A General Outline of Taharah Procedures

1. Ritual hand-washing (no gloves, no blessing)
2. Check equipment and supplies and assign tasks
3. Don protective clothing, including gloves and (optionally) head covering
4. Light the Yarzeit candle
5. Open the coffin
6. Lay out tachrichim, in general order of use:
   a. place sovev in coffin
   b. place tallit in coffin (remove one tzitzit)
   c. pants (should be closed at the feet)
   d. undershirt
   e. kittel
   f. face cover
   g. bib
   h. head cover (kippah vs. bonnet)
   i. bag
   j. ties of various lengths
7. Recite three prayers in the presence of the deceased:
   a. Prayer for Mechilah (Forgiveness)
   b. Prayer for the Chevra (Ana Hashem)
   c. Prayer for Compassion (“Ribono Shel Olam”; “Chamol” Prayer)
8. Gently uncover the metah while reciting the Prayer for Uncovering (Vaya’an Vayomer)
   a. Remove bandages, tubing, or other obstructions
   b. Remove jewelry and save for the family
   c. Remove fingernail polish and clean under fingernails
   d. Blood is buried with the body
   e. Bodily wastes are discarded
9. Prepare for the Rechitzah (physical washing/cleansing) by placing three buckets of clean warm water by the body. Cleanse the met/metah while keeping the body as covered as possible.
   a. If enough members of the chevra are present, one member may have been assigned to chant selected prayers of praise from the Amidah prior to or during the washing
   b. Using a cloth and water from the buckets, wash front of body in following order:
      Head and neck (eyes and mouth closed or covered)
      Right upper arm, lower arm, hand
      Right upper trunk, lower trunk
      Private parts
      Right thigh, leg, foot
      Left upper arm, lower arm, hand
      Left upper trunk, lower trunk
      Left thigh, leg, foot
   c. One member makes sure the head stays on the headrest while others turn and wash back of body in same order as in b above
   d. Replace the sheet with a dry sheet and discard the other in the appropriate place for soiled laundry
10. Remove gloves, and wash hands with soap and water (for cleanliness) and again ritually, with water only (right, left, right, left, right, left) and without a blessing.
11. Reglove
12. Prepare for Taharah by filling three buckets of cool clean water and placing at the head
   a. Read the two teachings for Taharah, either before or during the pouring
   b. Starting at the head, the first poulter empties the first bucket of water in a constant
      stream over the top 1/3rd of the body. Just before the first bucket is empty the
      second poulter empties the second bucket, beginning just where the first poulter
      leaves off, and continuing in a constant stream until 2/3rds of the body have been
      purified. Just before the 2nd body is empty, the third poulter begins pouring until the
      lower third of the body has been purified. No break can occur in the constant
      stream between the 3 buckets of water, or the procedure must be repeated.
   c. Optionally, comb hair.
   d. After Taharah, recite the words “Thorah hi: she is pure” or “Tahor hu: he is pure”
      three times

13. Dressing in white garments (halbashah)
   a. Recite the prayers for dressing
   b. Dress the metah in the following order:
      - Head Cover
      - Pants (if open at foot, tie the pant legs closed)
      - Undershirt
      - Kittel
      - Belt around kittel with bows in shape of shins
      - Tie pants at ankles
      - Tie Face cover

14. Move the body into the prepared coffin (sovev should be in place but if not place it in
    the coffin, and if applicable, also place the tallit in the coffin with one tzitzit removed):
    a. Wrap the tallit and sovev around the met
    b. Place pottery shards over the eyes and mouth
    c. Sprinkle earth from Eretz Israel over the metah, while reciting the afar prayer
    d. With all of the chevra around the coffin, recite the priestly blessing together
    e. Close the coffin, place magen David at the feet (feet always leave room first)

15. While still in the presence of the deceased, recite the prayer for mechilah after Taharah
    and the prayer for the Chevra after Taharah.
16. The chevrah may choose to recite the misheberach prayer.
17. Before departing the funeral home, the chevra may choose to recite the prayer for
    peace (Oseh Shalom) or they may choose to depart in silence.
Proposed Prayers for Tahara Training

1. Prayer for Mechilah (Forgiveness)

To be recited by the chevra in the presence of the metah (body of the deceased):
__________ (first name/Hebrew name if known), bat ______________(first names of parents/Hebrew names if known) – I ask mechilah for you, for your family and friends, and for all of Israel, and I ask mechilah from you for any mistakes or indiscretions I may unintentionally commit during this service. We will do everything possible to insure that you are treated with respect, and that the elements of taharah are properly completed. Everything we are about to do is for the sake of your honor.

2. Prayer for the Chevra (Anah Hashem)

To be recited by the chevra in the presence of the metah (body of the deceased):
Source of Kindness and Compassion. Whose ways are ways of mercy and truth, You have commanded us to act with loving-kindness and compassion towards the dead; and to engage in their proper burial. Grant us the courage and strength to perform this sacred work properly – washing and cleansing the met/metah (body of the deceased), dressing her in shrouds, and burying her. Guide our hands and hearts as we do this work, and enable us to complete it with love. Help us to see You in the face of the deceased, even as we see You in the faces of those who share this mitzvah. Source of Life and Death, be with us now and forever.

3. Prayer for Compassion for the Dead (“Ribbono Shel Olam”; “Chamol” Prayer)

To be recited by the chevra in the presence of the metah (body of the deceased):
Life of All Worlds, have compassion for ______________(first name/Hebrew name if known), bat ______________(first names of parents/Hebrew names if known), and of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Your dear ones. May her soul and spirit rest with those who have gone before, for You give eternal life to those who have died, even as You bring death to the living. May it be Your will, God of our ancestors, to encircle the departed one with love, for she is Your beloved, the daughter of those who sought Your presence.

4. Prayer for the Uncovering (Vaya’an Vayomer)

And he (the angel of God) raised his voice and spoke to those who were standing before him, saying, “Remove the soiled garments from him (the High Priest).” And he said to him, “Behold, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you in fine garments.”

5. Rechitzah: Washing the Metah (body of the deceased)

The chevra may choose to recite a prayer or two before washing begins:
M’chalcheil chayyim b’chesed, You nourish the living with kindness
M’chayyeih meitim You give life to the dead
b’rachamim rabim.
Um’kayyeim emunato lisheinei afar.
Mi chamocha, baal g’vurot,
Umi domeh lach.
Melech meimit um’chayyeh,
Umatzmiach y’shuah.

with great compassion.
You fulfill your promises to those who are gone.
Who is like You, source of all power,
And who can be compared to You?
You hold the keys to life and death,
And You generate salvation.

Elohai
N’shamah shenatatta bi t’horah hi.
Attah v’ratah,
Attah y’tzartah,
Attah n’factah bi,
V’Attah m’shamm’rah b’kirbi.
V’Attah atid lit’lah mimeni,
Ul’hachazirah limkorah.

Elohai - My God
the soul You have given me is pure.
You created it,
You shaped it into my very own soul,
You breathed it into me,
And You watch over it within me.
One day You will take it from me
to return it to its source.

6. Talmud Reading/Study (Rabbi Akiva) before or during Taharah purification

Before pouring water, the chevra may choose to recite this three times:
“God is the hope, the mikveh of Israel.”

Traditionally, it was seen as a great honor to the deceased to study (and thus to have one member read this aloud) during the water pouring. However, it may not be practical to read during the taharah purification, and the chevra may choose to read aloud just before the water is poured:
Rabbi Akiva said: “Happy are you, the community of Israel. Before whom are you cleansed, and who cleanses you? Your Father, your God, who is in heaven! As it is said, ‘And I have sprinkled pure water upon you, and you should be cleansed from all your impurities and from all your falsehoods; I will cleanse you.’ (Ezekiel 36:25) And it is said: ‘Mikveh Yisrael Adonai – God is the purifier, the mikveh, the hope of Israel.’ (Jeremiah 17:13). A fountain for gardens, a well of living waters and flowing streams from Lebanon.’ (Song of Songs 4:15) Just as the mikveh cleanses those who are impure, so does the Holy Blessed One cleanse the community of Israel.” (Talmud Jonah: 85)

7. Prayer after Taharah

Repeat: Thorah hi, Thorah hi, Thorah hi (she is pure she is pure, she is pure)
Or (for a Male):
Tahor hu, Tahor hu, Tahor hu (he is pure, he is pure, he is pure)

8. Prayers before Dressing (Sos Assis)

The following prayers may be read by the chevra before dressing begins:
“I greatly delight in God; my soul rejoices in my Source. For God has clothed me in garments of deliverance and wrapped me in a cloak of justice. For as the earth brings forth her growth, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so Adonai will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61: 10-11) And Adonai will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in time of drought, and make strong your bones, and you will be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters never fail. (Isaiah 58:11)

Also:
“And he shall be attired in a linen headdress.”
“And linen breeches shall be upon his flesh.”
“He shall don a holy linen tunic.”
“And he shall be girded with a linen sash.”
“These are garments of holiness.”
“…and you shall bathe your flesh in water and put them on. And may the God of nurturance give you compassion.”

9. Prayer after moving the metah

After transferring the metah to the aron (casket), the chevra recites together the priestly blessing:
May God bless you and keep you.
May God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May God’s face be lifted unto you and give you peace.
(Num. 6:24-26)

10. Prayer for Sprinkling Afar

After placing pottery shards on the eyes and mouth, soil from Eretz Israel is sprinkled over the metah and the following prayer is recited:
“….For dust you are
And to dust you shall return.”
Gen 3:19 Etz Hayim

11. Mechilah after Taharah

The chevra members recite the following prayer:
____________________(first name/Hebrew name if known), bat __________________(first names of parents/Hebrew names if known), we ask mechilah for any indignity that you may have suffered at our hands, despite the loving care and concern that we have exercised during this tahara.

12. Prayer for the Chevra upon completing Taharah

Together, the chevra may choose to recite:
Creator of the Universe, we have just completed our act of g’milut chesed for ____________ (first name of the deceased). We thank You for the strength and courage to perform this mitzvah. We appreciate this sacred fellowship and cherish the bond that has brought us together.
13. Mi Shebeirach

Together the chevra may choose to recite:
Mi shebeirach avoteinu, m’kor habracha l’avoteinu.
May the source of strength Who blessed the ones before us
Help us to find the courage to make our lives a blessing.
And let us say Amen.

Mishebeirach imoteinu, m’kor habracha l’avoteinu.
Bless those in need of healing with r’fuah sh’leima.
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
And let us say Amen.

14. Optional prayer before departing

Oseh Shalom bimromav,  May the One who makes peace in the heavens,
Hu yaaseh shalom aleinu,  make peace for us,
v’al kol Yisrael,  and for all Israel,
v’al kol yoshvei teiveil.  And for all who dwell on earth.
V’imru: Amein!   And say: Amen!

Glossary

Aron  Coffin, casket.

Chesed Shel Emet  The truest act of kindness

Chevra Kadisha  Burial Society (literally, holy society)

Halbashah  Dressing the deceased in burial garments

K’vod Hamet/ K’vod Hametah  Respect for the dead (male/female)

Met/ Metah  The deceased, the dead body (male/female).

Mechilah  Forgiveness, the forgiveness asked of the met/metah by the Chevra Kadisha.

Rechitzah  Physical washing for cleansing the body

Shomerim  Sitting with the body such that it is never alone.

Tachrichim  Shrouds: “All Jews are buried in the same type of garment . . . Nineteen hundred years ago, Rabbi Gamaliel instituted this practice so that the poor would not be shamed and the wealthy would not vie with each other in displaying the costliness of their burial clothes.” (Lamm, The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning)

Tahara  Purification, specifically, the ritual pouring of water before dressing the met for burial. Also refers to the entire service.