

Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Emor – Rabbi Shimon Zehnwirth

The Kohain's Dignity

"A leader among his people may not become defiled..." (Vayikra 21:4)

A worthy Jew has passed away, and his community gathers to perform the chesed shel emes of accompanying the body to its final resting place. The kohanim, however, cannot take part. The reason, according to the Ramban and S'forno, is explained in the pasuk above: A kohain is a leader of his people, and therefore it is improper for him to lower his stature by defiling himself with the impurity of a dead body. The S'forno elaborates, "Since the kohain is a leader among his people, to understand and to teach ... it is befitting that such a person conduct himself in a dignified and regal manner so that his words will be accepted... However, for immediate relatives he may defile himself, because their honor is his honor."

The grieving family is in great pain, and certainly the presence of the kohain would serve, in some small way, as a comfort. And imagine what an honor it would be for the deceased to have the kohain participate in the interment. On the other hand, exactly how much dignity does the kohain lose by becoming ritually impure? Surely people would understand the necessity for the kohain to defile himself to perform this vital mitzvah. The impact on their receptivity to the kohain's teachings, due to a perceived lowering of his dignity, would have to be extremely small.

Yet, in spite of the great significance of this mitzvah, and the tiny negative effect that it would have on the kohain's dignity, he must still abstain. The Torah is teaching us the paramount importance of Torah education and leadership. Any loss of effectiveness, be it ever so slight, is a loss too great to bear. The eternity of the Jewish people depends on the faithful transmission of Torah from its leaders to the next generation. If their teaching ability is even slightly impaired, future

generations will suffer in their inheritance of this priceless legacy. The kohain, and the people, are expected to know and understand that this sacrifice, as tiny as it may seem, is too costly to our people's future, and Torah education cannot be compromised.

As leaders and role models who impart Torah values to others, whether from a sefer in front of a classroom, from our honesty and integrity at work, or from the midos we display at home, we must be constantly aware of this concept. Any lowering of our esteem in the eyes of others will ultimately damage their receptivity to our Torah "lessons." And conversely, the more we set an impeccable standard of ethical conduct and derech eretz, of devotion and adherence to Torah and halacha, the more powerfully our words will impact upon them and register in their minds and hearts.

A similar obligation rests on the recipients of Torah instruction: For our children's sake, as well as our own, we must show respect for the rav of our shul, for the teachers who guide our children in school and for the leaders of our generation, because that dignity will result in more effective transmission of Torah, to ourselves and our families.

As parents, as teachers - whenever we are involved with transmitting Torah to others, we must be cognizant of the privilege, and concurrent responsibility, that Torah dissemination entails. The stakes are high, and we must do our best to ensure that the light of Torah be spread in the most perfect manner possible. From the noble bearers of His precious Torah, Hashem expects nothing less.

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Halacha Encounters

Netilas Yadayim

Rabbi Avi Weinrib

In this week's parsha we find many halachos related to how a *Kohein* must be extremely diligent in maintaining the sanctity of *Kodshim* and *Terumah*. For the most part, these halachos will not be relevant until the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash when *Tumah* and *Taharah* will once again be a regular part of our lives. However, there is a *Terumah*-based halacha which does apply today to *Kohanim* and Non-*Kohanim* alike. One of the reasons we wash our hands before eating bread is based on the requirement to eat *Terumah B'Taharah* (with purity), which therefore required a ritual washing prior to eating *Terumah*. The Rabonon being so concerned that the *Kohanim* not inadvertently eat *Terumah* without washing their hands, required all of us even non-*kohanim* to wash. This way, washing would become the norm and the *Kohanim* would always be sure to do so. Furthermore, even nowadays without the presence of a Bais Hamikdash the requirement to wash nonetheless applies in order for us to be familiar with doing so, thereby being fully prepared when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt speedily in our days. In this weeks Halacha Encounters we will discuss just a few of the many halachos concerning Netilas Yodayim.

Amount of Bread

As we know, the requirement to wash is limited to the consumption of bread. This is because the majority of *Terumah* was from bread. The *Roke'ach* writes that perhaps the only requirement to wash is when eating a *Kibeitzah* (size of an egg) of bread, as this is the minimum amount that can be *mikabel tumah*. (accept *tumah*) Do we say that the Rabonon only instituted washing when eating this minimum amount, or was it a blanket *g'zeirah* (decree) and would apply even on a lesser amount? The Shulchan Aruch [158-2] rules, that if one eats an amount of bread less than a *kibeitzah*, one should wash albeit without reciting a blessing because of *safek b'rachos l'hakel*- one does not recite a blessing when in doubt. If so, it behooves us to ensure that when we do wash and recite the brocho of *Al Netilas Yodayim* that we eat a minimum of a *Kibeitzah* of bread. Practically, this would amount to approximately the size of a half of a center slice of a two-pound rye bread. Although this is not a large amount, many people will wash and eat a small piece of bread and then proceed to eat the rest of the meal without further consumption of bread. This presents numerous halachic issues besides the

above-mentioned issue, and therefore the best solution would be to eat a *Kibeitzah* immediately, thus eliminating any of these issues.

Over Lasiyoson

In general, there is a rule, that the blessing over mitzvos is recited "*Over lasiyoson*" before the performance of the mitzvah. Netilas Yodayim is an exception. Being that prior to washing, a person may have been engaged in activity that disallows them to recite a brocho we therefore recite the brocho after washing. However the *Rema* adds that since the drying of the hands is part and parcel of the mitzvah of Netilas Yodayim, if one recites the blessing before the drying of the hands this would constitute *Over Lasiyoson*. The *Mishna Berura* [159-44] quotes the *Taz* that if one would dry their hands they can no longer recite the brocho as the mitzvah is now over. Although the *Mishna Berurah* writes that we don't hold like the *Taz*, and if one would forget to recite the brocho until after drying his hands he would recite the brocho, one should be extremely careful to recite the brocho before drying his hands. Furthermore, as with other mitzvos, one may not be *mafsik* [interrupt] between the brocho and the mitzvah. The *Tzlach* maintains that if one talks after washing before reciting the brocho they are required to wash a second time. (See *Sefer Birchas Shomoyim* pages 155-156 for a further discussion on this issue.) Furthermore one should not talk after they begin the washing process as they are then involved in doing the mitzvah and talking would constitute a break in the mitzvah.

One of the requirements for Netilas Yodayim is the use of a *Kli* [vessel]. One of the common questions people ask regarding the requirement of a *Kli* is whether a utensil with a narrow spout such as a soda bottle is acceptable for Netilas Yodayim. Is one required to use a vessel that can wash the whole hand at once, or is a bottle sufficient even though they will have to slowly pour it over the entire hand? The *Mishna Berura* [162-30] rules that *Lichatchilah*, one should wash the entire hand at once. However, he explains that this does not mean one pouring. Rather even two pourings without a break would be considered "at once". The *Poskim* write, that for sure if one would wash with one pouring even if it would be by slowly moving it over the entire hand this would be acceptable. Therefore, one can use a bottle or a similar *kli* even with a narrow spout as long as he ends up washing the entire hand.

Rabbi Weinrib, Manhig Ruchni of Agudas Yisroel of West Rogers Park, learns regularly at the kollel.