



Tahara (Ritual Purification)

Tahara is the tradition of ritual purification of the deceased. “As he came, so shall he go” (Ecclesiastes 5:15). Just as babies are pure when they are born and are immediately washed and dressed, the deceased are washed, ritually purified and dressed so their departure is as pure as their arrival.

During *tahara*, the *met/metah* (male/female deceased) is treated with utmost respect and dignity in accordance with Jewish tradition. Organ, tissue or cornea/eye donation does not affect the ability to perform *tahara*, nor does autopsy.

A moment of private reflection precedes and concludes *tahara*. Also before and after *tahara*, the *tahara* leader offers a prayer, addressing the deceased by name, asking for forgiveness by the deceased for any unintentional indignity that might occur during *tahara*. Other prescribed prayers are recited at specified times during *tahara*. There is no idle chatter. The *met/metah* is kept covered at all times except for the area being washed or dressed.

Men prepare men and women prepare women. The *met/metah* is gently washed from head to toe, turning him/her from side to side as necessary but never face down. The fingernails and toenails are cleaned. Then the *met/metah* is ritually purified by pouring a large continuous flow of water over him/her.

The *met/metah* is dried, and then dressed in *tachrichim* (burial garments). *Tachrichim* are made of simple muslin fabric, without decoration and without buttons or zippers. They are tied at the neck with a special slipknot. They have no pockets, as material wealth is left behind at death, and so as not to acknowledge wealth or status of the individual in life. The face is covered to prevent embarrassment to the *met/metah* of having people gaze upon the face.

Then the *met/metah* is placed in the *aron* (casket). Men are also buried with a *tallit* wrapped around them (women may be buried with a *tallit* upon family request or with advance request of the individual). One of the *tzitzit* is cut off then tucked back into the *tallit*, rendering the *tallit* invalid and symbolizing the fact that the deceased are no longer required to fulfill religious obligations. “*The dead cannot praise the Lord*” (Psalms 115:17).

The eyes and mouth are covered with pieces of broken earthenware, symbolic of human frailty. Earth from Israel is sprinkled over the *met/metah* and throughout the *aron* as a reminder of our connection with the land of our ancestors. The *sovev* (covering sheet) is pulled around the *met/metah* and tied with special slipknots. Finally, the lid is placed on the *aron* and fixed in place, not to be opened again.

The members of the *tahara* team are honored to be the last human beings to touch the *met/metah*, to have the final human physical contact on earth with a deceased.