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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן קס"א סעיף

Halacha Highlight

Are long fingernails an interposition?

Shulchan Aruch Siman 161 Seif 1

צריך לזהר מחציצה

One must be careful regarding a chatzitzah

Shulchan Aruch writes that when washing one must be cautious with regards to substances that are on his hands that may constitute an interposition. He then provides the guidelines for this matter and writes that anything that would constitute an interposition for immersion is considered an interposition for washing. Shulchan Aruch then gives numerous common examples of substances that could constitute an interposition for on one's hands. Shulchan Aruch HaRav (סעי' ד') writes that one must careful with regards to a fingernail that is partially detached since that part of the nail constitutes an interposition, as recorded in Yoreh Deah (198:21). Kaf HaChaim (אות י"ד) writes that one who discovers on Shabbos that part of his nail is detached should wash without reciting the beracha. His reasoning is that the partially detached nail constitutes an interposition but one may not remove it since it is Shabbos. Therefore, he should do the most that he could do which is to wash but not to recite the beracha.

Pri Megadim (א"א סק"ב) writes that just like a long fingernail that one intends to cut is considered an interposition when one immerses his body, even if there is no dirt under that fingernail, so too, long fingernails that one intends to cut constitute an interposition for washing. Therefore, he advises trimming one's fingernails every erev Shabbos so that one's nails do not grow too long. Kaf HaChaim (אות ד') in the name of Rav Chaim Vital writes that the part of the fingernail that extends above the height of the finger constitutes an interposition. His rationale is that according to Kabbalah one should not grow this fingernails long so it is assumed that one will cut them. Once they are in a position in which they will be cut, they constitute an interposition when washing or immersing.

Stories to Share

"The Merciful One Absolves Him!"

ש"ע קס"א, א': "שכל דבר שחוצץ בטבילה..."

A chassid once approached his rebbe, Rav Yizchak of Vorke, in a very broken-hearted manner. He had a physical ailment that contact with water severely exacerbated. When he had been ill the doctor had declared with certainty that his illness was the result of contact with water. They absolutely forbade him from going to the mikveh even after he recovered.

This chassid had previously been very careful to go the mikveh every day. He felt frustrated by his inability to maintain this practice. The Vorkever Rebbe turned to his young follower and said, "In Bava Kama 28 we find: 'אונס רחמנא פטריה—The Merciful One absolves those constrained by mitigating circumstances.' This seems superfluous. Why not just say that one who is constrained by mitigating circumstances is absolved? In addition, who cares if he is פטור since he didn't fulfill the mitzvah?

The Rebbe answered his own question: "Hashem sees into a man's heart. If a person yearns to do a mitzvah but truly cannot, it is as though the Torah itself fulfills the mitzvah for him!"

The chassid lingered in his rebbe's presence, obviously unsatisfied with this response. He clearly was hoping to receive a blessing that he would, in fact, be able to immerse in the mikveh.

The rebbe admonished him, "Why are you still standing here? Who will do the mitzvah better—you, or the Torah?"

גדולת הצדיקים, עמ' נ"ה

Overview

Siman 161 Seif 1:

One must be cautious regarding interpositions because anything that intervenes for immersion intervenes for washing. For example, dirt under one's fingernail which is not on the skin, dough under one's fingernail even where it is on the skin, a bandage with ointment, clay from pits and clay used by pottery makers. If the intervening substance covers only a minority of one's hand and one is not particular about its presence there is no reason for concern. For this reason people do not clean clay from under their fingernails for washing since it covers only a minority of their hand and people are not particular about its presence since people are not particular to remove it for washing. If, however, one is particular he must remove it and this opinion should be followed. It is possible to be lenient regarding interpositions regarding washing since there are opinions that maintain that there are no issues of interpositions for washing but halacha follows the first opinion.

- If one has an intervening substance on the majority of his hand washing is ineffective even if most people do not mind the presence of the substance but if it covers only a minority of the hand the washing is ineffective only if it is common for people to mind its presence. If one washed his hands and then finds an intervening substance we assume it appeared after washing regardless of how much of the hand is covered. It is preferable for one to examine his hands before washing. (M.B. 1)
- Shulchan Aruch refers to dirt that commonly collects beneath one's fingernail but actual excrement invalidates one's netila even if it is on the skin beneath the fingernail. (M.B. 2)
- People are generally particular about the presence of dough even on the skin beneath the fingernail. Elya Rabba in the name of Sefer Chassidim writes that out of this concern one should not grow his nails long. (M.B. 3)
- Shulchan Aruch refers to smearing an ointment of sorts on a bandage to alleviate pain. (M.B. 4)
- In this case Shulchan Aruch refers to where there is pain but no wound and for that reason there is concern that one will remove the bandage and the part of his hand that was under the bandage will touch the food. (M.B. 5)
- The clay in these cases is very sticky and prevents water from getting beneath them. However, if someone works in a profession that involves this clay it is not an interposition. (M.B. 6)
- If one finds an intervening substance covering a minority of his hand but he is not particular about it there is no need for concern. (M.B. 7)
- There is a disagreement whether one can claim to not be particular regarding the substances enumerated by Shulchan Aruch. (M.B. 7)
- If the majority of one's hand is covered he may not wash even if he is not particular that the substance is on his hand. (M.B. 8)
- Magen Avrohom asserts that Rema refers to where the dirt is on the skin beneath the fingernail but if it is not on the skin it must certainly be removed but some authorities are lenient about this matter. (M.B. 9)
- The implication is that although most people are not particular if this person is particular we take his perspective into account and it is considered an interposition. This is limited to those substances that are very sticky but not to those that are not so sticky. (M.B. 10)