



נְעִימֹת הַחַיִּים  
Ne'imas HaChaim Project  
In memory of Naama Markovits A"H  
לע"נ נעמה חנה ע"ה ב"ר יהודה איסר נ"י



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כ"ט חשוון תשע"א

שבת פרשת תולדות

Lesson #9: Wash Your Hands (2)

(Prepared by Yisroel Meir David)

We discussed previously the lesson of washing one's hands in order to avoid harming others even incidentally. A child who is careless with dirty hands is akin to an adult who isn't paying attention to the effects his actions may have on others.

As we mentioned in last week's lesson, there is another aspect of maintaining acceptable standards of personal hygiene that can be applied to a more mature audience. That is the need for a person to be responsible to themselves. Just like a child whose hands are dirty may inadvertently ingest unwanted or even harmful substances, so too an adult who is not careful may affect himself negatively.

If this article were part of a Mussar Sefer we would have to entitle it "V'nishmarta Mikol Davar Ra" (Devarim 23), the Torah commandment to be guarded against negative effects. There are actually several warnings and commandments in the Torah regarding this personal obligation which is obviously more significant than it appears from the plain meaning of the words.

We can apply this lesson to the two aspects of our being, the physical and the spiritual. The physical application is the lesson that can be gleaned directly from the expectation placed on the child. An adult is capable of making decisions and choosing actions and lifestyle that are not destructive. This is relevant to sleeping patterns, diet, exercise, and personal habits. Unfortunately, the child within, the one that is stubborn about washing hands, sometimes wins the battle and persuades the adult to succumb to destructive tendencies.

However, there is another aspect to this lesson that demands our attention. The Gemara in Avoda Zara (20b) learns from this passuk that a person must not allow his thoughts to be sullied, as the affect of such would be lasting. That Halacha is the basis for the famous saying of Rav Pinchas Ben Yair, the one that the Mesillas Yesharim uses as his guide for describing man's ability to reach the highest levels of service to Hashem.

Through this we can appreciate and understand the need to protect one's senses from influences that are anti-Torah. And, if we can continue the comparison to a child's hands, that is true of influences that creep into our lives incidentally. The Gemara relates that the Amoraim would choose to walk a path only if they were sure that nothing would tempt them on the way. The Amoraim would have a very hard time in our society.

Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, the author of the complex Birchas Shmuel, once commented that although he had accomplished much there was an incident from his youth that he felt restricted him. One time a fistfight broke out on the street in front of him, his father quickly grabbed him to pull him away from such a scene, but not before he had caught a view of the melee. This image always bothered him, and he sensed that his accomplishments were slightly tarnished because of it.

We may not be on the level to apply Rav Baruch Ber's sensitivity to ourselves, but we can at least make sure that we don't allow the blatant dirt to remain on our hands.