, etc.)

In Jewish life there are many ways in which water is foundational. The waters rose in the story of Noah. Our foremothers walked with Miriam at the well. We have the symbol of the red sea as a story of redemption.

The mikvah is a gathering not only of waters, but also of time. In the Mikvah, past and future swirl together with the waters of the present. The Talmud says that all the water in the world has its roots in the rivers which issued from the Garden of Eden. As Adam and Eve could not return to the Garden, we know that we cannot return to the past, but we can recall it. (Adapted from Charlotte Goldberg).

As _____ (optional: and those of us who choose to prepare to descend into the waters of the Mikvah), we recall the steps that have led us to this moment

Diving into the wreck – Adrienne Rich

First having read the book of myths,



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and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.
There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it is a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.
I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone



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to turn my body without force
in the deep element.
And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.
I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed
the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and away into this threadbare
beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative hunters.
This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored
body.
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he
whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies



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obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments
that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass
We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear

Final Mikvah blessing:

May I step into a life filled with continued wisdom and deeds of kindness. May I step forward into a life filled with the blessing of new beginnings. May I prove to be a loving and joyful mother. I am grateful to the women in my life who are with me in this journey. May we all be blessed in going out into a life of fulfillment and peace.

Everyone: (Say one word about how you feel at this moment and offer a bead with intention/affirmation). Beads will be made into a bracelet for birth.

DUNK/SWIM