

## Q&A from the Bais HaVaad Halacha Hotline

Hands Off

July 25, 2024

**Q** My child woke up in the morning and touched food before washing *netilas yadayim*. May the food be eaten?



**A** Because the *neshamah* partially departs from the body during sleep, a *ruach ra'ah* (bad spirit) rests on the hands after waking from a night's sleep (Chayei Adam 2:1), and *netilas yadayim* removes it. Before washing, one should avoid touching food, because the *ruach ra'ah* will transfer to the food.

Some say that eating such food is spiritually harmful, so eating it is forbidden, but the Chayei Adam (ibid. 2:2) rules that *bedieved*, after it was touched, the food may be eaten without concern. The Mishnah Brurah (4:14) follows his ruling but requires that the food be washed three times to remove the *ruach ra'ah*. (This only applies to washable items; absorbent foods like bread or cake cannot be fixed.)

If water is not available or if the food might be ruined by it, an alternate solution is to remove the outer layer. But that only works for foods whose outer layer is normally eaten, like an apple. If a food's outer layer is normally removed, like an orange, it cannot be rectified in this way, because the *ruach ra'ah* is inside the food (Ishei Yisrael 2 footnote 25). *Poskim* strongly urge that *netilas yadayim* be introduced at a very young age, because a child's spiritual development will be improved by it (see Teshuvos Vehanhagos 2:1). They disagree about when to start; some even recommend beginning in infancy. Still, food touched by a small child may be eaten without washing it. From the age of *chinuch* (about six), food that the child touched without *netilah* should be washed (Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Second Ed. II 4:2).