דיני הברכה

כד. אחר שנטל ידיו קודם הניגוב יברך: "ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על נטילת ידים". ואף על פי שאינו אלא מדרבנן שגזרו על זה משום סרך תרומה, מכל מקום שייך לומר על ה' יתברך קדשנו וצונו וכו', שכיון שאנו מקיימים דבריהם מטעם הפסוק שאמר לא תסור מכל אשר יורוך [על פי דברים יז, יא], הרי כשאנו מקיימים מצות חכמים אנו מקיימים מצותו יתברך, וזהו אשר קדשנו וצונו. וזהו הטעם בכל ברכות במצות דרבנן שאנו מברכין עליהם. [ב"י ולבוש סי' קנח ס"א]

Reciting the Blessing

Blessing God for giving us this mitzvah

24) After pouring the water on one's hands and before drying them, one must recite the blessing of בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם – May You, God our Master, King of the Universe be blessed for sanctifying us through His commandments and for commanding us concerning washing hands.

As explained above, the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* is a rabbinical injunction to protect the sanctity of *teruma*. It is not a commandment of the Torah. Nevertheless, we recite this blessing stating that God commanded us to perform this mitzvah. This is because the Torah did command us to obey the rules instituted by the Sages, as the verse states (*Devarim* 17:11), "Do not veer from the words that they tell you." When we fulfill a mitzvah that our Sages have instituted, we are at the same time fulfilling God's command to obey them. This explains why we recite this text in the blessings over this mitzvah and other mitzvot that our Sages instituted as well.

does not become *teme'im* whatsoever since that part of the hand is beyond the realm of the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim*. Although it is possible that the water that is *teme'im* could run from the fingers down beyond the wrist and then come back down onto the hand, this would not disqualify the *netillat yadayim*. Therefore, in this case there is no obligation to hold the fingers pointed upward.

Likewise, if someone performs the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* by immersing his hands in a river or if he pours *revi'it* of water on both hands or *revi'it* on each hand, there is no obligation to hold the fingers pointed upward. The *Tosefta* (*Yadayim* 5:1) teaches specifically, "Someone who immerses his hands does not have to hold them aloft." Maran in the *Bet Yosef* (*Siman* 162) explained that this is because when someone immerses his hands no water becomes *teme'im* . Therefore, the same rule applies when someone pours *revi'it* of water onto each hand. According to the *Arukh*, however, it is necessary to hold the fingers pointed upward in every case.

The *Shulḥan Arukh* (162:1) ruled that in these cases it is not necessary to hold the fingers pointed upward. The *Magen Avraham* (162:1) and other *Aḥaronim* explained that it must be that Maran changed his mind about the opinion of the *Arukh* and decided that even he agrees that it is not necessary in these cases. The *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer (162:1) pointed out that according to the Arizal it is obligatory to raise one's hands and fingers no matter how one performed the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim*.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (Vol. I, page 326) wrote that since the custom is to always pour the water up to the wrists, there is technically no obligation to point the fingers upward. The halakha is as Maran wrote in the *Shulḥan Arukh*. Nevertheless, it is possible that Maran the Rishon Letziyon agreed that it is proper to always raise the hands in accordance with the instructions of the Arizal.

ואף כשנוטל ידו אחת, וכגון שידו השניה נתונה בגבס, מברך "על נטילת ידים" בלשון רבים, ולא "על נטילת יד". וכמבואר לקמן סימן קס"א הלכה כ"ז.
ודין משותק שאינו יכול להזיז ידו אחת או שתי ידיו, וכן דין מי שנקטעה ידו, יתבאר שם הלכה כ"ט ובהערה שם.

כה. נהגו שלא לברך עד אחר נטילה קודם הניגוב, ואף על פי שקיימא לן שכל המצוות מברך עליהם עובר לעשייתן, מכל מקום מכיון שפעמים שאין ידיו נקיות ואינו יכול לברך קודם, לא חילקו בזה ואמרו שיברך אחר הנטילה. ועוד שכיון שמברך קודם הניגוב, נחשב עובר לעשייתן, שעדיין לא נגמרה מצות הנטילה עד אחר הניגוב. [ראה ש"ע סי' קנח סי"א, יבי"א ח"ח סי' כ בהערה]

Washing only one hand

If one hand is covered with a bandage or a cast so that it is possible to pour water on the other hand only, one still recites the blessing of *al netillat yadayim* after washing the one hand. The text of the blessing is the same; it is not *al netillat yad*. This will be explained below in *Siman* 161:27. The rules regarding someone whose one hand or both hands are immobilized or amputated are discussed there in halakha 29 and in the footnote there.

Blessing recited after performing the mitzvah

25) The custom is to postpone reciting this blessing until after pouring the water on one's hands but before drying them. Although the general rule is to recite the blessing for performing a mitzvah before one performs it, in this case our Sages ruled that it is possible to recite it after washing. This is because it happens sometimes that it is impossible to recite it beforehand since the hands are dirty. Therefore the custom developed to recite the blessing in all cases only after performing the mitzvah.

Furthermore, there is a basis to say that when reciting the blessing before drying the hands, it is still considered to be before the mitzvah has been fulfilled. The mitzvah is completed only after one dries the hands.[23]

23. Two reasons for reciting the blessing after washing the hands

The Tosafot (*Pesaḥim* 7b) offered two reasons for postponing reciting this blessing until after washing the hands. Finding a precedent for such a practice, they cited R"y who ruled that those [Ashkenazic] women who recite the blessing over immersing in a mikveh only after they have immersed themselves can be excused for doing so. He explained that when a non-Jew immerses in a mikveh to convert to Judaism, it is impossible for him to recite the blessing before immersing [since at that time he is not yet Jewish]. Therefore, he recites the blessing after immersing, and this is an exception to the general rule that a blessing can be recited only before fulfilling the mitzvah. Since we see that it is possible in some cases to recite the blessing for immersing in a mikveh after doing so, there is a basis to say that the rule is the same whenever anyone fulfills this mitzvah. Therefore, it is acceptable for women to recite the blessing after immersing.

When it comes to the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* as well, Tosafot noted that sometimes a person is incapable of reciting a blessing until after he washes his hands. For example, he might have just relieved himself and his hands are not clean enough to permit him to recite any blessing. Since in such a case it is impossible to recite the blessing until after performing *netillat yadayim*, we have a basis to say that in every case of someone performing *netillat yadayim* he can recite the blessing afterward.

The Tosafot offered a second reason for this anomaly. Since the Talmud states (*Sota* 4b) that anyone who eats bread without drying his hands is considered to be eating impure (*tame*) bread, the mitzvah is not completed until the person dries his hands. Therefore, as long as he recites the blessing after washing hands but before drying them, he fulfills the requirement of reciting the blessing before fulfilling the mitzvah.

Tosafot in *Berakhot* (51a) cited only the first reason for this halakha, while in *Sukkah* (39a) they cited the second

reason only. Rabbenu Asher and the Mordekhi cited both reasons. The *sefer Mitzvot Katan* (Vol. II, #178), Rabbenu David Abudarham, the *Pardes*, the *Orhot Hayim* and the *Shibole Haleket* all cite the second reason only.

Reciting the blessing after washing with more than *revi'it*

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* (*Siman* 158) cited the Mordekhi and the *sefer Mitzvot Gadol* ruling that if someone immerses his hands in a mikveh to fulfill the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* he does not have to dry his hands before eating. Maran explained that this is because in this case the water on his hands never became *teme'im* (impure). He then added that the halakha is the same for someone who pours *revi'it* or more of water at one time on each hand – the water on his hands does not become *teme'im* and therefore it is not necessary for him to dry his hands before he eats. Maran in the *Shulhan Arukh* (158:13) ruled accordingly in both cases – the person may eat his bread without drying his hands.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yabia Omer* Vol. VIII, #20 in the footnote) pointed out that nowadays, since we have running water in our homes we always wash our hands with plenty of water – certainly more than *revi'it*, as explained above in halakha 20. If so, we complete the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* even before we dry our hands. If we recite the blessing after washing, therefore, we fail to fulfill the principle of reciting the blessing before completing the mitzvah. There must be some other reason on which we base our practice to postpone reciting the blessing until after washing our hands.

The *Bayit Hadash* (*Siman* 165) and Rabbenu Shelomo Luria (*Yam Shel Shelomo* on *Hullin* 8:39) disagreed with the ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh*. They ruled that although someone who immerses his hands in a mikveh does not need to dry them, someone who pours *revi'it* of water on his hands does have to dry them. In fact, the *Levush* ruled that one must dry the hands even after immersing them in a mikveh. He argued that the reason for drying the hands is that eating bread with wet hands is bad etiquette and therefore it is necessary to dry them in every case. Rabbenu David ben Zimra (responsa Vol. I, #15) concurred with this ruling, as did several *Aharonim*.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon suggested that our present-day practice of reciting the blessing after washing even though we pour more than *revi'it* of water on each hand is based on those *Poskim* who ruled that even in this case one is obligated to dry the hands before eating. Even according to the ruling of Maran that there is no obligation to dry one's hands, we apparently rely on the first reasoning offered by the Tosafot and Rabbenu Asher, explaining that the general rule requiring us to recite the blessing before fulfilling mitzvot does not apply to the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim*. This is because it often happens that a person's hands are dirty and therefore he is unfit to recite any blessing until after washing his hands.

It turns out that we have a *safek sefeka* to permit reciting the blessing although one has poured *revi'it* of water on each hand. First of all, the halakha might follow the opinion of the *Rishonim* (the first opinion cited by Tosafot) who ruled that one may recite this blessing even after fulfilling the mitzvah. Even if the halakha follows the *Rishonim* who ruled that one may not recite the blessing once the hands have been dried, it could be that the halakha requires one to dry hands even after pouring *revi'it* of water on each hand.

The truth is that Maran the Rishon Letziyon presented this *safek sefeka* somewhat differently. In the *Yabia Omer* he wrote that the halakha might follow the *Rishonim* (*Or Zaru'a* in the name of Rabbenu Tam, *Hagahot Asheri*, Rabbenu Menahem Hame'iri, Ritba) who ruled that one may recite the blessing over a mitzvah after fulfilling it, such as in this case after drying the hands. Even if the halakha follows the opinion of those who ruled (Rabbenu Menahem Azarya of Pano, *Ture Zahav*, *Mor Uktzi'a*) that after drying hands one may no longer recite the blessing, perhaps the halakha follows those *Poskim* who ruled that one must dry the hands even if one poured *revi'it* of water on each hand. Therefore, even after washing the hands in this manner, it is permissible to recite the blessing before drying them.

Either way, since the common custom is to recite the blessing despite having poured *revi'it* of water on each hand, the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel* does not apply in this case.

Reciting the blessing before performing *netillat yadayim*

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* commented that neither rationale offered for reciting the blessing after washing obligates a person to wait until after he has poured the water on his hands in order to recite the blessing. Both reasons only provide a justification for the common practice of reciting the blessing after washing [but there is no halakhic basis to prevent someone from reciting it before washing, as long as he knows that his hands are clean]. In the *Shulhan Arukh*, he wrote that "one must recite the blessing before fulfilling the mitzvah, but the custom is to recite it after pouring the water on the hands since sometimes the hands are not clean enough until then. After [pouring the water] and wiping the hands on one another, the blessing is recited, before pouring the water on the hands a second time."

Rama, however, testified that the custom is to recite the blessing after completing the process of *netillat yadayim* and before drying the hands. The *Matte Yehuda* (158:20) added that although this is the custom, if someone wishes to recite the blessing before pouring the water on his hands he may do so. It is not necessary to follow the common custom regarding this, but he should not do so in public and display that he practices differently than everyone else. In the privacy of his own home, however, he may adopt this practice of reciting the blessing before pouring the water on his hands or at least before the second pouring.

The *Mishna Berura* (*Bi'ur Halakha*) explained that according to Rambam and other *Rishonim* one must recite the blessing before pouring the water on the hands, and therefore there is no basis to protest anyone who wishes to

כו. אם לא בירך קודם הניגוב, אינו רשאי לברך אחר הניגוב, שכל המצוות כולן מברך עליהן עובר לעשייתן. ולדעת הרמב"ם ורוב הראשונים ומרן השלחן ערוך והאחרונים, היינו לעיכובא. ואם מברך על המצוה לאחר עשייתה, ברכה לבטלה היא. ואפילו אם נזכר בתוך כדי דיבור שלא בירך, לא יברך אחר הניגוב. [הליכו"ע ח"א עמ' שיז]

Day 28

Reciting blessing after drying hands

26) If someone failed to recite the blessing until after he has dried his hands, it is no longer possible to recite it, following the rule that one must recite the blessing before fulfilling the mitzvah and not afterward. According to Rambam and most *Rishonim*, including Maran in the *Shulḥan Arukh*, if someone would recite this blessing after he has dried his hands it would be a blessing recited in vain. Even if he realized his mistake less than a second after he finished drying his hands, he may no longer recite the blessing.[24] The Sefardic *Aḥaronim* concurred with this ruling.

practice in this manner as long as he knows that his hands are already clean enough to enable him to recite a blessing.

Nowadays, the universal custom is to recite the blessing after pouring the water on the hands and before drying them. The *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer (158:83) added that this is the recommended practice according to the Arizal as well. See also the *Ben Ish Ḥai* (*parashat Shemini* halakha 5).

24. The Rama (gloss to 158:11) wrote that if someone forgot to recite the blessing until he had dried his hands he may still recite it. The *Ture Zahav* disagreed with this, ruling that once he has fulfilled the mitzvah completely it is no longer possible to recite the blessing.

Rambam's principle: Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 11:6) stated a cardinal principle that it is forbidden to recite a blessing over a mitzvah after it has been fulfilled completely. The *Hagahot Asheri*, citing the *Or Zaru'a*, disagreed with this principle, explaining that although the Talmud rules that one must recite the blessings before fulfilling the mitzvot, that is only the ideal formula for performing mitzvot. If someone had failed to recite the blessing before performing the mitzvah, however, he may still recite it afterward. Rama cited the *Hagahot Asheri* as the source for his ruling regarding reciting the blessing of *al netillat yadayim* after drying one's hands. Harav Eliyahu of Vilna (158:24) ruled otherwise, basing his decision on the Rambam's principle. The *Matte Yehuda* likewise explained that the *Aḥaronim* followed Rambam's opinion whereas Rama followed that of *Hagahot Asheri*. He then cited the *Sifte Kohen* (*Y.D.* 19:2) ruling in favor of Rambam in this matter, citing other *Rishonim* who concurred with this principle. He concluded that although the *Peri Ḥadash* took issue with the *Sifte Kohen*, we are powerless to decide in favor of either side of this debate. Therefore, we must assume that the halakha is indeed according to Rambam's rule. The *Aḥaronim* (*Peri To'ar*, *Tevu'ot Shor*, *Kereti*, *Tal Orot*, *Tif'eret Tzevi*, *Erekh Hashulḥan*, *Bet Me'ir*, *Peri Megadim*, *Zivḥe Tzedek* 19:2, *Ben Ish Ḥai parashat Vayeshev* halakha 10 and *parashat Shemini* halakha 7, and Harav Yosef Yedid in *Birkat Yosef* Vol. III, page 178) concurred that one may not recite the blessing after drying the hands. This, therefore, is the conclusion of Maran the Rishon Letziyon in *Halikhot Olam* (Vol. I, page 317).

Maran the Rishon Letziyon then pointed out that although Rama cited the *Hagahot Asheri* as the source for the common custom, he could have stated that the common custom agrees with Rambam's general principle, but that we follow the rationale cited in Tosafot that the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* is an exception. As explained above, the Tosafot suggested that our Sages permitted the blessing of *al netillat yadayim* to be recited after fulfilling the mitzvah since sometimes one's hands are dirty and unfit for reciting any blessing until after being washed. Nevertheless, Rama did not use this reasoning. This might be because there is no Talmudic source for it and Rambam disagreed with it out of hand.

Nevertheless, it is possible to build a *safek sefeka* based on the Tosafot to permit reciting the blessing after drying one's hands. First of all, the halakha might follow the opinion of the *Hagahot Asheri* permitting one to recite the blessing after performing any mitzvah. Even if the halakha follows Rambam's principle, it might be that the mitzvah of *netillat yadayim* is an exception as Tosafot suggested. Nevertheless, the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel* applies even when there is a *safek sefeka* to allow reciting the blessing, and therefore we must refrain from reciting the blessing after drying the hands.

Within one second of drying the hands

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Halikhot Olam* Vol. I, footnote on page 319) cited *Poskim* (*Kereti Ufleti*, *Tevu'ot Shor*, *Erekh Hashulḥan*) who ruled that once someone finishes drying his hands he may not recite the blessing even if it is within one second (*tokh kede dibur*) after he dried