

# WASHING BEFORE A MEAL: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (PART 1) THE PROCEDURE

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

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

**ANSWER:** This presents a halachic problem since it is improper both to wash the hands twice in a row and 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.(1)

\* Wash your hands with water but without using a vessel,(2) 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;(3)

\* Wash your hands with a vessel as usual, recite al netilas yadayim, dry the hands, recite asher yatzar and then recite ha-motzi.(4)

**QUESTION:** How much water should be used for netilas yadayim?

**ANSWER:** There are four possible shiurim (amounts) of water that could suffice for washing. In order of preference:

\* Technically, one could use one revi'is (approximately 3 fl. oz.) of water to wash both hands and his washing would be valid. Practically, this is not recommended, as several halachic problems could result when so little water is used.(5)

\* The recommended method is to pour at least one revi'is of water on each hand.

\* Some poskim require a second pouring of water over each hand. While ideally one should conduct himself according to this view, it is not obligatory, and if not enough water is available one need not search for it.(6)

\* It is proper and praiseworthy to use water unstintingly when washing, as the Talmud tells us that one who washes with an abundance of water is abundantly rewarded from Heaven.(7)

**QUESTION:** After washing one's hands, another person who has yet to wash touched the wet hands. Is the washing valid?

**ANSWER:** A minority opinion maintains that if one washed his hands - as recommended - with at least a revi'is of water, the washing is valid and the hand does not need to be rewashed.(8) Most

poskim, however, hold that the washing is invalid.(9) It is recommended that the hands be rewashed, but the blessing is not repeated.(10) Before rewashing, the hands should be dried.(11)

The same halachah applies if after washing one hand, the other (unwashed) hand touched the washed hand. But in this situation the poskim debate whether or not the hands first need to be dried before being rewashed.(12)

**QUESTION:** Is it important to make sure that one's hands are completely dry before washing?

**ANSWER:** According to the Mishnah Berurah this not a concern; it is permitted to wash one's hands even though they were just wet.(13) The Chazon Ish,(14) however, disagrees and requires that the hands be totally dry before the washing takes place. In his opinion, even b'diavad the washing may not be valid if the hands were not completely dry before being washed. It has, therefore, become customary for God-fearing people to carefully dry their hands completely before washing for a meal.(15)

**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.(16) 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 which is considerably different from the olden-day bathroom to which the Shulchan Aruch was referring.(17)

In addition, several poskim are lenient concerning a bathroom which is also used for personal grooming, e.g., toothbrushing or haircombing (a full bathroom). In their opinion, such a bathroom may be used for washing hands as well.(18)

## THE VESSEL AND THE WATER

**QUESTION:** Is it permitted to wash hands for a meal directly from the sink [without using a vessel] by turning the faucet on and off directly over each hand?

**ANSWER:** No. There are two basic requirements for how the water must reach the hands: a) from a utensil (keli), and b) manually, koach gavra (lit., "by human force"). Although turning the faucet on and off satisfies the requirement of koach gavra, since a "human force" allows the water to be poured over the hand by turning the faucet on, it still does not satisfy the requirement that the water must come from a keli. Since the water comes from the pipe directly onto the hands, it is not considered as if one washed from a keli, for a pipe is not a keli.(19)

In a case where the water for netilas yadayim is coming from a keli such as an urn, and a vessel with which to wash the hands is not available, then it is permitted to place the hand directly underneath the spigot, press the spigot and allow the first flow of water to fall directly on the hand. The

procedure is then repeated for the second hand. (20)

**QUESTION:** What type of cup may be used for netilas yadayim?

**ANSWER:** A cup made of any material, including paper or plastic,(21) may be used. Even a cone-shaped paper cup which cannot stand on its own may be used, since the cup was designed and manufactured in that shape.(22)

L'chatchilah it is not advisable to use a bottle, a soda can, or any vessel with a narrow opening for washing, since it is preferable that the entire revi'is reach the hand full-force from the vessel from which it is being poured. If, however, no other vessel is readily available, it is permitted to use one with a narrow opening as long as the water is poured in an uninterrupted flow.(23)

**QUESTION:** Is it permitted to dry the hands with an electric dryer?

**ANSWER:** Yes. Although the hands must be dried before the bread is eaten, (24) our main concern is that the hands will be dried, not the manner in which they are dried. It is also permitted, therefore, to let the hands air dry.(25)

**QUESTION:** After changing a baby's dirty diaper during a meal, does one need to wash his/her hands again for netilas yadayim?

**ANSWER:** Yes, he does. Changing a dirty diaper, as well as using the bathroom, scratching one's scalp or touching the sweaty areas of one's body, is considered a hesech ha-da'as, which "cancels" the original washing of the hands. Therefore, Netilas yadayim must be repeated before one may resume the meal.(26)

Whether or not the berachah of al netilas yadayim must be repeated as well is a subject of much debate among the poskim. Some rule that al netilas yadayim is repeated in all of the hesech ha-da'as cases mentioned above,(27) others require that al netilas yadayim be repeated only in some of those cases, such as using the bathroom or diapering a baby,(28) and some hold that the berachah of al netilas yadayim is not repeated in any of these hesech ha-da'as cases.(29) While one may follow any of the three views,(30) the prevalent custom today follows the third opinion.

#### FOOTNOTES:

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

2 As explained in Minchas Yitzchak 5:96, that it is not required to use a vessel when washing one's hands after using the bathroom. Those who are particular to wash their hands from a vessel after using the bathroom should not use this method.

3 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.

4 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.

5 Mishnah Berurah 158:37.

6 Mishnah Berurah 162:21. See also Chazon Ish 24:22. According to the Kabbalah of the Ari z"l, it is proper to wash three times on each hand; Kaf ha-Chayim 162:2.

7 O.C. 158:10.

8 Shulchan Aruch Harav 162:10, quoted by Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 162:39.

9 Chayei Adam 40:3; Aruch ha-Shulchan 162:20; Kaf ha-Chayim 162:29. This seems to be the view of the Mishnah Berurah 162:45 as well. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 162:39, where he remains undecided on this issue.

10 Mishnah Berurah 162:49 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 39.

11 Mishnah Berurah 162:45.

12 Mishnah Berurah 162:48 quotes two views about this and does not decide. While Aruch ha-Shulchan 162:22 is lenient, Chazon Ish 24:23 rules stringently.

13 Beur Halachah 162:2 (s.v. ha-notel).

14 O.C. 24:20. [Shulchan Aruch Harav agrees with this view in his Siddur but not in his Shulchan Aruch.]

15 Ketzos ha-Shulchan 33:13.

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

17 Eretz Tzvi 110-111; Zekan Aharon 1:1; Minchas Yitzchak 1:60; 4:36; Harav Y.E. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael).

18 Eretz Tzvi 110:111; Chelkas Yaakov 1:205; 2:174; Minchas Yitzchak 1:60; Harav E.M. Shach (Hashkafaseinu, vol. 4, pg. 5). Harav C. Kanievsky, however, does not rely on this leniency; see Nekiyus v'Kavod b'Tefillah, pgs. 163-164.

19 Zekan Aharon 1:1 (quoted in She'arim Metzuyanin b'Halachah 40:5); Minchas Yitzchak 4:21, based on Magen Avraham 159:4 and Mishnah Berurah 47; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 20, note 40). See also Taharas Mayim, pgs. 319-320. See, however, Shalmas Chayim 163, Yaskil Avdi 5:26 and Tzitz Eliezer 8:7, who rule that under extenuating circumstances, we may consider the pipe a keli and it would be permitted to wash from it.

20 Mishnah Berurah 159:64; 162:30.

21 Harav Y.E. Henkin (Am ha-Torah, 1979, vol. 10, pg.6); Harav M. Feinstein and Harav Y. Kamenetsky, oral ruling, quoted by Harav Y. Belsky (Halachah Berurah).

22 She'arim Metzuyanim B'halachah 40:3.

23 Mishnah Berurah 162:30; Aruch ha-Shulchan 162:15.

24 O.C. 158:12.

25 Chazon Ish O.C. 25:10. See She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 40:5.

26 O.C. 164:2. Mishnah Berurah 164:8 rules that even if there was already a piece of bread in his mouth when the hesech ha-da'as took place, he may not swallow the piece until he washes again. Other poskim, however, disagree; see: Peri Megadim 7, Kaf ha-Chayim 10; Aruch ha-Shulchan 5.

27 O.C. 164:2 and a host of poskim mentioned in Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 164:10.

28 Chayei Adam 40:14; Mishnah Berurah 164:13; Aruch ha-Shulchan 164:5.

29 Pri Megadim 170:2; Siddur Derech ha-Chayim; Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 164:2; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 40:16; Ben Ish Chai, Kedoshim 21; Kaf ha-Chayim 164:16. See also Chazon Ish 25:9.

30 See Beir Halachah 164:2, s.v., lachzor; Chazon Ish 25:9.

---

Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and **Torah.org**.  
Weekly sponsorships are available--please send email to the moderator, Dr. Jeffrey Gross  
[jgross@torah.org](mailto:jgross@torah.org).

Rabbi Neustadt is Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights. He may be reached at 216-321-4635 or  
at [jsgross@core.com](mailto:jsgross@core.com).