



Adas Israel Community Mikvah Guidelines

March 2016

The Adas Israel Community Mikvah was built in 1989 and serves Adas Israel Congregation as well as the entire Jewish community of the Greater Washington area. We are proud that over 40 local rabbis perform conversions here and that over 400 immersions take place here every year. As the only progressive and pluralist Mikvah in this region, our principles are based on both Halacha and the values of the Adas Israel Community.

A Mikvah is a Jewish ritual bath, requiring “living waters” sourced from rain. Oceans, rivers and other natural bodies of water are all kosher mikvahs. The ritual of immersion is rooted in centuries of Jewish tradition. It is a way for a Jewish person to experience an embodied spirituality that can connect them to God, to their own body, to their ancestors and to the water cycle of our planet.

Our Mikvah is a Jewish sacred space designed to support Jewish ritual life and the personal transitions of individuals and families in the Jewish community. Traditional reasons for visiting the Mikvah, such as the mitzvah of immersing monthly, becoming a bride or a groom, making dishes kosher, conversion, and preparing spiritually for Shabbat or holidays are welcome here. Equally encouraged are creative reasons to immerse, usually around major life transitions. Examples of this type of visit are varied but include reaching a milestone birthday, marking the end of a period of mourning, becoming a bar or bat mitzvah, or celebrating an anniversary.

Immersion in the mikvah is a highly personal and spiritual experience and we respect the privacy and dignity of each person who uses the mikvah. The following guidelines are meant to create the best conditions for safe and meaningful immersions and to articulate the values and principles of our progressive Mikvah at Adas Israel.

1. Conversions

- a. The conversion immersion is the first immersion, i.e. there are no trial runs.
- b. The Av Bet Din determines the halachic parameters of each conversion.
- c. Conversions must take place within earshot of the sponsoring clergy, except if the Bet Din has already taken place and the immersion had to be delayed due to menstruation or a Chatitzah that is unacceptable to the sponsoring rabbi. In such

a case, the person may make an individual appointment to come back to complete the process.

- d. A witness is required for all conversions. A person of another faith may be also present but isn't qualified to serve as a witness.
- e. Any adult Jewish person of the same gender may serve as a witness for another person's immersion. Gender may be self-defined.
- f. In the case of a transgender conversion candidate, the Av Bet Din, in consultation with the candidate, will share appropriate details with the Mikvah Director for the purposes of bringing sensitivity and privacy to the candidate's experience.
- g. Babies must be at least 6 weeks old before being immersed.

2. Chatzitzot (Barriers on the Body)

- a. In the case of conversion, Chatzitzot are determined by the Av Bet Din.
- b. For any immersion other than a conversion, the immersee (and not the Mikvah Guide) is responsible for finding a personally meaningful level of physical preparation.
- c. Mikvah Guides are encouraged to call the Mikvah Director or the Mara d'Atra with questions.
- d. Examples of Chatzitzot that have been deemed acceptable: ileostomy bag sealed with waterproof tape, prosthetic eyeball, rings that cannot be removed other than by cutting, and ear plugs.

3. Timing of Women's Visits

- a. Those who menstruate must wait until at least 7 nights have passed since the beginning of menstruation before immersing in the Mikvah, regardless of the reason for their immersion.

4. Tzniut/Privacy Concerns

- a. The Mikvah is a holy space that upholds appropriate standards of behavior.
- b. One adult at a time in the water.

- c. If a child is converting, one Jewish parent may be in the water with them but other than that, there's never more than one person in the water. A frail individual may require assistance getting in and out of the water and the extent of the assistant's entry into the water will be discussed and determined ahead of time.
- d. Babies and children should be prepared for their immersion the way that their parents bathe them at home. Before directing a parent and a child to shower together, first ask them if they do so at home. If yes, then proceed. If not, then have the parent shower first, put on their bathing suit, and then assist the child in showering.
- e. Taking pictures/video is permitted in the case of a baby or child immersion but the parent in their bathing suit must give their permission first.
- f. For any immersion other than a conversion, the immersee may decide whether they would like a witness or not.

5. Mikvah Guides

- a. For any immersion other than a conversion, the immersee is responsible for finding a personally meaningful level of physical preparation. The Mikvah Guide's role is to facilitate both halachic and extra-halachic immersions.
- b. Our Mikvah Guides may not sign a conversion certificate or serve on a bet din. The Guide may sign something attesting to Mikvah use only.
- c. Mikvah Guides are trained to provide safe, welcoming and discreet experiences for Mikvah visitors. Outside of situations where they are directly providing this service, Guides may not share the identity of visitors, their narratives, or their physical features. Guides who are unable to uphold these standards will be asked to volunteer in a different capacity.

6. Miscellaneous

- a. Tattoos are acceptable.
- b. Humans and dishes are the only things that may go in the Mikvah.
- c. Anyone may tour the Mikvah for any reason.
- d. Everyone must shower before entering the Mikvah, even if they showered just prior to arriving.