

The Mikvah

What is a Mikvah? The Hebrew word 'mikvah', means a 'natural gathering of water'. It is one of the most often used and important concepts in the Bible which teaches us about separating light from darkness, clean from unclean, life from death. This separation takes place through immersion in a Mikvah.

The first thing that comes to mind when we think of immersion, is baptism for the forgiveness of sin'. Yet this is but one of the many aspects of immersion. There are numerous times where Scripture tells us to immerse ourselves, each being a different aspect of the redemptive cycle of separation or holiness.

The main aspect of immersion is that it 'changes our status'. Remember when the Hebrews went through the mikvah of the Red Sea, God took them to Sinai and changed their status from slaves to 'bride'? Each time we experience immersion, our status is changed.

Immersion into the Name of YHVH: The most dramatic example of this change of status is in the case of conversion. When a Gentile chooses YHVH as the One and Living God and takes upon him or herself the yolk of the Torah, he or she converts to the Household of Israel. In the early Messianic movement, thousands of Gentiles literally converted to Nazarean (Messianic) Judaism. This immersion was a total change of status. Speaking to Gentiles who had undergone immersion, Paul says in Ephesians 2:2'...remember that at that time you were separate from Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.'

The Nazareans were a sect of Judaism, as were the Pharisees and the Saducees. Conversion through the Nazarean sect was a legitimate form of conversion to Judaism, the only difference being that the Nazareans followed the teaching of Rabbi Yeshua, believing him to be the Messiah. Judaism only eventually rejected believers in Yeshua when, with the domination of the 'gentile church', they were perceived to be 'another religion'. And rightly so, as the 'church' rejected Torah and began to follow totally pagan traditions. The Torah observant Nazareans did not remain within the church system.

Jewishness is not based on a personal belief in a Messiah. This is not what made a person a Jew or not a Jew. Today, many thousands of Jews believe that the Lubavitcher Rebbe Schneerson was/is the Messiah. They are still considered Jews because they keep the religion of Torah. Jewishness (apart from birth), has to do with obeying the religion of the Bible. The Talmud says, 'Whoever renounces idol worship may be called a Jew.' So really, the question, 'who is a Jew', is as Paul says: 'A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly' (Romans 2:29). There are some who are Jews by birth and don't even believe in God. How much greater is it then, to be a Jew by choice? We make this choice when we are immersed into THE NAME YHVH and choose to keep His Commandments.

Immersion into the Name of Y'shua: When we acknowledge Yeshua as Messiah, we not only acknowledge the atonement which he made on our behalf, but we also agree to follow his mesorah. Mesorah means 'tradition'. What we read in the gospels, is the mesorah of Yeshua. In Judaism, some Rabbis have their own disciples. The most well known in our days is the Lubavitcher Rebbe - the leader of the Lubavitch Hassidic movement, who passed away not long ago. His disciples learned from him. They belonged to his 'house' (beit) of learning - the chabad house 2. In the days of Yeshua, the most common Rabbinic Houses were the Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai (House of Hillel and House of Shammai). The Disciples of Rabbi Hillel 3 and Rabbi Shammai, followed their mesorah, or tradition. Yeshua also had disciples - they were of the House of Yeshua or Beit Yeshua. They learned Torah and halacha (the way in which Torah is kept), through the teaching and tradition of Yeshua.

Immersion into the name of Yeshua Ha Mashiach is exactly this: that we acknowledge and receive the atonement he made for our redemption and that we agree to follow his teaching regarding Torah. Yeshua did not come to abolish Torah, but to give us the full understanding of it. He said, 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:29,30). Some of the teachers of the law had put many burdens on the people. They had made the yolk of the Torah heavy, whereas in the first place God intended it to be easy. Deuteronomy 30:11 says, 'Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.' The mesorah and halacha of Yeshua is true Torah, without man-made burdens. Yeshua is the Living Torah, who came to dwell among men.

Immersion into the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit): It is by the Spirit of God that we are made a new creation! The Ruach HaKodesh is God's creative Spirit, the Spirit which moved across the face of the deep in the beginning, when all things were created. Yeshua said that we are to be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). When God immerses us into His Spirit, He enables us to keep His commandments, for we are immersed into the Spirit of Truth. This immersion is the final seal and testimony of our redemption. I John 2:3,4 says: 'We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him, 'but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' The proof that we are filled with the Spirit of Truth is that we obey God's commands. There are many who call themselves 'spirit-filled', but their lives declare otherwise.

There are other types of immersion which need to be mentioned, which are important aspects of the Biblical life-cycle. Leviticus 20:18 says: 'If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people.' Quite an interesting commandment. A woman, during her menstrual time, is referred to as Niddah. It

comes from the word nadah, which means 'removed' or 'separated'.The Torah states in Leviticus 15:19, that during this time, a woman shall be a Niddah (removed) for seven days. She retains this status until she immerses in the Mikvah and then is re-united with her husband. Since the monthly period is the womb discarding the old and preparing for new life, immersion in the Mikvah is symbolic of going from death to life.The use of the Mikvah is one of the most important aspects of Jewish married life.In a sense, it is even more important for the marriage bond than the wedding ceremony and can be seen as a monthly renewal of the couple's marriage.

Immersion in the Mikvah is also an act of self renewal and rebirth, and therefore, it is customary to immerse as a sign of repentance.For this reason, many Jews immerse before Yom Kippur and other Festivals.

One of the most important times to immerse in the Mikvah is on Friday evening before Shabbat begins. Because immersion indicates a change of status and the Shabbat is different in status from the other days of the week, immersion and Shabbat go together.The Shabbat is also symbolic of the Bride, and as a bride immerses before her wedding, so we immerse before entering Shabbat. Although this is not a commandment, it is a very special symbolism within the Biblical life-cycle.

Although Yeshua was without sin because he never transgressed God's Laws, before he began his ministry, he was immersed in a Mikvah - the river Jordan.At that moment, the Ruach HaKodesh descended upon him and he was ready to begin his ministry.Even for Yeshua, this rite of passage and change of status was necessary.

The concept of Mikvah is interwoven into every aspect of Biblical life.In every instance it speaks of separation between life and death, the old and the new.The Mikvah teaches us that our salvation is a daily walk, not just a 'once off' experience.Each time we immerse ourselves according to the Biblical pattern, we experience a change in status, a renewal.Although the act of immersion in the mikvah is purely symbolic and not a ritual, it is a clear outward statement that a change has taken place.At that moment of immersion, it is always a new beginning.

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1 Megillah 13a

2 ChaBaD stands for chokma/wisdom, bina/understanding amp; da'at/knowledge.

3 Hillel was the grandfather of Gamaliel, who taught the Apostle Paul