

My Miscarriage and My Mikveh

by Elisha Gechter

(<https://i0.wp.com/www.mayyimhayyim.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/elisha.jpg?ssl=1>) You see blood and it changes everything. You go from being unharmed to wounded, from ritually ready (*tahor*) to ritually unready (*tameh*), and sometimes from being pregnant to losing that pregnancy. And that's what happened to me – at 10 weeks pregnant, responding to a middle of the night cry from my three-and-a-half year old and then dashing to the bathroom before popping back in bed – I saw blood when I least expected it. Jessica Fechter wrote about her pregnancy loss in her memoir *Stir* (<http://www.amazon.com/Stir-Broken-Brain-Meals-Brought/dp/1594631328>), "Something red. I saw it before I saw it, my brain needed a sec to catch up." It similarly took a moment for me to register what I was seeing, but soon my body was being pin-pricked with dread. Back in bed it took a long time to fall asleep with the worry running through me of what seeing blood meant, what it would change. The next morning, consulting with my midwife over the phone, she told me, "It could be nothing or it could be something" and I should come in later that day to get a better sense of what was happening with my body.

I saw more blood when we were at the hospital for a sonogram. And together my husband Sam and I saw a fuzzy black-and-white picture of a nine-and-a-half week baby-shaped-fetus with no heartbeat. "Will you be able to reach out to friends so you don't feel lonely?" our midwife asked. Sam turned to me and said "I think we may be one of a few of our friends who has not yet experienced a miscarriage." So many people go through this, but not enough people talk about it. In the midst of utter sadness I felt grateful to our friends who had been transparent with us about their own experiences. It let me pick up the phone, send an email to those friends for whom I now had a slew of specific questions, and they shared with open hearts. Amidst my tears I wanted to know – how long did you bleed, did you need any intervention, did you go to work, when did you start trying again? I very much wanted to let my body take care of expelling everything on its own, and amazingly it did.



I saw such bright red blood that week I swore off a certain color of nail polish forever. I went from laying plans in my head for a summer baby, and for how to soon share the news with friends and family, to focusing my mental capacity on dealing with what felt like seven days of on-and-off labor, and on not being overly grouchy with my toddler. For all that time that I was wrapped up in my own thoughts and my own body, I went about my regular routine. Yet I was anticipating some point when I would retreat to my home for a few hours for what my midwife described as a time I might bleed excessively to pass the silver-dollar-sized embryonic sac. Waiting for this event was, as Sam put it, like “waiting for the birth of death.” He shared with me what he wrote that day when he was unable to think about anything else:

“I’m waiting for a birth, like when Zoe was due, but there’s only pain at the end of this one. I’m waiting for a death, like when we knew this last summer that my Grama was going to die. But this time I’m waiting for a death that’s already happened. I’m waiting for the birth of death, so I can have my breakdown and move on.”

Then, after a week, the blood just stopped – without my ever experiencing one isolated, dramatic moment. My little army of friends and family (those who had had personal experiences with pregnancy loss and those who had not) kept checking in on me after that first intense stage, still giving me space to cry. Eventually it was my time to return to the mikveh. One friend had [written about her experience \(http://mayyimhayyimblog.com/2014/01/01/3161/\)](http://mayyimhayyimblog.com/2014/01/01/3161/) at [Mayyim Hayyim \(https://www.mayyimhayyim.org\)](https://www.mayyimhayyim.org) after a miscarriage; I asked the staff to send me the ceremony she described. They gave me two versions – one for an individual, and one for a couple. I was moved by the latter and so was Sam, so we decided to make a joint appointment. Not unlike our time at the mikveh [before the birth of our daughter \(http://mayyimhayyimblog.com/2013/04/24/a-pregnant-pause/\)](http://mayyimhayyimblog.com/2013/04/24/a-pregnant-pause/), we came together to read words that choked us up, but this time for such different reasons:

Here we stand, the two of us together. The two of us, alone. We were counting the weeks until our child would be born. But the promise of life ended too soon. God, we mourn today for the one who could have been...

Even though Sam’s mantra in all of this was that my body was likely doing its job of taking care of an unhealthy pregnancy, it was still a loss. I am thankful that we turned toward one another in the face of that.

At the mikveh we prayed for help in continuing to move ahead.

Source of Healing, help us find healing among those who care for us, among our friends and loved ones who tend to us. And when the time is right, help us to dare to choose life again.

Who knows what the coming months will look like and feel like, but at the mikveh we marked the trust we have in our partnership, the confidence and comfort we feel in our midwife and all those who cared for us, and the belief in the ability of our bodies. We also marked our fortune in having a family that held our tears, a community that was gentle with us, and a mikveh that acknowledges the need for many types of healing.

May God who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, grant to me refu’at hanefesh u’refu’at haguf—a full healing of body and spirit... As we have wept together, so may we yet soon gather to rejoice. Amen.

Elisha Gechter is the Program Manager for [Wexner Israel Programs \(http://www.wexnerfoundation.org/programs/wexner-israel-programs-\)](http://www.wexnerfoundation.org/programs/wexner-israel-programs-) at Harvard. She is passionate about Jewish learning, is a lover of organizing and lives in Cambridge, MA with her husband Sam and daughter Zoe.



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Judith Dowla — Thank you for the enlightenment on niddah. Still in a state of wonderment of flashing lights. Your

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The Guide was incredibly respectful, supportive, and comforting. The first words she greeted me with on the phone were, "How can I be helpful?" That was exactly what I needed to hear in that moment.

- Jill

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