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**Shiur #15: Talking Between *Netilat Yadayim* and *Ha-motzi***

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This week, we will discuss whether one may talk or interrupt between washing the hands (*netilat yadayim*) and reciting the blessing over the bread (*ha-motzi*).

**Talking in between *Netilat Yadayim* and *Ha-Motzi***

As we learned in previous *shiurim*, one must be careful not to soil one’s hands after performing *netilat yadayim*. Therefore, one should eat immediately after washing one’s hands. Indeed, we noted last week that although the *gemara* (*Chullin* 106b) rules that one may at times “wash his hands in the morning and stipulate in order that it shall serve him the whole day long,” the *Rishonim* question whether this is limited to extenuating circumstances, and the *Poskim* explain that one must be very careful in order to ensure that his hands remain clean. However, when washing one’s hands before eating bread, must one also be careful not to interrupt, or even not to talk?

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 42a) states: “*tekef le-netilat yadayim berakha*” – “the blessing immediately follows the washing of the hands.” The *Rishonim* debate the meaning of this passage. Most *Rishonim* (Rashi, s.v. *le-netilat yadayim*; Tosafot, s.v. *tekef*; Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 6:20; see also Hagahot Maimoniot) explain that the *gemara* refers to *mayim acharonim*, the washing of the hands *after* the meal, before *birkat ha-mazon*. After washing one’s hands, one should not eat before reciting *birkat ha-mazon*.

The Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 1:1), however, states that one who “juxtaposes *netilat yadayim* with the blessing” will not be harmed for the entire meal. This passage clearly implies that the immediacy described by the *gemara* refers to the washing of the hands *before* the meal. Similarly, the Tur (166) cites his father, the Rosh, who “was accustomed even after the first washing (i.e. *netilat yadayim*) not to interrupt and not to speak, and when he would sit down to eat with others, he would wash his hands last, in order not to interrupt or to speak.” The Tur explains that his father was accustomed both “not to interrupt” and “not to speak.”

R. Shlomo Luria (1510–1573), in his Responsa (Maharshal 34), vehemently disagrees with the Rosh. He notes that not only do most *Rishonim* understand that the Talmudic passage (“*tekef le-netilat yadayim berakha*”) refers to *mayim acharonim*, but that even the Yerushalmi, cited above, may be viewed as a stringency, or may even be disregarded altogether, as the *halakha* is in accordance with the Talmud Bavli. Furthermore, he harshly criticizes the Rosh’s practice of washing his hands last in order not to interrupt. He wonders why the Rosh would be unable to avoid interrupting even if he washed first, and suggests allowing others, who may have greater difficulty not interrupting, to wash last. He even suggests that insisting upon washing last may even at times indicate haughtiness and may result in the degradation of the Torah (*bizayon* *ha-Torah*)!

He concludes that “is good to protect his hands and not to engage in other activities lest he will touch things which will require him to wash his hands [again], and therefore one who makes a fence and a hedge (*gader ve-siyyag*) and doesn’t interrupt… how wonderful is he. However, if a person asks him regarding a Torah matter and he does not answer, it is a great sin; after all, I proved that one may interrupt [after washing the hands]… And therefore I say that how good it is for a person to accustom himself not to interrupt with idle chatter … but for words of Torah, which ‘grant graciousness,’ one should interrupt…”

Although the Tur rules in accordance with his father, the Rosh, the Beit Yosef concludes that “it is correct to be careful also regarding the first washing,” implying that he views this as a stringency. Similarly, in the Shulchan Arukh (166), he writes: “Some say that one does not need to be careful not to interrupt between the washing and *ha-motzi*, and some say that one must be careful, and it is proper to be careful.” The Magen Avraham (166:1) adds that even according to the more lenient opinion, one should not pour a cup of hot water or engage in activities that require precision, as this may be a distraction.

The Rema (166; see Tosafot, *Sota* 39a) adds that one should not delay reciting *ha-motzi* for more than the amount of time it takes to walk 22 *amot* (approximately 11 meters). The *Acharonim* (see Arukh Ha-Shulchan 166:2, for example) record that some are even careful to wash their hands close to their table in order not to walk a long distance between washing one’s hands and reciting *ha-motzi*. This may have been more relevant before there was central plumbing. In any case, the Arukh Ha- Shulchan (ibid.) writes, “Truthfully, each case should be judged separately (*ha-kol lefi ha-inyan*), and in a situation in which it is necessary, it is not considered to be an interruption. For example, if the place for washing if farther than 22 *amot* … it is only considered to be an interruption if he unnecessarily delays [saying *ha-motzi*].” The Arukh Ha-Shulchan also rejects the practice of washing near one’s table, “*ve-eino ikkar klal.*”

The Magen Avraham (165:4) writes that “two or three words is not considered to be an interruption, and certainly if one is asked about something, one can respond yes or no.” The Mishna Berura (166:2), however, disagrees, and rules that one should not speak at all.

One may certainly speak if his words pertain to the *betzi’at ha-pat*, reciting the blessing over the bread. Therefore, one may ask for a knife, salt, or anything else relevant to the meal. Furthermore, if one is approached after washing the hands, he may respond briefly if nodding or signaling will not suffice (see Piskei Teshuvot 166, who cites Responsa Yeshu’ot Moshe 3:16). This is common when one washes in a public place and is then approached by those who may not understand his insistence on not answering. One may also answer *amen* when hearing *berakhot* recited by others.

Interestingly, the *Acharonim* cite the Zohar, which writes that one should pray for one’s physical sustenance (*mazono*) each day before eating. The Shelah (Sefer Shnei Luchot Ha-Berit) records that some recite *Mizmor Le-David* (*Tehillim* 23) before washing. He adds that although one should preferably recite this prayer before *netilat yadayim*, one who forgets may recite it between *netilat yadayim* and *ha-motzi*. The Magen Avraham (166:2) records that this is the “*minhag ha-olam*” (common custom), as does the Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav (166:1), who attempts to justify this custom. R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe, OC 2:48) adds that one should not make up one’s own prayer to recite between *netilat yadayim* and *ha-motzi*, and that this may even constitute an interruption between the *netilat yadayim* and *ha-motzi*. The Mishna Berura (166:3) writes that one should preferably say this prayer after *ha-motzi*, and others even harshly criticize this practice (see Arukh Ha-Shulchan 166:2).

Finally, although it is customary not to speak between *netilat yadayim* and *ha-motzi*, some have the practice on Friday night to wash their hands, and then recite Kiddush over wine, and only afterwards say the blessing over the bread. The *gemara* (*Pesachim* 106a), and subsequently the *Rishonim*, discuss this issue at great length.

The Shulchan Arukh (271:12) rules that one should wash his hands after reciting Kiddush and that one who washes his hands before Kiddush should recite the Kiddush on bread, and not wine. The Rema disagrees and cites those *Rishonim* who insist that Kiddush may and should be recited after *netilat yadayim*, and he records that this was the custom in Poland (*ve-khen ha-minhag ha-pashut ba-medinot eilu*), which should not be changed (*ve-ein le-shanot*). Other contemporary Polish *Acharonim* (Maharshal, Responsa 88; Levush 271:12) confirm this *minhag*.

Later Polish *Acharonim* (see Taz, 271:14, for example) question this custom, and other *Acharonim* rule that one should first recite Kiddush and then wash *netilat yadayim*. Indeed, R. Yosef Shaul Nathansohn (1808–1875) observes that the *minhag* to first wash completely disappeared from Eastern European practice (Responsa Sho’el U-Meshiv 5:18; R. Binyamin Shlomo Hamburger summarizes this issue, both halakhically and historically, in his Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz, vol.2 pp. 258–307). Today, Jews of German descent (“Yekkes”) still wash their hands before reciting Kiddush.

Next week, we will discuss the manner in which one should recite the blessing over the bread, *ha-motzi*, known as *betzi’at ha-pat*.