

### The Power of Water

1. Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 78 (Blakney translation)

Nothing is weaker than water,  
But when it attacks something hard  
Or resistant, then nothing withstands it,  
And nothing will alter its way.

2. Midrash, Avot d'Rabbi Natan I 6:2

What was Rabbi Akiva's beginning? They say: He was forty years old, and he had not learned at all. Once he was standing by a well and he asked, "Who carved this stone?" They told him, "The water which continually falls upon it, daily." And they said to him, "Akiva! Have you not read (Job 14:19), 'Stones were eroded by water?'"

Immediately, Rabbi Akiva drew a logical inference for himself: If the soft can carve the hard, then how much more so could words of Torah, which are hard as iron, carve my heart of flesh and blood!

Immediately, Rabbi Akiva sought to study Torah.

### Three Practices

3. Rabbi Yaakov Baal haTurim (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Spain), Tur Orach Chaim 606

The practice is to immerse on Erev Yom Kippur, and Rav Amram says to immerse in the 7<sup>th</sup> hour and pray minchah...

4. Rabbi Yitzchak Or Zarua (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Germany), Or Zarua II, Laws of Yom Kippur 277

Proof that we immerse is found in Midrash Tanchuma (Vaetchanan), "'*Shema Yisrael*... Our Sages said: But on Yom Kippur, when they are clean, like *malachim*, then they say it openly." ...

5. Rabbi Jacob Moellin (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century Germany), Maharil, Laws of Erev Yom Kippur 3

Some rule that one should immerse after the meal of cessation, toward evening, because the main role of immersion is for repentance, and the closer it is to [Yom Kippur] itself, the better... For the custom is for men and women, young boys and girls, *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah*, to immerse... Even the elderly and young boys and girls, whose bodies are clearly free of *tumah* – the purpose must be repentance.

6. Rabbi Jacob Moellin (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century Germany), Maharil, Laws of Rosh HaShanah 9

The practice of going to seas and rivers after the meal on Rosh haShanah, to cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea, is because we find in a midrash that Avraham Avinu passed through a river until his neck, and he said, 'Save me, G-d, for the water has come to my life!' ...

7. Michah 7:18-20

Who is a Gd like You, Who pardons iniquity and overlooks transgression for the remnant of His heritage? He does not maintain His wrath forever, for He desires kindness. He will once again show us mercy, He will suppress our iniquities. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Grant truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham, as You swore to our forefathers in days of old.

8. Nechemiah 8:1-12

And the entire nation gathered as one to the plaza before the Water Gate, and they told Ezra the Scribe to bring the scroll of the Torah of Moshe, which Gd had commanded Israel.

And Ezra the Kohen brought the Torah before the nation, men and women, and all who would understand when hearing, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the plaza before the Water Gate, from first light until midday, before the men and women and those who understood, and the entire nation's ears were turned to the Torah scroll. And Ezra the Scribe stood upon a wood platform they had made for this. And beside him stood

Matityah, Shema, Anayah, Uriah, Chilkiyah and Maaseiyah on his right, and on his left were Pedayah, Mishael, Malkiyah, Chacham, Hashanahs, Zecharyah and Meshulam.

And Ezra opened the scroll before the eyes of the entire nation, for he was elevated above the entire nation. And when he opened it, the entire nation stood [halted]. And Ezra blessed HaShem, the great Gd. And the entire nation responded, "Amen, Amen," with their hands raised, and they bowed and fell with their faces to the ground before Gd.

And Yeshua, Bani, Sherevyah, Yamin, Akuv, Shabtai, Hodyah, Maaseiyah, Kilita, Azaryah, Yozavad, Chanan, Pilayah and the Levites explained the Torah to the nation, and the nation remained standing [halting]. And they read the scroll of the Torah of Gd clearly, and they gave insight, and they made them understand the text.

And Nechemiah, the governor, and Ezra the Kohen, the Scribe, and the Levites who made the nation understand, told the entire nation, "Today is sacred to HaShem your Gd! Do not mourn and do not cry," for the entire nation cried when they heard the words of the Torah.

And he told them, "Go eat rich foods, and drink sweet drinks, and send portions to those who do not have any ready, for today is sacred for our Master. Be not sad, for joy in Gd is your strength." And the Levites silenced the nation, saying, "Be still, for today is sacred; be not sad." And the entire nation went to eat and drink and to send portions and to make a great rejoicing, for they understood that which had been told to them.

### The Unifying Factor

#### 9. Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning of Gd's creation of the heavens and the earth, and the earth was *tohu* and *bohu*, and darkness was on the face of the depths, and the spirit of Gd floated on the face of the water.

#### 10. Ezekiel 36:25

And I will sprinkle upon you *tahor* water, and you will be made *tahor*...

#### 11. Talmud, Horiyot 12a

We only anoint kings beside a spring, so that their reign should flow...

### Our inspiration

#### 12. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:4

Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent one to cry out perpetually before G-d in tears and pleas, and to give tzedakah according to his ability, and to distance himself greatly from that with which he sinned, and to change his name, as if to say, "I am another, I am not that man who performed those deeds." And he changes all of his deeds for the good...