

AIRPLANE TRAVEL - WASHING FOR A MEAL

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: What should one do if he wants to eat bread, but he is traveling and has no access to water with which to wash his hands?

Answer: If he has a bottle of seltzer with him, he may use that to wash his hands and recite the proper blessing^[1]. Otherwise, he may use a soft drink, beer or tea, with which to wash his hands^[2], but it is questionable whether or not a blessing is recited when these beverages are used for netilas yadayim^[3]. If a soft drink or beer is not available, he may wash his hands with any fruit juice, but not with oil^[4] or wine. No blessing is recited when washing with fruit juice^[5].

If there are no beverages to wash with, one may wear gloves or wrap both of his hands—until the wrist^[6]—in plastic bags, etc. ^[7] The hands must remain covered during the entire meal, even when one is eating foods other than bread^[8].

If none of the above options are available, some poskim allow eating bread with a fork while being very careful not to touch the bread with one's hands^[9]. This method should be relied upon only if one is very hungry, as most poskim do not allow this option^[10].

Generally, it is advisable for an orthodox Jew who is taking a long flight to book an aisle seat so that he will not need to disturb his seat mates each time he needs to get up to wash for a meal or daven. One who disturbs his seat mates unduly, even if he does so in order to fulfill certain halachic obligations, runs the chance of annoying or angering them and possibly causing a chillul Hashem.

Question: Is it permitted to wash one's hands for a meal inside a 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 which is considerably different from the bathrooms of yesteryear to which the Shulchan Aruch was referring^[12].

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

Answer: A cup made of any material, including paper or plastic^[13], 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^[14].

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[15].

Airplane Travel - Davening

Question: What is preferable—davening Shacharis at the airport or on the plane at the proper time (after sunrise), or davening at home or in shul before sunrise but afteralos amud ha-shacher?

Discussion: Although, generally, the preferred time to recite Shacharis Shemoneh Esrei is no earlier than sunrise, this rule is waived for one who is embarking on a trip. It is l'chatchillah permitted to put on tallis and tefillin and daven from the time of misheyakir (approximately 60 minutes before sunrise) for someone who is travelling[16]. Since it is difficult—for several reasons—to daven and concentrate properly while davening at the airport or on an airplane, it is preferable to daven at shul or at home, even though one would be davening earlier than the ideal time for davening Shacharis[17].

Question: While flying on an airplane, is one obligated to join a minyan which is being organized on the plane?

Discussion: Shulchan Aruch[18] rules that all men should make every effort to daven all tefillos with a minyan, for tefillah b'tzibbur[19] is much more than a preferred course of action—it is a rabbinic obligation[20]. Still, everything has its time and place. Many people just cannot concentrate properly while standing in a busy aisle way or passageway, valiantly trying to keep their balance. Sometimes there is turbulence in the air and the captain orders those standing to immediately return to their seats, which certainly interferes with one's concentration. Being able to concentrate properly often overrides the importance of davening with a minyan[21].

In addition, davening while standing in an aisle surrounded by other passengers, could entail the prohibition of davening in the presence of a woman who is not properly dressed or whose hair is not covered. Those who remain in their seats do not encounter these problems, since they need only look straight ahead, close their eyes or focus entirely on the siddur in front of them.

But there is yet another point to ponder: Some airlines welcome public prayer and permit the passengers to daven in a minyan while flying. Others, however, object to this practice and resent the fact that the "orthodox Jews are taking over the plane". Passengers may become upset from the noise and the tumult created by the makeshift minyanim. Since there is a strong chance that a chillul Hashem will result, many poskim recommend davening byechchidus while remaining in one's seat, being careful to keep a low profile and to create the least disturbance possible.

Question: How does one daven Shemone Esrei in his airplane seat?

Discussion: He should sit up as straight as possible with his head slightly bent downward; his feet should be placed together[22]. He should rise slightly from his seat onto his feet when it comes time to bending his knees and bow, and to take the three steps backwards[23].

Question: What should one do if he stood up for Shemoneh Esrei and, while davening, the captain turned on the seat belt sign ordering the passengers to return to their seats?

Discussion: He should finish the brachah reciting, take three steps back, and then walk back to his seat and resume davening. He must be careful not to speak at all on his way back to his seat, since it is strictly forbidden to talk during Shemoneh Esrei[24].

In addition to the safety issue involved, an Orthodox Jew who fails to return to his seat when ordered to do so by the airline staff could very well be causing a massive chillul Hashem, which must be avoided at all costs.

1. *Ohr l'Tziyon* 2:11.

2. Based on Rama, O.C. 160:12.

3. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 160:69 and Imrei Shalom 4:11.

4. Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 160:15.

5. Mishnah Berurah 160:64 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 69. See Imrei Shalom 4:12.

6. If that is not feasible, they must be covered at least until the knuckles; Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 163:7.

7. O.C. 163:1. Some poskim recommend relying on this option only under extenuating circumstances; see Be'ur Halachah, s.v. i'm, quoting Ritva and Siddur ha-Rav, Hilchos Netilas Yadayim.

8. Avnei Yashfei 2:11 based on Rama 170:1.

9. Mishnah Berurah 163:7.

10. While Mishnah Berurah allows one to rely on this option when no other alternative exists, many poskim disagree. Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Aruch ha-Shulchan do not mention this leniency at all.

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

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

13. Rav Y.E. Henkin (Am ha-Torah, 1979, vol. 10, pg.6); Rav M. Feinstein and Rav Y. Kamenetsky, oral ruling, quoted by Rav Y. Belsky (Halachah Berurah); Be'er Moshe 3:45; 5:42; Tzitz Eliezer 12:23; Az Nidberu 6:48.

14. She'arim Metzuyanin B'halachah 40:3 based on O.C. 159:5. Same halachah applies to using a soup

ladle as a washing utensil.

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

16. O.C. 89:8.

17. Mishnah Berurah 89:40.

18. O.C. 90:9. See Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 90:17.

19. For the exact definition of tefillah b'tzibbur, see The Daily Halachah Discussion on 8-9 Tammuz.

20. Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:27; 3:7; 4:68; Minchas Yitzchak 7:6; Peninei Tefillah, pg. 119, quoting Rav Y.S. Elyashiv. There are dissenting views that hold that tefillah b'tzibbur is not an absolute obligation; see Orach Yisrael, pgs. 535-538, for a review of all the opinions.

21. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:7; 4:20.

22. Mishnah Berurah 95:2.

23. Rama, O.C. 94:5.

24. See Sha'arei Tehuvah 104:1 and Mishnah Berurah 96:7.

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