The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן צ"ב סעיף ד'-ז'

Halacha Highlight

Washing hands for *davening*

Shulchan Aruch Siman 92 Seif 4
צריך לרחץ ידיו במים
One must wash his hands with water

Shulchan Aruch (סע' ד') writes that one is obligated to wash his hands for *davening*. Even if water is not immediately available but one knows that in the next 72 minutes water will be available, one is required to travel that distance in order to obtain water to wash before *davening*. The requirement to travel to obtain water, however, is limited to when one knows his hands are dirty but if one does not know that his hands are dirty he may be lenient and is not required to travel to obtain water (מ"ב ס"ק ט"ו).

Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק י"ג) cites Rambam's position that if one was required to wash his hands for *davening* but did not do so and did not even wipe his hands on a surface that would clean his hands, even *b'dieved* his *tefila* is not considered a *tefila*. He then mentions that in Biur Halacha he concluded that one is not required to repeat *davening* in such a circumstance.

When Rambam presents this *halacha* he equates washing one's hands for *davening* with washing one's hands before eating bread and it is obligatory even if one does not know with certainty that his hands are dirty. Many authorities accept Rambam's position about this matter. Although we do not require a person to *daven* again out of concern for those who maintain that he is not required to repeat *davening*, nevertheless, regarding the proper way to wash one should be stringent in accordance with Rambam's position. This means that one should wash with a utensil and the water should flow as a result of the force of a person. Included in this is that the water should be poured over the entire hand until the wrist. As such, those who merely wet some of their fingers to wash their hands for *davening* are not behaving correctly (פסקי תשובות אות ז').

Stories to Share

Lenient or Stringent?

מ"ב ס' צ"ב, ס"ק ל': "האזן והאף: והגר"א מיקל בזה..."

The Mishnah Berurah cites a novel opinion of the Vilna Gaon on today's amud. He holds that touching ear wax and effluvia of the nose does not require one to wash his hands before learning or praying.

When the author of She'eilas Rav noticed that many people are lenient in this regard he wondered about it. "The halachah is clear that one who touches a place that is sweaty or scratches his head needs to wash his hands to pray. Although the Vilna Gaon permits one to touch the substances that come out of his nose and ears without washing, that doesn't necessarily mean that one can put a finger in either of those apertures without needing to wash. Why, then, should inserting a finger into either of those places make one's hand less soiled than touching sweat or scratching one's head? But if we say that they are the same, the entire leniency of the Vilna Gaon has very few practical applications and people should be informed that they are misunderstanding the Gaon's opinion."

When he asked this question of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, he pointed out that this is somewhat ambiguous in the Vilna Gaon. "יש מחמירין"—Some are stringent and differentiate between putting one's finger in the nose or ear—which is requires washing—and merely touching ear wax or the like which does not."

שאילת רב, ע' קפ"ו

When the Kaf Hachaim was asked to rule about whether one can rely on the Gaon in this respect, he forbade it. "The Rema clearly forbids this and that is the conclusion of most achronim as well."

כף החיים, סוף ס' צ"ב

Overview

Siman 92 Seif 4:

One must wash his hands with water if he has some. If he does not have any he must travel up to a *parsah* to obtain it. This requirement is limited to someone who was travelling and will find water ahead of him but if he would have to travel backwards to obtain water he is only required to travel a *mil* but further than that he does not have to travel out of his way. If he fears that the time for *davening* will pass he should clean his hands on stones or dirt or something that will clean his hands. (See below *siman* 233)

- One must wash his hands for *mincha* and *maariv* as well. According to Rambam one who could have washed his hands but did not even clean them, even *b'dieved* his *tefila* does not count but Biur Halacha concludes that he is not required to repeat his *tefila*. (M.B. 13)
- It is not essential for one to dry his hands. (M.B. 14)
- One is required to obtain water only if he knows that his hands were dirty. (M.B. 15)
- He must travel to obtain water only if this will not cause him to have to travel alone and will not cause him to not reach his destination during the day. (M.B. 16)
- The requirement to travel to obtain water applies only if one is certain that he will find water. (M.B. 17)
- Certainly when one is in his home he must *l'chatchila* travel to obtain water if he knows that his hands are dirty. (M.B. 18)
- Bach writes that one is not required to forgo *davening* at the time the *tzibbur* is *davening* to obtain water and one may wipe his hands with something that will clean them. (M.B. 20)
- One should not pursue water if he fears that he will miss the time for *davening* and certainly if he may miss the time for *shema*. According to many *Poskim* if the time for *shema* arrives and one does not have water he should read *shema* immediately and should not wait to obtain water. (M.B. 21)

Siman 92 Seif 5:

If one washed his hands in the morning and became distracted if he has water he must wash his hands again without a *beracha* to *daven* even if he does not know that his hands became dirty. If he does not have water he is not required to find water in order to wash. Even if his hands were dirty and he washes them for *davening* he does not recite a *beracha* as mentioned above *siman* 6.

- If a person became distracted we are concerned that he touched a covered part of his body. (M.B. 24)
- For studying Torah, *krias shema* and *berachos* we assume that one's hands are clean although Pri Megadim maintains that for *krias shema* it is assumed that one's hands are not clean. (M.B. 25)
- One must nevertheless wipe his hands with something that will clean them. If one knows for certain that his hands were dirty he is obligated to find water. (M.B. 26)

Siman 92 Seif 6:

If one is *davening* and then recalls that he touched a dirty place it is sufficient for him to clean his hands with dirt or stones or wipe his hands on a wall.

- If one is reading *shema* or *pesukei d'zimra* one must go and wash. (M.B. 27)

Siman 92 Seif 7:

A dirty place refers to covered parts of the body since they have sweat particles on them. Similarly, one who scratches his head is considered to have touched a covered part of the body. Therefore, it is prohibited to touch these parts of the body while *davening* or studying Torah. Similarly, one should not touch discharge from his ear or nose unless his hand is covered with a cloth.

- *B'dieved* it is sufficient for one to clean his hands to study Torah or recite a *beracha* even if water is available. (M.B. 29)
- Other authorities are lenient regarding ear and nose discharge. (M.B. 30)