



## MIKVAH ACCESS: ACCESS MATTERS

The *mikvah* (ritual bath) plays an essential role in the lives of Torah observant women and men. The prohibition that forbids a man to have marital relations with his bride/wife until she immerses herself in a *mikvah* after her menstrual cycle and the obligation for a convert to immerse himself or herself make it essential that every woman or convert in a community be able to access the *mikvah*. This imperative applies to those with disabilities or ongoing health conditions. Unfortunately, a person can acquire a temporary or long-lasting disability or health condition at any stage in life; so our *mikvah* buildings and infrastructures should be designed and equipped in ways that can accommodate people with mobility, hearing, vision, and other disabilities.

The following are guidelines for the design for a fully accessible *mikvah*. It is most important that the user be able to access the building, a bathroom, and a *mikvah* pool. If you're working with a preexisting *mikvah*, go through the list and do whatever is possible. For example, hydraulic full body lift systems can be used in older *mikvah* buildings to transfer a wheelchair user through narrow interior doorways, onto toilets, as well as into and out of the *mikvah* pool. Nevertheless, it is best practice to design a new or renovated *mikvah* structure in ways that maximize the *mikvah* user's ability to independently access and use the facilities and amenities that a *mikvah* offers. Get input and ongoing feedback from *mikvah* users with disabilities in your community and surrounding areas.

### **PATHS, ENTRANCES, AND PARKING (where applicable)**

- ☐ Curb ramps to sidewalks are in place.
- ☐ Pathways are smooth and unobstructed and are at least 48" (inches) wide, with slopes of no more than 5 percent.
- ☐ At least one entrance is wheelchair accessible.
- ☐ Signs direct people to the wheelchair accessible entrance, if it's not the main entrance.
- ☐ Level resting space around entrance doors, 5 x 5 feet is provided.
- ☐ Accessible parking spaces are marked with signs and are close to accessible entrances.

### **RAMPS AND STAIRS**

- ☐ Ramps are 36" wide, minimum, extending one foot in length for every inch of rise, a 1:12 ratio. Thus, a ramp replacing an 8 inch step must extend 8 feet.
- ☐ Handrails are placed on at least one side of the ramp, 32" above the surface.
- ☐ Ramps have non-skid surfaces and are cleared from snow and protruding objects.
- ☐ Stair handrails on both sides are installed, 32" above the step, and extend a foot beyond the top and bottom of the stairs.
- ☐ Stairs have slip-resistant surfaces, i.e. rubber treads.
- ☐ A slightly raised abrasive strip is adhered to the top step of each stairway to warn people with limited sight where the stairs begin.

### **DOORS, DOORWAYS, AND INTERNAL PATHWAYS**

- ☐ Doorway openings are 32" wide or more, *including* the doorway leading from the accessible bathroom to the accessible *mikvah* pool.
- ☐ If any preexisting doorways are *not* wide enough for an adult-sized wheelchair, either the particular doorway is widened (preferable) or a hydraulic lift is installed.



- ☐ Doorway colors contrast against the wall colors.
- ☐ No more than 5 pounds of pressure is needed to open doors.
- ☐ Doors can be opened with lever handles or with a push bar.
  - If not, the door will be kept open or a buzzer and door assistant will be in place.
- ☐ All pathways are slip resistant and free of protruding objects so that persons who use crutches, canes, and walkers do not fall.
- ☐ All permanent signage complies with Section 4.30 of the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), for people with various vision disabilities.

## ACCESSIBLE BATHROOM CONFIGURATION

- ☐ At least one bathroom is designed to be wheelchair accessible.
- ☐ Bathroom doors in accessible bathrooms allow at least 32" of clear passage width.
- ☐ Clear floor space is provided to enable persons who use wheelchairs with footrests to turn around – via either a 60" diameter circle or a "T"-turn area.
- ☐ There is adequate room for a person who uses a wheelchair to approach the bathroom door from the pull-side and pull it open without it hitting the wheelchair.
- ☐ Floors are slip-resistant and unobstructed so that persons who use crutches and walkers do not fall.
- ☐ Two grab bars are installed, one adjacent to the commode and one behind the commode, to facilitate side transfer from a wheelchair.
- ☐ The toilet seat is between 17"-19" above the floor.
- ☐ Toilet paper can easily be reached from the toilet seat by someone with minimal arm extension.
- ☐ A call button with a pull cord is within easy reach from a seated position on the toilet.
- ☐ The sink is no more than 34" high with at least 29" high clearance under the front edge to allow persons who use wheelchairs to pull under the sink and use the faucet hardware.
- ☐ The sink has drain and hot water pipes that are insulated or otherwise configured to protect against skin contact with hot metal.
- ☐ The sink has a lever-controlled faucet that is easily operable and usable with one hand, without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist.
- ☐ The towel racks are placed within 54" of the floor for side approach or 48" of the floor for forward approach so that persons who use wheelchairs can approach and use the towel racks.

## SHOWER OR BATHTUB IN THE ACCESSIBLE BATHROOM

### *Roll-in Shower*

- ☐ A roll-in shower can be used by everyone, including wheelchair users and others with compromised mobility, instead of or in addition to an accessible bathtub.
- ☐ The roll-in shower has a securely fastened foldable seat at 17"-19" above the floor which ambulatory users can use or onto which wheelchair users may transfer in order to shower.
- ☐ The faucet controls and hand-held shower wand are positioned on the wall adjacent to the fold-down shower seat so that they are operable from the shower seat or from the shower wheelchair.



- ☐ A horizontal grab bar on the wall adjacent to (not behind) the foldable shower seat is installed for stabilization and for aiding in the transfer from a wheelchair to the foldable shower seat.
- ☐ A horizontal grab bar on the wall opposite the seat is installed for stabilization and to aid in maneuvering while in a shower wheelchair.
- ☐ The roll-in shower is free of doors that would impede someone from transferring from a wheelchair onto the seat.
- ☐ The roll-in shower is free of curbs or lips leading to the shower floor that would impede a wheelchair user's approach and transfer onto the foldable shower seat.
- ☐ The roll-in shower has faucet controls that are easily operable with one hand (i.e.: levers, wrist blades, single faucet arm, etc.) without tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist.
- ☐ An adjustable height hand-held shower wand with at least a 60" long hose is provided so that persons who shower from a seated position may wash and rinse with the directional spray.
- ☐ There is a gap between the wall and the inside face of each grab bar that is exactly 1½" to accommodate persons with disabilities who rest their forearms on the bars for stabilization so that the arm cannot accidentally pass between the grab bar and wall especially if a fall occurs.
- ☐ A rolling shower chair, with a slide-out foot rest, dual drop arms for easy and safe transfer, and a seat belt is provided for wheelchair users.

#### ***Accessible Bathtub***

- ☐ The bathtub faucet and shower controls are positioned between the center of the end wall and the open side of the tub so that persons with disabilities may approach and adjust the controls before they transfer onto the tub seat to bathe.
- ☐ The faucet and shower controls should be turned on and off easily with levers and be operatable and used with one hand, without tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist.
- ☐ A transfer tub seat (that can be securely attached to the tub) is available for persons who may not be able to lower into or rise from the bottom of the tub.
- ☐ An adjustable hand-held shower wand with at least a 60" long hose is provided so persons who bathe and shower from a seated position may wash and rinse with the directional spray.
- ☐ A horizontal grab bar at the foot of the tub (by the controls) that is at least 24" long is installed for stabilization while a person with a disability adjusts the water controls.
- ☐ A horizontal grab bar at the head of the tub that is at least 12" long is in place for stabilization and to aid in the transfer from a wheelchair to the fixed tub seat.
- ☐ Two horizontal grab bars (one high/one low) along the side of the tub that are at least 24" long are mounted for stabilization and to aid in the transfer from a wheelchair to the fixed tub seat.
- ☐ The gap between the wall and the inside face of each grab bar is exactly 1½" so that persons with disabilities can rest their forearms on the bars for stabilization without risking their arms accidentally passing between the grab bar and wall, especially if a fall occurs.
- ☐ A lift to transfer someone with limited mobility into and out of the tub is available.



## THE ACCESSIBLE MIKVAH POOL

- ☐ A permanent or portable *and* self-operable hydraulic lift is available for people who are unable to use the pool steps to enter and leave a *mikvah* pool. The lift will accommodate people with the least to most significant physical disabilities.
- ☐ If the doorway leading from the preparation bathroom to the *mikvah* pool is *not* wide enough to allow an adult-sized wheelchair to pass through, either the doorway is widened (preferable) or a self-operable hydraulic lift is set up to convey the *mikvah* user from the bathroom directly into the *mikvah* pool.
- ☐ Washable tactile and color-contrasting warning strips are placed around the *mikvah* pool to alert people with vision disabilities that they are approaching the edge of the pool.
- ☐ A grab bar, perpendicular to a pool wall, that vertically rises above the water's surface can be firmly inserted into or affixed to the *mikvah* pool wall and pool floor to allow the *mikvah* user to either hold or wrap either arm around it for stability. Leave enough room for body positioning and immersing and for assistants to help inside the pool.
- ☐ Optional: A transfer system, consisting of a raised transfer platform and a series of transfer steps that descend into the water is built in addition to providing the lift system to give people with arm strength an alternate way to access the *mikvah*.

## MIKVAH ATTENDANTS

The *mikvah* attendant plays a crucial role in ensuring that the *mikvah* is ready for use and that women properly fulfill the mitzvah. The *mikvah* experience is enhanced when the *mikvah* users feel comfortable talking with the attendant, especially about personal matters. When the *mikvah* user has a disability or health condition, she very much requires the ability to comfortably talk and collaboratively work with the attendant during the preparation and immersion processes. The following are guidelines for *mikvah* attendants to use when they work with people with disabilities.

- ☐ Speak to everyone in an adult tone and manner.
- ☐ Speak directly to the *mikvah* user, *not* to anyone accompanying her, about herself and about what she needs for preparation and immersion.
- ☐ If the person is deaf or hard of hearing, ask her how she would like to communicate with you during her preparation and immersion. This discussion can be conducted through texting, emailing, writing, or by using the 711 telephone relay service.
- ☐ Don't ask the *mikvah* user for personal information unless the information is functional in nature and directly related to preparation or immersion.
- ☐ Discuss with the *mikvah* user about how she would like to prepare and immerse and how you can help. Please do *not* assume you (the *mikvah* attendant) know best.

For further information about, guidance on and resources for accessible *mikvaot* please contact [access@yadempowers.org](mailto:access@yadempowers.org) or 646-723-3955. [www.yadempowers.org](http://www.yadempowers.org).

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