

Weekly questions: Laws regarding bread

Am I permitted to speak during *netilas yadayim* or between *netilas yadayim* and *hamotzi*?

While a person washes one's hands it is forbidden to speak until one makes the blessing *al netilas yadayim* (Drashos HaTzlach, 4:22).

The *bracha* applies to the *mitzvah* of washing and there should be no interruption between the *mitzvah* and the *bracha*.

If a person did speak before making the blessing he should again wash *netilas yadayim*. One should first rub his scalp or touch his shoe so that a blessing on the new *netila* will be justified (Piskei Teshuvos, 158:122).

After *netilas yadayim* it is preferable not to talk until *hamotzi* is recited (Shulchan Aruch 166:1). *Bidieved*, if one did speak he is not required to wash *netilas yadayim* again provided that he did not have *hesech hadaas*, any distraction from maintaining the cleanliness of his hands (Mishnah Berura 166:6).

What's the proper procedure for *netilas yadayim* before eating bread?

One should pour at least one *revi'is* (about four ounces), all at once, on the right hand, allowing water to flow over one's entire hand, both the front and back and between the fingers (this can be done by simply rotating one's hand). When water is plentiful the Mishnah Berurah writes that one should ideally pour a second time on the right hand (162:21). The cup should then be transferred to one's right hand and this procedure should then be repeated for the left hand.

One should then rub one's hands together, a process called *shifshuf* (Shulchan Aruch, 162:2), a practice Rav Belsky, *zt"l* felt is too often overlooked (Shulchan Halevi, chapter 3:1b)

One should then make the blessing *al netilas yadayim* and then dry them (Mishnah Berurah, 158:42).

Why do we wash *netilas yadayim* before we eat bread?

The requirement to wash one's hands is rabbinical. *Kohanim* were required to wash their hands to purify them before eating or handling *terumah* (produce separated for the *Kohanim*). To ensure that *Kohanim* not overlook this practice, *Chazal* required them, as well as all of *klal Yisroel*, to wash their hands before eating "regular", or *chulin*, bread. (*Chulin*, 106a) Although *terumah* is not eaten at this time, *Chazal* maintained this requirement, even in the diaspora, so that this *halacha* will remain familiar to us when the *Bais Hamikdash* is

rebuilt (*Aruch Hashulchan*, 158: 2, 3).

Another basis for *netilas yadayim* is that we are enjoined to lead our lives with sanctity: “You should sanctify yourselves and be holy” (Vayikra, 20:7). The Gemara (*Berachos*, 53b) understands “you should sanctify yourselves” as referring to washing one’s hands before eating bread.