

A KAVANAH (INTENTION) FOR WASHING HANDS

BY RABBI ABIGAIL TREU

In Jewish tradition, every action is an opportunity for mindfulness and gratitude. One spiritual practice is to aim to recite 100 blessings a day, a way of creating a through-line of mindfulness and gratitude as the day unfolds. Among the moments for blessing in this tradition is upon washing hands. Some recite this blessing every morning as part of their morning washing-up routine, others when they wash hands before or after meals.

As we place renewed focus on this simple act, the following *kavanah*—intention—can become a moment of mindfulness and gratitude. Before washing hands or sanitizing, take a moment to pause and recognize what you're doing: You're about to clean your hands. Whisper to yourself:

Thank you for water and soap and sanitizer.

Thank you for hands.

Thank you for everyone who made it possible for me to be clean right now—the people who made soap and sanitizer and sinks and towels and plumbing and this space and facilities and for the human project of medicine and health and hygiene.

Thank you for my health and the ability to care for others in this moment.

As you clean your hands, look at them. Feel your hands, see your skin, your nails. Take this moment to pause and breathe. Feel what cleansing feels like right now. Smile. If there is a mirror, look into your own eyes and smile to yourself.

Recite the traditional blessing for washing hands, or one of your own creation.

The traditional blessing is:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם

Barukh atah Adonai, eloheynu melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al netilat yadaim.

Blessed are you, Source of Life, who makes us holy through these actions including this washing of the hands.