

 Temple Studies:  
Ritual Purity 

by  
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Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD [YHVH]?  
Or who may stand in His holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,  
Nor sworn deceitfully.  
*Psalm 24:3-4*

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## ~ Introduction ~

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,  
And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,  
For correction, for instruction in righteousness,  
That the man of God may be complete,  
Thoroughly equipped for every good work.  
// Timothy 3:16-17

The subject of Temple/Tabernacle studies is often a controversial one in the Christian world. Many believe that because *Y'shua* prophesied the destruction of Herods' Temple, that Temple studies is now a moot point. After all, they reason, the Believers themselves are now the Temple and therefore there is no need for a physical building and physical rituals. Therefore, they say, studying about such matters is a waste of time.

This point of view misses some key points. First of all, it fails to recognize that the priesthood of *Y'shua* is a different priesthood from that of the Levitical priesthood. *Y'shua's Melchizedek* priesthood (which functions in the Heavenly Tabernacle) is the Spiritual priesthood of which the Levitical priesthood is an earthly shadow. Even so, when it existed God made His earthly dwelling there in the physical Tabernacle:

**"And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."** (Ex. 25:8-9)

Both priesthoods have their place in God's scheme of things: The *Melchizedek* priesthood of *Y'shua* does not replace the Levitical priesthood for they have different functions. As a result, the two priesthoods complement one another. Still more to the point is this direct command found in the book of Ezekiel which clearly states that Messianic Believers should be studying these matters:

**"Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern."** (Ezek. 43:10)

Temple study is relevant for today, especially for the descendants of the "lost sheep" of the House of Israel, in order to show them (us) their sins. Exactly how this works is unclear, but God says to do it. Therefore, we here at *Hebrew Roots* are addressing this command through a series of *Temple Studies* articles. We believe that by doing so, God will bless us with a fuller understanding of the sins of the House of Israel and, in so doing, will cause each one of us to draw closer to Him in spirit and in truth.

The articles found in this booklet were written ten years ago to provide a basic understanding of ritual purity and the absolute necessity for a Tabernacle/Temple worshipper to appear before God in a ritually pure state. Since these are foundation topics, we have incorporated them into this new ongoing series called *Temple Studies*.

The first chapter (*River of Eden*) serves as an introduction to the subject by going back in time to the very beginning of mankind's history, showing the symbolism and spiritual importance of "living water" in God's Word. Chapter 2 (*Ritual Impurity*) discusses the various ways in which a physical human being can become ritually impure. Chapter 3 (*Ritual Cleansing*) shows how to eliminate contracted impurity and return to a state of physical purity. The last chapter (*Creating a Clean Heart*) steps out of the physical realm into the world of Spiritual Purity. All of the physical commands concerning ritual purity are intended to be instruction for helping the Messianic Believer in *Y'shua* achieve Spiritual Purity so that he/she can come before the Father in Heaven, through our High Priest and Mediator *Y'shua Hah Mashiach* (Yeh-shoe'ah Hah Mah-shee'ack = Jesus the Messiah), not only with clean hands and bodies, but also with a clean heart.

It is our hope that this booklet will be helpful in bringing each of you to a better understanding of the importance God places on Temple studies and the spiritual principles that can be learned from such study.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2011



## ~ The River of Eden ~

Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden,  
And from there it parted and became four riverheads.  
*Genesis 2:10*



Scripture is silent about what, if anything, existed in the physical prior to the creation account recorded in the first chapter of Genesis. All we know about the conditions previous to this event is that:

**"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** (Gen. 1:1)

Scientists tell us that the earth is very old, but they cannot agree on its age and there is no indication in Scripture as to when in time this original creation took place. Usually the scientific estimates run in the billions of years. Interestingly, within Scripture there is a hint that the original creation was brought down to destruction and that the beginning referred to in Genesis 1:2 is a re-creation of the earth. This becomes apparent by comparing two texts which contain the Hebrew word, *tohu* (toe'-who, Strong's #8414) which means: "wasteness, destruction, emptiness, nothing." Another Genesis 1:2 word used in combination with *tohu* is *bohu* (bow'-who, Strong's #922) which means: "emptiness, voidness." These two words are used to describe the state in which the earth existed prior to the action of God's Spirit:

**"And the earth was [became] without form [*tohu*], and void [*bohu*]; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."** (Gen. 1:2a)

Another important word in this passage is the English word 'was,' which, in Hebrew, is *hayah* (hah-yah, Strong's #1961). It has a variety of meanings: "to be, become, come to pass, exist, happen." According to a note in E.W. Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, this word is sometimes translated 'became.' It is his (and our) opinion that, in Genesis 1:2, this word should be translated 'became' instead of 'was.' However, even if we were to accept the usual translation of *hayah* into 'was,' this rendering still does not preclude the possibility that the earth existed in a different state prior to that time. In other words, the earth could well have been in a state able to sustain some type of non-human life prior to the events recorded in Genesis. The fossil record seems to bear this out. Whatever the case concerning the original creation, when one considers the time frame from which the book of Genesis was written the earth was, at that time, *tohu* and *bohu*.

A passage out of the book of Isaiah indicates that the original creation was not one which left the earth in a state of *tohu*:

**"For thus saith the LORD [YHVH] that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain [*tohu*, without form], he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD [YHVH]; and there is none else."** (Isa. 45:18)

We believe the original creation of the earth was destroyed by some undefined cataclysmic event (possibly the rebellion of Satan) and was thereby rendered *tohu* (without form) and *bohu* (void), and that what is recorded in Genesis is the re-creation of the earth into a new state of purity which was maintained until the 'fall.' This purification was accomplished by the covering of the entire face of the earth with water:

**"...darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."** (Gen. 1:2b)

No matter how one interprets the first two verses of Genesis, the Scriptures are clear that the original earth was completely immersed in water. One way of understanding this watery state is that it allowed the earth to be cleansed of impurity.

### ~ Access to God ~

When God created *Adam* (Ah-dahm') and *Chava* (Hah-vah' = Eve) they were sinless. He placed them in *Gan Eden* (Gahn Eh-dehn' = Garden of Eden) which was specially prepared for them. It was a ritually pure or clean place. This was especially important because God does not dwell in places that are unclean. It was in this pure setting that God was able to commune directly with man and vice versa, for there was no sin nor uncleanness there:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."** (Gen. 2:15)

However, this state of purity did not last long, for *Adam* and *Chava* sinned, thereby bringing impurity into the garden:

**"And they heard the sound of the LORD [YHVH] God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD [YHVH] God among the trees of the garden."**

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'"** (Gen. 3:8-9)

The original intimacy, based upon purity, was now broken because *Adam* and *Chava* had partaken of the forbidden fruit and sin had entered *Gan Eden*. In addition, as long as they had access to *Gan Eden* it was still possible for *Adam* and *Chava* to eat of the Tree of Life and thereby gain eternal life. Had they been allowed to eat of that tree, it would have permitted them to exist in their *tamei* (tah-may' = impure or unclean) state forever. For these reasons, it became necessary for God to expel them from the garden.

God, being set-apart from sin, could not exist in a close relationship with man in his fallen, sinful, and *tamei* (unclean) state.

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' -- therefore the LORD [YHVH] God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken."**

**"So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."**  
(Gen. 3:22-24)

Once this had been accomplished, *Gan Eden* was again *tahor* (tah-hohr' = pure), for the impurity of *Adam* and *Chava* had been removed. They were driven out and not able to return because the entrance to the garden was guarded by a flaming sword and multiple angelic beings (*Cheruvim*).

~ The River of Eden ~

Set in the midst of the creation narrative is a short passage about the River of Water which flowed out of *Gan Eden*:

**"Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates."** (Gen. 2:10-14)

From a literary standpoint this passage seems to be totally out of place. The verses preceding it speak about the garden which God had planted and which contained both the *Tree of Life* and the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Likewise, the verses immediately following the *River of Eden* passage relate how God took *Adam*, placed him in the garden and gave him instruction concerning the trees. This passage could easily be lifted out of the text and not even be missed. However, because it is part of Scripture it must be there for a purpose, for the *River of Eden* is not mentioned in any other place.

Since this river is said to be the 'head' of four great rivers in that area, it is possible to view it symbolically as the source point for all the fresh water on the earth. Therefore, one way of viewing this anomaly is that it was God's method of indicating how a connection could still be made with *Gan Eden* through water. Thus, a link can be established between the Waters of Eden and the *mikvah* (meek'-vah) or Immersion Pool, which took on great importance after the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt.

Tradition tells us that following *Adam's* expulsion from *Gan Eden*, he would sit in this River, which emerged from Eden, in an attempt to spiritually reconnect with the paradise which he had lost.

~ The Earth Becomes Unclean ~

Because of the sin of *Adam* and *Chava* (and the sins of their descendants outside of *Gan Eden*) the earth became *tamei* (unclean), an unfit dwelling place for God's presence. Thus, pre-flood humanity was cut off from having an intimate relationship with their Creator, first of all because of *Adam's* sin but also because of their own wickedness. Thus, everyone was rendered *tamei* (impure):

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the**

**thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD [YHVH] was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."** (Gen. 6:5-6)

However, certain men from this era truly did seek God's will and thereby gained a degree of holiness (set-apartness) from mainstream humanity. It seems probable that every generation of that age had at least one righteous man with whom God had a close relationship. The most well known of these righteous men was Noah:

**"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD [YHVH]."** (Gen. 6:8)

God's solution to the problem of *tumah* (too-mah' = uncleanness or impurity), which resulted from sin and wickedness, was to purify the earth once again with water:

**"So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.' ...**

**"And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die."**  
(Gen. 6:12-13, 17)

~ Impurity Survives ~

The flood eliminated the people who had caused the earth to become corrupt and impure, and a new beginning was made. In this way it was much like the original re-creation:

**"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'"** (Gen. 9:1)

The earth remained in its newly purified state for only a short time before sin reentered, causing the earth to once again become *tamei* (unclean). The first impurity listed after the flood was perpetrated by Noah's son Ham who:

**"... saw the nakedness of his father ..."** (Gen. 9:22)

One can only imagine what other sins might have been committed between that event and a later time when the population had increased greatly and people had become totally self-centered:

**"Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.**

**"And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'"** (Gen. 11:3-4)

The basic problem at this time was the self-centeredness of the people. They wanted to make a name for themselves, instead of honoring the Name of *YHVH*.

However, destruction of the earth by water was no longer God's answer for an impure and sinful world, for God had made a covenant with Noah which precluded a similar destruction in the future:

"Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

"And God said: 'This *is* the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth.'

"And God said to Noah, 'This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth.'" (Gen. 9:11-17)

### ~ Working With Individuals ~

Following the flood, God once again went about dealing with specific individuals rather than with the entire race of people. However, this time it was with the intent of developing a subset of the human race with whom He would work most closely. This process was begun when God called *Avraham* (Ahv'-rah-hahm = Abraham) to be the father of the faithful, and He continued that process with *Yitzhak* (Yetz'-sock = Isaac), and *Ya'acov* (Yah ah'-cove = Jacob). All of God's dealings with these three Patriarchs was for the purpose of developing a family or nation of people with whom He would have an intimate relationship.

Eventually, this family grew and became known as the children of Israel. They numbered over 600,000 men of fighting age when God brought them out of Egypt. When the older men, women, and children were added in, the total must have climbed into the millions.

However, the earth was still filled with impurity and sin. Egypt was a particularly impure place, teeming with pagan gods and impure practices. The children of Israel were living in the land of Egypt and, because of where they lived, they also were in a state of impurity. How then could they be brought into a *tahor* (purified) state?

### ~ Working With a Nation ~

It took several months of plagues for God to prepare both the Pharaoh and the children of Israel for their departure from Egypt. When the time came, God provided two cleansing agents: the sacrifice of the Passover Lambs (as a means of providing protection for the firstborn) and a symbolic immersion in the Red Sea. It could be said that whatever impurities the children of Israel had contracted while living in Egypt were washed clean when they entered the sea in faith:

**"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual**

**Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ [Messiah]."** (I Cor. 10:1-4)

As can be seen from this passage, the cloud which accompanied them was also a type of immersion or baptism, which kept them in a state of purity while they traveled to their marriage ceremony as a pure and chaste bride.

### ~ Israel and Gan Eden ~

Once God's marriage to the children of Israel had been accomplished, a way had to be established so that the people could commune with God. This was not easy, since the children of Israel were still physical and susceptible to the many degrees of *tumah* (uncleanness) that existed in the world. In addition, they still possessed the *yetzer hara* (yeht-zehr' hah-rah' = evil inclination), which had entered the human race when *Adam* and *Chava* sinned back in *Gan Eden*. Because they were not totally *tahor* (clean and pure) like God, the children of Israel had to be given a way in which they could obtain the *tahor* (pure) state, even if only temporarily, so they could experience a marriage relationship with their Creator.

The vehicle which God used to effect marital contact was through the Tabernacle. However, the people could not simply enter into the Holy of Holies (where God dwelt) as they pleased. In fact, that kind of direct contact was only allowed once a year and then only by the descendant of Aaron who was designated as the High Priest. However, the average Israelites were allowed to come and observe the preparation of the offerings and participate in the community prayers if they were *tahor* (in a state of ritual purity).

*Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) was shown the design of the earthly Tabernacle. It was a copy of God's real Tabernacle which is in heaven. God told *Moshe* that if the children of Israel would build this physical model, He would come and dwell with them:

**"And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."** (Ex. 25:8-9)

Once again men would have a place where they could come and commune with God. This time it was the Tabernacle of God built by the children of Israel. The interesting thing about the design which *Moshe* was shown is that it also resembled *Gan Eden*, the garden from which man was banished. According to Joshua Berman, in his book *The Temple, Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*:

"The relationship between Eden and Sanctuary can be understood if we perceive the garden narrative as a postulate concerning the environment in which *man can enter into communion with the divine*.

"The notion that man can relate to God only by entering His province stands in contrast to popular Western conceptions of the relationship between man and God. Many will claim that they believe in God and relate to him on their 'own terms.'" (p. 22)

The privilege of having the Tabernacle in their midst was based on a condition, just as *Adam* and *Chava* had a condition

they had to meet in order to stay in *Gan Eden*. That condition was obedience:

**""If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ...**

**""I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.""** (Lev. 26:3-4, 11-12)

However, if the children of Israel did not follow the commandments given by God, they were promised to receive a series of curses as punishment, including banishment from an intimate relationship with God in the Tabernacle:

**""But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: ...**

**"I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.""**  
(Lev. 26:14-16, 32-33)

However:

**"...if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (II Chron. 7:14)**

This correlation between *Gan Eden* and the land of Israel is clearly set forth by the prophet Isaiah:

**"For the LORD [YHVH] will comfort Zion,  
He will comfort all her waste places;  
He will make her wilderness like Eden,  
And her desert like the garden of the LORD [YHVH];  
Joy and gladness will be found in it,  
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody." (Isa. 51:3)**

#### ~ Gan Eden and the Tabernacle ~

The spiritual center for the children of Israel was, first of all, the Tabernacle and later on the Temple. If there was a similarity between the land of Israel and *Gan Eden* the correlation was even stronger between it and the Sanctuary. Joshua Berman points out a number of ways in which the language used to describe *Gan Eden* is identical to the language used to describe the Sanctuary. First of all, in *Gan Eden* the voice of God is said to be *mithalekh* (meet-thah-lehkh') or 'moving about:'

**"And they heard the voice of the LORD [YHVH] God walking [*mithalekh*] in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD [YHVH] God amongst the trees of the garden." (Gen. 3:8 KJV)**

The same term is used to describe God's presence in the Tabernacle:

**""I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk [*mithalekh*] among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.""**

(Lev. 26:11-12)

Berman comments on a second way in which *Gan Eden* and the Sanctuary correlate:

"In Eden, man's responsibilities are *le-ovedah u-leshomerah* -- to work the garden (*avodah*) and to preserve or guard the garden (*shemirah*). The activities of the Priests and Levites in the Sanctuary are likewise referred to as *avodah* and *shemirah*." (p. 26)

**"It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD [YHVH] will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep [*shamar*] this service [*avodah*]." (Ex. 12:25)**

Ezekiel chapter 28 contains a picture of the covering *HaSatan* wore while in *Gan Eden*. It contained nine precious stones that were later used in the Breastplate worn by the High Priest:

**"You were in Eden, the garden of God;  
Every precious stone was your covering:  
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,  
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,  
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold." (Ezek. 28:13)**

These precious stones were found among the twelve stones of the Breastplate which depicted the twelve tribes of Israel. In addition, gold was used for each setting:

**"And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings.**

**"And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes." (Ex. 28:17-21)**

Water is significant to both *Gan Eden* and the Sanctuary. One connection in this respect comes from the name *Gihon*, which was one of the four rivers that emerged from the water that flowed out of *Gan Eden*. *Gihon* is also the name of the spring which supplied water to the Tabernacle and the Temple. The Tabernacle of David was set up directly over the *Gihon* spring. A second water connection is found in the Psalms:

**"They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,  
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures [*adanekha*]." (Psalm 36:8)**

God's House is the Tabernacle, while the word 'pleasures' comes from the Hebrew *adanekha* (ah-dah-neh-khah') which means: "Your Edens." Thus, the abundant pleasures received

by the worshippers in God's House were said to be like drinking the waters of *Gan Eden*.

In *Gan Eden* there was a *Tree of Life* whose fruit, if eaten, would impart eternal life. In Proverbs the law of God is personified as Wisdom, which is obtained from the *Torah*. Wisdom is then referred to as a *Tree of Life*:

**"My son, do not forget my law [torah] ,  
But let your heart keep my commands [mitzvot];  
For length of days and long life  
And peace they will add to you.  
...  
"She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,  
And happy are all who retain her." (Prov. 3:1-2, 18)**

The tablets of the testimony, the Ten Words a.k.a. Ten Commandments (which represent all of the commandments of the *Torah*), were contained within the Ark of the Covenant which was placed in the Sanctuary.

A further connection between *Gan Eden* and the Sanctuary are the *Cheruvim* (Kheh-rue-veem'). They were the angelic beings set to guard the entrance to *Gan Eden* so that *Adam* and *Chava* could not return and eat of the Tree of Life. The very next appearance they make in Scripture is when two of them appear on top of the Ark of the Covenant, where they protected the *Torah*, as represented by the two tablets of stone containing the Ten Words (commandments), which were placed inside:

**"And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat." (Ex. 25:18)**

The *Cheruvim* were also embroidered onto the curtain that hung between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies:

**"You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim." (Ex. 36:31)**

The appearance of the *Cheruvim* on the veil constituted a visual warning to the people that God forbade access to the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, except by the High Priest on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

Another correlation between *Gan Eden* and the Sanctuary was that both had their entrances on the east. Therefore, to meet God, whether He was in the Garden or in the Sanctuary, the worshippers had to face west, with their backs toward the rising sun. Today, in the Jewish community, the worshipper faces in the direction of the Temple Mount, as King Solomon indicated should be done:

**"And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place [the Temple]. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive." (I Kings 8:30)**

Finally, there is the connection with death. Once *Adam* and *Chava* had contracted death (as a result of eating the forbidden fruit) they could no longer stay in *Gan Eden*, for death could have no place in *Gan Eden* because that was God's earthly dwelling place at that time. Likewise, once the Sanctuary had become God's new dwelling place on earth, it was necessary that anything which was connected with human

death be banned from there as well. Once again Joshua Berman comments:

"If the phenomenon of death is reflective of spiritual failure, then there can be no place for death within the precincts of the Temple. Indeed, all forms of death, or even associations with death, are proscribed from the Temple complex. The Torah addresses these within the laws of ritual impurity, laws whose halakhic relevance is exclusively within the context of eligibility to enter the Temple complex. The things that render a person ritually impure and unfit to enter the Sanctuary nearly all involve things that have died or are associated with death, such as contact with a dead insect, carcass, or corpse. A leper may not enter the Sanctuary, his skin is considered dead." (pp. 33-34)

### ~ Summary ~

God's first recorded dwelling place on earth was *Gan Eden* (the Garden of Eden). There He was able to meet and commune with the apex of His creation, *Adam* and *Chava*. This divine communion could only take place as long as the man and woman (and their offspring) remained in a state of ritual purity, free from death in any form.

Tradition teaches that when God created *Adam* and *Chava* they were clothed in the Radiance of God and needed no physical clothing. However, once sin had entered the world, they knew their nakedness and God expelled them from *Gan Eden*, for they were now in the process of dying because they had become *tamei* (unclean) through sin.

Thus began the long journey by mankind to find a way back into intimate communion with *HaShem* (*YHVH*). However, through ignorance, all of man's efforts failed for the natural man did not understand that worship must not involve pagan and idolatrous practices. It was through God's design and plan that a new way was established by which divine communion could once again take place. The vehicle chosen by God for this communion was the *avodah* (service) of the Tabernacle, and later on the Temple. The people chosen to participate in this divine communion were the children of Israel, while the method used was through the Levitical Priesthood.

Striking parallels can be found between *Gan Eden* and the Sanctuary (Tabernacle). These can best be understood as a confirmation that God desired man to understand, it was the Sanctuary service which He had established that would satisfy the longing within men's hearts to become purified of all uncleanness and to once again experience a communion similar in type to *Gan Eden*.

As Believers, we understand that all of this typology points to a time in the future when the Messiah will return and make the earth to be At One with Him. At that time we will have come full circle, and the conditions that prevailed in *Gan Eden* (where man had direct contact with God) will once again occur:

**"And in that day it shall be  
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,  
Half of them toward the eastern sea  
And half of them toward the western sea;  
In both summer and winter it shall occur.**



**And the LORD [YHVH] shall be King over all the earth.**

**In that day it shall be --**

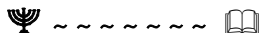
**'The LORD [YHVH] is one,**

**And His name one.'"**

(Zech. 14:8-9)

As we await that day, may we all learn how to live lives of purity, so that we may draw ever closer to our Father in heaven through our Husband and Savior, *Y'shua HaMashiach*:

**"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus [Y'shua], by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."** (Heb. 10:19-22)



## ~ *Ritual Impurity* ~

Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things;  
They have not distinguished between the holy and unholy,  
Nor have they made known *the difference*  
Between the unclean and the clean;  
And they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths,  
So that I am profaned among them.  
*Ezekiel 22:26*



nciently, people lived in a world filled with ritual.

Ritual added meaning to the difficult lives of the people, giving them a sense of connection with their gods, their society, and the earth from which came their physical sustenance.

This inherent need for rituals, especially when it comes to worship, was placed in mankind by the Creator of the universe. However, in our modern world, many people go through their daily lives without giving thought to any type of ritualistic observance. In our opinion, this lack of ritual observance has been instrumental in casting an air of spiritual impermanence into the lives of many people, causing them to feel alienated from each other and from society as a whole. This may be why people who do not know the Creator (*YHVH*) are so easily led into pagan (New Age) worship, for it gives them a sense of being a part of something that is larger than themselves.

Given man's inherent longing for spiritual connection through ritual, it should come as no surprise that when God established proper worship among the children of Israel it was a service of ritual.

## ~ Temple Service ~

Much of Temple Service was centered in the court of the Priests around the *Mitzbeach Olah* (Meets-bay-ach' Oh-lah' = Altar of Burnt Offering) where various daily rituals were performed based primarily upon the type of sacrifice being offered. In addition, there were other rituals and prayers performed in the *Macom Kodesh* (Mah-comb' Koh-dehsh' = Place Holy) in connection with the lighting of the *Menorah* (Meh-noh-rah' = the seven-branched candlestick), the *Shulchan Lechem* (Shool-cahn' Leh-khem' = Table of Showbread), and the *Mitzbeach Ketorech* (Meets-bay-ach' Keh-toe-rehkh' = Altar of Incense). Once a year, on *Yom Kippur* (Yohm Key-poor' = Day of Atonement), a special ritual was performed in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Koh-dehsh' Hah Koh-dah-sheem' = Holy of Holies).

## ~ The Holiness of God ~

The Hebrew word *Kodesh* (Koh-dehsh', Strong's #6944) is often translated into the English word 'holy.' A companion Hebrew word is *Kadosh* (Kah-dohsh', Strong's #6918). Both these words have the basic meaning of being, "sacred or set apart." Of all things that exist, God is the most Holy or set apart:

**"Also with the lute I will praise you --  
And Your faithfulness, O my God!  
To You I will sing with the harp,  
O Holy [set-apart] One of Israel.** (Psalm 71:22)

The Scriptures indicate that since our Creator is Set-Apart (Holy), He does not wish to mingle with man unless man too is in a holy, pure, or set-apart condition. Thus, in order for a person to have contact with God at the Temple, man had to appear for worship in a state of ritual purity.

In Hebrew such a person was said to be *tahor* (tah-hohr') or 'clean.' The opposite of the *tahor* or 'clean' person was one who was said to be *tamei* (tah-may') or 'unclean.' Ritual impurity or 'uncleanness' (*tumah* in Hebrew), created a wall of separation between the *tamei* (impure) person and God. It could be obtained from a variety of sources, some of which were a natural part of a person's life, while others might come from inadvertent physical contact with another person who was already *tamei* (unclean), or even from objects which were *tamei*. Because of the ease with which a person might come in contact with someone or something *tamei* (unclean), great care had to be taken to avoid them, especially if one wished to worship God at the Temple.

The precise manner in which a person might become *tamei* (ritually impure) is spelled out in Scripture. Additional and more detailed information can be found in the *Mishnah* (Mees'-nah); the oral traditions as recorded by the Jewish sages.

#### ~ Uncleanness ~

The first mention in Scripture of anything being *tamei* (unclean) is found in the book of Genesis when *Noach* (No-akh' = Noah) was given instruction on how to load the ark:

**""You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; ...""** (Gen. 7:2)

Although this verse indicates that at least portions of the *Torah* commands concerning clean and unclean were known prior to the flood, the codification of these commands did not come until after the Exodus.

The primary Scriptural source for information concerning what makes a person *tamei* (ritually unclean) is found in the book of Leviticus: The three main causes of ritual impurity are:

- ◆ Leprosy of body, clothing or home.
- ◆ Dead bodies of certain animals and humans.
- ◆ Discharges from the sexual organs.

#### \* Leprosy \*

Chapter thirteen of Leviticus expounds on the varieties and symptoms of leprosy:

**"And the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:**

**'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his**

**body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. The priest shall examine the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him, and pronounce him unclean.'"**

(Lev. 13:1-3)

Leprosy was not considered to be a communicable disease in Temple times. Rather, it was believed to be the result of some unrepented sin in the life of the person so afflicted. Thus, healing from leprosy could only take place once the person had fully repented of their sin.

The reason lepers were not allowed to be in contact with others is because they were *tamei* (ritually impure), and by touching another person they passed on their *tumah* (too-mah' = uncleanness). It was also for this reason that lepers were not allowed within the city of Jerusalem, for it was assumed that many of the people in the city were there because they wished to worship at the Temple and needed to avoid contact with anyone or anything that might render them *tamei* (ritually unclean). (For more information about Leprosy and its role as a punishment for sin, see *Hebrew Roots* Issue 97-5.)

#### \* Dead Bodies \*

Another major source of ritual impurity was coming in contact with the dead body of any unclean animal:

**""By these [*unclean animals*] you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening: *The carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean.***

**""And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on *all fours*, those are unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. Whoever carries *any such* carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It is unclean to you.'""** (Lev. 11:24-28)

Likewise, the dead carcass of certain creeping things could also cause ritual impurity:

**""These also shall be unclean to you among the creeping things that creep on the earth: the mole, the mouse, and the large lizard after its kind; the gecko, the monitor lizard, the sand reptile, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. These are unclean to you among all that creep. Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening.'""** (Lev. 11:29-31)

The carcass of any clean animal that had died of itself (i.e. not been properly slaughtered for food) also rendered a person *tamei* (unclean):

**""And if any animal which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until evening. He who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean**

until evening. He also who carries its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening."''' (Lev. 11:39-40)

Eating the flesh of a clean animal which died naturally also caused a person to become *tamei* (unclean):

**'''And every person who eats what died naturally or what was torn by beasts, whether he is a native of your own country or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.'''** (Lev. 17:15-16)

Contact with a human corpse also rendered a person *tamei* (ritually unclean). In fact, it was considered to be the highest degree of impurity that a person could contract:

**'''He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.'''** (Num. 19:11)

Anyone who touched a dead body and did not properly purify himself before going to worship, defiled the Tabernacle or Temple:

**'''Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD [YHVH]. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.'''** (Num. 19:13)

Not only did touching a corpse render a person *tamei* (unclean), anyone who entered the tent of a dead person also became *tamei* (unclean) for seven days:

**'''This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; ...'''** (Num. 19:14)

In addition, all open food vessels in the tent of a dead person became *tamei* (unclean) because of the presence of the corpse:

**'''...and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean.'''** (Num. 19:15)

Finally, even touching a grave would render a person *tamei* (unclean):

**'''Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.'''** (Num. 19:16)

This last prohibition was the reason for the practice in *Y'shua's* (Jesus') day of painting the sepulchers white so that pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the Festivals could easily identify them and stay far away. It also became the source of the expression of disgust *Y'shua* used for hypocritical people:

**'''Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.**

**'''Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear**

**righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness..'''** (Matt. 23:26-28)

### \* Bodily Discharges \*

The third major category of things which caused ritual impurity have to do with discharges from the sexual organs. The most obvious of these was the monthly cycle of a woman:

**'''If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. Everything that she lies on during her impurity shall be unclean; also everything that she sits on shall be unclean. Whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. And whoever touches anything that she sat on shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.'''** (Lev. 15:19-22)

According to Scripture, impurity from the monthly cycle lasted for seven days, even if the discharge ended prior to that time. However, if a woman had an issue of blood outside of her regular cycle, an additional purification time of seven days was required after the issue ceased:

**'''If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, other than at the time of her customary impurity, or if it runs beyond her usual time of impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity. She shall be unclean. ...**

**'''But if she is cleansed of her discharge, then she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean.'''** (Lev. 15:25, 28)

As we already saw, anyone (male or female) who came into direct contact with a menstrous woman, or who sat on a couch she had used, would also be rendered *tamei* (unclean) for the remainder of the day. However, if a man were to have sexual relations with such a woman, the infraction was more severe:

**'''And if any man lies with her at all, so that her impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.'''** (Lev. 15:24)

An issue of semen also rendered a man *tamei* (ritually unclean), but the cleansing period was only one day:

**'''If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his body in water, and be unclean until evening.'''** (Lev. 15:16)

Sexual relations rendered both the man and woman *tamei* (ritually unclean):

**'''Also, when a woman lies with a man, and there is an emission of semen, they shall bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.'''** (Lev. 15:18)

There were other ways in which a man could become *tamei* (ritually unclean). If he had an issue of something other than semen he became impure:

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them:  
"When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge *is* unclean. ...

""And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in running water; then he shall be clean."" (Lev. 15:2)

*\* Impurity From Other Sources \**

In addition to these three main categories, it was possible to become ritually unclean from other things as well. One of them was childbirth:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying,

'Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall then continue in the blood of *her* purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

""But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of *her* purification sixty-six days."" (Lev. 12:1-5)

Although the specified 'unclean' period was either seven days or fourteen days (depending on whether the child was a boy or a girl), the woman was still not allowed to participate in Temple worship until either thirty-three days or sixty-six days had passed.

Eating the flesh of any unclean creature also rendered the individual *tamei* (ritually impure):

""For I am the LORD [YHVH] who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

""This *is* the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten."" (Lev. 11:45-47)

Ritual impurity could also be transferred to clothing, vessels, and utensils used for eating. Anyone using such implements would also become *tamei* (ritually unclean):

""These also *shall be* unclean to you among the creeping things that creep on the earth: the mole, the mouse, and the large lizard after its kind; the gecko, the monitor lizard, the sand reptile, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. ...

""Anything on which *any* of them falls, when they are dead shall be unclean, whether *it is* any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack, whatever item *it is*, in which *any* work is done, it must be put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean.

""Any earthen vessel into which *any* of them falls you shall break; and whatever *is* in it shall be unclean: in such

a vessel, any edible food upon which water falls becomes unclean, and any drink that may be drunk from it becomes unclean. And everything on which *a part of any such* carcass falls shall be unclean; *whether it is an oven or cooking stove, it shall be broken down; for they are unclean, and shall be unclean to you.*

""Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean."" (Lev. 11:29-30, 32-36)

Finally, there was the principle of secondary uncleanness, when a person who was *tamei* (ritually unclean) transferred his impurity to another through direct physical contact or by mutual contact through an intermediate object:

""Whatever the unclean *person* touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches *it* shall be unclean until evening."" (Num. 19:22)

While impurity could be transferred from one person or object to another person or object, the reverse was not true. If something or someone was 'holy' (set-apart for service to God) they (or it) could not project their 'holiness' to another object or person:

"Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?'"

"Then the priests answered and said, 'No.'

"And Haggai said, 'If *one who is unclean because of a dead body* touches any of these, will it be unclean?' So the priests answered and said, 'It shall be unclean.'" (Haggai 2:11-13)

The lesson to be learned is that the people were required to be circumspect when coming before God in worship.

~ Other Impurities ~

There are allusions in Scripture to additional sources of impurity. One of these would be uncircumcised men:

"Awake, awake!

Put on your strength, O Zion;

Put on your beautiful garments,

O Jerusalem, the holy city!

For the uncircumcised and the unclean

Shall no longer come to you." (Isa. 52:1)

Another source would be countries other than Israel. This belief sprang out of the story in the book of Joshua where the tribes of *Reuven*, *Gad*, and the half tribe of *Menashe* built an altar on the east side of the Jordan River at their border with the land of Canaan. They had received special permission from Moshe to settle there, despite his initial opposition:

"And when they came to the region of the Jordan which *is* in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan -- a great, impressive altar. ...

"Then they came to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them, saying,

"Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD [YHVH]: "What treachery *is* this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD [YHVH], in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the LORD [YHVH]? Nevertheless, if the land of your possession is unclean, then cross over to the land of the possession of the LORD [YHVH], where the LORD's [YHVH's] tabernacle stands, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the LORD YHVH], nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides the altar of the LORD [YHVH] our God." (Josh. 22:10, 15-16, 19)

A third thing that was considered to cause impurity was idols:

"And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.'"

(Gen. 35:2)

**"You will also defile the covering of your graven images of silver,  
And the ornament of your molded images of gold.  
You will throw them away as an unclean thing;  
You will say to them, 'Get away!'"**

(Isa. 30:22)

~ Impurity Is Not Sin ~

One thing should be clear by this time, it was not a sin to be *tamei* (ritually unclean). Many of the things that made a person *tamei* (ritually unclean) were simply unavoidable. Every healthy woman of childbearing age had a monthly cycle unless she was pregnant. When a person died, someone had to prepare the body and bury it. Creeping creatures got into houses and sometimes died among the pots and pans. They had to be removed and the vessels had to be cleansed. Sexual relations between married couples rendered both parties unclean and yet it was a direct command from God:

**"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"**

(Gen. 1:28)

~ When Ritual Impurity Becomes Sin ~

Ritual impurity becomes sin if someone brought their *tumah* (uncleanness) into the Temple. This was true even if the person was unaware at the time that he was *tamei* (ritually unclean):

**"Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether it is the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty. Or if he touches human uncleanness -- whatever uncleanness with which a man may be defiled, and he is unaware of it -- when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty." (Lev. 5:2-3)**

This passage is understood to mean that even if a person was unaware or had forgotten that he had become *tamei* (ritually unclean) and went to the Temple, that action became a sin, for he had brought ritual impurity into the place where God dwelt. Therefore, it was required that he bring a special offering in order to be forgiven. On the other hand, if a person became *tamei* (unclean) and went into the Temple on purpose, knowing he would defile it, there was no sacrifice available to purge that sin. It could only be forgiven through complete repentance and only then could an efficacious offering be brought to the Sanctuary.

The offering required for inadvertently defiling the Temple through ritual impurity was called the *asham* (ah-shahm = Trespass Offering). The value of the *asham* varied depending upon the ability of the sinner to pay. (See Lev. 5:6-13). In addition, he would be liable to pay the costs for anything in the Temple which might need to be cleansed or replaced due to his inadvertent sin.

~ Rituals of Purification ~

There were a variety of rituals that had to be performed in order for impurity to be purged from an individual. Once those rituals were accomplished that individual was once again allowed to participate in Temple worship.

In all purification rituals, time is an important element. The amount of time that needed to elapse before *tahor* (ritual purity) could be achieved depended upon the degree of uncleanness which had been contracted. For lesser degrees of *tumah* (uncleanness) the person needed only wait until sundown (the beginning of a new day). For corpse *tumah* (uncleanness) a period of seven days was required, while the leper had to be declared free from his disease before the seven day purification period could even begin.

Immersion was required for almost all of the purification rituals (this will be covered in the following article) and in many cases the clothes of the individual also had to be washed, while greater degrees of *tumah* (uncleanness) required the offering of a sacrifice at the Temple.

According to tradition, purification of clothing was accomplished by immersion in water. However, contaminated (defiled) cooking or eating utensils had to be purified by being passed through a fire, unless the fire would ruin them, then they could be cleansed through immersion. On the other hand, contaminated earthenware vessels (which were unglazed in those days) had to be broken, as did contaminated (defiled) ovens, which were probably made of clay.

Some of these principles were derived from the instruction given to the members of the army after the children of Israel had defeated the Midianites in war:

**"And as for you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' hair, and everything made of wood."**

"Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, **'This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD [YHVH] commanded Moses: Only the**

gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, and it shall be clean; and it shall be purified with the water of purification. But all that cannot endure fire you shall put through water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp." (Num. 31:19-24)

~ Ashes of the Red Heifer ~

The most serious type of impurity was caused by a dead body. This was known as 'corpse uncleanness' and could only be purged by the sprinkling of the individual with water that contained the ashes of the red heifer sacrifice. The red heifer sacrifice was a special sin offering in which the entire animal was burned and the ashes saved for later use. When purification needed to be accomplished, a very small quantity of ashes were placed in water and sprinkled upon the person being cleansed:

""And for an unclean *person* they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. The clean *person* shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean."" (Num. 19:17-19)

In practice, a portion of the ashes of the red heifer were sent to various places throughout the nation of Israel so that the Priests who lived in those areas could perform the red heifer purification rites locally.

Today, 'corpse uncleanness' cannot be eliminated because the ashes of the red heifer no longer exist. For this reason, the Rabbis declare that everyone on earth is ritually unclean because all have come in contact with a dead body or a grave sometime during their lifetime.

A side effect of many purification rituals was that the priest doing the cleansing would sometimes become *tamei* (unclean) as a result of performing the ceremony:

""It shall be a perpetual statute for them. He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening."" (Num. 19:21)

~ Y'shua and Purity ~

According to the *Brit Chadasha*, Y'shua was tempted in all the same ways in which we are tempted but He never submitted to the sinful urge:

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15)

While Y'shua never committed sin in His life (He kept the *Torah* perfectly, as it was intended to be kept), there are

numerous times when the Scriptures clearly indicate He had become *tamei* (ritually unclean) due to the people around Him or the actions which He initiated. The most obvious example is when the woman with the issue of blood touched His garment:

"And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem [*kraspedon*]\* of His garment. For she said to herself, 'If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.'" (Matt. 9:20-21)

This woman had been in a state of ritual impurity for twelve years. Everything she touched became *tamei* (ritually unclean) and anyone who touched her, or anything she had touched, also became *tamei* (ritually unclean). For this reason, when she touched Y'shua's garment He also became *tamei* (ritually unclean):

"Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.

"And Jesus [Y'shua], immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My clothes?'" (Mark 5:29-30)

Another time when Y'shua would have experienced ritual impurity was when He healed a leper:

"And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'

"Then Jesus [Y'shua] put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

"And Jesus [Y'shua] said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" (Matt. 7:2-4)

The act of touching a leper made Y'shua *tamei* (unclean) and therefore unable to worship at the Temple until He had performed the proscribed ritual of purification. In addition, this passage is informative in that Y'shua instructs the leper to show himself to the Priest and perform the necessary rituals, including an offering of sacrifice, which was required by *Torah* for one who had been healed of this affliction:

"And on the eighth day he [*the leper*] shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil.

"Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before

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\* The portion of Y'shua's garment which the woman touched was the *kraspedon* (Strong's #2899). It is defined in *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* as:

"the extremity or prominent part of a thing, edge, skirt, margin; the fringe of a garment; ... The Jews had such appendages attached to their mantles to remind them of the law, acc. to Num. xv. 37 sq."

What the woman touched on Y'shua's garment was His *tzit-tzit* (Strong's #6734), the specially tied fringes which were to be placed on the corners of the garments to remind them of the commandments of the *Torah*. (See Num. 15:37-40).

the LORD [YHVH], at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ...

**"But if he is poor and cannot afford it, then he shall take one male lamb as a trespass offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, a log of oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons, such as he is able to afford: one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering. He shall bring them to the priest on the eighth day for his cleansing, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, before the LORD [YHVH]. ...**

**"And he shall offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, such as he can afford -- such as he is able to afford, the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him who is to be cleansed before the LORD [YHVH]."**  
(Lev. 14:10-11, 21-23, 30-31)

Thus was the instruction concerning the cleansing of lepers. This is a wonderful example of how Y'shua taught the observance of the teachings of the *Torah*.

#### ~ Some Thoughts On Impurity ~

To the casual reader, the instructions concerning ritual impurity might seem somewhat strange. Why, for example, should perfectly normal bodily functions (such as sexual relations within marriage) or the eating of a permitted meat from an animal that has not been properly slaughtered, render a person temporarily *tamei* (ritually unclean)?

While we do not pretend to have all the answers to the questions that might be raised concerning this subject, we have noticed two connecting themes. All of the things that rendered a person unclean seem to have been connected with either death, or blood. Since all animal life is dependent upon the proper circulation of blood in order for life to be sustained, one might narrow it down even further and say that all the instructions are, in some way, related to issues of death.

This analogy is clear when it comes to contamination via dead animals or people. It is less clear when it comes to bodily functions or leprosy. However, if one thinks of the spilling of male semen as potential life that will not have an opportunity to take root within the female egg, this too can be seen as linked to death (or nonlife). Likewise, while the act of sexual relations may produce new life, most often it does not. As for the leper, he was essentially a living dead man, since he was not only banned from Temple Worship but was also cut off from the camp of Israel and thereby from general society as well.

God is life inherent. He is the polar opposite of death, which is found only in the realm of the physical world. Since mankind was made in the image of God, it was important that when the worshipper came to Him at the Temple he did so in a state of *tahor* (purity), devoid of any contamination from death. Only in that completely pure and living state could a true meeting between man and God take place.

#### ~ Summary ~

The Scriptural instructions concerning ritual purity teach us that our God is a 'holy,' set-apart God. Ritual purity laws were designed to inform us that -- as far as Temple worship was concerned -- He will not involve Himself with anything or anyone who is in a state of *tumah* (ritual impurity), for He is the complete embodiment of *tahor* (purity). It is important to remember that being *tamei* (ritually unclean) did not necessarily mean that sin had occurred. In most cases it had not. Rather, it was a condition that reminded the people of their temporal, physical nature.

Today, the principles of ritual impurity teach us that in order to become totally pure we must be changed from flesh to spirit, from mortal to immortal. Only then will death be eliminated:

**"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. ...**

**"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"**  
(I Cor. 15:42-44, 53-54)

From the standpoint of the *Torah* and in relationship to Temple Worship, the things that made the children of Israel *tamei* (ritually unclean) in their day still make humans *tamei* today. In fact, the Rabbis teach that today all the world is in a state of *tumah* (ritual impurity or uncleanness), including the nation of Israel. This may be the reason why a purification by fire must one day take place:

**"But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ...**

**"Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

**"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation ..."**  
(II Pet. 3:7, 11-15a)

With all of this in mind, let us hold fast to the faith that we have been given.



## ~ Ritual Cleansing ~

And Aaron and his sons  
You shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting,  
And you shall wash them with water.  
*Exodus 29:4*



Most Christians probably believe, as we once did, that baptism was instituted by the person known in Scripture as John the Baptist. What a shock it was to learn that the physical act of immersion in water was an ancient practice mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) and that it continues to be practiced within the tenets of Judaism to this very day. The purpose of this article is to trace the practice of immersion in Scripture and tradition so that we might gain a more full understanding of its meaning and purpose.

### ~ The First Immersion ~

The first recorded immersion in Scripture is found in the book of Exodus, when the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai:

**"In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai."** (Ex. 19:1)

First *Moshe* (Moh-shay' = Moses) was called up to the mountain to speak with God:

**"And Moses went up to God, and the LORD [YHVH] called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."** (Ex. 19:3-6)

*Moshe* brought this message to the elders of the children of Israel and they took the question before all the people: "Will you agree to obey the voice of God and keep His covenant?" Their answer was unanimous:

**"So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD [YHVH] commanded him.**

**"Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD [YHVH].**

**"And the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.' So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD [YHVH]."** (Ex. 19:7-9)

At this time no details as to what God expected of the children of Israel had been spelled out. The Hebrew expression the children of Israel used in responding to God was: *Na'aseh V'Nishmah*. The literal meaning of this expression is: "We agree even before we have listened," for it was clear that additional instruction (the terms and conditions) would be coming their way as a part of the covenant. They wanted to express that they were willing to enter into a covenant relationship with God and that their hearts were willing to do whatever God asked.

In this pending covenant, God agreed to take the children of Israel as a covenant people and the people agreed to do whatever He said. Once this was established it was time to prepare the Israelites for the great event of actually hearing the voice of God and receiving the Ten Commandments:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.'** (Ex. 19:10-11)

The command to "wash their clothes" is understood to mean that they were also to immerse their bodies in water. This expression is used twenty-nine times in the Hebrew Scriptures and in every instance it is associated with a process which will render the person *tahor* (tah-hohr' = ritually clean) before God. In sixteen of these instances this expression is accompanied by another expression which gives a direct command to immerse, or to "bathe ... in water."

Thus, according to tradition, the children of Israel were given three days in which to wash their clothes and immerse themselves in water, in physical preparation for their marriage ceremony to *HaShem* (Hah-Shem' = The Name or YHVH) at Mount Sinai. It is interesting to note that it is still the custom for a Jewish bride to immerse herself in a *mikvah* the night before her wedding.

In addition, the children of Israel were required to abstain from sexual relations with their wives during this period so as not to again become *tamei* (tah-may' = ritually unclean), for sexual relations would produce that effect:

**"Also, when a woman lies with a man, and there is an emission of semen, they shall bathe in water, and be unclean [*tamei*] until evening."** (Lev. 15:18)

It is very important to understand that the children of Israel had to be in a ritually pure state (*tahor*) before God would come down into their presence:

**"So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives.'"** (Ex. 19:14-15)

### ~ Temple Practice ~

The ritual of immersion was practiced by the children of Israel throughout all levels of their society. For example, every priest had to be immersed in a *mikvah* (meek'-vah = a ritually kosher immersion pool) prior to beginning his daily work of



service at the Temple. So did the Levites who were on sacred duty that day. In addition, every worshipper who came to the Temple (whether male or female) was required to immerse in specially constructed *mikvaot* (meek-vah-oat' = the plural form of *mikvah*) before even coming onto the Temple mount.

Many of those ancient Temple *mikvaot* have been excavated by archaeologists and their ruins can be seen today at the base of the southern steps leading up onto the Temple Mount. In the first century, the southern gates comprised the main entrance to the Temple compound and were the gates through which all of the worshippers entered. Like all worshippers, *Y'shua* and His disciples would have been required to immerse themselves in these *mikvaot* prior to entering the Temple compound.

It is unfortunate that today most tour groups visiting Jerusalem do not go to this particular location. Thus, the average Holy Land visitor leaves Israel having gained no knowledge at all about the ancient practice of immersion and its relationship to New Testament baptism.

### ~ Method of Immersion ~

As the word immersion implies, entering a *mikvah* involved complete immersion in water. Tradition teaches that every part of the person's body had to be covered by the water, including all of the individual's hair. However, immersion in a *mikvah* was not to be used for removing physical dirt from the body; that was to have been accomplished by bathing prior to immersion. The purpose of the immersion was to provide a physical ritual which expressed a spiritual process; the cleansing of ritual impurity from the individual being immersed.

In order for water to touch every part of the body, immersions were performed in the nude with a witness of the same sex present to make sure the person being immersed went completely under the water. The witness was not allowed to enter the water of the *mikvah* along with the individual being immersed for, according to *halakah* (hah-lah-kah' = the way one walks or traditional practice), that would have invalidated the immersion. Instead, they had to view it from the edge of the pool. The one exception to this rule was if the immersion were taking place in a body of water that had a shallow shore line, such as a river. In that case, a witness standing on the shore might not be able to see if the person being immersed went completely under water. Only in such instances could the witness enter the water with the person being immersed. However, the witness was not allowed to touch the person, for that too would invalidate the immersion. An example of this practice is found when Philip 'baptized' the Ethiopian eunuch:

**"So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him."** (Acts 8:38)

In this case Philip served as the witness to make sure that the eunuch went completely under water and also to testify that the purpose of the immersion was the eunuch's expression of faith that *Y'shua* was the promised Messiah and his personal Savior.

### ~ Mikvah Requirements ~

The Hebrew word *mikvah* (Strong's #4723) has two basic meanings: "expectation, hope, confidence," and "a congregation, gathering together." It is the latter definition which is used to designate the gathering together of water into a pool for the purpose of supplying a place for ritual cleansing.

The *mikvah* is specifically mentioned in Scripture as a place that is *tahor* (tah-hohr' = clean):

""**Nevertheless a spring [mayan] or a cistern [bor], in which there is plenty [mikvah = a gathering] of water [mayim], shall be clean, ...**"" (Lev. 11:36)

There are a number of important words in this passage.

- ◆ *Mayan* (mah-yahn,' #4599) refers to water from a spring. This is considered to be the purest grade of water for immersion purposes.
- ◆ *Bor* (bore, #953) refers to a cistern which would normally be the holding place for rain water. Such water is also considered to be appropriate for immersion but of a lesser grade than spring water.
- ◆ *Mikvah* (meek'-vah, #4723) the collecting place of water suitable for the purpose of ritual immersion.
- ◆ *Mayim* (mah-yeem,' #4325) water of any type.

From this passage the early Rabbis developed the *halakah* which determined that both spring and rain water were suitable for ritual immersion. In their view, an additional source for a *mikvah* is a river or lake, provided that the majority of its water comes from natural springs and not from runoff.

All of the rules concerning what constitutes a kosher *mikvah* are found in the *Oral Torah*, which is set forth in the *Mishnah*. Believers are not Scripturally bound to live under the rules of the *Oral Torah*, nevertheless, much can be learned about first century practices by studying these traditions.

All of the first century *mikvaot* which have been uncovered in Israel, through archaeological excavation, are considered to have been properly constructed based on modern standards. In other words, the requirements for a kosher *mikvah* have not changed in over two thousand years. (Remember that *Y'shua* used the *mikvaot* that were outside the southern gates of the Temple Mount.)

It is not the purpose of this article to cover all of the rules pertaining to a kosher *mikvah* as prescribed by the Rabbis. However, there are six conditions which are considered necessary before a body of water can be designated as a *mikvah*:

- ◆ "The Mikvah must consist of water. No other liquid can be used.
- ◆ "The Mikvah must either be built into the ground, or be an integral part of a building attached to the ground. It cannot consist of any vessel that can be disconnected and carried away, such as a tub, vat, or barrel.

- ◆ "The water of a Mikvah cannot be running or flowing. The only exception to this rule is a natural spring, or a river whose water is derived mainly from springs.
- ◆ "The water of the Mikvah cannot be drawn. That is, it cannot be brought to the Mikvah through direct human intervention.
- ◆ "The water cannot be channeled to the Mikvah through anything that can become unclean. For this reason, it cannot flow to the Mikvah through pipes or vessels made of metal, clay, or wood.
- ◆ "The Mikvah must contain at least 40 *Sa'ah* (approximately 200 gallons)."

(From: *Waters of Eden*, by Aryeh Kaplan, NCSY/Orthodox Union, New York, 1976, p. 51.)

### ~ Mikvah Symbolism ~

Rituals are, by nature, symbolic, and the *mikvah* is no exception. It is said that everything in the spiritual world has a physical counterpart. This concept is given support by a passage from the book of Hebrews:

**"Now *this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. ...***

**"For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, '*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*'"**  
(Heb. 8:1-2, 4-5)

The earthly Tabernacle (and later on the Temple) were but copies of the Sanctuary which exists in heaven to this very day. Every utensil and item of furniture used in the Temple, plus every ritual performed during worship, in some way pictured the Sanctuary in heaven. Likewise, the physical symbolism of the *mikvah* is meant to teach spiritual truths.

First of all, the waters of the *mikvah* picture a womb. Just as an unborn child is immersed in the fluids of the mother's womb, so the person being immersed is surrounded by the waters of the *mikvah*. Just as the unborn child must depend entirely upon the mother for its life support, so an individual immersed in the *mikvah* is totally dependent upon God for life support. This is why a person coming up out of the *mikvah* immersion is said to be as one who is 'born again.' It is like a rebirth:

**"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus [*Y'shua*] by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'**

**"Jesus [*Y'shua*] answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'**

**"Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'**

**"Jesus [*Y'shua*] answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"**  
(John 3:1-8)

Surely Nicodemus, being a Pharisee, must have known about the 'born again' symbolism of the *mikvah*. However, he pressed *Y'shua* for understanding about what being 'born again' meant in a spiritual sense. *Y'shua's* answer was that he should look forward to a spiritual rebirth.

Similar to this symbolism is that of immersion being like death, for if one stays under water too long, they will die physically. To the Believer, as well as the Jew, such symbolism points to the time of the resurrection, when:

**"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."**  
(I Cor 15:51-52)

Another symbol is that of seed being planted in the ground. What comes up out of that seed is a new creation, containing the genetic makeup of the seed that was planted. The Apostle Paul used this symbolism as well, when he spoke of the resurrection:

**"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?'**

**"Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain -- perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body."**  
(I Cor. 15:35-38)

In all of these analogies, the underlying principle is that immersion in the *mikvah* represents rebirth and renewal.

### ~ Living Waters ~

The water contained in a *mikvah* is called *mayim hayim* (my-eeem' high-eeem') or 'living waters' The Hebrew word *mayim* is Strong's #4325, and it means: "*water, or waters.*" The Hebrew word *hayim* is the plural form of Strong's #2416, and it means: "*1) living, alive 1a) green (of vegetation) 1b) flowing, fresh (of water).*"

The term *mayim hayim* (living waters) did not originate with *Y'shua*. It is a common Hebrew term that comes straight from the Old Testament and it too is laced with symbolism:

**"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns -- broken cisterns that can hold no water.'"**  
(Jer. 2:13)

**"O LORD [YHVH], the hope of Israel,  
All who forsake You shall be ashamed.  
'Those who depart from Me  
Shall be written in the earth,  
Because they have forsaken the LORD [YHVH],  
The fountain of living waters.'" (Jer. 17:13)**

It is clear from these two passages that the source of our spiritual 'living waters' is our Creator (YHVH). Thus, when we go into the physical 'living waters' of the *mikvah*, we are symbolically putting ourselves into the hands of our Creator (YHVH) who is the "fountain of living waters."

There is another very interesting aspect to the passage found in Jer. 17:13. The English word 'hope' is translated directly from the Hebrew word *mikvah*. Thus, another meaning of the word *mikvah* is 'hope.' In this instance, our Creator (YHVH) becomes our 'hope' as well as our *mikvah* in which we find "The fountain of *mayim hayim* or 'living waters.'"

As Believers, we recognize that it is the job of our Messiah, *Y'shua*, to lead us to the place where we can partake of the spiritual 'living waters:'

**"They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'" (Rev. 7:16-17)**

Today, the place to which *Y'shua* leads His people is into the body of His Bride, for it is to the Bride whom the Betrothal Gift of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Rue'-ach Hah Koh-dehsh' = the Holy Spirit) has been given:

**"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus [Y'shua] stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"**

**"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus [Y'shua] was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39)**

Thus today, Believers (in *Y'shua*) are the vessels in which the spiritual 'living waters' have been poured.

In the Millennial kingdom that will be established when *Y'shua* returns, living waters are prophesied to flow forth freely from Jerusalem:

**"And in that day it shall be  
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,  
Half of them toward the eastern sea  
And half of them toward the western sea;  
In both summer and winter it shall occur.  
And the LORD [YHVH] shall be King over all  
the earth.  
In that day it shall be --  
'The LORD [YHVH] is one,'  
And His name one." (Zech. 14:8-9)**

In that day, all the earth will be cleansed (both physically and spiritually) through the living waters coming from the throne of the King of kings in Jerusalem.

### ~ The Purpose of Ritual Immersion ~

In the first century, the local Synagogue was not considered to be a house of worship, but a *Beit Midrash* (Bait Meed-rahsh = House of Study). If an individual wanted to join others in worship he made a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. However, an individual could only attend Temple Worship in a state of ritual purity -- he had to be *tahor* (clean). To purposely appear before God at the Temple in a ritually impure (*tamei*) state caused that individual to become *karet* (kah-reht') or 'cutoff' from the 'camp' of Israel:

**"But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD [YHVH]. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean [*tamei*]," (Num. 19:20)**

The reason a ritually unclean (*tamei*) worshipper was banned from the Temple, was so that he would not defile the House of God through his impurity. The same was true of the Priests and Levites whose primary purpose was to conduct the *avodah* (ah-voh-dah' = service of the Temple).

Therefore, the main reason for being immersed was to provide a means by which the worshipper could be rendered *tahor* (ritually clean). In some cases, other rituals also had to be performed prior to the ritual of immersion, such as the sprinkling of the person who had 'corpse uncleanness' with water that contained the ashes of the red heifer. The extent of the purification ritual depended upon the degree of *tumah* (two-mah' = uncleanness) which had been contracted.

The ritual of immersion signified an individual's change of status. This was especially important to the Priests and Levites who were officiating at the Temple, although it had relevance to the common worshipper as well. An example of an immersion for change of status occurred when the Priests went on Temple service duty in the morning. After sleeping in a room in the Temple compound, their first act upon rising was to run to the special *mikvah* provided within the compound and be immersed. This signified their change of status from ordinary off-duty Priest to one who was now consecrated to perform *avodah* (Temple service).

### ~ Personal Responsibility ~

It is interesting to note that, in practice, any Priest who had a nocturnal emission of semen, was required to disqualify himself from the *avodah* (service) the next morning. He would don a specially marked robe and exit out of a side door. Because of his attire, the other Priests would know not to come near him or touch him, otherwise they too would become *tamei* (ritually unclean) and would be disqualified from *avodah* that day.

A Priest so disqualified would perform the necessary purification ritual and, at sunset, would once again become

*tahor* (ritually clean) and eligible for *avodah* (service) the next day.

The worshipper, as well, had to disqualify himself from attending the *avodah* (Temple service) if he had somehow become *tamei* (ritually impure) prior to coming to the Temple.

If someone became ritually unclean or impure, their condition often lasted only for one day, provided they accomplished whatever ritual was necessary to absolve themselves of their impurity. The one unifying element in all ritual cleansing was contact with living water of the *mikvah*. However, in some cases it would require a seven day period during which they would have to accomplish a number of additional rituals including bringing offerings to the Temple.

~ Change of Status ~

In reality, all immersions serve to change a person's status. This includes immersion for ritual purity, for prior to such an immersion a person is *tamei* (ritually unclean), while after immersion they are raised to the status of *tahor* (ritual purity). A prime example of immersion being used to signify a 'change of status' occurred on *Yom Kippur* when the *Kohen HaGadol* (Koh-hehn' Hah Gah-dole' = The High Priest) officiated at the Temple. During the day's activities he was immersed in a *mikvah* five different times, and each time he went through a change of status.

The first immersion of the day was performed when the *Kohen HaGadol* dressed in the garments which he normally wore when performing *avodah* (service) at the Temple:

**"And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest. They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked."** (Ex. 28:4-6)

These garments were especially colorful and made the High Priest stand out from all of the ordinary Priests. On *Yom Kippur*, the High Priest wore these garments whenever he was performing *avodah* (service) outside of the Holy of Holies.

The High Priest's second *Yom Kippur* immersion took place when he was ready to go into the *Kodesh HaKodeshim* (Koh-dehsh' Hah Koh-dah-sheem' = Holy of Holies) for the first time. At that point he would change into pure white linen garments. This elevated his status from High Priest doing ordinary *avodah* (service) to High Priest prepared to do *avodah* in the Holy of Holies:

**"He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on."** (Lev. 16:4)

Prior to each immersion, the High Priest also had to wash his hands and feet at the *Kiyor* (Key-or'), the bronze washbasin:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying:**

**"You shall also make a laver [*kiyor*] of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it."** (Ex. 30:17-19)

The first special offering of the day was a bull which the *Kohen HaGadol* offered to make atonement for himself. It was when he took the blood of this bull into the Holy of Holies that he was first required to wear the special linen garments:

**"And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself. Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD [YHVH], with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil."** (Lev. 16:11-12)

After performing the required rituals inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Holy of Holies), the *Kohen HaGadol* (High Priest) would emerge, remove his linen garments, be immersed for the third time, don his regular garments, and resume the service outside. This immersion signified that his status had been lowered back to that of regular High Priest.

The fourth immersion took place later on when the High Priest was again required to enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of the Atonement goat, which was offered for the sins of the people of the nation of Israel:

**"Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness."** (Lev. 16:15-16)

Even though the children of Israel were constantly becoming *tamei*, God was willing to remain associated with them through the Tabernacle as long as the Sanctuary was cleansed (purified) once a year through the sprinkling of the blood of the Atonement goat on the Mercy Seat.

Upon exiting from this ritual, the *Kohen HaGadol* was immersed for the fifth time, changing his status, once again, back to that of normal High Priest sanctified to perform ordinary service:

**"Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there. And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people."** (Lev. 16:23-24)

~ Other Immersion Examples ~

There are many recordings of immersion found in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). A few are listed here to provide the reader with a sense of the importance of this ritual. Please remember that the expression "wash his clothes" was understood anciently to mean the individual also had to be immersed in a *mikvah*.

In the following passage a differentiation is made between a person who merely touches the carcass of a 'clean' animal and one who eats of it or carries it. In the first instance the individual was not required to wash his clothes or be immersed; he became clean when the sun went down. However, if a person carried the carcass, or ate of it, he had to perform the ritual of washing his clothes and being immersed:

**""And if any animal which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until evening. He who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. He also who carries its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.""** (Lev. 11:39-40)

Sometimes the performance of certain rituals rendered the officiating Priest *tamei* (unclean). When such was the case, he had to be immersed when the ceremony was completed. For example, on *Yom Kippur* two Priests, in addition to the *Kohen HaGadol* (High Priest), performed special immersions for this reason. The first was the man who drove the Azazel goat into the wilderness and the second was the Priest who burned the carcass of the bull and the Atonement goat:

**""And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. ...**

**""Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.""** (Lev. 16:26, 28)

Soldiers returning from war were considered to have become unclean and had to perform certain purification rituals which included immersion:

**""And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp.""** (Num. 31:24)

~ Y'shua and Immersion ~

It is evident from Scripture that *Y'shua* was immersed in the *mikvaot* located outside the Temple Mount, otherwise He would not have been allowed access to the Temple, and it is clear that on occasion He did visit there:

**"In that hour Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to the multitudes, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me.'" (Matt. 26:55)**

Since *Y'shua* also referred to the Temple as His 'Father's House,' it can also be assumed that He approved of the *avodah* (service) which was performed there, despite the personal corruption of some of the chief Priests:

**"And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!'" (John 2:16)**

In addition, as we have already seen, *Y'shua* would have performed ritual immersion, as required by the *Torah*, in order to rid His body of ritual impurity contracted on those occasions when He touched someone who was *tamei* (ritually unclean).

~ Summary ~

A survey of both the Scriptures and first century historical records of the prevailing practice, make it clear that immersion was both common and central to the practice of first century Temple worship. This practice included full immersion in an immersion pool, called a *mikvah*, which was filled with at least two hundred gallons of 'living water.' Immersion constituted a physical ritual that, when properly observed, rendered the individual being immersed *tahor* (ritually clean). Thus the physical ritual pictured a spiritual cleansing.

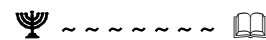
The waters of the *mikvah* symbolized a number of things, including: the womb, the grave, and a seed being planted in the ground in preparation for sprouting into newness of life. The process of coming up out of the *mikvah* is likened to being 'born again.'

The first immersion recorded in Scripture was when the children of Israel prepared themselves for meeting God at Mount Sinai. Once the Tabernacle was erected, immersion became a regular part of daily life. The main purpose of ritual immersion in a *mikvah* was to cleanse the participant of ritual impurity and/or to effect a change in their spiritual status.

There is much that we, as Believers, can learn from studying the immersion practices of the Israelites for:

**"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."**

(II Tim. 3:16-17)



## ~ Another Immersion: ~ ~ Creating a New Heart ~

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit,  
According to the tradition of men,  
According to the basic principles of the world,  
And not according to Christ [Messiah].  
*Colossians 2:8*



A common mistake made by Bible students is to assume that Judaism was a unified religion during the time when *Y'shua* lived. Such was not the case. In fact, it was quite divided in many respects.

There were two main sects that existed within first century Judaism, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducean sect was made up primarily of Priests and Levites, those who were responsible for the *avodah* (ah-voh-dah' = service) at the Temple. The Pharisees came primarily from the Rabbis who were in charge of the Synagogues, although their ranks included at least a few Priests and Levites. In addition to these two major sects there were a number of smaller and less well known sects such as the *Essenes*, the *Boathusians*, and the *Zealots*.

Also not generally known is the fact that the Pharisees were subdivided into various 'schools,' each headed by a well known Rabbi. The two most famous were the ultraconservative School of Shammai and the more liberal School of Hillel (these are relative terms, for both schools were 'conservative' compared to the Jewish Hellenists). Also within the sect of the Pharisees were several smaller 'schools,' each with its own head teacher or Rabbi.

In addition to the Sadducees and Pharisees, there were other 'sects' that sprung up under the leadership of charismatic teachers. One of these was led by a Rabbi from the *Galil* (Gah-lill' = Galilee) named *Y'shua ben Yoseif* (Yeh-shoe'-ah behn Yoh-safe' = Jesus the son of Joseph). He was neither a Sadducee nor a Pharisee, but one sent from God to be a light to all people and to bring to the world the knowledge of how to properly live by the precepts of the *Torah* (Toh-rah' = instruction or law of God). This is why His disciples referred to Him as the 'Word' or the 'Living Torah.' His following was small, only about one hundred and twenty at the time of His death.

### ~ Pharisee Influence ~

Historians tell us that despite their divisions, the Pharisees were by far the most influential sect among the people of Judea, even though Temple worship and the *Sanhedrin* (the seventy member Supreme Court of the Jews) were under the control of the Sadducees. The Pharisees probably had somewhat less influence in the *Galil* than in Judea.

The two Rabbis who originally headed the Schools of Hillel and Shammai were said to have been close friends,

although they differed sharply in their interpretations of some of the 613 *mitzvot* (meetz-vote = commandments) of the *Torah*.

Hillel and Shammai were both contemporaries of *Y'shua*, although Hillel died about 10 CE when *Y'shua* would have been in His early teenage years. It is quite probable that Hillel and Shammai were among the teachers whom *Y'shua* was conversing with at the Temple when He was a mere twelve years old:

**"Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."**  
(Luke 2:46-47)

These two schools were somewhat equal in influence until Hillel died. Then the more conservative School of Shammai began to gain prominence so that, by the time *Y'shua* began His ministry, the School of Shammai was by far the dominant force within the sect of the Pharisees. It is interesting to note that in every instance except one, when *Y'shua* condemned the Pharisees for their interpretation of the *Torah*, He was condemning the position of the School of Shammai and upholding the position of the School of Hillel. Thus, to say that *Y'shua* was completely opposed to the teachings of all the Pharisees is quite wrong.

### ~ The Focus of the Pharisees ~

Jacob Neusner is a well known contemporary Jewish author who has written dozens of books about the second Temple period. He has done extensive research on the teachings of both Hillel and Shammai and has concluded that nearly two-thirds of all their rules had to do with three things: 1) table fellowship 2) tithing and 3) ritual purity. Especially important to first century Jews were the family purity laws of *niddah* (nee-dah' = separation for the woman's monthly cycle). Likewise, nearly one-fourth of the *Mishnah* (Meesh'-nah = oral traditions), is devoted to the subject of purity.

Because of the stress laid upon ritual purity by the School of Shammai, many of the common people began to practice extensive purity rituals (including immersion) as a part of their everyday life, whether or not they were planning on going to Jerusalem for Temple worship. One of the rituals that impinged heavily upon the average Jew of the day was the ritual washing of hands before meals, which was also considered a form of immersion. Originally, ritual hand washing was a command given to the Priests as a part of Temple *avodah* (service):

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying: 'You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD [YHVH], they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it**

**shall be a statute forever to them -- to him and his descendants throughout their generations.'" (Ex. 19:19-21)**

The School of Shammai reasoned that God had originally intended all of the children of Israel to be Priests, and that they were in fact Priests within their own homes. Therefore, Shammai taught that all Jews should ritually wash their hands prior to eating each and every meal. The School of Hillel taught that it was only necessary for the common people to ritually wash their hands before a Festival meal.

*Y'shua* took issue with this teaching of the School of Shammai:

**"Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.**

**"Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.**

**"Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders [School of Shammai], but eat bread with unwashed hands?'**

**"He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:**

**"This people honors Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far from Me.  
And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."**

**"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.'" (Mark 7:1-8)**

It is important to understand the intense focus which the Pharisees of *Y'shua's* day placed upon ritual purity within the context of everyday life, even apart from Temple worship. Thus, among the observant Jews of that day, we find people striving to draw close to God through the practice of the ritual purity laws. For many of the people this was probably a meaningful and effective way to accomplish this goal, as long as it did not cause them to forget what *Y'shua* called the "weightier matters of the law" as exemplified in the above passage concerning the Pharisees and scribes:

**"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.'" (Matt. 23:23)**

#### ~ The Availability of Mikvaot ~

Every first century Synagogue had a *mikvah* (meek'-vah = kosher immersion pool). It was the practice (and still is to this day) that if a new congregation were being established and there was not enough money for both a meeting hall and a

*mikvah*, the *mikvah* would be built first so that the ritual purity laws could be observed by the congregation.

In the previous chapter in this booklet we have studied many of the reasons for which ritual purity immersion was required. In addition to those Scriptural injunctions, many (if not most) observant Jews would immerse themselves prior to a Festival. Some would also immerse on Friday afternoons as a means of spiritual preparation for the Sabbath day.

However, among the less observant, the practice of immersion would have been much less frequent. Some, perhaps, would only immerse themselves prior to *Yom Kippur*, considered within Judaism to be the most holy day of the year. Still others may have immersed prior to Passover as well. Some probably never immersed at all, unless they were actually going to attend one of the Pilgrimage Festivals at Jerusalem.

Exactly what the practice would have been in *Y'shua's* family is not known, but based upon their careful observance of the *Torah* commands, concerning the bringing of an offering to the Temple after the birth of their son *Y'shua*, it can be assumed that they were observant Jews and would have held to the teachings of the Pharisees. This is born out even further when one studies the life of *Y'shua's* half-brother *Ya'acov* (Yah ah'-cove = Jacob a.k.a. James -- as per the KJV), for according to Jewish history, *Ya'acov* was a very observant Jew and was so well respected by the Pharisees of his day that they referred to him as the 'Pious One' or the 'Just One.'

Certainly, as an adult, *Y'shua* was not hung up on practicing all of the unnecessary rituals laid upon the people by the School of Shammai. However, as we also have seen in a previous chapter, *Y'shua* would most definitely not have profaned the Temple by appearing there in a ritually impure state.

#### ~ Body Purity ~

One important point to remember is that the purity laws were designed to remove only ritual uncleanness from the body, for immersion by itself could not change the person's heart. However, it is likely that for most people a clean heart and a ritually pure body went hand in hand. Nevertheless, the function of ritual immersion was for outer ritual purity of the body, not inner spiritual purity. The individual going to worship at the Temple was required to cleanse his physical body of impurity so that he could physically attend the physical Temple and observe physical rites which had great spiritual meaning.

Both Scripture and tradition teach that during the time of the late second Temple (first century CE), there was much observance of ritual purity but often a lack of inner purity:

**"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.**

**"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear**

**righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."** (Matt. 23:25-28)

According to both Scripture and Jewish tradition, the first Temple (Solomon's) was destroyed because of idolatry and Sabbath breaking. Tradition teaches that the second Temple (Herod's) was destroyed because of *Lashon Hara* (Lah-shone' Hah-rah' = the evil tongue) which was expressed by a lack of love among the people.

~ Inner Purity ~

Into this setting came a man chosen by God to be a forerunner, preparing the way for *Y'shua's* message concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God and the forgiveness of sins. His name was *Yochanan* (Yoh'-khah-nahn = John). *Yochanan* was of the Priestly line. His father, *Z'kharyah* (Z' khah-ree-ah' = Zechariah), although elderly, was still serving as a Priest at the Temple when *Yochanan* was conceived. His mother, *Elisheva* (Eh-lee-she-vah' = Elizabeth) was also a daughter of Aaron. Thus, *Yochanan* was also eligible to serve as a Priest in the Temple. However, his calling was not to the Priesthood, but to serve in the spirit and power of *Eliyahu* (El-ee-yah'-who = Elijah), who was prophesied to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah:

**"Behold, I send My messenger,  
And he will prepare the way before Me.  
And the Lord, whom you seek,  
Will suddenly come to His temple,  
Even the Messenger of the covenant,  
In whom you delight.  
Behold, He is coming,"  
Says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts.**

...

**"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of  
the LORD [YHVH].  
And he will turn  
The hearts of the fathers to the children,  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,  
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."**

(Mal. 3:1, 4:5-6)

Two specific prophecies were given about *Yochanan*. The first was proclaimed by the angel *Gabriel* at the time of his appearance to *Z'kharyah* when he was offering incense in the Holy Place:

**"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.**

**"He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** (Luke 1:15-17)

The second prophecy was given by *Z'kharyah* himself, when *Yochanan* was circumcised and named on the eighth day of his life:

**"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;**

**For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,**

**To give knowledge of salvation to His people**

**By the remission of their sins,**

**Through the tender mercy of our God,**

**With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;**

**To give light to those who sit in darkness the shadow of death,**

**To guide our feet into the way of peace."**

(Luke 1:76-79)

~ Yochanan's Immersing ~

The people of Judea and the *Galil* were already well versed in the practice of immersion when *Yochanan* appeared on the scene some thirty years after these prophecies were given. As we have already noted, immersion was an integral part of the average observant Jew's daily life and it was occasionally practiced even by generally nonobservant people. Then, along came *Yochanan* who began calling sinners and slackers back to a life of purity. In addition, for those who were already practicing the ritual purity laws, he issued a call to full repentance of their personal sins.

Before going on, it is important to understand the Hebrew concept of repentance. Today, many think of repentance as feeling 'sorry' for something they have done, especially after being caught. While feeling 'sorry' is certainly an important step in true 'repentance,' it is really only the very beginning:

**"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. 'Repent [shuv], and turn [shuv] from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.'" (Ezek. 18:30)**

The Hebrew word for 'repent' is *shuv* (shoov, Strong's #7725) and it means: "to return, turn back." In the verse just quoted, *shuv* appears repeated, so instead of saying "Repent, and turn..." it literally says, "Turn and be made to turn." A word derived from *shuv* is *teshuvah* (teh-shoe-vah') which is used to describe the forty days preceding *Rosh HaShannah* (Rohsh Hah Shah-nah' = Feast of Trumpets) when observant Jews go through a period of introspection, searching their hearts for any sins which they may have committed and of which they have not already repented.

Here then is the essence of the message given by *Yochanan*; "Turn [*shuv*] from the lifestyle that separates you from your Creator (YHVH) and turn [*shuv*] back to obeying Him with all your mind, heart, and soul (being). Do not just go through the motions of ritual purity, instead, become pure from the inside out. Then the ritual purity commands will have great spiritual meaning as well."

Obviously, this message was not meant for those who were fully observant and living righteously before both God and man (their neighbor). Rather, it was directed towards those caught up in sin who had left their observance of the tenets of Judaism. *Yochanan's* task was to show those lost souls their need to return to a Godly lifestyle.



The immersion of *Yochanan* had three facets to it: 1) It was a public statement of repentance, 2) It symbolized the release of the person from their sins, and 3) It made the person's body ritually clean, unless they had 'corpse uncleanness' or were being healed of leprosy. In the later case, the individual would also have to be sprinkled with water which contained the ashes of the red heifer before they became *tahor* (ritually clean).

In order for all of this to be accomplished the individual also had to confess his sins. Whether this was done privately to *Yochanan*, publicly to those assembled, or silently to God is not known. However, confession was an important step in the process:

**"John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."** (Mark 1:4-5)

One of the reasons why so many of the *am ha aretz* (ahm hah ah-rehtz' = people of the land or common folk) responded to *Yochanan's* call was because he spoke to them about how to live their everyday lives in accordance with God's will:

**"So the people asked him, saying, 'What shall we do then?' He answered and said to them, 'He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.'**

**"Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you.'**

**"Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, 'And what shall we do?' So he said to them, 'Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.'" (Luke 3:10-14)**

*Yochanan's* preaching taught that an important step in the process of repentance was the demonstration of a change of heart. He encouraged the people to change their lives so they would begin to bear 'good fruit.' This principle is evident from what *Yochanan* said to some of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to observe what was going on:

**"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'" (Matt. 3:7-10)**

So the process was fourfold:

- ◆ Confession of sins,
- ◆ Repentance and turning away from those sins,
- ◆ Being immersed for the remission of those past sins, and

- ◆ Showing that real repentance had taken place by bearing 'good fruit.'

As already noted, *Yochanan's* immersion, besides being for the remission of sins, may also have served to render the individual ritually pure (unless, of course, there were other rituals they needed to perform in order to be cleansed of a particular type of ritual impurity as prescribed by the *Torah*).

The idea that the immersion of *Yochanan* was an outward purification of the body, which took place after the inward cleansing of the heart, is expressed by *Flavius Josephus*, the first century Jewish historian:

"Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the *Baptist*; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away, [or the remission] of some sins [only,] but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter V, No. 2. [Brackets by William Whiston, underlining ours.]

Please note, this was a totally Jewish event and was not a process of 'conversion.' The people who were coming to *Yochanan* were already a part of the Jewish family and religion. They were simply answering his call to 'return' (*shuv*) to a lifestyle that would be pleasing to God in every way, including Temple worship.

#### ~ Y'shua's Immersion ~

Given the four principles required for a person to be immersed by *Yochanan* leads to a question. Why then did *Y'shua* come to *Yochanan* for immersion if He lived a life that was totally without sin?

**"Then Jesus [*Y'shua*] came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?'**

**"But Jesus [*Y'shua*] answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him.**

**"When He had been baptized, Jesus [*Y'shua*] came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" (Matt. 3:13-17)**

We believe this event is best explained by the Apostle Peter, who wrote that the act of being immersed is literally a public pledge to obey God:

**"This also prefigures what delivers us now, the water of immersion, which is not the removal of dirt from the body, but one's pledge to keep a good conscience toward**

## **God, through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah.**

(I Pet. 3:21 CJB)

*Y'shua*, being without sin, was not immersed for the forgiveness of sin. Rather, He was immersed to publicly express His pledge to remain without sin. In this way, He fulfilled His calling. At the same time, He presented Himself before His Father for public identification.

### **~ Yochanan Was Questioned ~**

When the common people began to flock to join in the immersion of *Yochanan*, it was only natural that the religious authorities should seek to find out what was going on and whether it might be a threat to the established religion of the day. The religious authorities were especially touchy in Judea, where there had been numerous radicals trying to gather a following for the purpose of driving out the Roman occupation forces and declaring an independent Jewish state, as had been done in the days of the Maccabees. They wanted to make sure that *Yochanan* was not such a person, since the Romans allowed the Jews to practice their religion as long as they remained peaceful.

First came a contingent of Priests and Levites:

"Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you? He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ [*Messiah*].'

"And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.'

"Then they said to him, 'Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?'

"He said:

**'I am "The voice of one crying in the wilderness:**

**Make straight the way of the LORD [*YHVH*]," as the prophet Isaiah said.'**

(John 1:19-23)

The group of Pharisees then asked another question of *Yochanan*:

**"Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, 'Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ [*Messiah*], nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'"**

(John 1:24-25)

It is apparent from their question that the Pharisees were familiar with immersion. But the immersion they knew about was for the purpose of ritual purity. They could see that *Yochanan's* immersion was for a different purpose so they wanted to know by what authority he was performing these immersions. His answer must have astonished them:

**"John answered them, saying, 'I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose..'"**

(John 1:26-27)

According to the gospel of John, it was the very next day when *Y'shua* again came to visit the site where *Yochanan* was preaching repentance and performing immersions:

**"The next day John saw Jesus [*Y'shua*] coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me." I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.'**

**"And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.'"**

(John 1:29-34)

At this time the mantle was passed from *Yochanan* to *Y'shua*:

**"Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified -- behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!'"**

**"John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ [*Messiah*]," but, "I have been sent before Him." He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.'"**

(John 3:25-30)

From this point on *Yochanan's* ministry diminished while *Y'shua's* ministry grew. The purpose for which *Yochanan* had been born, to announce the coming of the Messiah, had been accomplished.

### **~ Y'shua's Teaching ~**

According to the Scriptures, the teaching and immersion that was done by *Y'shua* (through the agency of His disciples) was almost exactly the same as that of *Yochanan*. Its purpose was to bring sinners to repentance so they would turn from their sins and begin living a life of righteousness. However, there was one additional message which *Y'shua* emphasized:

**"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus [*Y'shua*] came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'"**

(Mark 1:14-15)

*Y'shua's* message of repentance was consistent throughout His ministry. He taught that a sinner needed more than just the ritual purity of the flesh, he needed to become clean from the inside out. On at least one occasion *Y'shua* was questioned as to why He was eating with men who were probably ritually unclean and could transfer that ritual impurity to Him:

"Now it happened, as Jesus [*Y'shua*] sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

"When Jesus [*Y'shua*] heard *that*, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what *this* means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Matt 9:10-13)

Going through the immersion of repentance raised the status of an individual from one who stood guilty of their sins to one who had been forgiven of their sins, thus free from sin.

*Y'shua's* message was a confirmation of the Hebrew Scriptures which spoke about God's willingness to forgive sin whenever true repentance took place. Knowing what we do about immersion in the first century, we believe that once a sinner repented, they naturally wanted to be immersed in a *mikvah*, thus expressing their change of heart.

The following passage speaks about the efficacy of a repentant prayer made at the Temple:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: 'I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**

**"Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place."** (II Chron. 7:12-15)

*Y'shua* was also aware of people who were not in need of repentance because they were already living righteous lives:

**"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."** (Luke 15:7)

Two such 'just' people had been the parents of *Yochanan*, *Z'kharyah* and *Elisheva*, who were not 'self-righteous,' but people who actually lived the righteousness of the *Torah*:

**"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."** (Luke 1:5-6)

The righteous walk of *Z'kharyah* and *Elisheva* is the same righteous walk which members of the Bride of Messiah are called to take today. It is a walk of obedience to the *Torah*, not so that we can earn our salvation (for that is a gift) but so that we can please our heavenly Father in the same manner as did our Savior *Y'shua*:

**"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.**

**"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

**"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.**

**"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, ..."** (I John 3:1-7)

#### ~ Summary ~

*Yochanan* and *Y'shua* were set apart from the various Jewish sects, each being sent by God to do a specific work. *Yochanan* was sent to prepare the way for *Y'shua* by proclaiming the need for sinners to repent (turn from their sins), return to God as exemplified by a righteous and loving lifestyle, confess their sins and be immersed in an immersion of repentance for the remission of sins.

*Y'shua's* message was essentially the same, but with the added emphasis of the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. In addition, *Y'shua* was also sent to offer Himself as a ritually pure and sinless sacrifice upon whom the sins of the world were placed so they could be forever removed as a means of judgment against the Believer.

The main emphasis, by both *Yochanan* and *Y'shua*, was that the sinner had to have his inner heart cleansed so that he could be pure inside as well as outside. Inner purity had to come before bodily or ritual purity was of any real value for:

**"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD [YHVH],**

**But the prayer of the upright is His delight."**

(Prov. 15:8)

#### ~ The Teaching Continued ~

The disciples of *Y'shua* were instructed to carry on this core teaching of repentance for the remission of sins:

**"Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ [Messiah] to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.'"** (Luke 24:46-48)

In closing let us recall the beautiful expression of repentance as written by king David after his child had died at birth:

**"To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.**

**"Have mercy upon me, O God,**

**According to Your lovingkindness;**

**According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,**

**Blot out my transgressions.**

**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,**

**And cleanse me from my sin.**

For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin *is* always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done *this* evil in Your sight --  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge.  
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.  
Behold, You desire truth in the Inward parts,  
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to  
know wisdom.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me hear joy and gladness,  
*That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me *by* Your generous Spirit.  
*Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners shall be converted to You.  
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,

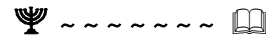
*And* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.  
For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart --  
These, O God, You will not despise.  
Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.  
Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices  
of righteousness,  
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar."

(Psalm 51)

We have a mighty God who offers forgiveness of sin, even  
for the offense of bloodshed.

May our tongues sing aloud of His righteousness.

Shalom!



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