

EREV SHABBOS SHUVA

7 Tishrei 5787

Friday • September 18, 2026

CANDLE LIGHTING

7:05 PM

Friday • Vaughan, ON

TORAH READING

Ha'azinu

Devarim 32:1-52

HAFTARAH

Shuva

Hoshea 14:2-10; Michah 7:18-20

SHABBOS ENDS

8:04 PM

Kol Nidrei Sunday 7:00 PM

IN A MIKVAH, OUT A JEW



In the ground at Carmei Gat. The plastered chamber with its stone kerb and the steps at the near end, before the lift. Photograph: Emil Aladjem / Israel Antiquities Authority.

Jews immerse in a mikvah on erev Yom Kippur. One reason the Alter Rebbe gives is that it is an expression of teshuvah, genuine transformation, done the way a convert immerses. A convert goes down into the water and comes up a Jew.

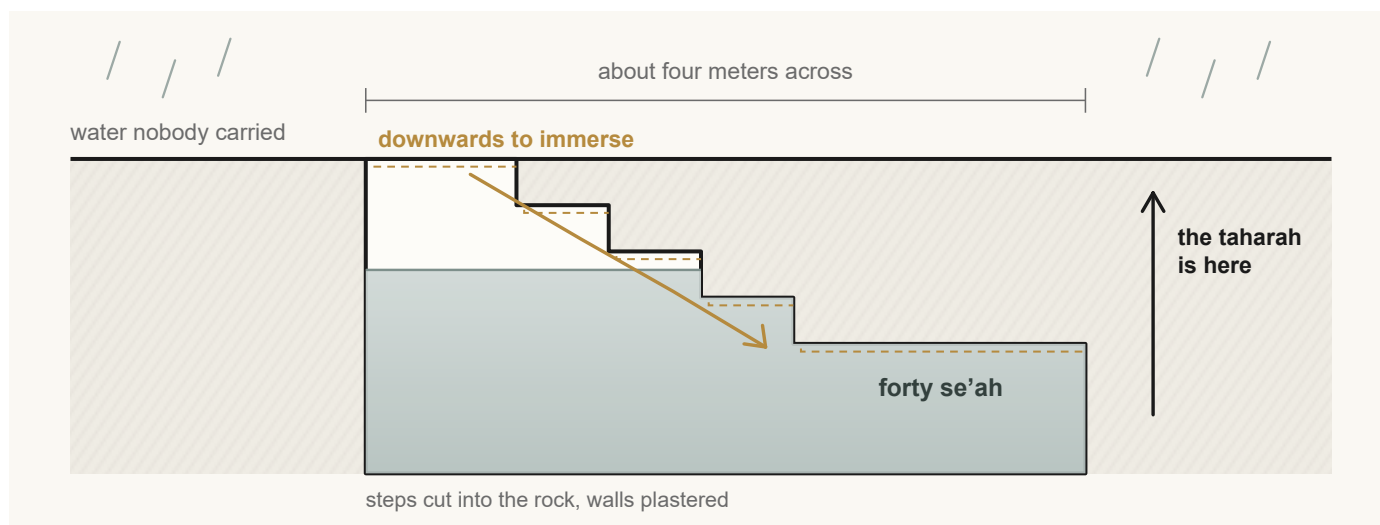
This week, four days before the fast, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced that a mikvah two thousand years old had been lifted whole out of the ground in the northern Negev. It was found in July, in a salvage dig ahead of a new neighborhood at Kiryat Gat, and taken out the same month.

Between the Judean Lowlands and the northern Negev there is a seam of country in which no Jewish settlement had ever been recorded. Its excavators put it plainly: “In the Judean Lowlands, many Jewish settlements from the Roman period are known, but in the seam between the Judean Lowlands and the northern Negev, no Jewish settlement was known until now.” What identified the people who lived there was the bath they immersed in.

Two thousand years ago Jews at Kiryat Gat cut a pit into the ground, plastered its walls and cut steps down into it, and in their houses they kept measuring vessels made of stone,

which Jews used in the Second Temple period because stone does not contract ritual impurity. They were there until the Bar Kokhba revolt, and then they were gone, and nobody lived on the spot again until the Byzantine period, the centuries when the country was ruled from Constantinople and governed as a Christian land.

Israel’s Lands Authority paid for the dig, about twenty-eight million shekels. Carmei Gat is going up fast and the mikvah sat in the path of it, so rather than record it and lose it to the building work they took it out whole. It is about four meters across and weighs about twenty-five tons. Conservators spent two weeks excavating around it, drilling underneath it and threading steel beams below, then padded the ancient plaster with gauze, adhesives and foam. In July a three-hundred-ton crane lifted it onto a wide-load transporter, which carried it to the National Treasures storehouse at Beit Guvrin. Eyal Kaho, the senior conservator who ran the lift, said: “If it falls apart — we’ve lost the mikvah. Therefore, every detail must be considered in advance.” When the housing is finished it goes back, set in an open public space at the center of the new neighborhood.



A mikvah in section. The water arrives without being carried, a person walks down the steps, and the taharah takes effect as he comes back up.

The validity of a mikvah depends almost entirely on how the water got in it. The Rambam gives a case. A man leaves jars out on his roof to dry and it rains, and they fill. He may smash them where they stand, or tip them over, and the water that runs out and collects is fit to immerse in, because he never filled them himself. If instead he picks the jars up and empties them, that same water, off that same roof, out of those same jars, is drawn water, and it ruins whatever it falls into. Nothing about the water is different. What is different is that he carried it.

Water that has passed through any vessel made to hold things counts as drawn and ruins the pool, and the Rambam is explicit that this includes vessels which cannot contract impurity at all: “Even containers that are not susceptible to ritual impurity, e.g., stone containers and containers made from earth, disqualify water.” The same stone that kept a family’s measuring cups pure in the kitchen at Kiryat Gat would have invalidated the bath outside, had the water been carried in it.

Then, at the close of those same laws, the Rambam rules that the water takes nothing off the body. He puts immersion among the chukim, the inexplicable laws, a king’s decree with no reason the mind can get hold of: “Immersion in a mikvah to ascend from

impurity is included in the category of chukim, because impurity is not mud or filth that can be washed away with water.” Nothing tangible or perceivable comes off. One who immerses without intending to be purified, the Sages said, is as though they had not immersed. Which leaves all those rules about the water looking strange. What, then, is the immersion doing?

A person standing in a valid mikvah who reaches out and touches a carcass lying in that same water is impure, and becomes pure only when they immerse and come up out of it. The Kesef Mishneh draws the principle out of it: a person who is impure is not purified except by his coming up out of the mikvah, and not while he is still inside it. Forty measures of rainwater are encompassing him entirely but actually doing nothing for him. The Rebbe put the question plainly: what is the sense of a law in which the completeness of the purification falls specifically at the moment he leaves the water?

Entering the water is not, by itself, enough. What the immersion is for is what comes after it: he goes up out of the water, back into the world, and makes a dwelling for God there. And if nothing about him afterwards shows that he immersed, that suggests that the immersion was never a proper one.

Rabbi Akiva speaks last in the tractate of Yom Kippur. Happy are you, Israel, he says: before whom are you made pure, and who makes you pure? Your Father in Heaven. Then he brings a verse from Yirmiyahu, “mikvah Yisrael Hashem.” The word mikvah there means hope, and Rabbi Akiva reads it as the pool as well: just as a mikvah makes the impure pure, so the Holy One, blessed be He, makes Israel pure. On the third of Tammuz 5732 the Rebbe quoted that mishnah in a letter to a rav who had spent his life building mikvaos, and quoted the continuation of the verse: “and you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.”

People are about to dwell around that mikvah again. The pit comes out of the storehouse and is set down in

the open, at the center of a neighborhood, where people will walk past it on their way home. Nineteen hundred years after those Jews came up out of that water for the last time, the one thing about them still legible is that they immersed. They are known by it. Whatever else they were in that stretch of country, they were Jews there, and the ground still says so.

That is the Rebbe’s test. A man who comes up out of the water and goes home unchanged has left nothing for anyone to see. What is asked of every Jew is to occupy oneself with someone else as well and bring that person near, rather than be content with one’s own avodah and claim, “I have saved my own soul.” “And precisely then one sees that the immersion counted.”

Gmar chasima tova!

SOURCES

Mishnah Yoma 8:9 · Mishneh Torah, Immersion Pools 4:3, 6:1, 11:12 · Shulchan Arukh HaRav, Orach Chayim 606:11–13 · Mishneh Torah, Other Sources of Defilement 6:16 · Kessef Mishneh there, 6:16:2 · שיחת ש"פ בראשית ה'תשי"ז · Jeremiah 17:13; Ezekiel 36:25–28 · Igros Kodesh Vol. 27, י' תיח · The excavation was directed by Elena Kogan-Zahavi, Maayan Margulis and Shira Lifshitz for the Israel Antiquities Authority; the lift was run by its senior conservator, Eyal Kaho.

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SHABBOS SHUVA · 8 TISHREI 5787

THIS SHABBOS

826 BCE The fourteen days of dedication for the Beis HaMikdash built by Shlomo HaMelech begin on 8 Tishrei

1791 Yahrtzeit of Reb Baruch, father of the Alter Rebbe

1941 The massacres at Babi Yar

YOM KIPPUR

9 Tishrei · Sep 20 Erev Yom Kippur. Kapparos, the immersion, the meal before the fast

Sunday 7:00 PM Candles, then Kol Nidrei

10 Tishrei · Sep 21 Yom Kippur. Fast ends 7:59 PM

AHEAD

15–16 Tishrei · Sep 26–27 Sukkos

17–21 Tishrei · Sep 28–Oct 2 Chol HaMoed

22 Tishrei · Oct 3 Shemini Atzeres

23 Tishrei · Oct 4 Simchas Torah

DAILY RAMBAM · SHABBOS, 8 TISHREI

Three chapters. Tum'as Ochlin 16; Keilim 1; Keilim 2. **One chapter.** Ishus 23. **Sefer HaMitzvos, day 229**, positive commandment 98, the mitzvah of judging the impurity of foods and drinks: אוכלין ומשקין כדנינים האמורים בהם ומצווה זו כוללת כל תורת טומאת אוכלין ומשקין כולם.