

Baptism

The Mikva - gathering of waters

Mikvot then and now

Baptism as ritual and as a commandment

- Ritual immersion in water is carried out in a **mikvah**, which is a Hebrew word meaning **gathering of waters**.
- For the observant Jew, the mikvah personifies both the womb and the grave and consequently, rebirth. It is regarded as a pure, unadulterated avenue of connection with God; and for that reason, it is a place where hope is reawakened and strengthened.



Ritual baptism in the Jordan River



Mikvah - immersion site for the ritual cleansing of men

Mikvot then and now

Baptizo and Tevilah

- Tevilah (full-body immersion) marks a change of status from being **tamay to tahor**—ritually unclean (impure or unfit for the presence of God) to ritually clean. This is necessary because anytime a person is to come into the presence of God, they must come tahor (pure).
- The word **baptism** comes from the Greek word **baptizó**, which primarily means a **thorough change of condition accomplished through immersion**. It is written in Bibles to take the place of the Hebrew word **tevilah** (to totally immerse).



Before entering the Temple, Jewish men immersed themselves in a mikvah, such as this one from the Second Temple period.

Mikvot then and now

Ceremonial use of the mikvah

- Entering a mikvah is commanded in Scripture for a number of common life events
- “The Lord said to Moses, ‘These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing... He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water and he will be clean.’” (*Leviticus 14: 1–4, 7, 9*)
- As well, a woman who completes her menstrual cycle needs to be immersed before resuming sexual relations with her husband. (*Leviticus 15:19–24*)



Mikvot then and now

Mikvah and marriage today

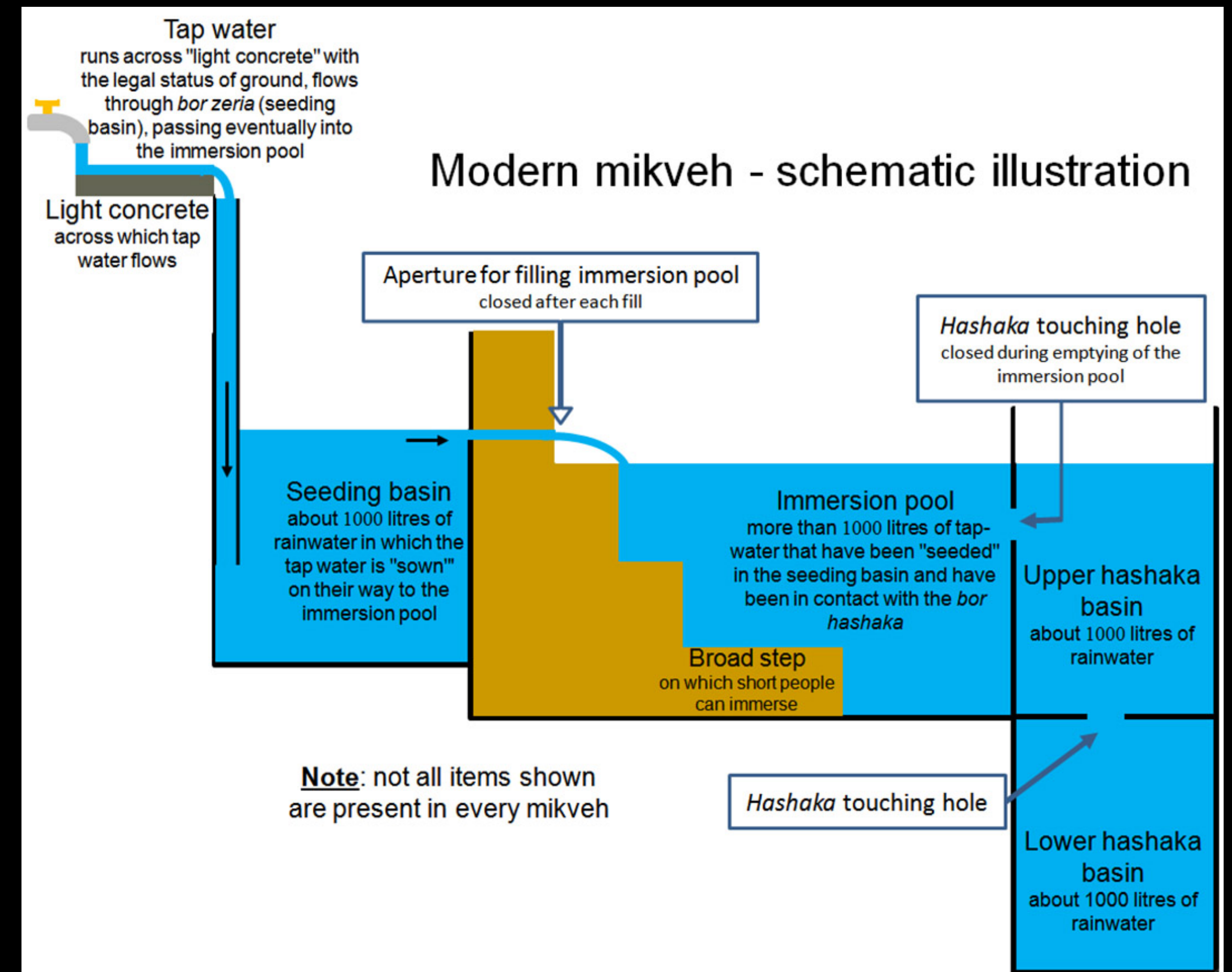
- Today one of the most widely practiced uses of the mikvah is in the pre-wedding preparation of the [bride and groom](#). It's a way of becoming ritually pure before the marriage.
- The bride is immersed as close to the wedding as possible, even on the afternoon before the ceremony.
- It's customary for Chassidic men to go to the mikvah before their wedding as well, and today many observant Jews have also taken on this custom.



Mokvot then and now

Anatomy of a Mikvah

- A mikvah must have “living water” or naturally produced water in it. Tap water can be added to the rain water in times of drought but can NOT be the primary source to fill the Mikvah and the tap water MUST run across the ground BEFORE entering the *Seeding Basin* where rainwater is captured.



Mikvot then and now

It ain't a bath

- Obviously, the primary significance of the mikvah isn't for physical cleansing, but to symbolize a spiritual cleansing.
- **The apostle Peter tells us that** “the waters of immersion 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.” *(1 Peter 3:21)*



Yardenit (Little Jordan), a baptismal site on the Jordan River, may be near the place where Yochanan (John) immersed Yeshua (Jesus).

Mikvot then and now

Mikvah and proselytes

- When Gentile converts go down into the waters of the mikvah, they leave behind their pagan ways— symbolically dying to their old life— and come up out of the water as a newborn child with an entirely new identity. They are in essence reborn.
- The Talmud (oral law) states, “When he comes up after his immersion, he is deemed an Israelite in all respects.” (*Yevamot 47b*)



Mikvot then and now

Being born again - a Jewish term

- Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again - John 3:1-15
- He was explaining to Nicodemus that we cannot rely on our “Jewishness” (or any other heritage) to enter the kingdom of heaven. A conversion of our spiritual condition is necessary for salvation.



Jesus and Nicodemus, by Crijn Hendricksz, 1616–1645. Yeshua told Nicodemus (a Jewish Pharisee) that to enter the Kingdom of God, one must be “born-again.”