



A menstruant doesn't leave her menstrual state until she immerses. Even if a number of years have passed, she remains forbidden until entering a proper *mikveh*.

—*Sbulchan Aruch* 197:1

DEFINITION

The *mikveh* is the single most important ingredient in the purification process. Yet only its most external component, the *mikveh* pool itself, is visible to the eye². The information in this chapter is presented for the reader's information, although familiarity with it is unnecessary for immersion to be totally valid.

The word *mikveh* translates as a *gathering of water*. A *mikveh*, or a gathering of water, refers to naturally³ falling rain water which has *gathered* in one place⁴. Our sages fixed a minimum amount to this body of water as being that which the full body of a person can immerse in at one time. (This is the size of the *otzar*; as explained further.) Once this amount of gathered water exists, any amount of drawn tap water⁵ can be added (or connected through pipes) to it and then this water too becomes "*kosher*" for immersion.

THE TECHNIQUE

Since it would be unhygienic to leave this gathered water all year long and impractical to repeatedly change it on a weekly or monthly basis, the following is done. At the time of construction, two separate components are built into the *mikveh*. On the bottom⁶ or side (depending on which style *mikveh* is being built) is a saving pool—*otzar*, which is connected (through an aperture(s)) to the ritual bath—that part of the structure which is visible to our eye. This ritual bath is filled on a regular basis with clean tap water which, as stated above, thereby⁷

2 Its distinction from a bath or pool is likewise not readily discernible.

3 As distinguished from drawn tap water called "*mayim she'uvim*".

4 See Directions for *Mikveh* Construction, printed in the end of *Sbulchan Aruch Admur Hazoken* parts 5-6. See a letter from the *Rebbe* printed in *Sharei Halacha Veminbag* page 108.

5 As distinguished from naturally fallen rain water.

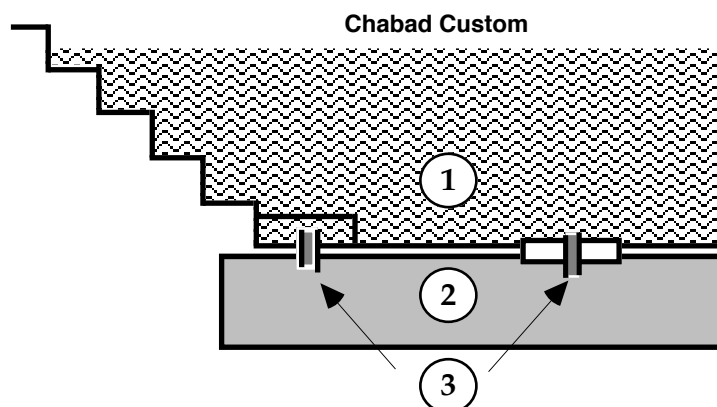
6 *Chabad* custom is to build the *otzar* below; others build it alongside.

7 By virtue of its contact with the *otzar* pool of rain water.

becomes “*kosher*.” It is in this part of the structure that the woman immerses.

CHABAD CUSTOM

In *mikvebs* where the *otzar* is beneath the pool, the tap water immediately becomes “*kosher*” when it comes into contact with the *otzar* water⁸, this contact continues through two apertures⁹ in the floor. Each aperture is one *tefach* by one *tefach*¹⁰.



The above diagram shows:

1) The ritual bath in which the tap water is filled; 2) The *otzar*—pool of rain water; 3) The connecting apertures. According to *Chabad* custom there are two connecting apertures, generally¹¹ one under the steps and one in the middle of a separating piece.

ADVANTAGES

There are a number of *balachic* advantages to this type of *mikveh*. One lies in the reduced intermingling of the *otzar* (rain water) and the ritual bath (tap) water. As stated, the *otzar* water

8 Note that the “*otzar* cover” is removed when filling the *otzar* with rain water, see Directions for *Mikveh* Construction (paragraph four), printed in the end of *Shulchan Aruch Admur Hazoken* (parts 5-6).

9 Note that this is classified as *otzar zriyah*. “Regarding the *mikveh*: you wrote that they made an additional *otzar* on the side of the *mikveh* so that there should be a *otzar zriyah*. In truth according to the *Rebbe Rashab’s mikveh*, which is a ritual bath constructed above the *otzar* (according to the directions recorded by Rabbi Y. Landau) this is the best type of *otzar zriyah*, and it is superfluous to then have an *otzar hashbakab*...” Part of a letter printed in *Sharei Halacha Veminbag* page 107.

10 Directions for *Mikveh* Construction, printed in the end of *Shulchan Aruch Admur Hazoken* parts 5-6.

11 See *Mivneh Mikvaos Vebeksharom* page 51.

validates the tap water. To do so there must remain a certain minimum amount of original naturally falling rain water. This design facilitates that, since the heated ritual bath water naturally remains above the cooler *otzar* water¹². This difference in temperature, since warm water rises, helps reduce intermingling of water¹³.

Secondly, this custom requires two apertures through which contact between the two waters is made, unlike other *mikvebs*, which require one. This is to ensure that even if dirt built up in one of them, making it less than the minimum diameter, the second one remains intact¹⁴.

An additional requirement of this type of *mikveb* is that the *otzar* is twice the size normally required in other *mikvebs*, further ensuring that the minimum amount of rain water is constantly present.

The above represents *balachic* advantages inherent in the design of this *mikveb*. *Mikvebs* of other designs, if under constant orthodox supervision are, of course, totally acceptable.

OTHER POSKIM

In *mikvebs* with the *otzar*¹⁵ on the side, a round hole, approximately three inches in diameter, is unplugged. This contact¹⁶ allows the “gathering of rain water” from the *otzar* to make the tap water *kosher*. The saving pool’s waters touch the *mikveb*’s waters and validates them for immersion. This hole should remain unplugged during immersion¹⁷. If, however, it was not

12 This negates the *Ravid’s* contention “*nason sab v’natol sab*,” *Shach* 201:63. See *Darchei Tesbuva* 201:128. See Directions for *Mikveb* Construction, printed in the end of *Sbulchan Aruch Admur Hazoken* parts 5-6.

13 “I was amazed to read what I saw in relation to the directions to construct the *mikveb* above the *otzar*. These instructions are from the holy and glorified *Rebbe Rasbab* (the father of the previous *Rebbe*, my father-in-law) may the memory of the holy *tzaddik* be blessed etc. may his soul rest in heaven and protect us, who sacrificed himself for the *mitzvab* of *mikveb*, as was known in the last generation. Also the greatest Torah giants of his generation discussed these subjects with him at length.
“Anyone who is expert in the laws of *mivkebs* knows that there are many advantages to this construction style (the ritual bath above the *otzar*)...” Part of a letter from the *Rebbe* printed in *Sharei Halacha Veminbag* page 106.

14 See Directions for *Mikveb* Construction, printed in the end of *Sbulchan Aruch Admur Hazoken* parts 5-6.

15 *Mehaber* 201:52, 53.

16 Another type of *otzar* sees tap water being opened directly into the *otzar*. From there, the *otzar* overflows into the bath. This is called *otzar zriyab* “growing/ascending.” These are less common requiring additional supervision ensuring a *balachically* required minimum rain water remains present. With time this could present a *balachic* obstacle and is a problem according to the *Rambam Hilchos Mikvoas* 4:7 and the *Raved* brought in *Shach* 201:63.

17 *Shach* 201:112.