morning, the harmful forces depart his body but they remain attached to his hands. They can be removed by performing *netillat yadayim*.

The *Orhot Hayim* cited the Talmud (*Shabbat* 109a) teaching that harmful spiritual forces contaminate one's hands during the night and can be removed only through *netillat yadayim*. This is not identical to the *Zohar's* teaching. According to the Talmud, it is not being asleep that brings this harmful contamination; it is the night itself.

In the halakhot that follow, each of these reasons affects the rules in different ways. In practice, we rule stringently wherever any of these reasons make it warranted. Unless someone is obligated in *netillat yadayim* according to all these reasons, he does not recite the blessing of *al netillat yadayim*, based on the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel*.

If someone remained awake all night long: Maran explained in the *Bet Yosef* that this person would not have to perform *netillat yadayim* according to Rabbenu Asher since he was in control of his hands through the night. Since he remained awake, there is no difference between the day and the night. Likewise, the *Zohar's* reason would not apply in this case. The harmful contamination mentioned by the *Zohar* is the result of sleeping; if someone did not sleep at all, there is no such contamination and no reason for *netillat yadayim*.

One would assume that the Rashba would agree in this case that *netillat yadayim* is unnecessary since the person has not been renewed by a night's sleep. He has not deposited his soul with God, nor has God refreshed it for him. Nevertheless, Maran countered that one might be still obligated to perform *netillat yadayim* although one did not sleep. It could be, he explained, that once our Sages instituted the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* in the morning, the mitzvah is incumbent on all people, whether or not they slept during the night. This is the Talmudic concept of *la pelug*, meaning that once our Sages instituted a halakha, the institution is universal whether or not its purpose is applicable in any particular situation.

According to Rabbenu Asher's reasoning, however, the principle of *la pelug* does not apply. He taught that *netillat yadayim* was instituted for a very practical reason – one's hands are dirty when one awakens from a night's sleep. When a person knows that his hands have remained clean, there is no basis for washing them.

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atmosphere or air. Our Sages likely were referring to some negative, harmful energy that radiates from a Jew's hands after sleeping. Although many books have been written about human energy and energy healing and they do not mention this, that is because it does not exist among non-Jews. I took the liberty to write "harmful forces" wherever the Hebrew text states *ru'ah ra'a*, although the literal translation would be "evil spirit." (MM)

According to the *Orhot Hayim*, however, the night causes a person's hands to become contaminated whether or not he slept. The mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* would be necessary in any case. See below in halakha 2.

If someone napped for only a short time at night: Maran explained that according to Rabbenu Asher it would not be necessary to perform *netillat yadayim* in this case. In fact, Rabbenu Asher issued this ruling in a responsum. We do not suspect that anyone touches an unclean part of his body during a short nap. According to the Rashba, however, he would definitely be obligated in *netillat yadayim*. Even a short nap is enough to deposit one's soul with God and to have it returned new and refreshed. Indeed, the *Darkhe Moshe* comments that according to the Rashba there is no difference between a short nap and a full night's sleep, in both cases the person must perform *netillat yadayim*.

The *Zohar's* reason of the harmful spiritual contamination might apply in this case. It depends if the person slept long enough for his hands to become spiritually contaminated. It appears from the *Zohar* (*Bereshit* 207b) that if the nap is as long as fifty-nine breaths or less, the harmful forces do not contaminate the person who slept. The flavor of death is experienced only if the nap is at least sixty breaths long.

According to the *Orhot Hayim* it makes no difference how long a person sleeps or if he slept at all. Every morning it is necessary to perform *netillat yadayim* since the night itself causes the spiritual contamination of one's hands.

What is the halakha if someone woke up before dawn and performed *netillat yadayim*? Must he repeat it after dawn? See below in halakha 64.

If someone went to bed after midnight, is it necessary to perform *netillat yadayim* in the morning? See below in halakha 60 and its footnote. What is the halakha if someone slept while wearing gloves? See below in halakha 49.

Going to Sleep After Midnight

The halakha is more lenient in several aspects for someone who goes to sleep after the halakhic midnight. This is because Harav Shalom Mizrahi Sharabi taught that when someone remains awake until after midnight his body and hands are not contaminated by harmful forces. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to perform *netillat yadayim* upon waking up in the morning and to recite the blessing of *al netillat yadayim*, as will be explained below in halakha 60. If the person recited all the morning blessings and continued to study Torah for some time after midnight before going to sleep, however, the *Poskim* debated whether or not he must recite the blessing of *al netillat yadayim* in the morning. See below in halakhot 39, 43, 44 and 45.

Why Only the Hands?

It is self-evident that according to Rabbenu Asher the mitzvah is to wash one's hands and not any more of one's body. According to the Rashba who compared a person in the morning to a *kohen* beginning his service in the *Bet Hamikdash*, one may ask why the mitzvah applies only to one's hands. The *kohen* must rinse his hands and his feet, so we all should have to rinse our hands and feet.

Some explanation is needed regarding the reasons given by the *Zohar* and the *Orhot Hayim*. Why are one's hands contaminated by harmful forces and not the rest of one's body. The *Ben Ish Hai* (introduction to *parashat Toledot*) explained that one's hands and feet are the extremities of one's body, and the fingers and toes are the tips of those extremities. The fingers correspond to the letters *mem*, *nun*, *tzaddik*, *pe* and *kaf*. Each of these letters has two forms, one when used in the beginning or middle of a word and another when used at the end of a word. These ten forms correspond to the ten fingers on one's hands and they are repeated on the ten toes. The harmful spiritual forces can cleave only to these tips of one's body, and these forces are represented according to the Kabbalah by these ten letter forms.

While a person is awake, these harmful forces have no access to his person. His fingernails and toenails prevent them from approaching him. While he is asleep at night, however, they attach themselves to his fingers and toes, five on the right side and five on the left. In order to remove their influence, one must pour water – the symbol of *hesed*-kindness – over the fingers. In this way, the five forces of kindness overcome the five harmful forces on each hand.

Why Don't We Wash Our Feet Each Morning?

The reason for *netillat yadayim* given by Rabbenu Asher applies to the hands only; there is no basis for it to be necessary to wash one's feet. According to all the other reasons, however, it would seem that it is just as necessary to wash one's feet as it is to wash one's hands upon awakening in the morning.

The *Ben Ish Hai* cited an explanation from the *Yefe Sha'a*. He taught that the harmful spiritual forces are firmly attached to one's toes. Rinsing them with water is insufficient: the harmful forces remain attached regardless. Only the *kohanim* in the *Bet Hamikdash* were able to dispel this contamination through using the sacred water of the *kiyor* (basin) when they stood in the sanctity of the *Bet Hamikdash* compound. Nevertheless, he added that we can weaken these harmful forces when we bathe our feet in preparation for Shabbat. The sanctity of Shabbat gives us that power.

Status of Harmful Spiritual Forces in Modern Times

Maran the Rishon Letziyon often cited (see responsa *Yabia Omer* Vol. I, *Y.D.* #9:2; Vol. III, *O.H.* #2:4; Vol. IV, #1:4; Vol. V, #1) the opinion of many

Poskim that there no longer exists any harmful spiritual force that contaminates one's hands overnight. Most prominent is Harav Shelomo Luria (*Yam Shel Shelomo* to *Hullin* 8:31) who ruled that the harmful forces no longer exist and therefore it is sufficient to wash each hand twice instead of three times. Concurring with this are Harav Moshe ben Haviv (*Tosefet Yom Hakippurim* to *Yoma* 77b), the *Lehem Mishne* (*Hilkhot Shevitat Asor* 3:2) and the *Damesek Eliezer* (cited in the *Eliya Rabba* 1).

The responsa *Yitzhak Yeranen* took issue with this, arguing that Maran the Rishon Letziyon misunderstood these *Poskim*, but in responsa *Yabia Omer* (Vol. IX, #4) Maran defended his position. He explained that we can rely on these *Poskim* only if we have an additional basis for leniency, but we may not rely on their opinion alone. This argument and its practical application can be found below in the footnotes to halakhot 39 and 41.

Importance of the Morning *Netillat Yadayim*

In the *Yalkut Yosef Berakhot English Edition*, in the preface to *Siman* 158, there is a presentation of the importance our Sages placed in the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* in preparation for a meal. Regarding the mitzvah of the morning *netillat yadayim*, the *Kaf Hahayim* Palachi (8:1) states that anyone who disregards this mitzvah is liable to be excommunicated. His sin is considered equal to that of committing adultery and He will be uprooted from the world. The Arizal's disciples taught that such a person will be reincarnated into water running downhill in a stream, something that never has a moment's rest. This is the identical punishment that is slated for a murderer, based on the verse in the Torah about blood (*Devarim* 12:16) – "עַל הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכֶנּוּ כַּמָּיִם; You shall spill it onto the ground like water."

According to popular legend, Harav Yisrael Baal Shem Tov once wandered deep into a forest, when he discovered an enormous toad. He realized that the toad possessed the reincarnated soul of a person, and he began a conversation with it. The tortured soul related to him that he had been imprisoned inside this lowly creature for 500 years because he once disparaged the importance of *netillat yadayim* and failed to perform the mitzvah properly. Harav Hayim Palachi mentioned this story in his *Torah Vehayim* and concluded that anyone who hears or reads this story should become filled with dread. Maran commented in the *Shulhan Arukh* (4:18) that if a Torah scholar fails to wash his hands when the halakha demands it, he will forget his Torah knowledge. If he is not a learned man, he will lose his sanity. See below in halakha 72.

סימן ד

דיני נטילת ידים

א. בכל יום אחר שיקום ממטתו, צריך ליטול ידיו במים מתוך הכלי, ויברך קודם הניגוב: "ברוך אתה ה', אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על נטילת ידים".

אופן הנטילה

ב. צריך לערות על ידיו מים שלש פעמים, כדי להעביר רוח רעה ששורה עליהן. [ש"ע ס"ב].

וכך היא צורת הנטילה: בתחילה יטול כלי המים בידו הימנית, וימסרנו לידו השמאלית, ואחר כך ישפוך מים מהכלי שבידו השמאלית על ידו הימנית, ואחר כך יאחז הכלי בידו הימנית וישפוך על ידו השמאלית, הרי פעם אחת. וחוזר כסדר הזה פעם שנית ופעם שלישית, באופן שירחץ על כל יד ויד שלש פעמים. ולא ירחץ לכל יד בפני עצמה שלש פעמים בזה אחר זה, כי לא תיעקר רוח רעה אלא דוקא ברחיצה של סירוגין, כאשר כתבנו. [בא"ח תולדות ה"א]

Siman 4

The Morning *Netillat Yadayim*

The mitzvah

1) The halakha demands that each person wash his hands each morning upon waking up. He must pour water on his hands from a container, and before drying them he recites the blessing, "בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם – May You be blessed, God our Master, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us regarding *netillat yadayim*."

Day 48

Netillat Yadayim – Step by Step

The procedure

2) In order to cleanse the hands of the harmful forces attached to them, it is necessary to pour water over them three times. The procedure is as follows:

First the person should pick up the container of water with his right hand and transfer it to his left hand. Then he pours water on his right hand. Then he transfers the container back to his right hand and pours water on his left hand. This procedure is repeated two more times, so that he has poured water on both hands alternately three times.

It is not possible to fulfill this mitzvah by pouring water three times on the right hand and then three times on the left hand. The harmful forces cannot be dispelled from the hands unless the water is poured on the hands alternately, as explained here.[158]

158. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 109a) teaches: Ribbi Natan said that the harmful forces on one's hands are "haughty and independent." The *Arukh* and Rabbenu Hanan'el (cited by Rashi) explained that in the realm of demons and spirits,