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This woman would become the first person he took to the *mikveh* when it opened in 1995. "I believe at that moment, the first true Reform *mikveh* was born."

In 1999, Shir Ami Bucks County Jewish Congregation in Newtown, Pennsylvania built its own *mikveh*. While its primary uses are for conversions and before weddings, Rabbi Yair Robinson says that new uses are increasing. The men in his synagogue often immerse before a big trip, such as to Israel, or in the aftermath of recovery from illness. Both men and women are immersing after divorce or illness, or in the midst of a job change. And many religious school children choose to immerse before their b'nai mitzvah. When his own newborn son reaches the age of one year, Rabbi Robinson plans to take him to the *mikveh* to celebrate. "I treat the *mikveh* as a natural part of the synagogue experience, as much as Friday night services or lighting Shabbat candles," he says.

Much of the impetus for building liberal *mikvaot* can be attributed to the success of Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters, a nondenominational community *mikveh* and education center that opened outside Boston in 2004. In its first three and a half years, it hosted more than 4,500 immersions, almost 25 percent of them by men. In June 2006, Mayyim Hayyim held a national liberal *mikveh* conference to encourage networking and sharing of best practices. Hundreds attended. As of March 2008, twenty-three communities have since requested help in building their own *mikvaot*, including more than half a dozen Reform congregations in the U.S. and three in Israel. And about eighty Reform Jews attended the Reform Movement's first-ever *mikveh* workshop at the 2007 San Diego Biennial.

Of the twenty-seven liberal *mikvaot* now operating in North America, five are in Reform congregations: Temple Israel in West Bloomfield; Shir Ami Bucks County Jewish Congregation in Newtown, Pennsylvania; Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto; Temple Sharon in Colorado Springs; and the newest, the Jill and Jay Stein Family Community Mikveh, which opened in September 2007 at Congregation Beth Israel in Scottsdale, Arizona.

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