



### A DIP IN THE LIVING WATERS IN ELUL? Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, Leo Baeck Centre

As you may have seen, the historic *mikvah* at the Melbourne City Baths has now been renovated and is available for use through the PJV office. Although the primary goal was to make it easier for our conversion candidates to complete the requirements for ritual immersion, it does of course mean that it can also be used at other times for anyone who wishes to do so. When our sister Progressive Movements constructed their own *mikvaot* (plural of *mikvah*) for the same primary purpose, they also found some modest interest for other uses.

Progressive Judaism is based upon educated choice - and we now have the choice, so let's introduce a few of the traditional uses by way of initial education. Further education is available on the internet, though of course a lot of this will be of an orthodox nature. Looking up: <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1387> takes you to an article about the use of the mikvah in American Reform communities. And one of the PJV Rabbis will be very happy to discuss the issues with you further.

'*Mikvah*' means 'collection' or 'gathering' and the root is first found right at the beginning of Genesis (1:9) in the account of the third day '*vayomer Adonai YIKAVU hamayim* - God said 'let the waters be gathered', and in the next verse it comes in a more recognizable form '*u'MIKVEI hamayim* - and the gathering of waters' God called 'Seas'. The *mikvah* is about RITUAL purification, not physical. This is clear because it is considered to be important to be physically clean before entering the *mikvah*. In order to be ritually pure in preparation for the holiest day of the year, some Jews still go to the *mikvah* on the day before Yom Kippur (the day of *Kol Nidrei*). The intention on *Yom Kippur* is to do *teshuvah* (repentance) and become 'new people' and immersion may help with this psychological transition. Indeed I have used the *mikvah* in London in the past, and plan to use our own *mikvah* in Melbourne as part of my High Holyday preparation this year. The month of *Elul*, leading up to *Rosh Hashanah*, is an opportunity for preparation for the High Holyday period, and has traditional structures such as the daily blowing of the *shofar*, the *s'lichot* service, special readings or visiting the cemetery. **Now, through *Elul* or during the ten days of Penitence, the historic, renovated *mikvah* offers a new yet traditional option. You may wish to try it?** It is an entirely private and personal experience - the water is warm and clean, offering both physical and spiritual refreshment. Call the PJV office 03 9533 9930 to book.