The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן ד' סעיף י"ח-כ

Overview

Siman 4 Seif 18:

A list of activities that require washing one's hands are presented. A Torah scholar who does not wash after these activities will forget his learning and if he is not a Torah scholar he will go out of his mind.

- The purpose of these washings is to remove *ruach ra'ah* therefore it should be done as quickly as possible and it should be to the wrist. (M.B. 38)
- Washing three times is required only for one who slept. Some are also stringent after walking between corpses and following marital relations. Magen Avrohom refutes the opinion who maintains that one must wash three times when coming out of the bathroom. (M.B. 39)
- The requirement to wash when leaving the bathroom or bathhouse applies even if one did not use those facilities. (M.B. 40)
- Washing after removing one's shoes, touching one's legs and rubbing one's head are for cleanliness and does not have to be rushed. (M.B. 41)
- Maharil writes that one should wash before and after davening by a grave and some have the custom to wash their face. (M.B. 42)
- The custom is to wash if one entered a room that contained a corpse or if one accompanied a corpse to burial. It is the practice not to enter a house before washing. (M.B. 43)

Siman 4 Seif 19:

One who bloodlets but does not wash will be frightened for seven days, one who has a haircut and doesn't wash will be frightened for three days and one who cuts his nails without washing will be frightened for a day and will not know the source of his fear.

Siman 4 Seif 20:

It is dangerous to wash one's face without drying it well and the remedy is to wash it a lot with *silka* juice.

Siman 4 Seif 21:

One must be cautious while davening and eating not to touch parts of the body that are normally covered due to the presence of sweat. Similarly, he should not rub his head but there is no issue to touch exposed parts of one's body.

- One must also be cautious about this while studying Torah. (M.B. 49)
- If while saying *shemoneh esrei* one realizes that he touched a covered part of the body he should rub his hands on a surface that will clean his hands but during *psukei d'zimra* or *krias shema* he should wash his hands. (M.B. 50)
- During a meal one is obligated to rewash but without reciting the beracha. (M.B. 51)

Stories to Share

"Guard Yourself, Lest Your Forget"

ש"ע ס' ד',י"ח: "אם תלמיד חכם הוא משכח תלמודו..."

The Chazon Ish, zt"l, warned that those who wish to succeed in learning should be exceedingly vigilant to immediately wash their hands when the Shulchan Aruch dictates that this is required.

He said, "We must be very careful regarding behaviors which, naturally or supernaturally, will cause one to forget his learning or make learning difficult. Included in the things which supernaturally cause one to forget his learning is failing to wash one's hands, both before davening and most especially when do so leaves a bad ruach on them. Our sages viewed this as a very serious mistake as the Shulchan Aruch rules in siman #4. Washing during these times is included in טהרה which leads to קדושה, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair reveals in meseches Avodah Zarah."

But the natural result of disregarding these halachos is much more serious than one initially understands. As Rav Moshe Sternbuch, shlit"a recounts, "The Chazon Ish would say that siman #4 says that failing to wash when ruach ra is prevalent causes one to forget his learning. Therefore, one who is not careful in this regard violates the prohibition, 'השמר לך פן תשכח—Guard yourself, lest you forget...' Indeed, such words are fitting for a gaon and kadosh like him!"

Halacha Highlights

The status of bathrooms nowadays

Mishnah Berurah Siman 4 Seif Katan 40

אפילו לא צרכיו ... משום רוח רעה ששורה באלו המקומות

[One is obligated to wash when exiting a bathroom] even if he did not relieve himself due to the presence of *ruach ra'ah*

There is a disagreement in the Poskim whether modern bathrooms have the same status as bathrooms in the time of Chazal. In the time of Chazal bathrooms were similar to outhouses in that the waste remained within the structure and thus its ongoing presence created an issue of *ruach ra'ah*. The Gemara Berachos (26a) rules that Persian bathrooms do not have *ruach ra'ah*. The reason is that the place where the waste would fall was sloped so it did not remain in the structure but came to rest elsewhere. Chazon Ish (או"ח סי' י"ז סק"ד) expressed uncertainty about this issue. On the one hand it is similar in the sense that the waste does not remain in our bathrooms similar to Persian bathrooms, but on the other hand it does remain for a period of time until it is flushed out. His inclination was to be stringent about the matter.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (הליכות שלמה תפלה פ"כ רות ל"ח) holds that our bathrooms are not considered to be full fledged bathrooms; therefore one who enters a bathroom and does not relieve imself is not obligated to wash. Other Poskim (ע' פסקי תשובות סי' ד' אות י"ט) adopt a stringent position and maintain that one is obligated to wash after entering a bathroom even if he does not relieve himself. If the bathroom is used for purposes other than relieving one's self, e.g. to shower, bathe, wash, etc. there is room for leniency but those who are stringent are deserving of beracha. Similarly, when no alternative is available it is permitted for one to wash *negel vasser*, for davening or for bread in a bathroom. Preferably when utilizing this leniency one should dry his hands outside of the bathroom. Another leniency applies to a person who puts his hands in a bathroom but the rest of his body was outside. Teshuvas L'Horos Nosson (ח"ז סי' א') ruled that one could certainly be lenient and not wash if he merely stuck his hands into a modern bathroom.