

The Community Hevra Kadisha of Greater Boston (CHK)

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1. SUPPLIES

Alphabetical list of where supplies kept will be left on table in tahara room as well as a list of what belongs on each shelf on carts. Please restock as needed at the end of a tahara, or inform coordinator if out of or running low on any supplies including particular sizes of gloves or gowns.

Supplies are kept on the carts. Extra supplies may be found in the desk drawer marked CHK on the bottom left and on the shelves on the wall (including box with KN95 masks, face shields, extra sheets, etc.) If you can't find something, check the closet where the tachrichim are stored (door on sink side of wall) as well as the refrigerator room (door on liturgy side of wall.) **Squeegees** are in the boiler room in the passageway on the right as you are leaving the tahara room; Some brooms are under the desk. **Candles** are stored in a pile of boxes in the room adjacent to the tahara room at the bottom of the steps. The **drill** for aron holes is ?? (CHECK) hanging in the garage/refridgerator room on the wall on your left as you walk in, high up. You may need a chair to get to it. (See 2. Aron below.)

Tools are soaked in disinfectant if they have been exposed to body fluids: *Rinse off bloody or sticky tools and open scissors* before placing them in the long metal tray (marked hevra kadisha) on white desk.

Extra Tachrichim Components are arranged in labeled boxes on the wire shelves near the gloves and booties. They should be used to replace damaged tachrichim if a complete new set is not needed. If you should have to open a new tachrichim package and have left over components, please put them away in these boxes at the end of the tahara.

Extra sheets, towels, and washcloths may sometimes be found in the dryer in the supply room.

Webril (the cotton batting sheets hanging over tahara table) can also be used for *rehitza*. Webril, cut pieces of cloth or disposable wipes (fecal matter) should be

used when possible for cleaning body fluids/fecal matter that will go in the biohazard and also for dam that will go in the aron.

2. ARON

Remove the lining, pillow, and some straw padding *unless* specified that they are to be left in the aron (by family request.) This information is written on the document on top of the aron with the Met/ah's name. **Please check this document when you arrive.**

Extra straw from the aron should be placed in the large plastic bag left near the aron and moved to the garage or left in the tahara room. Do not place loose straw in the closet: It is a fire hazard!

The lining of the aron cover is often difficult to remove: Leave the lining on the aron cover in place if it is too difficult to remove or if manipulation while doing so risks damaging the wood.

Take great care not to damage or scratch the aron especially by banging it against a wall while you're moving it around. There are blankets in the storage room to help protect the wood when moving it if necessary. Some aronot covers are heavy and easy to drop on fingers or slide and get scratched when pushed against the wall.

IF the aron is damaged in any way, either when you first arrive or during the course of the tahara inform your coordinator immediately so that they can give the Funeral Home a heads up well before the funeral.

At the end of the tahara, never leave the aron near the wall under the plaque, as people opening the garage door can bang into it. During the tahara it is convenient to keep it there provided you hang the "do not disturb sign" on the garage door. **Never put the aron back in the fridge. This damages the aron!**

Some aronot covers have a sliding mechanism, others have pegs. If you have difficulty removing or replacing the cover, call your coordinator.

If Aron does not have **holes**, drill three holes using the drill _____

***Notify XXXX if there were no holes in the aron so they can f/u with the Funeral Home.** This is a quality control issue!

Placement of the Met/ah: The aron sometimes looks the same at both ends, and once the pillow is removed it may be difficult to tell which side is which. **The Magen David is always on the foot end of the aron.** *Please note that this may not be the case in other hevrei kadisha.* From now on, the Magen David will always be affixed on the aron cover before the tahara.

To help prevent mistakes, it is suggested that when the aron is moved out of the way when we first come downstairs it be placed either underneath the wall plaque with the head of the aron towards the entry door and the foot end facing the garage door; or in the entryway ready to be moved directly into position, foot end facing door to the shoe-room. That way, when the aron is moved for the transfer, it can be easily whisked into position without changing its orientation. The pillow filled with straw is placed at the head during preparations. When the tachrichim are laid out, place the *Mitsnefet* on the head end of the aron. The aron is always kept with the Met/ah's feet facing the door. (For our purposes, this means the door that leads upstairs.)

Temperature Controls: **In the winter, leave the aron in the room with the thermostat at 60 and the AC on.** The aron is left in the tahara room in the summer since it is air-conditioned. The air conditioner and controls are over the desk: Be sure to leave the AC on before leaving (but don't change the AC controls as it is automatically set to go on if the temperature rises above 60.) You may turn off the AC when you arrive and set up if the room is too cold for the team, *as long as you remember to turn it back on before you leave.*

ID tags are left at the *foot* of aron. One tag must always be left on the body.

Straw: Extra straw that is not bagged can be used around the head to keep it from falling off the pillow. (Keeping the head steady also helps prevent body fluids from backing up out of the mouth.) Straw can also be used on the sides of the met/ah to keep the body from shifting during transport if necessary. (Extra straw in closet.)

3. TAHARA TABLE

Depress and release brake with your foot. DO NOT move table if in locked position.

The drainage hole of this table is small and the sides do not have steep lips, so water can easily splash off. Pour tahara water slowly to help prevent a mess...

To increase angle of table, raise head side while depressing bar underneath with your foot. To release table back down, one must raise it all the way up to a right angle, then push it down by releasing bar underneath (pushing it up with foot.)

The met tends to slide down table with this maneuver. To prevent this, one person on each side can hold met up in place while table being maneuvered.

4. REHITZAH (see weight issues for turning a heavy met/ah.)

Use soap and water or acetone (nail polish remover) to wash off Desitin/ointment sometimes found in the groin area. May need to leave soap/water on stuck bandage glue for a few minutes in order to get it off. Acetone removes tape marks if skin is not too friable to do this. “Glue-Off” also available (blue liquid) on cart.

Use the recycled cloths or Webril if they are going to be kept for the aron or discarded into biohazard container. Disposable/baby wipes can be used for fecal matter.

5. HOW TO USE LIFT and other WEIGHT ISSUES re: *tahara* and *halbasha*)

Using the lift to transfer meyt/ah to aron.

Directions: The lift slides along the ceiling. Tahara table should be centered underneath the lift. Move the aron so it is in position to be slid under the met/ah when the lift is raised. Use the two black straps that can be found on the bottom metal shelf. Push “down” button to lower hook. Slide one strap under the shoulder blades with the arms *inside* the strap and slip it onto the hook, slide the other strap under the hips (arms inside.) Easier to slip strap under neck and ankles and shimmy it into place under the met/ah. Do the reverse when removing the straps. Have someone support the head and one or two people hold the legs and push the “up” button until met/ah is just high enough for the aron to be whisked under as the table is pulled away. Press the “down” button to lower the met/ah into the aron. *Keep either the table or the aron under met/ah at all times.*

***Remember to raise hook and move lift to the side near the tefilot when done. Injuries have occurred from suspended orange lift box.**

If lift straps get bloodied, wipe them down with disinfectant after tahara and set aside for the Funeral Home staff with a note.

Placing boards under met before *Tahara*.

The lift can be used to raise the body while placing the boards. This involves moving the table back to the drainage sink after using the lift. Easier now with the new table.

Alternatively, the women have opted not to use boards when the meyta is very heavy or has very friable skin. Instead, a small amount of tahara water is taken from the 9 kavvim in a small pitcher and poured directly on the table or on the metah's back as the meyta is rolled side to side. Her entire back will then lie on water from the 9 kavvim while the ballance is poured over her. (The idea was

extrapolated from the idea of wooden boards that are wet to moisten the skin that lies on them.)

***When rolling a heavy met/ah, be sure the center of gravity is on the far side of the table** as you draw the met towards you, and keep you bodies flush against the table as a wedge to prevent the body from rolling off.

***Halbasha* can be facilitated by cutting the back of the *k'tonet* and *kittel* if necessary.** Cut almost up to the collar so that it holds together and can be pulled over the head. The met/ah can then be turned on the side to pull the clothing together in the back. In this case, it is advisable to slip the *avnet* on while the body is being turned from side to side so that it can be tied to secure the garments before the transfer to the aron. For the pants, one can place feet over one's shoulders to help lift the hips so the *michnasayim* can be pulled up. However caution must be used as pressure on the abdomen may lead to fluid or fecal leakage!

6. CLEANING STOOL

Pretahara: Have a plastic bag available or taped to side of cart for easy access to garbage and to help prevent odor staying in room. Tear off a few sheets of Webril for cart so roll not contaminated with soiled gloves.

Prevention: Do not put pressure on abdomen when turning meyt/a.

Clean rectal area during inspection *with disposable wipes*. Met/ah frequently must be packed to prevent stool from oozing out after *Rehitza* using tampons or Webril. May need to change gloves several times.

Rectum may need to be repacked after *tahara* to keep *tachrichim* clean and dry. A large tegaderm or diaper may be needed to hold packing in place before *Halbasha*.

If stool leaks after the *tahara* buckets poured, one does not need to repeat the *tahara*.

Massive stool: When wiping seems futile, use the hose to gently flush the rectum until the water clears, much like an enema. Be careful not to splash: (wear faceshields!) Pack when finished and disinfect end of hose during cleanup.

Odor: Essential oil on cart to dab under one's nose. Menthol lip balm or vapor rub is also effective. Remind team that it's OK to step away.

7. ISSUES INVOLVING BLOOD/BLEEDING (see also autopsies)

7a. BLOOD and/or Stomach Contents in Mouth/Nose

If you see dried blood around the mouth, more may drain from the mouth (and nose.) Be prepared with a disposable cloth around the mouth when Met/ah is turned.

If not frank blood, mouth contents may be fluids from stomach or lungs or blood mixed with these fluids. Not to be saved.

Keep head elevated at all times to help prevent fluid from stomach and lungs from backing up. If head held without using face cradle, the head may be too low and fluids may back up.

Strategies: Mouth can be packed and covered with webril and taped. An orange stick can be used to wedge packing between teeth. Consider packing nose as well, (can be removed later,) since the fluid in mouth will back up with gravity. Change packing as needed.

- Put on *Mitznefet* last rather than first.
- When turning met/ah, hold a disposable cloth tightly over the mouth to catch contents.
- If large amounts of stomach contents backing up, one may turn met/ah on the side and let the drainage flow until it stops.

NOTE: Bleach pen (kept on top shelf of cart) works for small amounts of blood on tachrichim.

7b. BLOOD IN HAIR

Wash off with slightly moist cloth and save for aron. (*Don't pour water over hair as blood will get too diluted and cloths saturated.*) No need to save the amounts of remaining diluted blood that may run down during tahara. (Phone communication with RB.*)

7c. DAM NEFESH

*(Email correspondence with VR**)*

...The primary blood to be saved is דם הנפש, blood which flowed at the time of death. Blood that is intermixed with other fluid does not need to be saved...

“Dam Nefesh” is a technical, narrow definition that isn't always helpful. We sometimes save Dam even when we know it is not Dam Nefesh because of our emotional relationship to blood and its deep sense of meaning given its significance in so many aspects of Jewish life.

7d. COAGULANTS

Aron alpha industrial glue is on the top shelf of one of the carts in a small white jar containing several vials. It is similar to “crazy glue” and is good for IV sites and other small wounds.

Envelopes of coagulant powder on cart. Easy to use-- pour on site.

Monsel's solution (Ferrous Sulphate) is kept in a bottle on the desk under the air conditioner. *Bottle needs shaking, solution stains clothing and tachrichim.*

Suggestion: pour a bit in a cup, reclose bigger bottle. Can also be used to cover wider areas such as bed sores... Forms a scab. (Use a Qtip or saturate webril).

Soak webril in solution to pack autopsy cuts (See autopsies below.)

8.AUTOPSIES

(Modified from email by SL.)

--Prepare team so they know what to expect and how things will proceed.

--Reassure/remind haveirim to step aside or leave the room if necessary: Each person responsible for his/her own wellbeing so focus can stay on Met/ah. --Safety Issues:

- 1.Rosh/a to decide if all required to wear face shields (if any risk of splashing.)
- 2.Review how to remove gowns and gloves safely.
- 3.No one should ever reach under met/ah in body bag where can't see.

--Double glove.

--Explain that it may be necessary to step away from tahara table as a team and to strategize as you go along.

--Set the Kavannah: to do the utmost to help insure a peaceful transition for the Met/ah. Intension not perfection.

What to expect: Met/ah will be in a body bag which may contain pools of blood. (Face shields.) If not the case, know that there will be much running blood from incisions when Met/ah being tended to.

“Y” incision sometimes extends over shoulders, sides, sometimes down to groin. May have incisions on legs or elsewhere. Incisions may be loosely sutured and gaping open or they may be sewn tightly. A “complete autopsy” will include a craniotomy. (see Craniotomy section below.)

Most bleeding is from shoulders and (in case of craniotomy) behind the ears (lowest point that is open.)

Preparation:

Have a large plastic bag easily accessible if needed to set aside bloodied materials for aron. May be able to use body bag for this. (Contents may be wrapped in a (stained) cotton sheet for aron later.)

Supplies: Tear off sheets of batting/ Webril in advance so roll isn't contaminated by dirty gloves. Have face shields readily available. Set aside cloths that will be used to absorb *dam* for aron. Familiarize yourself with Monsels. (If used, shake first, then pour some in a cup. Caution: it stains!)

Inspection:

Absorb blood in bag with towels and save for aron. Use colored washcloths or old toweling material when possible.

May need to leave body bag in place to catch blood that continues to flow until source of bleeding controled. Cut away flap and zipper for greater access. (Flap can be placed with clean side on floor to hold things that will be sorted for aron later.)

Control sources of bleeding by packing tightly with Webril (can saturate in Monsels,) then taping down using Tegaderm or roll of tape with checkerboard backing. Flat pads (chux) may be cut and taped over incision. Use extra padding on shoulders and behind ears (if craniotomy was performed.)

Wrap skull in chux or saran wrap if necessary. (Craniotomy) Shower caps on cart may be helpful.

Roll meyt from side to side using minimal manipulation to remove bag and to check for bleeding sources on back. If can't remove bag, cut away as much as possible. *Pack rectum* as blood often flows from there during halbasha even if not an obvious source of bleeding. (*see halbasha below*)

Carefully retrieve bony fragments for aron. (Set bag aside for later and invert to find bone fragments or to wipe off dried blood.)

**NEVER reach inside bag underneath meyt/a as there may be sharps or bone fragments that can cut through gloves.*

Gloves may need to be changed multiple times.

Stop and Pause when feeling overwhelmed by enormity of task.

Rehitza:

If washing off blood or cleaning off hair, use moistened washcloth rather than pouring water so blood can be saved.

May need to use lift to get to back for *Rehitza* and to place boards for *Tahara*. Keep raised on boards for drying and to help with *Halbasha* and transfer. Note: there may be times when this is not possible because of bleeding from a source on the back.

Tahara:

Low bucket, gentle stream so water doesn't get into incision and to minimize splashing.

If craniotomy, start each sequence by sprinkling water on face with washcloth moistened from the respective bucket with actual pouring starting below.

See 10b for how to conduct the modified tahara when necessary.

Halbasha:

May need to repack rectum first. There often is bleeding from rectum during halbasha even if none seen earlier in tahara. (Table tilted, blood will find it's way out with gravity.)

May need fresh tape and/or chux over Y incision to keep tachrichim dry.

Gloves/gown may need to be changed multiple times: Remind each other to reglove as needed before *Halbasha* as it is very easy to inadvertently stain tachrichim! (Bleach pen available on cart.)

Split *mitsnefet* (males), *k'tonet* and *kittel* down the back. If these must be cut completely (not to pull over head), one person hold the tie inside collar to keep it from slipping out as others make the knots. May need to lay garments on top of body if dressing not possible. (Tie all knots.)

Prepare Aron: If there is concern about leaking fluid, line aron with plastic-backed thick pads found in storage closet or with chuxs, (blue or green plastic backed pads on bottom of carts,) or with a plastic body bag found in bottom R drawer of white table.

Before closing aron, one can wrap items with Dam in a (stained) sheet to be placed around the meyt/a's legs in the aron. If too much to fit in aron, carefully discard some in biohazard. (Technically, *dam* is from post mortem and not *Dam Nefesh*.)

Take time to debrief and follow up with team/individuals as needed. Sometimes teams arrange to meet during the week after a traumatic tahara. Contact volunteer coordinator for help debriefing. She is a wonderful, experienced resource and is there for you and your team.

AUTOPSY OF THE BRAIN/CRANIOTOMY (See also write-up in appendix.)

Craniotomy: skull opened, bone may be removed, skull maybe held together loosely (sometimes only 1 suture,) gap will bleed. May see tiny bone fragments on face, in hair. (Save for aron.) Wrap skull in a chux pad cut as necessary or in saran wrap. Shower caps on cart may be helpful.

Alternatively, there may be an incision at the rear of scalp, (harder to find under long hair.) In this case, place chux underneath head and pad with Webril.

Most blood leaks behind ears and will need extra padding.

Rehitzah: Dab exposed part of the head.

Halbasha:

May need to rewrap head.

Split *k'tonet* and *kittel* up the back to minimize movement of head.

Tahara: Sprinkle water on face with washcloth wet from each of respective three buckets and start actual pouring from the shoulders down, synchronizing timing to have a steady uninterrupted flow of water.

9. FLUID MANAGEMENT: “Skin Slippage”(loose, friable skin that may peel off in sheets,) Oozing from blisters and skin, fluid drainage, leaking urine, and other unexpected challenges.

...I wanted to write while the issues raised by tonight's tahara are fresh in my mind. The meyta had significant skin slip in multiple places. She was oozing blood continuously from her arms due to deterioration of the skin and what may have been blood clots. There were multiple decisions: how to stem the bleeding, how to manage blisters as they broke and released large amounts of serous fluid, how much to move her, what kind of rehitzah to attempt, whether or not to pour tahara water over her, and whether or not to dress her.

This is what we did: We managed the bleeding from her arms by wrapping them in saran wrap and then in chux which were securely taped. Broken

blisters were covered with chux cut to size and taped. We moved her enough to do an inspection and an abbreviated rehitza--for example, we could not wipe ointment from her back without causing more skin loss and bleeding. Once rehitza was as complete as we felt we could make it, we decided that a tahara would only start more bleeding and disturb all the coverings on the weeping areas. So we immersed a sheet in the three buckets of taharah water, wrung it out, and held it over her like a canopy as we walked around her. Likewise, we felt that dressing her would simply provoke further bleeding and drainage. We placed the bonnet and face covering on her, placed her in the aron, lay the tachrichim over her in the proper order, and wrapped her in the sovev. We said the appropriate liturgy as we did this... (JH)

Strategies:

Bandage or cover open blisters or leaking areas with tegaderm tape, the tape with green checkered backing, saran wrap, or chuks cut to size when possible .

Tachrichim should not be soiled as a result of unprotected sores or wounds.

Rechitza: May need to be modified if skin is too friable to wash thoroughly.

Tahara: May need to be modified. (See also section 10: Modified *Tahara*.)

Halbasha: May need to be done in aron to minimize movement of the limbs. Garments may be placed on top of the meyt/a or cut open in back. Place garments directly on Meyt/a and tie all the knots before wrapping Meyt/a in the sovev. (See case report below.)

- *If there is concern that body will continue to ooze fluid or bleed when in aron, line the aron with chux, etc. (see autopsy above, case report below.)*

In one tahara, Metah was oozing fluid from all over from edema. Sheet covering her was thickly stained with yellow discharge. Although this is not *dam nefesh*, it would have been good to save the sheet since the fluid had been part of the metah. (VR personal communication.)

9a. Case report: Complex Tahara with Multiple Medical Issues, drainage, and Back to Back Taharot

(email from LB)

Description: This was the second of a back to back tahara. Upon initially entering the tahara room we addressed both Metim and assured them that each would get our full attention in turn.

- *After we finished the first tahara, we temporarily placed the aron on the elevator shaft.*

The second Met was very large and was transferred from the original gurney to the tahara table using the lift.

The Met recently had had open heart surgery: There were chest tubes and open drainage tubes, and multiple ports in the arm and chest. The leg had open wounds and had recently had a vein graft. There was an anal catheter that was full. There was discharge from the mouth. There were numerous areas where the skin was broken down with discharge.

- *The tubes and ports were all taped down—not removed. When necessary, cotton and tape was used to plug the drainage tubes.*
- *Open areas were covered with cotton, and when it was clear that the draining would continue, “plastic skin” was used to cover the open area. (Thin plastic sticky wrap in a roll that’s peeled off checkered backing.)*
- *The anal catheter and bag was taped to the leg.*
- *The mouth was packed.*

Rechitza: *The body was washed to the extent possible.*

Tahara: *A modified Tahara was done: the 3 buckets were gently poured over the sides of the met.*

...After the tahara it became evident that a significant amount of urine was leaking out. We cleaned that up. I did not repeat the tahara. Also, I used a bit of the wadding material taped into the groin to catch any further leakage...

Halbasha:

- *Because of the drainage, this was done after the met was transferred to the aron. The Met was covered with a sheet and transferred to the aron with the lift.*
- *The tachrichim were cut in the back and draped over him in the aron, and all the knots were tied.*
- *Be careful when cutting the tachrichim, since the ties also get cut.*
- ***Aron:*** *The aron was lined with “soakers” to absorb fluid that continued to drain. (Long thick cotton pads with a plastic backing found in the storage room.) These were put on top of straw. We sprinkled more soil on top of the liner.*

10. AMPUTATIONS

Email from SL:

·The meyt was curled onto his right side. We couldn't lie him flat. We had to do everything with him on his side.

·He was a bka - below the knee amputee - and the stump was not in great shape. I pulled off the bandages and covered it again before the rehitza along with a bit of Newskin. I changed the bandage again after the tahara...

·There was a large bedsore on the right hip. I changed the bandage with a new gauze after the tahara.

The only thing that got to me a bit was the bka since it was very unexpected. It got to me a few times.

Artificial limbs are not placed in the aron if they can be reused by someone.

11. TAHAROT AND SPECIAL SITUATIONS

11a. Complications with the met/ah

See weight issues (#5) above for lifting the meyt to place the boards if they are being used.

11b. Modified Taharot

Modified taharot are performed when we cannot pour tahara water over the Met/ah because of the condition of the body, or because the remains are enclosed in a body bag we should not open.

If the met/ah has been placed in a thick, leak proof bag that is not to be opened, the sovev (and talit if used) is placed under this unless the instructions are not to move the bag because of body friability or infection. All the tefilot are recited in their proper sequence. *The Shir Hashirim is a poignant reminder that we are addressing the soul at this point. (VR)*

The tachrichim are placed on top of the met/ah (or bag), and all the knots are tied. The Avnet is threaded under all the garments and tied as we would normally would. Place the shards, approximating where the eyes are and sprinkle the afar..

From VR:

“... We agreed that we could not possibly do a full tahara ant that we could not place the boards under the met. We decided to have three people sprinkle water upon the met. We chanted Amar Rabbi Akiva, three people taking the tahara buckets in hand an sprinkling droplets of water the length of the met all chanting “tahor hu”... The words from Yechezkel, “v’szrakti alychem mayim t’horim” suddenly seemed to me to be about sprinkling, “zarakti/to throw,” not as pouring, but as sprinkling droplets of water, each drop thrown into the air, alighting softly upon the met.”

Another minhag for a “**Dry Tahara**”: A sheet or a towel is soaked in each of the

buckets with tahara water, then wrung out. The team holds each corner and walks the sheet or towel over the met/ah, from top to bottom, back up, then back down each time saying “tahor hu/ tehora hi.”

11c. 9 Kavvim

There are variations in the interpretation of 9 kavvim. The requirement is generally interpreted to mean between 18-24 quarts, or between 24-36 cups per bucket using 3 buckets. 36 cups/bucket: fill the 12 oz. beige rubbermaid buckets up to 1” below the line, (not to the top.) The 24 cup level is marked with magic marker. (Tahara Manual of Practices , Rabbi Mosha Epstein.)

12. INFECTION CONTROL / Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Gloves are to be worn at all times and should be kept on while cleaning up after a tahara and while cleaning or rinsing instruments. Care should always be taken not to touch one’s face while gloved. **If glasses need to be adjusted or one needs to touch one’s face for any reason, use a tissue as a clean barrier.**

Gloves may need to be changed multiple times when cleaning fecal matter. Do not touch carts or webril roll with soiled gloves.

The Rosh/Rosha is responsible for teaching new haveirim the proper way of removing gloves and gowns. These should be thrown into the biohazard container if they are contaminated with body fluids. *A CDC poster illustrating how to put on and remove PPE is on the door to the parking lot.*

Face shields are in a box on the top metal shelf in the T. room on the left. They are easy to use, comfortable, and don’t fog up. Goggles are available in the storage room on the bottom shelf on the right as you walk in.

- **If the Rosh sees that the tahara involves blood that may splash at any time during the tahara, work should be halted until *everyone* puts on**

face shields. They can be discarded after the tahara. Use face shields for taharot following autopsy.

- Face shields should be worn when removing a tube that may cause splashing of body fluids.

It is up to the Rosh/a to decide what PPE is mandatory during any given tahara based on the particular circumstances and condition of the met/ah.

Proper hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent spreading germs: Wash hands with soap and water carefully for a minimum of 20 seconds after a tahara.

13. FACILITY ISSUES

13a. Pre/Post tahara meeting

**Assign someone to be a “Gabbai”, responsible to check that no trash in laundry bin and that AC turned on at end of tahara.*

Do not leave belongings in the family room during work hours or on Sundays as it may be needed for family meetings and arrangements. Similarly, don’t leave belongings there if there is a late night tahara as it may be needed for the Shomer.

If on an early morning tahara, do not enter the family room unless the door is open.

It’s our responsibility to return and refold chairs before leaving! Leave facility as you found it.

13b. Doors / Lights /Thermostat

Back door to the parking lot and front driveway door are opened for team members.

- **Relock doors before going downstairs and when you leave.** (The parking lot door is kept open during a *community* shemira, not when the shomer is hired by the Funeral Home. You will be notified if this is going on.)
- **ALL lights are left on downstairs.**

Thermostat: In the winter, turn down the thermostat to 60 before leaving the tahara room. During the summer, be sure the AC is left on when you leave.

13c. Phone numbers for questions during a tahara

Phone numbers are listed next to the telephone near the garage door. (Don't hesitate to call!)

14. TAHARA BEFORE CREMATION

We respond to requests for a tahara before cremation. The team consists of haveirim who feel comfortable performing a tahara in this context. The notable difference during the tahara is that instead of an aron, the met/ah is placed in a large cardboard receptacle that has a wooden base. By State regulation, the body has to be enclosed in a plastic bag, and we may line the "aron" with this bag without zipping it closed. The sovev is placed on top of it and the met/ah wrapped as usual with the shards placed, the afar sprinkled, and the "aron" closed with a cover that fits over the metah and that is secured with straps, not to be reopened. Our intention is to fulfill the mitzvah of *Taharah* and *kavod hamet*.

15. Tahara Checklist (revised 7/17)

1. **Entry** to the Funeral Home: Rosh enters through Tahara room (*insert specific information here*). Lock table brakes. Complete Tahara Certificate. Upstairs, unlock L side door in parking lot and front door to let in rest of the team. *Lock both doors before heading downstairs.* Don't leave belongings in family room if during business hours.
2. **Check-in**, change into shoes, Rosh/a leads *Kavannah* before all head into Tahara room as a group in silence.
3. Check: *Met/ah* on table (tag), aron in room. (**NOTE:** if aron damaged in any way contact Funeral Home contact who's on call immediately.) Write **Hebrew name** on white board. Arrange carts,
4. **Tahara in Progress signs** on doors to parking lot, garage, and front room.
5. **Prepare aron:** Cover left on gurney: *Carefully* move to corridor. Check *tachrichim* size before opening. ("L" means Ladies, not Large.)
 - a. Remove ties, fill pillow with straw (supply room), place at head of aron. Extra straw on sides of pillow as needed.
 - b. *Afar*: sprinkle in pillow and under sovev then set aside for later. (Or leave for later.)
 - c. Spread *sovev* diagonally into *aron*, set out *tachrichim* on side of *aron* in the order that they will be used: *Talit* on top of *sovev*, *Avnet* (longer belt) across

aron on top of talit, to be tied later, *Mitsnefet*/bonnet and face cover(f) pullover head cover(m), *Michnasayim* (pants) with ties, *K'tonet* (shirt) *Kittel*.

6. **Ritual Hand Wash:** no *bracha*.

7. **Put on Gown,** gloves

8. **Fill Buckets:** 3 for *Tahara* (cold water), 2 for *Rehitzah* (warm, never hot.) Store near head of table with pots used for *Rehitzah*. (**NOTE:** hot/cold faucets reversed at Funeral Home.)

9. **Light Candle** (May already be lit.)

10. **Mechila:** Gather around *Met/ah* and recite **as a group**, using *met/ah's* name.

11. **Chamol**, (seeking God's compassion on behalf of the *met/ah*.)

12. **Ana** (prayer for our own strength) while body being undressed and checked.

Check and remove ID tag(s) to be left on cover of aron. Inspection in same sequence as *Rehitzah*. (pp.22-23.) Nail polish removed *if possible*. Blood-stained clothing/sheet cut off to be placed in aron, fecal material washed, rectum packed if necessary, cloths used to wash off blood buried with *met/ah* if not soiled.

IV's/tubes/bandages attended to. (*See details p. 21-22.*) Cloth bags for *Dam/* aron items in box on bottom of cart. Body covered at all times except for area being checked or washed. Entirely uncovered only during *tahara* itself. **Jewelry:** place in manila PROPERTY OF envelop (on shelves), label, leave on table under AC.

Rechitza:

13. Recite **Vayaan** just before *Rehitzah*/washing. (p. 20)

14. Recite **Shir Hashirim** (M/F) while washing body (see sequence, pp. 22-23.)

Gently pat dry after washing and leave *Met/ah* covered as prepare for *tahara*.

15. Remove gloves, ritual hand wash, (no *bracha*,) Put on fresh gloves.

Tahara:

16. Place **3 or 4 boards** under *met/ah* after wetting them with *tahara* water, **wet headrest**.

17. Recite **Amar Rabbi Akiva** just prior to beginning *tahara*.

18. **Pour** the 3 buckets of *tahara* water from head to feet, chanting **Tahor hu/Tehorah hi** with each bucket. *Must* have continuous flow or repeat process.

Dry *met/ah* thoroughly, and roll side to side to dry table underneath. Cover with clean sheet.

Halbashah:

18. **Sos Asis** recited before beginning *halbashah*.

Recite Leviticus passages while dressing (pp. 35-37.) Order of dressing in tachrichim: *Mitsnefet*/face cover (Women put this on last, after the *k'tonet*), *Michnasayim*/pants, pant ties, *k'tonet*/shirt, *Kittel*, *Avnet* to be tied once *met/ah* in aron (or on table if can be slipped under *met/ah* easily), *Avnet* verse to be recited when tied.

19. **Transfer met/ah to aron**

20. **Avnet** tied and verse recited.

21. **Talit** (Men and for women who wore talit): made pasul by tying one corner/tsitsit into a knot or cut. Talit then wrapped around *met/ah* first over the left side and then over the right.

22. Recite **V'lo yavo'u**. Mitsnefet lifted to place **shards/sherbelach** on eyes. Vaseline can be used under shards to anchor on eyes.

23. Wrap **Sovev** over *met/ah* (feet, Met'ah's right side, left side, head.)

24. **Afar** : sprinkle in pillow, under sovev, over sovev.

25. Recite **V'chiper Admato**. Items that must be buried place at foot of casket.

26. **Close Aron**. ID tag left on top. Magen David always on foot end of aron.

27. Concluding **Mechilah** using Met/ah's name.

28. Sign Tahara certificate with attendees names listed.

29. **Aron left in tahara room with AC on**. (Instructions will be on tahara form if it is to be left elsewhere.) Move lit candle on dish or trivet to top of aron if cover is flat.

30. **Cleanup**: Rinse Taharah tools, place scissors in disinfectant tray with solution *in open position* if bloodied. *Check that no garbage in laundry bin, that extra straw in plastic bag*. Wipe table and boards with disinfectant spray. Leave room as you found it!

31. Remove protective clothing, wash hands with soap. Optional: Ritual hand wash outside the tahara room to signify the end of team's time with *met/ah*.

30. **Remove signs** from doors, **lower thermostat** to 60. **Air conditioner ON**

31. Sign tahara sheet. Copy name of meyt/a and of officiating Rabbi for coordinator. 32. Leave Tahara room, lights left on. Group closing upstairs. Lock doors on the way out.

16. LINKS and Resources

<http://www.hevrakadisha.org/> Community Hevra Kadisha of Greater Boston

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/avd0hoq9tmw8zet/AACMoNQo8pX7s03PdACXN41Ya?dl=0> Link to dropbox with liturgy recordings. Female recordings soon.

http://www.jewish-funerals.org/sites/default/files/spiritweb/Chesed_Prayers_Men.pdf Pdf of Male liturgy that is followed in above recordings.

<http://www.jewish-funerals.org/> Kavod V'Nichum Website. Go through tabs to find section on tahara including tahara stories. (some specific links added below.) Many interesting articles on issues including cremation, etc. Links to the Gamliel Institute which offers online classes and continuing education.

<http://jewish-funerals.org/chesed-shel-emet-3rd-edition> In description has links to the male and female liturgy with kavannot and transliteration opposite the Hebrew.

<http://www.jewish-funerals.org/sites/default/files/spiritweb/PSJCTaharahManual.pdf> Park Slope Tahara Manual. Includes **good introduction and guidelines for first time haverim**. (New team members also receive this info from the coordinator when they volunteer for their first tahara.) Includes kavanot for use before tahara and suggestions for niggunim. Also contains **illustrated knot instructions on p. 13**.

***<http://www.jewish-funerals.org/sites/default/files/spiritweb/kjmanual.pdf> Kehilath Jeshurun Tahara Manual. At the end there is a discussion of **how to handle medical issues** and challenging situations. NOTE: Some of these suggestions should not be followed unless there is a medical person on the team who feels comfortable with them.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2004/02/06/february-6-2004-jewish-burial-practices/1794/> PBS interview with Rochel Berman and brief video that shows a mock (truncated) tahara with a mannequin. A good visual introduction to tahara and a useful educational tool.

<http://www.nasck.org> Go to “for Chevra Kadisha members”, then click on box that says Tahara Video. A more complete tahara video (using a mannequin). Introduction from an Orthodox perspective. Tahara starts 1/3 of the way into the video.

<http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/pdfs/ppe/ppeposter1322.pdf> CDC posters with instruction on how to put on and remove PPE. (Poster hanging on door to parking lot.)

BOOKS (very partial list)

Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness... Exploring the Meaning of Tahara An Expanded Third Edition. Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel EKS Publishing Co. 2013. Also available through the Kavod V'Nichum website. Essential to understanding the liturgy.

Dignity Beyond Death The Jewish Preparation for Burial Rochel U. Berman Urim Publications, 2005. (Available at Amazon)

“... a passionate and deeply informed study of one of the most ancient and significant rituals of Jewish practice. Written in a lively and engaging style...”
Froma I Zeitlin, Princeton University

Final Kindness: Honoring K'rovei Yisrael: Guidelines for /burial Preparation of Non-Jews who are Part of the Jewish Community Richard A. Light (Amazon)

Tahara Manual of Practices. Rabbi Mosha Epstein 3rd addition 2005 (available through Kavod V'nichum, Amazon)
Includes halachic viewpoints and decisions, some in translation.

To Midwife a Soul Guidelines for Performing Tahara Expanded 4th edition
Richard A. Light 2013
With chanting by Shefa Gold (includes music.) (Amazon)

Rosh/Rosha Resources

Procedural:

Insert important people and phone numbers here

Medical:

Insert important people and phone numbers here

GUIDELINES AND SEDER FOR “FINAL KINDNESS” FOR K'ROVEI YISROEL

*The word tahara should not be used because while we are doing a mitzvah, there is no mitzvah obligation on the part of the deceased.

*All members of the team should be aware of what makes this act of kindness different from others

*Secular readings may be used or Biblical readings that are not part of the traditional tahara (for further exploration, perhaps something from Shir HaShirim might be used, if not Rosho Ketem Paz). Suggestions for possible texts and a seder are below.

*Use the English name, in this case the Japanese name, of the deceased.

*There is no reference to the Jewish people, as in returning to one's people, or use of God's name as in the traditional form of blessings. At the same time, I suggest that our own kavannah be one of drawing near the deceased, as into our embrace, the meaning of karov/near, keruv/drawing near. This might in fact be expressed by the Rosh or another member of the team as part of the M'chila.

*Hebrew is not used

*Tachrichin may be used, the garments that are familiar to us. At the same time, the knots, as Kelman and Light suggest, should be simple bow ties, not the traditional knots of tahara.

*A talis should not be used, since the tzitzit stand for all of the mitzvot and are made pasul because the dead are no longer able to fulfill the mitzvot. Someone who is not Jewish was not obligated in life to fulfill the mitzvot so there should be no connection to the mitzvot in death.

*The traditional, simple aron should be used, but without any religious symbol on it, as the Magen David.

*The sprinkling of earth is meaningful for many reasons. Because earth from Eretz Yisrael has ritual symbolism, I might suggest earth from a local garden, representing return to the earth (expressed in the last verse in the seder below).
Seder (in formation)

All members of the "Final Kindness Team" (as referred to by Kelman and Light) should have copies of the readings

Begin with *M'chilah*

We draw you near to us, __ (name) __, as in life you drew near to the people of Israel. We draw you near to us and honor you now, as in life you drew near to us and honored us. We honor you and express gratitude to you for helping to raise Jewish children. So are you joined as a true friend to the generations of the Jewish people as you find your rest now in the earth from which all life comes, your soul winging home.

Kohelet 3:1-8

1. To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;
2. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
3. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6. A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
7. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

R'chitza

Before pouring of water -- not to be called *tahara*:

Psalm 23

1. A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.
3. He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.
5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.
6. Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

As pour water say three times:

We pour upon you the waters of kindness

Before dressing:

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for siblings (in spirit) to dwell together in unity!

Once placed in the aron, say:

Isaiah 2:4

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more.

So may you know peace, ____ (name) ____

Sprinkle a garden's earth and say:

Genesis 3:19 -- *By the sweat of your countenance shall you eat bread until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

End with final *M'chilah*

Prepared by Rabbi Victor Reinstein

Adapted in part from Final Kindness: Honoring K'rovei Yisrael: Guidelines for Burial Preparation of Non-Jews Who Are Part of The Jewish... by Richard A. Light and Stuart Kelman

APPENDIX 1: EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

Taharot following an autopsy. SL's description (slightly abbreviated.)

...In addition to the autopsy, the meyt was about 6'4" and over 200 lbs.

We had started... trying to save all of the blood in the bag to be placed in the ahron. After reflection as a team, we abandoned that path. There was too much and it might not have fit in the ahron... Our main consideration was that it was not *dam nefesh*. All of the blood was due to the autopsy... I had noticed small 'bits' of material that I believed to be bone and skin fragments primarily from the head. These were collected and placed in the ahron. They were very small and easy to miss (1/4 inch or less). We probably didn't get them all.

... we left all the straw in the ahron and added a large chux to make sure that there was absolutely no chance of leakage. Almost everyone used masks and we had to change gloves a few times.

Inspection: We attempted to seal the chest incision with multiple layers of tape. We were never fully successful and there continued to be leakage, primarily at the shoulders during most of the procedure. At no time did we attempt to roll the meyt onto either side.

Rechitsa: We poured water where we could and otherwise washed with wet cloths. We washed the face with a damp cloth but could not do the top of the head. The skull had been opened from ear to ear across the top and there was no way to neatly seal the incision. After mostly drying the meyt, we inserted the lift straps (used a small chux under the meyt first) and then lifted the meyt just a few inches off the table so that we could clean and dry the back. We lowered the meyt, left the lift straps in place and prepared for the taharah (washed, changed gloves, prepared the boards).

Taharah: We used the lift to help place the boards, removed the straps and did a full taharah except that we did not pour any water on the head. Water did not enter the incision because of the tape. The boards were left in place for the halbasha. After the meyt was dry, I placed a chux over the chest and shoulders and taped it down along the edges to ensure that no blood would contaminate the kitel or ktonet.

Halbasha: We split the mitnefesh, ktonet and kittel down the back to limit manipulation of the meyt. We were able to put the michnisayim on intact. I cut a chux in half and wrapped the back of the skull. We placed the shards at this point since I realized that this was our only opportunity due to the wrapping. We used the lift to transfer the meyt to the ahron. The meyt looked dressed exactly as he should, spotless and in the appropriate image. We felt at peace when we wrapped the sovev.

Autopsy 10/12/14 Notes from SL:

. The team must be prepared emotionally before entering the room to begin the tahara. While the medical examiner will close their incisions, it is a very rough closure with very thick chord. There will be a lot of blood and the initial view will be a shock. The Rosh/a should take a few moments to both prepare the team and help set the kavanah to begin the journey to the ultimate goal of completing the tahara and properly preparing the mayt/ah. There will be a profound sense of closure when you finish wrapping the sovev given the dramatic change which will occur.

There are several major cautions to keep in mind during the entire procedure.

Protecting the team:

- Remind everyone to be vigilant regarding gowning and gloving particularly when changing gloves. *Do not touch the outside of the gloves with your bare hands.* You will probably need to change gloves several times.
- Always check your gloves before handling the tachrichim.
- Use the face shields to protect your face and eyes from any accidental splatter. They are very comfortable and do not fog your glasses like masks.

Other Preparations

- Blood: In prior cases we have not saved all this blood since our judgement was that it wasn't "dam nefesh", blood that was flowing at the time of death. It all occurred post-mortem since any dam nefesh was washed away before the post mortem was done. There is also no practical way to save this much blood.
- Skin and Bone: There will be skin and bone fragments on the outside of the body, the head, and in the hair. These small fragments must all be saved and placed in the aron. They are very easy to overlook and washed away during the rechitzah.
- Incisions: At a minimum, there will be an incision that circles the top of the skull (mostly in the hair) and a "Y" incision from each shoulder meeting at the breast bone and proceeding to the abdomen. These incisions could be longer depending on the reason for the post mortem and could extend to the groin and could curve from the shoulders to the sides. There could be additional incisions.
- Sealing the incisions: the incisions will only have a rough closure. The sides of the wound will not match up. They will need to be taped extensively to stop blood from flowing from the wound. Some techniques that have been used include:
 - o Wrapping a lower limb in saran wrap and taping if the foot/heel has an incision
 - o Wrapping the back of the head in a piece of the chuck sheet and taping above/below the face.
 - o Cover the chest incision with a chuck sheet and tape the sides if needed. In some cases, part of the chest incision can be sealed. We need to take care so that the taharah does not introduce water into the body.

- Moving the mayt/ah: Depending on the extent of the incisions, very little movement of the mayt/ah will be possible. Any movement to the sides will cause blood to flow from the shoulders. Great care must be taken. The rechitzah will take place mostly without moving the mayt/ah. However, some washing of the back is vital since the entire body will be covered with blood from the inside of the body bag. The lift will need to be used and the k'tonet and kittle will need to be split so that they can be placed on the mayt/ah with minimal movement. We have had success in placing the michnasayim intact.

Rechitza:

The mayt/ah will be in a 'body bag'. Partial roll the mayt/ah on the left side, remove the right from the bag and push the bag under the mayt/ah. Reversing the roll, pull the bag out from under the mayt/ah. Seal the bag up without moving it too much and place it immediately in the biohazard box. Seal the incisions during the inspections and when everything is sealed, proceed with the rechitzah. Keep an eye out for blood seepage.

Taharah:

Use the lift to place the boards.

- Do not pour any taharah water on the head from the bucket. It will soak the chuck sheet that you will have already used to seal the back of the skull.
- Be very cautious about any tahara water over the incision. *Keep the buckets low over the body to have as gentle a stream as possible.*
- Watch for any seeping blood and seal leaks as best you can
- Dry the mayt/ah while on the boards to minimize movement.

Halbasha:

Check gloves for blood before proceeding and change gloves and aprons as needed. Proceed keeping in mind that you can't fully roll the mayt/ah on the side. Lifting the legs too far will also cause blood to flow from the shoulder incisions. Remove the boards during the halbasha and avoid any turning or lifting of the body that will create undue pressure on any of the sealed incisions. Place in the aron using the lift.

Take time to decompress after the taharah. There is an emotional impact from dealing with that much trauma to a person. Give everyone a few minutes and make sure you reflect on the final completion of the task.

AUTOPSY OF THE BRAIN

The following is an email between X (Rosh) and X (MD) describing their encounter with a met who had had an autopsy of the brain. The first paragraph includes how the team was prepared for what they would see in the tahara room.

Sent: Friday, January 24, 2014 2:04:26 PM

Subject: Continuing to reflect

Dear Friends,

... with X's permission, I have included below a description from him regarding the medical realities of what we faced and how we responded. You might want to read that first, especially for those who were not present... (see below.) X's description of the procedures we followed is extremely helpful. I want to express how critical X's medical expertise was, as well as his soothing spirit and way of response. He also offered a very important and compassionate reminder of the concern we have for each other as part of this work. He reviewed for us before we went down stairs what we might encounter, reminding each of us to step aside at any point it became too much. Once we went downstairs, X took the first look once we were gowned had taken our places around the met. With a sense of the unknown and its attendant fear, we paused to allow each person to look, as they wished, to see what we were going to need to address and to gain greater

understanding through X's explanations. I believe that this was very important as a way to transcend fear.

It was once again made clear to me that whatever information we have ahead of time, it will often and unavoidably be incomplete. I had been focused on how loose the sutures would be. In fact, there was only one suture, as X explains, which made for a much more delicate approach. I will not describe details of what we did, since X has done that so thoroughly. There was quite a bit of material to be placed in the aron, as well as in the bio-hazard bag. As we have been doing, we placed material in a paper bag during the tahara, but then wrapped it all in one of the sheets afterward and placed it all in the aron. In regard to supplies, we placed such items as scissors in the stainless steel container. We did throw out one of the plastic combs which we had used to remove debris from the hair. Once we had cleaned and covered the head, we were able to proceed with a full rechitsa and tahara. Once completing the halbasha, we weighed whether to remove the extensive dressings on the head, which we decided to do, packing webro into the open wound. The preference was to remove as much inorganic material as possible. Without medical expertise, I would likely have left the dressing in place, perhaps removing only the saran wrap. As X refers to, we did trim and allow a small tube in the skull to recede into the cavity, an approach described in some of the chevra kadisha literature. I will leave for future discussion the question that pained us at the end, as to whether to take a whole new set of tachrichim to replace the mitznefet on which there was now a small amount of blood. As much as it troubled me, I felt it more prudent not to do anything else that could indeed initiate further flow or staining.

I share very personally my own feeling of a certain sense of intimacy with this man, the place of his very being lying open before us, the vessel of his character and intelligence, even though so faded at the end. Acknowledging that it was disturbing and distressing on one hand, seeing what we saw also inspired a rare depth of awe and reverence that enveloped all of us, joining us to each other as well as to the met and to the Holy One. Our mistakes were so wrapped in love and caring that they became as naught. In our desire to do right by this man, so we did.

It becomes ever more clear to me how important the ritual and spiritual framework is in setting the kavannah as a container for the practical details that we lovingly perform. So focused on these holy details, I forgot to pause at first for "Va'ya'an Va'yomer" and then even for "Rosho Ketem Paz," as we began r'chitza, Ebn reminding us, and so reminding us of our need for each other. Ebn's chanting from Shir HaShirim brought tears to my eyes. As a kavannah, we noted the holiness and miracle of the human body, even when it is so broken, reminding of life even when lifeless.

Whatever logistical details were out of place, I feel that they paled in the fuller context of what we accomplished together. I found something quietly comforting going out into the stillness beyond midnight. It was the time of "Tikkun Chatzot," the time of rising to pour out one's heart at the darkest hour of night, looking toward dawn with hope renewed.

With gratitude, and with blessings for a sweet and peaceful Shabbos,

From X:

The met had a posterior craniotomy that involved excision of his scalp from mastoid to mastoid in a single arc across the upper occiput. (Mastoid bone: "the bony prominence behind the ear.") The scalp had been peeled back and a craniotomy was done to remove his brain for autopsy. A single suture was in place to reconnect the scalp at the midline posteriorly. This held the skull together - but this did leave a narrow elliptical gap with bone exposed from that point to each mastoid.

There was some blood on his skin and hair that we washed and combed away. We did not attempt to wash the exposed bone. There was an ommaya reservoir and we trimmed the exposed line without attempting to remove this. Actually, I was tempted to remove it in this scenario - even though it would have likely led to some more fluid - but I did not (see note below about fluid volumes).

To get adequate access we had to have the met on one side and then on the other side - to get to the back of the head.

After that we used a 'chuck', clear tape, and then saran wrap to cover the scalp for rechitza.

We then removed the plastic and put cotton batting (or whatever the cotton roll that is hanging from the ceiling is called) in the gap prior to halbasha.

This worked pretty well - though there did end up being a few very small blood stains on the mitznefet. We were using a muslin tachrichim set - and the mitznefet did seem a little small. This was also partially due to the cotton at the back.

Regarding the amount of blood. It happened several times that people felt there was a lot of blood. I think this may be something worth talking about as a group. I would say that the total amount of blood from the beginning to the end including everything on an initial chuck under his head and everything was actually quite modest and certainly less than 10 cc. The concept of volume and blood is really a matter of experience though.

I think it makes sense to make a decent effort to clean the met. In this scenario, I do not think we should feel any disrespect was imparted by the really very minimal blood staining on the mitznefet. The notion was raised to possibly replace with another completely clean mitznefet - and I think we made a really reasonable decision to leave it in place. Having said that - it would have also been reasonable to have used another layer of cotton behind the ears where a bit of blood staining came from on the inside of the mitznefet -- and if I would have changed my gloves one more time - as a single small external blood stain came from my gloves.

MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT

We are a young Hevra Kadisha. We had come to understand a critical path to our collective growth as Roshot was to come together as a team of Roshet for more complicated Taharot be it accident, murder or autopsy.

A 60 ish year old woman was killed instantaneously when her vehicle flipped over trapping her beneath the wreckage. Knowing this two Roshot with medical backgrounds checked the condition of the Metah then shared with the rest of the Roshot so that we could be better prepared emotionally and practically for our time in the Tahara room. Our Metah came to us in a body bag, fully clothed. There was copious amounts of blood on and beneath her and she was covered with debris. There were many gashes, with extreme trauma to her skull, face, her eyes wide open their sockets starkly askew, brain matter exposed. I am keenly aware of trying to keep an outward respectful composure while honestly feeling quite shocked and deeply saddened within.

Clothing was gently cut away, her sneakers untied, everything wrapped in a sheet for burial in her Aron.

Her long dark raven hair matted with blood, bone and dirt. The hair, unable to be wetted or combed was gently smoothed, her contorted face was gently dabbed before chuks and Saran Wrap were used to encapsulate her head. There was a deep stillness in the room as we read from Song of Songs, the written/poetic imagery of beauty became her beauty

There was concern over additional unseen wounds on the back of her torso that may continue to bleed out with our turning her. More quiet, more quiet discussion, more quiet caring. Which may be dam nefesh, which may not.. How best to perform the 'pouring' of waters...how best to dress her in simple white...how best to place the shards..asking forgiveness for our missteps as she was finally and carefully laid in her Aron.

Wishing her body respite and her Neshama to soar.

With God's Help

Dear Friends,

I have struggled with how to convey, to reflect on the technical details that gave structure to our caring for _____ of blessed memory. As with so much of Jewish life, holiness is expressed through details, the simple deeds that when added one to another give form to great ideals and make real God's presence in the world. So it is with tahara. In reviewing details, we increase our collective knowledge and experience, allowing for the fuller flow of holiness in caring for others. In that spirit, I share these details of a tahara, aware of privacy concerns regarding a death widely known and felt. The challenge is to balance so much technical detail with awe, with holiness, and with emotion. The details become as ritual, not separate from the holy, but as a means of expressing the holy. This was the challenge that I felt so deeply in caring for _____, and that I continue to reflect on. The challenge to interweave the technical and the holy that they become as one infuses this sharing.

I am grateful to the team. It was made clear how essential experience and chevruta are in approaching a challenging tahara. We become as God's angels, serving the Holy One when we serve truly with each other in serving the dead.

We gathered upstairs, taking a deep breath together, reviewing what was known. We acknowledged what was different about this tahara, the first time caring for one who had been murdered, for one whom we all felt a connection to through the public nature of the tragedy and so many interwoven lines of human connection. We discussed the halachic values tension we would face, always a dynamic to be reckoned with, all the more so in the face of such trauma. The halachic ideal is to do the full tahara, that to be balanced with what is possible without causing further distress to the body. The ideal is not to add inorganic material, that to be balanced with the need to stop blood flow, at times using tape and other materials that may be needed to stop continued bleeding.

Once downstairs, we paused to address the meyt. As we started to gather material and prepare the aron, one member noticed blood on the floor near the upper left corner of the table. One strap of the body bag was acting as a wick, allowing blood to drip to the floor. Aware it was an indicator of what we would encounter, we waited to clean the floor and move the strap until having gowned and gloved. From the point of cleaning the floor, we agreed that all blood in this case was to be treated as dam nefesh.

We placed a mat from the storeroom along the entire bottom of the aron, deciding to wait until later to see if other mats would be needed.

There was great strength in breathing through the initial prayers, chanting them together. I acknowledge having wanted to hold them, to stay in their embrace. As we gathered then around the meyt to begin, we opened the bag, a flap on top with a zipper all around. We needed to pause for a moment, to take in what we were seeing. I was struck by the nakedness of the meyt, surprised that there was no garment of any kind, words coming to me from the bris with so much painful irony, “mitboses b’damayich/wallowing in your blood..., by your blood shall you live...” It was an overwhelming sight, before which we were touched by a deep sense of calm and painful purpose among us. In the nakedness of the meyt, I also thought of the halacha that if the one who has been murdered is still in the garments worn at the time of death, we do not remove them and do not do tahara.

How clear it was made to us that we were to proceed, for there were no garments at all. We needed to and would do all that we could for one so cruelly taken from life.

We took a sheet and covered the meyt within the bag, the sheet quickly becoming quite soaked with blood.

It was clear that we would need to soak up a great amount of blood in order to work. We agreed it was best to leave the bag in place to catch blood that was clearly continuing to flow.

The good suggestion was made to cut the entire flap and zipper off so that we would have greater access within the bag. We decided not to cut the end of the bag to insure that blood did not flow into the sink, given all of the pooling in the bag. We carefully folded and put aside the flap to clean the blood on it later. One member tied a large plastic bag to a shelf for the disposal of what would become a great quantity of bloodied towels, cloths, and sheets to be place into the aron.

We soaked up an initial quantity of blood and then began an examination of the body to determine where dressings would be needed and to gauge what would be possible and what our approach would be. It was clear very quickly that much would need to be modified.

It is hard to describe the condition of the body. As I looked upon the face, I was struck by a certain calm that belied the brutality of his death. His eyes and mouth were closed, no sign of pain, as though wordlessly saying “hineni, I am here,” I have lived. There were sutures from surgery and from the post-mortem. I still wonder at the need for such an extensive post-mortem, a large Y incision on the torso and a full cranial incision. The entry point of the bullets seemed to merge in front with sutures and openings caused by heroic efforts to save him. As we gently turned him, there was no mistaking the exit hole of a bullet that had torn through him. As we held him, blood began to flow from that hole, as though to remind of the seeping away of life.

We worked a carefully shaped piece of webril into the bullet hole and covered it with a medium size Tegaderm. We next realized that blood was flowing from the rectum, blood from within the body finding a natural opening from which to flow. We packed the rectal area. Later, when we realized that blood was still pooling beneath the body, we used a diaper in addition to packing.

We placed dressings over open wounds and over sutures as seemed necessary at that point, hoping to wait until after r'chitza for fuller dressings if needed. There was a fair bit of blood flow from the shoulders, at the lower corners of the Y incision on both sides. As in a number of places, we improvised bandages, cutting webril or Tegaderm, or chux to a shape that seemed to work and then taped them into place at the shoulders.

We had discussed the use of Monsel's solution beforehand, but the wounds were too extensive and large to make it feasible.

As we examined the body, we gathered bits of flesh upon damp paper towels to place in a smaller paper bag, pieces gently picked up and placed with our fingers..., sacred specks of God's image. We considered carefully combing hair upon the chest to insure that we didn't wash away the sacred specks. Realizing that it was unlikely there would be the flow of tahara water, we left all safely in place until determining the nature of tahara, in the end leaving all such pieces where they were.

After working for a long time to soak up blood in the bag and to stabilize the bleeding, we placed a fresh sheet over the meyt. When it seemed to remain relatively white, we paused to assess what to do for r'chitza. We agreed that we could not risk any flow of water. Without any pouring, we used damp cloths to wash the top and sides of the body, more of a daubing than a washing, but so tender, hands of one cradled tenderly around the meyt's head to protect. We realized that we could not safely turn the meyt to fully wash the back, so we symbolically reached only as far as we could, following the traditional order of washing, doing what was possible

Before beginning to chant Vaya'an Va'yomer, we acknowledged with great feeling that this broken human form was indeed the Kohen Gadol. Even more so, as Rosho Ketem Paz was said accompanying the gentle washing, we affirmed the miracle of the human body, its grandeur and ever so painful fragility.

It seemed that throughout the process, bleeding would spontaneously begin again, some from previously dressed wounds, others from wounds that had been quiescent.

Feeling so immersed in the moment as I think about it, I may, nevertheless, not be remembering the exact sequence of all of the steps we took to facilitate as much of tahara as possible.

I believe at this point, we followed the traditional order, honoring the framework even if not able to fully enact each part of it. Following r'chitza, we then again covered the meyt with a fresh sheet. We took off the gloves used to that point and washed and re-gloved. In truth, there were many points at which gloves were either changed or washed due to blood on them, members of the team letting each other know when blood was noticed on gloves.

We paused, taking a deep breath together when gathered back around the meyt. We agreed that we could not possibly do a full tahara and that we could not place the boards under the meyt. We decided that we would have three people sprinkle water upon the meyt. We chanted Amar Rabbi Akiva, three people taking the tahara buckets in hand and sprinkling droplets of water the length of the meyt, all chanting "tahor hu," as each one doing the sprinkling followed the previous one prior to his finishing. The words from Yechezkel, "v'zarakti aleychem mayim t'horim," suddenly seemed to me to be about sprinkling, "zarakti/to throw," not as pouring, but as sprinkling droplets of water, each drop thrown into the air, alighting softly upon the meyt.

We carefully daubed the meyt dry, continuing to apply dressings as blood continued to flow even now. I don't remember if it was here or earlier that we wrapped the head in saran wrap. We now paused to consider our approach going forward and how we would handle halbasha.

We decided that we would need to remove the body bag at this point. Rather than trying to move the body, we cut the bag as carefully as possible from all around the meyt, gently lifting to draw out the pieces of the bag. We set the cut sections of the bag on the floor with the previously placed flap, to clean all remaining blood later.

After some discussion as to whether to dress the meyt in the aron or on the table, we elected to work on the table to have more room and to minimize the risk of blood flow in the aron.

We agreed that we would cut the tachrichim up the back, knowing we would need to minimize any movement of the body. Realizing that blood was dripping from beneath the saran wrap covering the head, we now cut a large chux and shaped it around the head, taping its edges. This meant that we would also have to cut the mitznefet in order to place it around the head. We also placed a chux over the sutures on the torso. I had hoped we could use more minimal coverings, generally preferring narrower strips of bandage/webril covered by tape on sutures. Because of the raw wounds and concern for continued bleeding, we opted for the larger covering to protect the tachrichim. Prepared now to dress the meyt, we stopped and recited Sos Asis together.

By cutting the tachrichim as we did, we were able to place them all in proper place upon the meyt, pausing to recite each garment's verse as we held it, remembering again that even in this ravaged state we were dressing the Kohen Gadol. We had tried not to cut the k'tonet and the kittel at the neck to leave the ties within whole. In the end we needed to cut all the way up in order to minimize even the slight manipulation that would otherwise have been required to bring the garments over the head. When tying, one person held the tie inside the collar to keep it from slipping out as others made the knots.

As we had done at each stage, we paused to assess. Before placing the meyt in the aron, we added two pads length wise on top of the coffin liner placed earlier. We also placed one horizontally at the top to lie under the head, possibly more than needed, but allaying our own concern for continued bleeding.

We agreed that using the lift would cause the least movement to the body, and minimize irritation to wounds on the back. Due to these same concerns, it was difficult to place the lift belts. Using the belt with the metal plate at its end allowed us to slip it more easily under the meyt, though the plate did have some blood on it as it came through, which we cleaned off and saved. Once placed in the aron, there was also some blood on one of the garments, which we were able to treat with a bleach pen. We were then able to tuck all of the garments under the meyt and carefully fold the talis over his shoulders and then swaddle him in the sovev. With the looser fitting mitznefet, the sherblach were easily placed. So may he look through the broken shards of this world and know wholeness, for himself, for all of us.

Our final act before closing the aron and saying m'chilah was the hardest. One member of the team had noticed some items on the desk outside the tahara room with a note requesting that they be placed in the aron. I begin to cry as I speak of them, as I did then... After sprinkling the remaining afar, we held open the sovev and placed these last and eternal tokens of love upon _____ z"l's heart.

Quietly, virtually kneeling on the floor, we cleaned the remaining blood off the sections of the bag we had set aside. We collected the bloodied cloths and towels just used along with all of the ones used earlier, and placed the sections of the bag in the biohazard barrel. When we took down the large plastic bag to place it in the aron, it felt wrong to place it like that, looking like a bag of so much refuse. We were about to cut out a bloodied section of a large remaining sheet. Instead we placed the sheet on the floor and emptied the contents of the bag into the sheet, wrapped it all and placed it in the aron, working it around the feet and legs of the meyt.

We cleaned the tahara room as fully as we were able, energy of body and soul fairly depleted. The process had taken some four hours. Some of what we had to contend with and our responses to it were similar to the way of tahara in all cases of death due to trauma. The unique elements due to a murder, God protect us, were both practical and emotional, the latter due in part to the public awareness of the tragedy and to the shared sense of grieving, each of us touched in different ways, along with so many others. Upstairs, we gathered in a circle, standing in silence, acknowledging the depth of meaning in what we had shared and accomplished together. It was too late at night to linger, each of us knowing that the thoughts within ourselves were shared among us. We embraced, each then at our own pace making our way out into the night...