

Immersion and the Pool of Immersion

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To add to our discussion on Christian water baptism from a Hebraic perspective, it may be well to recall that the word for the immersion pool at the Temple in Jerusalem and at every entrance to a synagogue even today is *mikveh* [מִקְוֵה].

The word *mikveh*, often written as *mikvah* in Judaism, is properly transliterated into English as *miqveh*, or *miqvah*. Because English readers expect the letter “u” to follow the letter “q”, translators long ago adopted a convention to change the letter “q” to the letter “k” to make reading transliterated Hebrew a bit easier for English readers.

The word *qava* (*kava*). Our word *mikveh*, or *mikvah* is derived from the Hebrew verb *qava*, which means “to wait for, endure, look eagerly for, to hope.” Behind the idea of *mikveh* is a strong sense of “longing, hoping” beyond the present condition to make something new and improved out of the old and incomplete. When a person enters into the collected body of water known as *mikveh* (immersion pool), he or she enters into a physical place that expresses one’s absolute and resolute hope in Yahweh for an outcome impossible otherwise left to ourselves. The hope of our rescue, salvation and transformed life by Yahweh is expressed in the collected body of waters of immersion known as the *mikveh*.

From this point forward we will use the conventional spelling in Judaism as *mikvah*.

The word *mikvah*. The *mikvah* is a collected body of water—a pool, a river, a lake, or wherever living, running water was found sufficient to carry out the act of full immersion. It is best described as the place of hope in Yahweh where one’s old identity is reckoned to be done away with beneath the water, to be washed away ceremonially, to assume a new identity, a transformed life as one rises up out of the water. The *mikvah*, the physical place where hope is expressed ceremonially, and the immersion into it is an act of hope in Yahweh to bring to pass what He has promised according to our obedience to his promise.

The way immersion was done in ancient Israel and during the time of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) was that the person being immersed (*tovel*), actually immersed (*tovel*) himself or herself into the depths of the collected body of water, the *mikvah*. An attendant may stand near to assist in any way needed, but the action is the primary responsibility of the one being immersed.

The one being immersed (*tovel*) has prepared for a life transformation before entering the pool. It may be based upon repentance from sin, or a new status in life being assumed where the old must be gone and the new must come. Standing upright at first as one enters the *mikvah*, he or she then sits down beneath the water level in the pool, totally submerged, sitting on their haunches. Then the person quickly identifies with his or her new identity as a transformed person by the act of repentance, or with a life status change. It is a momentous choice. Then he or she quickly stands up straight up, bursting the waters open as a new person with a new identity for a new way of living.

The people of Israel immersed like this for any major change of identity from the old to the new. When a woman was betrothed in marriage, one of her first acts was to enter the *mikvah*. She publicly immersed herself as one once available for marriage. Beneath the water’s surface, she affirms her decision once and for all to change her role in life and arises straight forth up from her haunch position with her new

identity. She is taken, no more available for marriage to another. Her life is changed radically with joy. The immersion is an act of her hope for the marriage soon to come.

Similar immersions occurred for priests, usually at age 30, when they officially became priests and not student-priests.

Likewise, Torah students desiring to become a rabbi, or Torah teacher, after qualifying educationally and attitudinally, immerse themselves in a *mikvah* at about the age of 30. Going below the water's surface, they declare their hope in a new life as they arise straight forth up out of the water. They go into the water as an apprentice of a rabbi. They rise up out of the water as an official master teacher whose hope and expectation is to seek to make their own apprentices—to make disciples (*talmidim*) of those who follow them.

An Israelite who was sold into slavery for seven years to another Israelite to work off their debt, completed his or her seventh year of labor by having their debt settled in full. Then they entered into a *mikvah* to go beneath the waters to show that their debt was paid, their master was pleased, and life was now full of hope for a debt-free life in their newly-acclaimed freedom.

Today, when we enter the *mikvah* we declare that we have prepared ourselves in advance for the immersion. We have done all required of us up to this moment of immersion so show ourselves faithful and obedient to Yahweh according to our trust and hope in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua).

How nouns are formed from verbs in Hebrew. In the Hebrew language, some nouns are formed by attaching certain Hebrew letters as prefixes to a verb. The root idea of the verb remains, but depending on the one-letter prefix, the noun takes on a certain meaning unique to itself.

For example, if the prefix to a verb is the letter *tav* (transliterated into English as the letter “T”), the verb is changed into a noun, but not any noun. It becomes a thing, a reality.

In this case, when we use the verb *qava* (“to hope”) and attach the letter “t” as the prefix, it is changed to mean “a thing of hope.” We see this in Joshua 2:21 where the scarlet “cord” that Rahab placed in her window was called a *tiqvah* [letter *tav* + *qava*]—“a thing of hope”—something that gives deep significance to hope for a desirable outcome under trying circumstances.

Tiqvah is a feminine noun—a thing of hope.

In Jeremiah 29:11 the word *tiqvah* (henceforth written for English readers as *tikvah* [תִּקְוָה]), is used to express something to hope for:

Yahweh declares: “For I know the thoughts that I think for you,”—
“thoughts of peace and not of evil,
to give you a latter end and a hope [תִּקְוָה].”

When the prefix is the Hebrew letter *mem* (in English, the letter “M”) the verb changes to a noun, but any noun. The prefix *mem* makes the noun into a place, literally “from” a place where something is or happens. Hence, the word *mikvah* is M + *qava*. It is a place where hope is collected and expressed, therefore, an immersion pool. *Mikveh* is a masculine noun.

What's more, the noun *mikvah* has the unusual distinction of being a metaphor to describe one's relationship with God.

In Jeremiah 14:8 Yahweh is called, "O Hope [*Mikvah*] of Israel, its Savior in times of distress." He becomes the figurative place, that is, the One where one's hope is collected (like a body of water from immersion), and the One in whom it is experienced.

We find this again in Jeremiah 17:13:

O Yahweh, the Hope [*Mikveh*] of Israel,
all who forsake you will be put to shame.
Those who turn away in the land will be written a bill of divorcement,
because they have forsaken the fountain of living water—even Yahweh.

In this verse we see the connection between Yahweh, the *Mikveh* of Israel, and the *mikvah* [same as *mikveh*] as an immersion pool of living water, that is, Yahweh is "the Fount of living waters."

The text is in the form of a Hebrew chiasm following the literal sentence structure in Hebrew:

A *Mikveh* of Israel,
B all who forsake you will be put to shame,
B¹ those who turn aside in the land shall be written a bill of divorcement,
A¹ Fount [*Mekvor*] of Living Waters, even Yahweh.

A play on words is found between *Mikveh* [Hope] and *Mekvor* [Fount]. Only the last letter is changed in Hebrew from "H" to "R". The *Mikveh* (Hope) is also the *Mekvor*—the Fountain of Hope. Apart from Him, there is no hope in this world, only imagination and dreams.

This personification of *mikveh* from a physical immersion pool to the Holy One who is the Eternal Holy Spirit suggests that to be baptized in Him, that is, in his Name, we have hope for eternal life.

The immersion pool of living water becomes the metaphor, the shadow, the pattern for his Name, that is, his essence. So immersion in water is a metaphorical act, a shadow of things we hope for in the Living *Mikveh*, Yahweh, the God (Elohim) of Israel, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Where does the concept of the *mikvah* come from?

In the Bible, water is associated with life. In the womb, an unborn child is surrounded by water—amniotic fluid filled with electrolytes. The water gives hope to the mother and father for the infant sharing their lives. Meanwhile, it sustains the life of the unborn baby.

The baby is birthed from the water. The old way of living since conception is gone, the new way of life has come.

For the Hebrew, the purpose of the *mikvah* may be illustrated by the purpose of the amniotic fluid sac in which the unborn baby is nurtured before birth. But its fundamental concept is much earlier in time and space than the way we are all born into this world.

When we read from the Bible's first creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3) we see the universe's primordial origin, of everything that exists in time and space, as being once submerged in water. Before all things were, there was an uncreated universe of water. Genesis 1:2 reads:

And the earth was formless [*tohu*] and empty [*bohu*].
And darkness was upon the face of the deep [*tehom*].
And the Spirit [Wind] of God oscillated [*merachepeth*, from *rachaph* – “fluttered”]
upon the face of the waters.

In Yahweh's design of all that was created, He chose to begin with waters. The universe was as if it were contained by conception in the mind of Yahweh in waters before they were anything—pre-time and pre-space. All that we may say that was in this description is that it tells us of Yahweh's hope for creation to come forth as He conceived it in his deepest thoughts. And it did from the waters of hope as the Spirit of God oscillated, fluttered, or hovered over it in enormous expectation of something to be that was not yet. He was about to bring forth life—living things.

This is the idea behind the *mikvah*. It is the place of expressed hope and anticipation for a new creation of a new man—a new person, male and female—from the old that was to the new that shall become.

Christian baptism is rooted in the very concept of the *mikvah* of Israel. It expresses hope of a new creation of a new person. Christians do not do a system of different baptisms for changes of status in this life for another identity, role or activity in this life, as is done within Rabbinic Judaism today, a continuation of what it was before the time of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua). No, Christians baptize on the basis of one baptism, not several. The one baptism is the ultimate change of status—from the old life of the sinful flesh and bones, to the new body in the Messiah by the workings of his Holy Spirit whereby we are formed in Him before Yahweh, our Father, as a New Person for eternity.

Yahweh, as for Israel, is our hope, our *Mikvah*. The Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) shows us the Father and does his works, and his works only. We come to saving faith through the Messiah whose Spirit teaches us about our Father, the Creator of the heavens and earth, who abides in eternity beyond space and time.

So when we as Christian baptize, we are immersing in water—in the living water—to identify with our Father—our True Hope, through abiding faith in our Lord Jesus (Yeshua)—his Eternal Son, by his Spirit helping us to become renewed living beings with the “breath” (*neshamah*) of the Spirit (*Ruach*) of God. The Spirit (*Ruach*) of God gave the humans breath to become living beings (*chayyim*), and breath for speech to live by—the evidence the man, male and female, were made in God's image and likeness.

As the Spirit oscillated over the deep waters of creation to bring forth life, so He oscillates over our rebirth so we may become a New Person in Father's global family of faithful children.

Thus, we immerse in the name of the Father—our *Mikvah*, and in the name of his Eternal Son—the Living Waters of the *Mikvah* of Eternity, and in the name of his Spirit who breathes into us the breath of renewed life, making us into a new creation according to his promise.

For God is One (*Echad*) in his awesomeness—the Three Powers of Heaven in One from eternity without end.

Why do some Christians misunderstand water immersion, or baptism?

Christians, for the main part, lost their Hebraic understanding of the Bible, replacing it with Continental Europe's Greco-Roman language and philosophy to interpret the Bible. This began to take place in the first century during the times of the apostles, hence some of the letters were written that are preserved in the "New Testament" of the Bible. The apostolic movement of the Judean Nazarenes during the first century managed to contain the influence of the Greco-Roman bred gentiles becoming believers in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua).

With their eventual displacement from Jerusalem and the land of Israel to be scattered in the Dispersion among the nations, the Greco-Roman worldview flourished, becoming Christianity and the Church. During the third to fifth centuries afterward, the Latin Fathers sought to displace the once dominant and commanding Hebraic worldview of the Bible and its hermeneutic from existence.

Thus, Christians ever since have been at a cultural disadvantage for understanding the Bible according to its Hebrew writers immersed in the Hebrew language and culture of ancient Israel and the land of Judea. Resistance within the Church to change to a dominant and commanding Hebraic understanding of the Bible continues in most all branches of the Church today.

Hence, water baptism is one of many concepts that were metamorphosed into variants of the authentic meaning shared among the people of Israel.

A true recovery requires understanding and applying Hebraic hermeneutics in place of the Greco-Roman hermeneutic of the past 1,800 years.

Meanwhile, we have the question among Christians about water baptism as to what it is, what it means, why it exists, what it promotes, what its original purpose was for Israel and for the Judean Nazarene movement of the first century, how it was done, and more. Churches have divided into sub-groups and taken new identities over the issues that spring forth from asking and answering these questions by Christians nourished on the milk and meat of the Greco-Roman worldview.

How do we recover the ancient concept of water immersion as practiced by the Judean Nazarenes of the first century?

Fundamental to the recovery and reclamation of the Hebraic mind behind the immersion event is to learn to read and understand the Judean Nazarenes as they intended to be understood within Israel, within their Hebraic worldview. In particular, and most important, the ones to study are those Judean apprentices of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) whom we know as the apostles (*shlichim*). Gladly, they left us their Gospels and letters to inquire, read and study so we may be thoroughly informed unto every good work.

Let's look at two of their ways of writing about water immersion in a *mikvah* (baptismal location or pool of living water).

Before the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), most Judeans were on the same page, so to speak, about water immersion. It was a sign of a change of life status—from slavery to freedom, from singleness to betrothal, from a student priest to a priest, from a student teacher to a teacher (rabbi), from a sinful, unrepentant attitude to a changed, repentant attitude to live life by.

After the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), the Judean Nazarenes saw and understood the wonder that all other bathing rituals and immersions in a *mikvah* were patterns and shadows of the reality found only in the Messiah of Israel—Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth. They came to understand that only one immersion was essential, that only one that should be practiced in hope, the hope and anticipation of eternal life. The others were signs of the reality of the one immersion that recognized life change from the power of death to the powers of the Three in One—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Immersion, or water baptism, recognized the change of status from being a son/daughter of Adam to becoming a son/daughter of God through faith in our Elder Brother—the firstborn of creation, the firstborn from among the dead, the firstborn of the Witnessing Assembly (*Kahilah; Edah*) of God’s reborn people. This immersion, this baptism, gathered all the other immersions, all the other ritual baths into one living concept—the baptism that signified the difference between the life governed by time and space, to life governed by eternity. In our faith in the atoning and saving work of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), we became immersed only once, signifying that we’ve been transformed from the old to the new life, from a life destined to death due to our sins to life eternal in the hope (*mikveh*) of the Messiah’s righteousness.

The Hope (*Mikveh*) of Israel was always our Father Yahweh. The Fount (*Mikvor*) of the Hope (*Mikveh*) was always Yahweh. The problem was always the condition of those who entered into the watery *mikvah*—Israelites entered unchanged desiring a spiritual cleansing and left unchanged spiritually, but with hope for a spiritual life change. The Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), the Judean Nazarenes understood through the reality of his death and resurrection, was the Change Agent for those entering the pool. He alone was the One needed to make the hope of the mikvah reality for both faithful and unfaithful, but repentant Israel.

The Judean Nazarenes understood the significance that the death and resurrection of the Messiah brought to the lost sheep of Israel and to the lost nations of the earth. They understood what immersion promised in the Messiah. They practiced only one baptism, only one immersion, the sum of all other baptisms in one—a true change from the old, condemned nature of sin to the new, transformed righteous nature of humanity found only through faith and hope in the Messiah.

Thus, immersion was done “in the name of Jesus (Yeshua)” to show the changed life entering into the living waters of hope, the waters of the *mikvah*.

But this was not all.

They were immersed in the name of the Father—the *Mikveh* (the Hope, represented by the shadow or pattern within the collected body of water) of Israel and the *Mikvor* of the *Mikveh*—the Fount (Water Source) of the Hope (*Mikveh*) of Israel.

This, too, was not all.

Being immersed in the name of the Father Yahweh and in the name of his Eternal Son, the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), the Judean Nazarenes also immersed in the name of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Father and Son. The immersion expresses hope in a spiritual reality, something the Spirit does in bringing forth

a new life, a new creation out of the water. Without the oscillating, fluttering, hovering Spirit above the waters of creation, life does not come forth.

Thus, we baptize in the name of the Father, yes. He is our Hope. We baptize in the name of the Son, yes. He is the Living Waters of Hope. We baptize in the name of the Spirit, yes, He is the Giver of Life from above the living waters that creates a path for us to new life in Him.

The picture is quite vivid. To be immersed you need the *Mikveh* (Yahweh) that contains the waters of creation and life. To be immersed, you need the Living Waters within the *Mikveh* (the Son in the Father). To be immersed, you need the life-giving spiritual transformation from death unto life (the Holy Spirit above the waters bringing life forth a new creation of people of God) from amidst the Living Waters.

The Gospel (*Basar*) of Matthew (MattiYahu) (28:19) puts this three-fold witness of ceremonial immersion into perspective:

Go therefore and make apprentices [*talmidim*] of all the nations,
immersing [baptizing] them in the name of the Father,
and the Son,
and the Holy Spirit [*Ruach HaQodesh*] ...

We also get a better understanding of the words of John (Yochanan) the Immerser (the Baptist) as recorded in Matthew 3:11 (*cf.* Luke 3:16):

A Indeed, I immerse you with water to reformation [*teshuvah* - repentance] [*in this life*],
B but He who after me is coming is mightier than I,
B¹ of whom I am not worthy to bear the sandals.
A¹ He shall immerse you with the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaQodesh*) and with fire (*esh*) ...

So we baptize (*tovel*) with the understanding that the Messiah is the critical difference between a ritual of hope for this life only, and a ceremony of hope for eternal life. Jesus (Yeshua) is the Living Waters of our Hope (*Mikveh*) in our heavenly Father—Yahweh.

What about the fire of immersion?

What does this mean considering that we enter into the *mikveh* of living waters?

The answer is quite simple, and refers to the second creation account of the Bible (Genesis 2:4-25).

We have two complimentary, somewhat symmetrical creation accounts in the Bible. The first is Genesis 1:1-2:3. The first is about the waters of the deep upon which oscillates the Spirit of God. The second is about the creation of man from the dry ground in which Yahweh forms him and by his Spirit breathes into him the breath (*neshamah*) of life (*chayyim*).

In the first creation account the Spirit acts as the Mighty Wind of God (*Elohim*) to divide the waters to bring forth creation. In fact, the Hebrew word *Ruach* (Spirit) comes from a verb that means to divide, to separate in order to cut a great wide path in between. Think of Israel crossing the Reed Sea (*Yom Suph*) by a mighty wind parting the sea to create an open and wide path for the Hebrews to cross through on

dry land. The Holy Spirit—the Awesome, Mighty Wind of God, creates a way, a path for new life to occur.

In the second creation account the Spirit acts as the Life-fire in the nostrils of man. Man speaks of his passion as a fire within him. When man was breathed into by the Spirit of God he became a living being—a fire of life filled with desire and passion to obey God, to participate creatively himself/herself in his creation in his “image and likeness”. For God is a living fire.

Thus, immersion brings into one life-changing event both creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 the work of the Holy Spirit revealed in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua). The watery one of Genesis 1:1-2:3 where man is created from the waters, and the fiery one of Genesis 2:4-25 where man becomes a living fire of life.

John the Immerser understood who the Messiah Jesus was when He was approached by Him. He saw in Him the Spirit of God, the Awesome, Mighty Wind of the first creation account, and the Fiery Breath of God in the second creation account.

Summary

Immersion in water is important to believers in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua). It is the summation of all baths and immersions Israel practiced ritually as a pattern or shadow of the reality in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua). In the immersion practice of the Judean Nazarenes of the first century, they understood that all previous immersions were rolled into one in Messiah with eternal significance.

The Judean Nazarenes practiced only one immersion. It was done respective of the fullness of Yahweh’s activity to bring forth life from the *mikvah* of creation, through the living waters of creation subjected to the Mighty Wind of God oscillating over the waters to bring from creation. In all three descriptions are the Threeness in One—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.