YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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Dedicated in memory of
Joseph Y. Nadler z”l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi

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**Shiur #12: *Netilat* *Yadayim* (7)**

**Rav David Brofsky**

**Introduction**

Last week, we continued our discussion of the manner in which one should perform *netilat yadayim*. We noted that although the Mishna describes how one should wash his hands twice, once to purify the hands and then again to remove the *mayim temei’im*, some *Rishonim* (see *Bi’ur* *Halakha* 162:8 s.v. *metuharim be-shifshuf*) maintain that one may remove the *mayim temei’im* through *niguv* (drying one’s hands). According to these opinions, washing a second time is not necessary. The *Bi’ur* *Halakha* insists that the halakhically preferred method it to wash one’s hands twice.

Furthermore, the *Shulchan* *Arukh* rules that if one pours a *revi’it* of water over each hand, it is unnecessary to wash a second time. Some wash a second time regardless, in deference to the Ra’avad, who maintains that one must always pour water twice over each hand. Finally, we noted that some *Rishonim* (*Tosafot*, *Chullin* 107a s.v. *de-lo*, *Smag* *Asin* 27; see *Tur* 162) write that one should actually wash one’s hands three times. The first washing cleans one’s hands, the second purifies the hands, and the third washing removes the impure water. Although the *Shulchan* *Arukh* (162:2) cites this view, adding that the water for the first washing may be taken from the *revi’it* used for the *netilat yadayim*, the *Bi’ur* *Halakha* (162:2 *s.v. ketzat*) disagrees and rules that one who must clean his hands before *netilat yadayim* and has only a *revi’it* of water should clean his hands in another manner before performing *netilat yadayim*.

It is customary to pour water only twice over each hand. Furthermore, although the *Shulchan* *Arukh* rules that when pouring a *revi’it* of water over each hand one need not pour more than once, some *Acharonim* (*Chayei* *Adam* 40; see *Mishna* *Berura* 162:21) write that one should still preferably pour twice over each hand, fulfilling the *Ra’avad’s* view as well.

In addition, we discussed the function of *shifshuf* (rubbing the hands together), mentioned by the *Tosefta* (*Yadayim* 1:2). Although the Rash (*Yadayim* 2:2) explains that the Tosefta refers to drying one’s hands, most commentators understand the *Tosefta* as referring to rubbing one’s hands together. The *Acharonim* disagree as to whether one rubs one’s hands together simply in order to remove dirt from the hands (*Magen* *Avraham* 162:24) or in order to ensure that the water has reached the entire hand (*Pri* *Megadim*, *Mishbetzot Zahav* 162:7). The Rema (162:2) cite this *Tosefta*. The *Bach* (162) writes that although it is not necessary to rubs one’s hands together, it is customary to do so. The *Acharonim* disagree as to whether one should recite the blessing of al *netilat yadayim* before or after the *shifshuf* (see *Siddur* *Ha*-*Rav* and *Shulchan* *Arukh* 158:11, *Chayei* *Adam* 40:4; we will relate to this debate below).

We also related that the *Shulchan* *Arukh*, based upon the Mishna (*Yadayim* 2:3; see also Rosh, *Chullin* 8:18), teaches that if one touches one’s washed hand with the other, unwashed hand, or if another person touches one’s hands after they are washed but still wet, one must repeat the entire process. The *Acharonim* (see *Mishna Berura* 162:48) disagree as to whether in this case, in which one’s *tamei* hand touches the other washed, but still wet, hand, one must dry the hands before washing them again. Therefore, one should preferably pour a *revi’it* over one’s right hand, or pour less than a *revi’it* twice over the hand, thereby removing the *mayim temei’im*, and then pass the vessel to his left hand, without touching the hand, and repeat the washing.

Finally, we noted that some meticulous people dry the handles of the *netilat yadayim* vessel before washing their hands. Some (*Sha’ar* *Ha*-*tziyun* 162:41 cites the *Pitchei Teshuva*) express concern that when one touches the handle with his left hand, in order to pour the water over his right hand, he renders the water on the handle impure, and therefore when he then places his right hand on the handle, the *mayim temei’im* which was left by the left hand renders the right hand impure. Others (*Eretz* *Tzvi* 35) fear that in public places, some people may wash their right hand with less than a *revi’it*, and then take the handle of the vessel with their right hand, thereby leaving *mayim temei’im* on the handle of the vessel. Some *Acharonim* insist that one need not be concerned, and one does not need to dry the handles of the vessel before washing. Some (*Chazon Ish* OC 24:30; see also *Siddur Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav*) also suggest that one should dry his hands before washing *netilat yadayim*, although others (*Bi’ur Halakha* 162:2 s.v. *ha-notel*) disagree. Although the common custom adopts the lenient view, some meticulous people dry their hands and the vessel before *netilat yadayim*.

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 This week we will discuss the conclusion of the *netilat yadayim*, i.e. the *niguv yadayim* (drying one’s hands), and the recitation of the blessing “*al netilat yadayim.*”

***Niguv Ha-yadayim***

The Talmud (*Sota* 4b) attributes significance to the actual drying of the hands: “R. Abbahu says, ‘Whoever eats bread without first drying his hands is as if he eats *lechem tamei* (unclean bread).’” The Rishonim disagree regarding the reason and the halakhic significance of this passage.

Rashi (*Sota* 4b s.v. *kol*) explains that eating bread with wet hands is simply “*ma’us*” (disgusting), and therefore one must dry one’s hands after washing. Other *Rishonim* (see, for example *Or Zaru’a* 79), however, explain that by eating with wet hands, one will transfer the *tum’a* from one’s hands to the bread, and he will therefore, quite literally, eat “*lechem tamei.*” Seemingly, there are numerous differences between these two explanations. For example, if one washes his hands with a *revi’it* of water, or it one immerses one’s hands into a *mikveh* or *ma’ayan*, the water on one’s hands is *tahor* (pure), as we discussed previously, and therefore there would be no need to dry the hands. Furthermore, one might suggest that although when one’s hands are still damp but not “*tofei’ach al menat le-hatpi’ach*” they cannot transfer *tum’a*, they may still be considered too damp in order to eat bread. Therefore, while those concerned with impurity might permit eating bread with hands which are still somewhat damp, those concerned with “*mi’us*” might insist that one’s hands be completely dried.

Some (see *Chazon Ish*, OC 25:10) note that even one who pours less than a *revi’it* over his hands removes the impure water after pouring water over his hands a second time. Therefore, why would one still need to dry his hands? Seemingly, the Rabbis instituted that one should completely remove the impure water through drying one’s hands as well (see *Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav* 158:17).

The *Shulchan Arukh* (158:13) rules that one who immerses his hands, and one who pours a *revi’it* of water over his hands, may eat bread without drying his hands. R. Shlomo Luria (Maharshal) in his *Yam Shel Shlomo* (*Chullin* 8:39) disagrees. He adopts *Rashi’s* explanation of the Gemara and therefore always requires one to dry his hands before eating bread so as to avoid the problem of “*mi’us*.”

The *Mishna Berura* (159:46) cites the *Bach*, who concurs with the Maharshal’s view, and concludes that such is the consensus of the *Acharonim* and that such is common practice (see also *Arukh Ha-Shulchan* 158:18).

 R. Shimshon b. Tzadok, a student of the Maharam Mi-Rutenburg, in his *Tashbetz Ha-katan* (287), writes that one should not wipe his hands on his garment (*chaluko*), nor should one put one’s clothes under one’s head, as it may cause forgetfulness. It is not clear whether this practice is Kabbalistic or symbolic in nature.

His source is most likely a passage in *Horayot* (13b), which lists things which cause one to forget one’s studies, including putting clothes under one’s head (for sleeping) and drinking “*mayim mi-shiyurei rechitza*” (water remaining from washing one’s hands). The *Tashbetz* apparently believes that water left over from washing is, in general, dangerous and therefore should not even be wiped on one’s clothing. Many *Acharonim* (see *Magen Avraham* 158:17; see also *Mishna Berura* 158:44 and *Arukh Ha-shulchan* 158:17) cite this stringency. The *Acharonim* question whether this fear of forgetfulness applies to all of one’s clothes or only one’s upper garments (see *Pri Megadim*, *Eshel Avraham* 158:17), whether it applies only to his own garments or to others’ as well (see Responsa *Rivevot Efrayim* 1:126), and whether this practice applies to all water or only to *mayim temei’im* from *netilat yadayim* (see R. Re'uven Margoliot’s *Nefesh Chaya* 2:3). Seemingly, it is preferable to wipe one’s hands on his garment than to eat with wet hands.

May one allow one’s hands to dry on their own? Furthermore, may one dry one’s hands under a hot air dryer? The *Chazon Ish* (OC 25:10) writes that one may also wait until the hands dry by themselves. He explains that since the reason for drying the hands is to ensure that one does not eat with wet hands or that the *tum’a* on one’s hands is removed, even if the water dries on its own neither of these issues poses a problem. Other *Acharonim* (see *Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav* 158:17) insist that one should preferably dry one’s hands, unless one immersed his hands in a *mikveh*. R. Betzalel Stern (1911 – 1989), in his Responsa *Be*-*tzel* *Ha*-*chokhma* (4:141), writes that one who poured a *revi’it* of water over his hands may certainly let one’s hands dry, or dry one’s hands in an electric air dryer; however, one who poured less than a *revi’it* of water over each hand should preferably dry one’s hands properly.

**The Blessing of *Al Netilat Yadayim***

The role of *niguv* in the ritual washing of the hands may also impact upon another question: when is the proper time to recite the blessing over washing the hands? Generally, the blessings recited upon the performance of *mitzvot* are recited “*oveir la-assiyatan*” (*Pesachim* 7b) - before the performance of the mitzva. Indeed, the *Rambam* (see *Hilkhot* *Berakhot* 11:7) asserts that all blessings recited upon performing *mitzvot* are said prior to the mitzva, except for *tevilat ha-ger*, the immersion of a convert, who cannot recite the blessing until emerging from the water, at which point he is considered to be Jewish.

 The Rambam’s source is a passage from the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 7b), which teaches that “one … immerses and then arises [from the *mikveh*] and upon rising says the blessing *asher kiddeshanu … al ha-tevila*.” Other *Rishonim*, however, challenge whether *tevilat ha-ger* is really the only exception to the principle. For example, *Tosafot* (*Pesachim* 7b s.v. *al ha-tevila*, *Berakhot* 51a s.v. *mei-ikara*; see also *Rosh*, *Berakhot* 7:34) cite those who insist that this applies to *netilat yadayim* as well, as one’s hands may be dirty, and therefore one should preferably wait until they have been washed.

 Some *Rishonim* (see *Tosafot*, *Pesachim* ibid., Rosh, *Berakhot* ibid.) cite an additional reason for delaying the blessing. They explain that reciting the blessing before drying them is actually still considered to be *oveir la-assiyatan*, as if one is reciting the blessing before the performance of the mitzva; the Gemara, cited above, teaches that “whoever eats bread without first drying his hands is as if he eats *lechem tamei* (unclean bread).” Seemingly, according to this second reason, one should recite the blessing before drying the hands, while according to the first reason, one can recite the blessing even later, possibly until one says the blessing before eating bread (*ha-motzi*).

 The *Shulchan Arukh* (158:11) writes that one should recite the blessing before washing his hands. He adds that it is customary to say the *berakha* after washing, “as sometimes one’s hands are not clean, and therefore we recite the blessing after rubbing the hands together, at which point the hands are already clean, before pouring water over them a second time.” The Rema comments that “one can also recite the blessing before drying the hands, as the drying is also part of the mitzva, and it is considered to be *oveir la-assiyatan*.” In other words, the *Shulchan* *Arukh* cites the first answer suggested by the *Rishonim*, that the blessing was instituted to be recited after washing lest one’s hands are too dirty to recite the blessing. The Rema, on the other hand, cites the second reason, which views the *niguv ha-yadayim* as an integral part of the mitzva.

 What if one forgot to recite the blessing before drying his hands? The Rema concludes, “and if he forgot to recite the blessing until after he has already dried his hands, he may recite the blessing afterwards.” The *Taz* (158:12) cites the Maharshal (*Yam Shel Shlomo*, *Chullin* 39) who argues that one may recite the blessing until one says *ha-motzi* before eating the bread. The *Taz* (see also *Chayei* *Adam* 40:4) disagrees and argues that one should not recite the blessing after drying his hands. Some *Acharonim* (see, for example, *Kaf Ha-chayim* 158:86 and *Pri Megadim* 158, *Mishbetzot Zahav* 12) suggest scratching one’s head or touching one’s shoes, thereby creating a new obligation to wash one’s hands, at which point one may recite the blessing in the proper manner. The *Mishna Berura* (158:44), however, writes that the *Acharonim* agree with the Rema, and *be-di’avad (*post facto) one may recite the blessing until he says *ha-motzi*. Interestingly, R. Ovadia Yosef (*Yalkut* *Yosef* 158:10) disagrees, and rules that in this case one should not recite the blessing after drying his hands. He also objects to the advice offered by the *Acharonim* cited above, lest this lead one to recite an unnecessary blessing (see *Shulchan Arukh* 162:4).

 Since it is customary to recite the blessing before drying them (*niguv*), many mistakenly believe that one may talk until reciting the blessing “*al netilat yadayim.*” Indeed, R. Yechezkel Landau (1713 – 1793), in his *Derushei Ha-Tzelach* (*Derush* 4:22) observes that many, even Torah scholars, are more careful to avoid speaking in between the blessings of al *netilat yadayim* and *ha-motzi* than in between washing one’s hands and the blessing recited before *niguv*. He insists that although not interrupting between al *netilat yadayim* and *ha-motzi* is a “*zehirut be-alma*” (merely a precautionary measure),, interrupting after washing one’s hands is an actual *hefsek* (interruption) and one may have to wash one’s hands again! R. Ovadia Yosef (*Yalkut Yosef*, 158 fn. 11) rules that one who speaks in between washing and the *berakha* does not need to wash again, although he should certainly be more careful the next time.

 Next week we will discuss the laws of *chatzitza*, and the rules regarding one who does not have any water for *netilat yadayim*.