

# A ritual bath at Poale Zedeck

By **ABBY MENDELSON**, *Special to The Chronicle*

Elvira Pfeffer lifts the wooden lid over a waist-high pool of water.

Wetting her hand, she takes a new drinking glass, reads a one-line blessing printed on the wall, and dips the glass into the water. "That's it," she smiles. "That's all there is to it."

The "it" in question is using Congregation Poale Zedeck's new Kaylim Mikvah (ritual bathhouse for utensils), a small glass room next to the front stairs of the historic synagogue at the corner of Shady and Phillips Avenues, Squirrel Hill.

As Mrs. Pfeffer explains, tevilas kaylim, the immersion of tableware, cutlery, and cooking utensils before their use in the Jewish home, is a Biblical mitzvah (commandment), found in Bamidbar (Numbers) 3:23.

Opened last spring, the Poale Zedeck Kaylim Mikvah counts its satisfied customers in the hundreds, for good reason:

• Convenience. Because

the mitzvah of tevilas kaylim is not bound by time, and can be performed by anyone over Bar/Bas Mitzvah, the Kaylim Mikvah is available 24 hours a day. While it is kept locked for security, many community members have keys. They are also available at the Poale Zedeck office, 421-9786.

• Cost. The use of the Kaylim Mikvah is free of charge.

• Comfort. Unlike men's and women's mikvaos, which have stairs, the Kaylim Mikvah is waist high, meaning no wet feet or wrenched backs.

• Clarity. The mitzvah of tevilas kaylim is quite simple, and is explained in a large sign on the wall. The one-line bracha (blessing) is printed in Hebrew and transliterated English.

• Chinuch (education). When teaching any mitzvah to children, there's no substitute for seeing it



**CELEBRATING** the new Poale Zedeck Kaylim Mikvah are generations of the Unger-Pfeffer families.

done.

The Poale Zedeck Kaylim Mikvah was fully funded by the Pfeffer family, at a price they would prefer not to discuss. "It was our family project," Mrs. Pfeffer says. The reason?

"Three years ago, when we were married 40 years, we wanted to give something substantial as a gift to the community. This

was our way to make a mitzvah easier, and to have it discussed publicly."

Over a period of three years Mrs. Pfeffer worked with Poale Zedeck, architect Peter Brown, city authorities, contractor Dovid Nadoff, halachic (legal) authority Rabbi Shimon Silver, and others, seeing the project through to completion.

"When a person does a mitzvah," Mrs. Pfeffer explains, "the person internalizes that mitzvah. Every mitzvah changes

you, elevates your personality, for the better. The mitzvah of tevilas kaylim is one more way to polish a person's persona.

"In looking back," she adds, "our family sacrificed a great deal to remain frum (observant) in the years when it wasn't as easy as it is now. I wanted to show we appreciate it. And I wanted to show my appreciation for all my children's and grandchildren's efforts as well. This is my way of expressing it."