

Clean Hands Doctrine

March 14, 2024

**Q** If I have to leave the table during a meal, must I repeat *netilas yadayim* upon returning?



**A** Following a *hesech hada'as* (mental disengagement), one must wash anew. If you leave the table and get involved in something else for an extended period of time—over an hour—that qualifies as a *hesech hada'as* (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 170:1). In this case, *netilas yadayim* should be repeated with a *bracha*. Though there may not have been a *hesech hada'as* from *eating*—as you intended to return and eat, and therefore *hamotzi* is not repeated—there was a *hesech hada'as* from your hands (Mishnah Brurah 164:13). Similarly, if you take a nap, a new *netilah* with a *bracha* is required (M.B. 178:48).

If you touch a part of the body that is normally covered (*makom mechuseh*) or scratch your head, *netilah* is required because of the sweatiness of those areas (O.C. 164:2). Many *poskim* debate whether a *bracha* is recited on the second *netilah*. The Mishnah Brurah concludes that it is not, unless a *makom metunaf* (soiled area) was touched. Touching a sweaty undergarment is akin to touching a *makom mechuseh* (Mishnah Brurah ibid. 10).

If you are unsure whether a *makom metunaf* was touched or just a *makom mechuseh*, a *bracha* may be recited, as we may rely on the Chazon Ish's view that touching any *makom mechuseh* requires a new *bracha* (Chazon Ish O.C. 25:9).

*Poskim* debate the case of one who touched a *makom mechuseh* that was recently washed. Some say *netilah* is not needed, because the reason doesn't apply (Kaf Hachaim 4:85); others say that the halacha applies even though the reason does not (Eishel Avraham 4).

If you use the bathroom, *netilah* with a *bracha* is required, as the hands touch unclean areas. If only one hand did so, only that hand need be washed (ibid.). If neither hand did, no *netilah* is required (O.C. 170:1).

If you change a baby's dirty diaper, *netilas yadayim* must be redone with a *bracha*. If your hands are soiled with mud or dirt, *netilah* is not necessary.