

# WASHING BEFORE A MEAL: PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

*The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.*

*When you will eat of the bread of the Land... (15:19)*

**QUESTION:** Visitors to amusement parks, etc., are often stamped on the back of their hand so that they can freely exit and re-enter the park. May one wash his hands for a meal while the stamp is visible, or does the stamp constitute a chatzitzah (an halachical obstruction) that invalidates the netilas yadayim?

**ANSWER:** Yes, one may wash his hands. There are two reasons why this may be permitted:

Shulchan Aruch<sup>(1)</sup> rules that dried ink is considered a chatzitzah. He is referring, however, only to dried ink which can actually be felt when touched, such as ink from an inkwell. If there is only an inky smudge but the ink has no substance and cannot be felt, it is not considered a chatzitzah<sup>(2)</sup>.

An additional argument for leniency in this case is that the basic halachah follows the opinion of the poskim who rule that one is required to wash his hands only until the knuckles. Although under normal circumstances one should be stringent and wash his hands until the wrist<sup>(3)</sup>, in this situation [when the stamp is needed for re-entry and there is no other choice] we may rely on the basic view that washing the hands until the knuckles is sufficient. Accordingly, even if the stamp on the back of the hand would constitute a chatzitzah, the washing itself is still valid.

**QUESTION:** Is a woman's nail polish considered a chatzitzah?

**ANSWER:** Generally, no. Since women paint their fingernails for the sake of beauty, the polish is considered as if it is part of their body and is not considered a chatzitzah<sup>(4)</sup>. If, however, the nail polish has become chipped and the woman would be embarrassed to be seen in public in that state, it is possible that the nail polish would no longer be considered as part of her body<sup>(5)</sup>. She should, therefore, remove the chipped polish before washing her hands.

**QUESTION:** Are men or women required to remove their rings before washing their hands for a meal?

**ANSWER:** Generally, yes. A ring is considered a chatzitzah since the water cannot easily reach all

parts of the finger while it is worn. Even though a loose-fitting ring does allow the water to reach the entire finger, the poskim maintain that it is difficult to assess what exactly is considered loose and what is considered tight. L'chatchilah, therefore, all rings should be removed before washing(6). B'dieved, though, one who forgot to remove his ring and has already washed, need not wash his hands over, as long as the ring fits loosely around the finger(7). [When in doubt if the ring is loose or not, the washing should be repeated but the blessing should not.]

The rule that an object such as a ring is considered a chatzitzah applies only to men or women who sometimes, even on rare occasions, remove their ring from their finger. The occasional removal signifies that the person is sometimes particular about having the ring on his finger, rendering it a chatzitzah. It follows, therefore, that men or women who never take their ring off, even when kneading dough or performing manual labor, may wash their hands for a meal while wearing a ring(8).

**QUESTION:** Is a band-aid protecting an open wound [from bleeding, infection or pain] considered a chatzitzah?

**ANSWER:** No. Indeed, the area which the band-aid is protecting does not need not to be washed at all. Care should be taken, however, that at least 3.3 fl. oz. of water is poured over the rest of the hand(9).

It frequently happens, however, that the wound which was originally protected by the band-aid has healed and the band-aid no longer serves as protection. In such a case, the band aid must be removed before the washing. If it was not, the washing may be invalid(10).

**QUESTION:** Is it permitted to wash for a meal in the bathroom?

**ANSWER:** L'chatchilah this should not be done, even if the hands will be dried outside the bathroom(11). It is proper, therefore, to fill a cup with water and wash one's hands outside the bathroom.

Under extenuating circumstances, however, there are several poskim who are lenient and allow washing in a modern day bathroom, since they are in several ways different from the olden-day bathroom which the Shulchan Aruch was referring to(12).

In addition, several poskim are lenient concerning a bathroom which is also used for personal grooming, e.g., tooth brushing or hair combing (a full bathroom). In their opinion, such a bathroom may be used for washing hands as well(13).

**QUESTION:** What is the proper procedure to follow when using the bathroom immediately before washing for a meal?

**ANSWER:** This presents an halachic problem since it would be improper to wash the hands twice in a row, nor is it proper to delay the recital of asher yatzar until the meal has begun. After debating the

various possibilities, the poskim recommend one of the following two methods<sup>(14)</sup>:

Wash your hands with water but without using a vessel<sup>(15)</sup>, dry your hands and recite asher yatzar, and then rewash your hands with a vessel as usual and recite al netilas yadayim and ha-motzi<sup>(16)</sup>;

Wash your hands with a vessel as usual, recite al netilas yadayim, dry the hands, recite asher yatzar and then recite ha-motzi<sup>(17)</sup>.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. O.C. 161:2.

2. Mishnah Berurah 161:14. See also Machatzis ha-Shekel 8. There is a minority view that holds [concerning tevilah] that a mere appearance may also be considered a chatzitzah (see Sidrei Taharah Y.D. 198:17). See following paragraph as to why the stamp will not be a chatzitzah even according to that view.

3. Mishnah Berurah 161:21 and Beiur Halachah.

4. Mishnah Berurah 161:12.

5. Halichos Bas Yisrael 3:2 and other contemporary poskim. See possible source in Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:62 [concerning artificial eyelashes].

6. Rama O.C. 161:3.

7. Mishnah Berurah 161:18. This is valid, however, only if he poured at least 3.3. fl. oz. of water over his hand.

8. Mishnah Berurah 161:19; Aruch ha-Shulchan 161:6. [A woman who removes her ring only when immersing in a mikveh, may still wash for a meal while wearing a ring.]

9. O.C. 162:10.

10. Mishnah Berurah 161:4. If the band-aid is on the back of the hand past the knuckles, the washing is valid b'dieved.

11. Chazon Ish O.C. 24:26; Igros Moshe E.H. 1:114.

12. Eretz Tzvi 110-111; Zekan Aharon 1:1; Harav Y.Y. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael); Minchas Yitzchak 1:60.

13. Eretz Tzvi 110:111; Chelkas Yaakov 1:205; 2:174; Minchas Yitzchak 1:60; Harav E.M. Shach (Hashkafaseinu, vol. 4, pg. 5).

14. There are also some other suggestions, see Kaf ha-Chayim 165:1 and Ketzos ha-Shulchan 33:14.

15. As explained in Minchas Yitzchak 5:96 that it is not required to use a vessel when washing one's hands upon leaving the bathroom. Those who are particular to wash their hands from a vessel upon leaving the bathroom, should not use this method.
16. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 40:15; Mishnah Berurah 165:2. If not enough water is available for two washings, all agree that the second method is followed.
17. Aruch ha-Shulchan 165:2 and Chazon Ish O.C. 24:30, who testify that our custom is to follow this method. If the hands are very dirty, this method cannot be used, since the dirt may be considered a chatzitzah.

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