

# **THE MIKVAH AND THE EARTHQUAKE**

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What do an interior designer, the community Rabbi, and a woman who had a ‘dream’ and worked with passion to achieve it all have in common? Together with a small community whose families and friends donated far beyond their means, a committee of dedicated women, and a very generous donation from Rabbi and Mrs. Raitport of Brooklyn, New York, they accomplished what originally seemed an unattainable goal. A beautiful Spa-like Mikvah, where a Jewish woman can feel like a ‘million bucks’ as she engages in one of the holiest Mitzvahs in Jewish family life, was dedicated in Long Beach, California.

To celebrate and showcase the newly remodeled Mikvah, a special evening was planned for Sunday, May 17<sup>th</sup> 2009, featuring Mikvah tours, a delicious dinner, and a world renowned speaker, Shimona Tzukernik. Her topic was “The Waters That Keep the Fires Burning.” A comedienne, Dawn Ellison, rounded out the evening with a light and humorous touch.

The ambiance in the room was especially suited for the feminine mystique. Over one hundred women in this relatively small community came to taste, give honor, and celebrate this achievement. Women who have not yet used a Mikvah came out of curiosity. Others who had recently discovered this wonderful Mitzvah, with its many fringe benefits, came out of excitement. Still others came to celebrate the centrality of Mikvah to Jewish family life.

The excitement in the air this past Sunday evening May 17<sup>th</sup> was palpable. Suddenly, as Shimona spoke and held her audience enthralled the building shook and... **BOOM!** An earthquake, which registered 4.7 on the Richter scale, hit Southern California with its epicenter about 20 miles away. Everyone took out their cell phones and called home to determine that their loved ones were alright. Within minutes after assessing that all were safe and sound, the program continued. The crowd went home feeling they had just been to an earth shattering event, in more ways than one. One woman who had never seen a Mikvah before, and whose first marriage was to a gentile, said, "The presentation was great! The ideas presented seem so ideal for a marriage and so liberating to a Jewish woman. The Mikvah is truly beautiful; it looked and felt like I had entered a modern day Spa. When it's time, I'm gonna take the plunge." (She is presently engaged to a Jewish man).

What makes the Long Beach Mikvah so unique? After all, in the last 35 years beautiful Mikvahs have sprung up all over the world!

It all started in 1972 when Long Beach had no Mikvah, and the city had only a handful of Mikvah users who would travel monthly to Los Angeles. The dream of a Mikvah seemed almost impossible. Then a thousand dollar check arrived from the Lubavitcher Rebbe with an attached note. It read, "Since the Mikvah in Long Beach is so important, I am sending you a \$1,000 check via special delivery towards the building of a Mikvah."

This got the ball rolling. A committee was established to build a beautiful Mikvah, and a speaker's bureau was formed to reach out to the unaffiliated. A powerful pamphlet about Mikvah entitled "The Purifying Waters" was sent to over six thousand Jewish families.

When the Mikvah was actually built, a Jewish Family Institute was created to promote its use. The results were remarkable. Women started inquiring and learning about this ennobling Mitzvah, and many to whom this mitzvah had been foreign until then actually started using the Mikvah. I remember a couple telling me, "We don't keep Shabbat or Kosher yet, but we've become committed to the Mitzvah of Family Purity and the use of the Mikvah."

After this newfound excitement and Mikvah resurgence, the committee sent guidelines, packets, advice, and questionnaires to all Mikvahs throughout America. **THE RESPONSE WAS OVERWHELMING!** Many calls were received from Mikvah committees asking us 'how to do it right'. Queries came from Monsey, New York; Williamsburg, Brooklyn; Los Angeles, California; Far Rockaway, New York; and other large Jewish centers, as well as small communities where some had outdated and outmoded Mikvahs. Mikvah committees expressed great interest in our accomplishment. They flew in from S. Francisco, drove in from Los Angeles and the S. Fernando Valley to see the Mikvah first hand, and to hear more about this modern day miracle and accomplishment. Of note was the visit of a very prominent Rabbi in the Los Angeles area, Rabbi Isaacsohn, of blessed memory, whose Shul housed the main Mikvah in Los Angeles at that time. Although he was aged and went everywhere with an oxygen tank, he made a personal trip to Long Beach, a distance of 35 miles, to see our Mikvah and to find new ideas on how to beautify his own Mikvah.

Soon after that it all started to happen. **THE REVOLUTION HAD BEGUN!** The first Redwood Mikvah was built in Berkeley; the first solar paneled Mikvah was built in the S. Fernando Valley; and a new and beautiful Mikvah was built in the Pico Robertson area of Los Angeles. This revival wasn't limited to California alone. Over the next decade, new Mikvahs as well as the beautification of existing ones became the norm all over the country. Furthermore, this aroused a renewed interest in Mikvah use, even among those who had long ago forgotten this sacred practice which had for too long been so misunderstood. It became clear to us at this point why the Lubavitcher Rebbe had emphasized that the Mikvah in Long Beach, California was so important.

As I wondered why the earth shook during the women's celebration of our newly remodeled Mikvah, I realized it was perhaps a reminder for us to 'shake up the world again' with this precious Mitzvah. We urge and beckon all Jewish communities to build new Mikvahs and beautify existing ones. Moreover, to teach people about this meaningful and important Mitzvah, outreach programs and tours should be made available and well-publicized.

Let the power of this time-honored and hallowed practice penetrate the Jewish world once again, replacing apathy, ignorance and assimilation with holiness and purity. For general information about Mikvah, or for advice and guidance on creating a Mikvah revival in your area, contact us at [itamarcus@gmail.com](mailto:itamarcus@gmail.com) or call Ronye at (562)426-4894.