



Mikvah is a complex issue. For some women, it is a welcome and celebrated experience, for others it may be a harrowing and challenging one, while for others, it may just be something that they'd like to get through quickly and painlessly. Whatever the nature of the experience, it is a uniquely female and personal one. Many *mikvaot* are women-centered, safe and sensitive and they empower women to experience *mikvah* in a dignified, respectful, and healthy way. This is a list of *Mikvah* Best Practices that various Orthodox and community *mikvaot* currently have in place. It is our hope that in sharing this list of *Mikvah* Best Practices we can encourage all *mikvaot* to move towards meeting these standards.

***Mikvah* Governance and Decision Making:**

The *mikvah* board is made up of a majority, if not entirely, of women who use/have used the *mikvah*.

If requested by a *mikvah* user and available within a given community, a Yoetzet Halakha, or other woman with certification in the laws of *niddah* and *taharat hamishpacha*, is consulted on halakhic questions, including whether a woman may use the *mikvah* during the daytime for a particular reason.

Mikvah boards identify two or three female ombudspeople to whom women may direct confidential complaints/concerns, and clearly publicize their names and contact information at the *mikvah* and on the *mikvah*'s website. *Mikvaot* establish a protocol, in writing, as to how to investigate and respond to such complaints/concerns.

The names of all members of the *mikvah* board and the supervising rabbi are clearly publicized at the *mikvah* and on the *mikvah*'s website, and there is a mechanism for women to contact the board and rabbi directly.

***Mikvah* Design and Operations:**

Mikvah users make the decisions with respect to the design of the *mikvah* based on their knowledge and experience.

The *mikvah* is clean and sanitary and provides as much privacy and comfort for women as feasible given space constraints.

The *mikvah* has adequate space and toiletries, etc. for women to fully prepare in privacy on the *mikvah* premises.

The *mikvah* facilities are wheelchair accessible.



The *mikvah* has gowns and towels which are appropriate for women of all sizes.

The *mikvah* offers space in which women can resume their usual appearance prior to leaving the *mikvah*, including drying their hair.

The *mikvah* has a sufficient number of preparation rooms to ensure that the women in the community can get in and out in a timely manner. If there is a wait time for the *mikvah*, efforts are made to ensure that women's privacy and comfort are protected during such wait time.

The *mikvah* has information in the preparation rooms about self breast exams and detecting skin cancer, and information for women experiencing domestic violence.

The *mikvah* has a system that allows women to sign up for appointments online and a website that clearly indicates hours of operation and contact information.

Friday night and *yom tov* accommodations are made for women, including allowing women to arrive prior to Shabbat/*yom tov*, allowing women to use the *mikvah* prior to Shabbat/*yom tov* if approved by the local halakhic authorities, and/or providing a satellite *mikvah*, if feasible. A satellite *mikvah* is a small *mikvah* that women can walk to and use on Friday night or *yom tov*. Daytime hours are made available to women in particular cases such as with brides or converts or in other special cases at a reasonable cost to the user.

Women are not rushed through the *mikvah* process and are able to take extra time in the *mikvah* without an attendant if they so desire.

Mikvaot have a system for accommodating late arrivals, within reason.

Mikvaot have information available in the preparation rooms about what women might do in order to prepare for the *mikvah* and what to expect during the process, with contact information for halakhic authorities, including Yoatzot Halakha, the Yoetzet hotline, and/or women with certification in the laws of *niddah* and *taharat hamishpacha*, who may be consulted with questions or concerns.

The blessing for immersion, along with transliteration, is printed in large letters and clearly visible from inside the *mikvah*.

***Mikvah* Safety and Security:**

Mikvaot retain a security firm to set up closed circuit surveillance cameras which are monitored by the women on duty during the *mikvah*'s business hours.



The parking lot, walkways and doorways of the *mikvah* are well lit and have monitored surveillance cameras.

There are emergency backup lights in the preparation rooms and *mikvah* in the event of a blackout.

If there is a *keylim* (vessels) *mikvah* on the premises, the hours of use do not coincide with the hours that women are scheduled to use the *mikvah*. The entrance to the *keylim mikvah* is separate and distinct from the entrance to the general *mikvah*.

If there are offices (synagogue and/or other) connected to the *mikvah*, they have a separate and distinct entrance and are not accessible from the *mikvah*. To the extent possible, the offices are closed during the hours that women are scheduled to use the *mikvah*.

If the *mikvah* is available for use by men, hours for men and women are clearly established and followed. There is a gap between men's and women's hours.

No one is in the *mikvah* building unless accompanied by a *mikvah* employee and/or female board member. The *mikvah* is locked at all times and only female *mikvah* employees and female board members have the key to the *mikvah*.

Each *mikvah* employee and board member is assigned their own individual code to access the *mikvah*. Records are kept of who enters the *mikvah* at what point and periodically checked to make sure that no one was in the *mikvah* when not supposed to be there.

All *mikvah* employees and board members, including Yoatzot Halakha and halakhic advisors, are to be cleared by checking the state and federal criminal databases and the state central registry of child abuse and maltreatment.

The *mikvah* is periodically swept for surveillance equipment by security experts together with *mikvah* employees who are familiar with the *mikvah* and will recognize if something is out of place. The *mikvah* is kept neat and orderly so that if something is out of place, it will be noticed.

Mikvaot discourage users from bringing in extra bags and belongings unless necessary. Users are encouraged to only bring in what they need and are advised that they may be subject to bag search by *mikvah* employees for security reasons. There is a secure place available for *mikvah* users to leave extra belongings.

Mikvah Shomrot:

Shomrot are warm and welcoming, respectful to women and sensitive to users' unique circumstances.



Shomrot are trained to be sensitive, and provide alternatives within *halakha*, to women who are afraid of the water or have other phobias/mental health conditions/medical conditions that make it difficult for them to use the *mikvah*.

Shomrot ask whether a woman wishes to be checked prior to using the *mikvah* and know that declining to be checked does not preclude the woman from making use of the *mikvah*.

Shomrot are trained to be respectful of women's personal space and privacy and take steps to only see so much of the unclothed woman for as long as necessary to determine that she has fully immersed in the *mikvah*.

Shomrot leave the room or hold an opaque sheet or robe in front of them while the woman enters and leaves the *mikvah* waters.

The *mikvah shomrot* receive training in recognizing signs of domestic and/or child abuse, addressing such with affected women and reporting such as appropriate.

Shomrot allow women time alone in the *mikvah* following immersion, if requested. If requested, *shomrot* allow women to immerse alone or to bring their own *shomeret*.