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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayechi  Rabbi Yossi Lowinger

Mutual Respect

"So he blessed them that day, saying 'By you shall Yisroel bless saying: May Hashem make you like Ephraim and like Menasheh'" (48:20).

When fathers bless their sons, they bless them that Hashem should make them become like Ephraim and Menasheh. This requires explanation, as we would think to bless our children to be like the *Avos* and all the *Shevatim* (tribes). Why then were Ephraim and Menasheh singled out as the ones we bless our children to be like?

The *Otzros Hatorah* brings an answer to this question from Reb Avrohom Zalmans Z"l. There is a tremendous lesson to be learned from Ephraim and Menasheh, and it is to this lesson that we refer to when we bless our children to be like them. Menasheh was the *Bechor* (firstborn) and Ephraim was Menasheh's younger brother. Therefore when they received a brocha from Yaakov, Yosef put Menashe on Yaakov's right side, and Ephraim on Yaakov's left side, as befitting the *bechor* who deserved to be on the more prestigious side. Yaakov, however, knew that Ephraim's offspring would be more righteous than Menasheh's, and so Yaakov put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Menashe. We see in the parsha that Yosef reacted to this and tried to get Ya-

akov to switch his hands. Menasheh however, did not react at all, nor make any comment about the embarrassment he was subjected to, even though it was very embarrassing for him to see that Yaakov was treating Ephraim, the younger brother, in a more superior way than him. Nor did Menasheh show any jealousy towards Ephraim for the honor Ephraim received. When Yaakov saw the tremendous relationship between Menashe and Ephraim, and how Menashe did not develop any jealousy or anger towards Ephraim, he blessed them that Klal Yisroel should bless their children to be like Ephraim and Menasheh. That is, to emulate their tremendous *Middos*.

With this explanation, we can answer the *Sifsei Chachomim*'s question. The *Sifsei Chachomim* asks why Yaakov gave Ephraim and Menasheh two blessings, first the blessing "*hamalach hagoel osi*" and then the blessing of "*Yisimaich Elokim k'Ephraim uk'Menashe*". We can answer, that originally Yaakov planned on giving only one blessing, but when he saw Menasheh and Ephraim's wonderful relationship, he blessed them with the second blessing of "*Yisimaich Elokim k'Ephraim uk'Menashe*".

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Mayim Achronim

Rabbi Dovid Greenberg

In many homes, the men wash their hands- mayim achronim, before bentsching. What are the reasons for this custom, and how should one properly fulfill it?

The Source of this Custom

The Tur (O.C. 181) quotes two reasons for the requirement of mayim achronim based on the Talmud. The first reason is based on the assumption that after eating a meal, there is probably some residue of the food left on one's hands. This was especially true in olden days where cutlery wasn't necessarily the norm. As it is prohibited to utter a blessing with dirty hands, Chazal instituted this law to wash before bentsching. A second reason, is as a preventive health measure due to the dangerous properties of Sodomite salt. If even a slight amount would be on one's fingers and touch one's eyes, blindness would result. Therefore since most foods contain salt, and there was a possibility of this kind of exposure to the eyes, Chazal made an obligation to rinse our hands after eating.

Many Rishonim determined that the above reasons don't apply nowadays, due to the fact that most people don't notice any residue on their hands (possibly due to the proliferation of silverware) and the absence of Sodomite salt in our areas. Nevertheless, because there are some opinions who fear that there might be some Sodomite salt or similar caustic agents that filtered into our salt, and also for kabbalistic reasons, the custom in many communities is to continue to wash mayim achronim. However, being that this is only a stringency, women, who never accepted this custom upon themselves, don't normally wash.

If one's hands feel greasy or the like, to the point where one would ordinarily wash them, one is obligated to do so before bentsching as with all blessings. This rule applies equally to women. The custom that one recites Kiddush and Havdallah even though wine may have spilled on his hands, may be an exception for it is considered an honor to become dirty from a mitzvah (Harav Dovid Zucker shlita). One should make sure to clean one's hands before the bracha achrona after havdallah.

How to Wash

One should be careful to wash up to the second knuckle on both hands which is where the residue normally reaches. The common custom of just washing the fingertips or just washing one hand and wiping onto the other, has no halachic basis. Preferably one should dry his hands on a napkin or towel. The Vilna Gaon was of the opinion that mayim achronim includes all the halachos of washing for bread, and therefore required one to wash both hands fully from a valid vessel containing a reviis of water (3.3 oz.). Some adhere to his view.

The Gemara tells us that the mayim achronim contain a ruach ra'ah (evil spirit) after use, therefore one should be careful to collect the water in a vessel or pour the water onto the floor in a place where no one will step on it, like under the table. Some say (Kaf Hachayim 181:8) that one should be careful not to pour the water into a vessel used for food, or into a sink filled with dishes. If one has a specific vessel used for mayim achronim, it is proper that it should not be especially nice or beautiful due to its containment of the ruach ra'ah. For the same reason, it is customary to remove the vessel from the table or to cover it before bentsching.

When to Wash

Preferably one should wash immediately (within 30 seconds) before bentsching or the zimun. Therefore, one should recite Shir Hamallos before washing. If one did make a long break after washing, one should wash again. In a situation where there are many people who need to wash, it is advisable to bring a few vessels for washing to the table so the washing can be concluded in a timely fashion.

Other Liquids

It is best to wash with water. Other liquids are acceptable when there is no water readily available. However, one should try to be careful not to waste drinks that otherwise would be used for drinking. Leftover liquids in cups that will be thrown out may be used. Of course if the liquids will make one's hands sticky or dirty they shouldn't be used.

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