

## “DER SKANDAL” AT “DER MIKVAH”

The Yiddish word for “scandal” is “skandal”

The word “mikvah”/”mikve” mean ritual immersion

“Mikvah ladies”

Telz Angel wrote for Frum Satire on “Eight Worst Mikvah Ladies” (6/26/12):

#3 Do you want to buy some...She takes advantage of the captive audience to sell me stuff. Tupperware, Amway, the Pampered Chef, you name it. If it's a multi-level marketing scheme, she's on it and selling it hard. Hey lady, I'm not at Bed, Bath and Beyond. I'm actually planning on Bath, Bed and Beyond--if you know what I mean.

“Kosher mikvah”

For a mikvah to be kosher, two things are necessary: the “mikvah” must contain forty seah of water. (A “seah” is a biblical measurement--750 liters of water.) Secondly, the water that fills the mikvah must be “living water”--rainwater that is collected in a pit dug in the earth or in a tank fixed on the roof of a building. Water that is drawn by hand is not acceptable.

By



MARJORIE GOTTLIEB WOLFE

Many people have said that the “mikvah” is NOT a once in a lifetime event (“pasirung”), but an action to be experienced over and over again. It recalls the watery state that each of us knew before we were born. We enter the “mikveh” as naked (“naket”) as the day of your birth--without a status (“matsev”). Simply a human being (“mentsh”).

I must confess that I was to the “mikvah” only once in my life, just before my wedding in November of 1958. I was accompanied by my rebetsn (rabbi's wife), Ada Cohen. The “mikvah” was in Far Rockaway, New York. I was 20 years old, and so filled with dreams of the future (“tsukunft”).

Ritual immersion is an ancient part of Jewish tradition. It has been observed for over 3,000 years. People immerse to commemorate a wide

variety of transitions and occasions:

At Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters, a “mikvah” which opened in Newton, Mass. in 2004, people immerse for a number of reasons:

- . prior to reading Torah for the first time
- . before or after surgery
- . on the occasion of being ordained as a rabbi
- . on becoming a grandparent (“zeyde”/”bobe”)
- . reaching the age of 40, or 50, or 85 (“fertsik,” “fuftsik,” ...)
- . for brides AND grooms before their wedding day
- . for converts to Judaism
- . for infertility problems
- . following menstruation
- . for the adoption of “kinder” (children)
- . for receiving a doctorate
- . for retirement (“tsuriktsien zikh” means “to retire”)
- . for the last child leaving the nest
- . after a miscarriage
- . for coming out of the seven-day mourning period--”di shive”
- . for the onset of menopause

How about visiting the mikvah when your team, “50 Shades of Flayshik” wins first place at the Long Island Kosher BBQ Championship?

Would Madonna be allowed to immerse at Mayyim Hayyim? “Only if she were converting to Judaism. Non-Jews seeking a spiritual immersion will not be permitted to immerse.” (Source: “The House of Secrets: The Hidden World of the Mikveh” by Varda Polak-Sahm.)

Some modern-day “mikvahs” are accessible to the handicapped or infirm. They are equipped with lifts. Others--larger mikvah buildings--include conference rooms used for tours and educational programs.

When you enter the “mikvah,” you are instructed: do not rush. (The Yiddish words meaning “to rush” are “aylin zikh.”) Walk slowly. (“pamelekh”). Count the seven (“zibn”) steps into the water, stepping on each one. Relax into the embrace (“arumnemen”) of the water, into whatever the next moment may hold for you.

The cost: Mayyim Hayyim, according to their website, is a 501 (c) (3) organization. Suggested contributions: \$90 for conversions, pre-wedding

celebration, healing. Weekly/monthly/holidays: a \$36 contribution.

So why the attention to THIS “mikvah”? Because, as Mark Oppenheimer reports, “Mayyim Hayyim was designed to be more welcoming, safer, and more theologically innovative than traditional Orthodox mikvahs...But they operate with the progressive philosophy (“filosofye”) that individuals can decide for themselves (“zikh”) how to observe this ritual.”

Source: “In a Scandal, New Attention to Mikvahs” by Mark Oppenheimer, The New York Times, Oct. 25, 2014.

So, what’s the “shlekht” (bad) news? Rabbi Barry Freundel, the spiritual leader of congregation Keshet Israel in Washington, has been accused of using a secret camera to spy on women immersing in the mikvah. (Note: The Yiddish word meaning “to accuse” is “bashuldikn”; the Yiddish word meaning “accusation” is “di bashuldikung.”) People were horrified.

Carrie Bornstein (“Breaking the mikveh monopoly”) wrote, “..what happened with Barry Freundel is no isolated issue. Every person--man or woman--everyone who has a “mikveh” in their community should be asking themselves the same thing: “Could this, or other forms of abuse, happen in my community?”

Carrie Bornstein continues, “This is a communal problem and it does not live in our nation’s capital alone. This communal problem will require a communal solution if anything is going to change.”

Source: [www.timesofisrael.com](http://www.timesofisrael.com)

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MARJORIE WOLFE hopes that Rabbi Freundel will get the necessary medical and/or psychological help. And she encourages everyone to show some “rakhmones” (mercy/pity) for the Rabbi and his family.