

Mikvah, A Halachic Expose

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The recent draining and the refilling of one of Yeshivah's Mikvaos presented the community with the perfect opportunity for a shiur and guided tour on the halachos of constructing and filling a Mikvah. An outline of the halachos and the refilling process are described in this article.

The Torah teaches *אך מעיין ובור מקוה מים יהיה טהור* a spring or pit of collected water will be pure. This *Posuk* describes two types of bodies of water which may be used for purification; a *Maayan* (natural spring) or a *Mikvah*. The word *Mikvah* means a gathering of collected water.

The water of a *Mikvah* must gather naturally from rainwater which collects into an excavation or structure built into or on the ground. There must be a minimum of 40 *Se'ah* (approx. 332L *הגר"ח נאה*) although common practise is to collect at least double this volume and often more.

In previous times, *Mikvaos* would have only a single *Bor* (pit), and people would *Toivel* in the actual rainwater. However, since the water could not be changed (without collecting new rainfall), the water in these *Mikvaos* would sit stagnant and become dirty.



A *Mikvah* from the times of Bayis Sheini using only one *Bor*

Cleaner Mikvaos

For the last few hundred years, *Mikvaos* have been constructed using two *Boros* in a manner that allows the water used for *Toivelling* to be changed regularly to remain clean.

The rainwater is kept in one *Bor* known as the *אוצר מי גשמים*. A separate *Bor* is used for *Toivelling*. This *Bor* is filled with regular tap water and can be filled and refilled to keep the *Mikvah* clean. This tank is referred to as the *בור טבילה*.

Tap water itself is not kosher as a *Mikvah* so the *בור טבילה* must

be rendered kosher by connecting it to the *אוצר מי גשמים*. The connection is achieved via an opening between the two *Boros* of at least two finger-breadths diameter (approx. 4cm) which remains open. This method of connecting the two *Boros* is called *Hashakah*, literally the *kissing* of the waters, describing how the waters touch one another.

Traditionally the two *Boros* were positioned side-by-side with the hole placed in the wall in between. This type of *Mikvah* is referred to as *בור מן הצד*.

The "Chabad" Mikvah

The "Chabad" *Mikvah* is a *Mikvah* which is based on the explicit directives of the Rebbe Rashab concerning the *Mikvah* which was built in Rostov. The primary feature of this *Mikvah* was that instead of placing the *Boros* side by side, the rainwater *Bor* would be placed underneath the *בור טבילה* with the connection hole in the floor of the upper *Mikvah*. Due to its configuration, this type of *Mikvah* is referred to as *בור על גבי בור*.

The Rebbe Rashab specified that the *Mikvaos* should be connected with two holes rather than one, to avoid a situation where the hole gets blocked. He also required that these holes be one *Tefach* diameter (approx. 8cm).

Why Bor Al Gabei Bor?

According to the *Raavad* and others, once the original 40 *Se'ah* of rainwater becomes diluted with tap/drawn water and reduced to less than 50%, the *Mikvah* is invalidated. Whilst the *halacha* does not accord with the *Raavad*, we try to build *Mikvaos* to a level of *hiddur* which would satisfy most opinions.

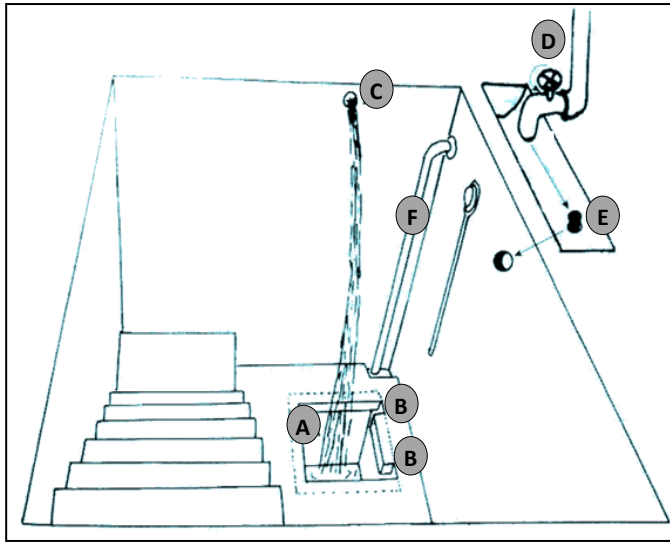
When the two *Boros* are positioned side by side, there is greater mixing of the waters between the two chambers and when the *בור טבילה* is drained, rainwater will also be removed. This creates a situation where the refilling will cause a dilution of the original rainwater and the concern of it falling below the 50% threshold.

By placing the rainwater *Bor* below the *בור טבילה*, with only the small holes connecting them, the dilution rate is greatly reduced, since the draining of the upper *Mikvah* does not affect the water level in the lower one. Additionally, the water in the upper *Mikvah* is heated, whereas the rainwater is not. Since heat rises and cool falls, the waters are kept distinct and minimises mixing.

Another concern is that when the *Mikvaos* are side by side, constant care must be taken to ensure that the water level remains above the connecting hole. One need not worry about this in a *בור על גבי בור* *Mikvah*.

Key Features of a Mikvah

Below is a diagram showing a "Chabad Mikvah" and its key features which are described below.



A. The rainwater *Bor* is situated under the floor of the upper *Toivelling Mikvah*. This is where the rainwater collects when being filled. The opening is fitted with a ledge. Once filled with rainwater, a stone cover is fitted into the opening sitting on top of the ledge. The *Bor* is sealed with a water-proofing to ensure that it does not leak.

B. Two openings of one *Tefach* width are left uncovered. These holes create the *Hashakah* connection between the upper and lower *Boros*.

C. Rainwater enters the *Mikvah* falling into the *אוצר מי גשמים*. Customarily the rainwater first flows through a *Hamshacha* channel (not depicted) before entering the *Mikvah*.

D. Once the lower *Mikvah* has been filled with rainwater and covered, regular tap water is used to fill (and refill) the upper *Mikvah*.

E. As an extra *hiddur*, all water coming into the *Mikvah* flows through a *Hamshacha* channel of at least 3 *Tefachim*. This channel is constructed of a concrete mix or earth which is able to absorb water. This *hiddur* has many halachic benefits to ensure the *kashrus* of the *Mikvah*.

F. A pump is used to drain the tap water from the upper *Mikvah* when required.

Filling the Mikvah with Rainwater

The halachos that follow apply when filling the *Mikvah* for the first time or for periodic replacing of the rainwater as required by the Rebbe Rashab.

Refilling a *Mikvah* with rainwater presents major halachic concerns and must be done under strict Rabbinic supervi-

sion by a qualified authority. Some of the concerns and how they are addressed are outlined below.

The rainwater must come to the *Mikvah* in a natural flow, usually running down the flat sloped roof which serves as a catchment. The water falls into the gutter at the end of the roof and flows into the downpipe hole which brings it to the *Mikvah*.

מים שאובין: Water which has been "drawn" or passed through a receptacle is invalid for a *Mikvah*. This includes water drawn in buckets and also tap water which has inevitably passed through pumps and filters.

If even 3 *lugin* (just over 1 litre) of *מים שאובין* goes into the *Mikvah* before the full measure of 40 *se'ah* of rainwater has collected, the *Mikvah* is invalidated.

Therefore before filling, the *Mikvah* must be left empty to air-dry until it is completely 100% dry.

Care must also be taken that no other water can enter the *Mikvah* other than the rainwater. In our case, the *Mikvah* had to be sealed off internally in a water-tight manner to ensure that no splashes from the adjoining *Mikvah* or from the drying area could leak in. A window was left in the partition so that the refilling progress can be observed.

Rainwater which runs through a receptacle also becomes *מים שאובין* and is invalidated. Therefore the roof structure should be free of any receptacles. The gutters and pipes also present a concern. The gutter at the bottom of the roof is built open on both ends so as not to create a receptacle. The pipe which brings the rainwater down to the *Mikvah* should be a solid straight pipe with no bends (*elbows*) or joins which can be considered as receptacles which would allow water to collect.

מקוה מים יהיה טהור: The *posuk* says *הוייתו על ידי טהרה*. From this we derive that the rainwater coming into the *Mikvah* cannot pass through or over anything which is *Mekabel Tumah* even if they are not receptacles. This will affect the types of materials used for bringing the water to the *Mikvah* and how they are attached to the building structure. Care is taken to ensure that no objects such as balls, loose screws etc. remain on the roof

Conclusion

For Chassidim going to *Mikvah* is an integral part of our *Avodah*. Immersing in a *Mikvah* daily is one of the preparations for davening which facilitates enhanced *Kavana*. It is also customary for men to go to the *Mikvah* on Erev Shabbos and one is required to purify themselves before *Yomtov*.

In the *Zechus* of studying the halachos of *Mikvah* may we merit the revelation of the teaching in the Mishna

”אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם, אביכם שבשמים שנאמר וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם“

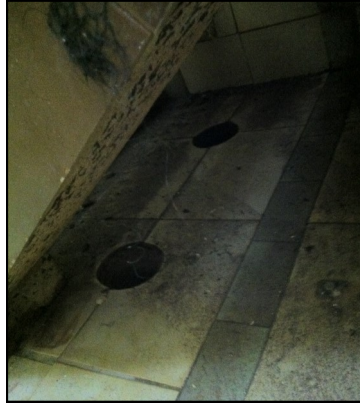
And may we experience the ultimate *Taharah* with the *hisgalus* of Moshiach now. ■

We would like to thank the maintenance team at Yeshivah for their effort and concern to enable us to refill the *Mikvah* with *hiddur*.

The Yeshivah Men's Mikva



The *Bor Tachton* for containing the rainwater. Typically holds over 660L of rainwater. Note the ledge on which the stone cover will be placed once filled.



The two *Hashakah* holes to connect the *Tevilah Mikvah* to the rainwater *Mikvah* below. Note the *Tefach* diameter size. Placing the holes under the stairs will prevent them being stood on and blocked.



The flat sloping roof catches the rainfall. The roof is constructed with no exposed screw heads which could be considered receptacles.

The wooden structures shown are covering the air vent fans to prevent rain falling directly onto them. Note that they have only 3 sides so as not to be considered *Keilim* themselves.



The gutter at the bottom of the roof is constructed with open sides so as not to be classified as a receptacle.



The downpipe in the middle of the gutter which brings the rainwater down to the *Mikvah*.



The water comes down the pipe and runs through the *Hamshacha* channel before entering the *Mikvah*.



The *Mikvah* is sealed off from inside so that no splashes of *Mayim She'ugin* can enter while it is being filled.



Once the rainwater is full, the tap water is brought into the upper *Mikvah* coming through a separate *hamshacha* channel.



A partial view of the crowd of over 50 men and bochurim who participated in the *Mikvah* shiur and tour.

The shiur and tour was also presented to the Talmidim of the Mesivta.