



נעימות החיים

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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שבת פרשת ויצא ו' כסלו תשע"א

Lesson #10: Wash Your Hands (3)

(Prepared by Rabbi Azriel Bodner)

In the last two lessons, which were Parts 1 and 2 of the “Wash Your Hands” series, we focused primarily on the potential dangers that lie in allowing children to roam freely with unwashed hands. There is another reason that parents insist that their children be clean, and from that we can apply a lesson that is relevant to ourselves.

The Gemara relates a story about a person was not scrupulous in the requirement to wash his hands before eating. His laxity led to his eating non-kosher food, as the person who was serving him assumed that he was not a Jew because he did not wash his hands before eating. Although the context of that story is about maintaining proper Halachic standards, we can learn something more from the specific example that Chaza”l chose to relate.

The man in the story allowed himself to be observed as someone who was not concerned with the Ruach Rah that stained him. One who observes such a person would have the right to associate that person with others who are also not concerned with such stains, namely a non-Jew.

Children often like to play with substances that leave their mark. There is something special about the picture of a child on his first birthday sitting in his high chair with chocolate “paint” on his hands and clothes and forming a clown’s ring around his mouth. As special as that picture may be, nobody would take that child into a public setting without first cleaning him up.

Why do parents care when their children have magic marker stains on their hands, or glue and paint on their clothes, or dried food on their faces? Isn’t it because the child’s appearance is a reflection of the standards that the parents want to be associated with? When a parent maintains a child’s dress and hygiene they are expressing to others, as well as to themselves, that they are intent on raising their children to be conscientious in all areas of responsibility.

Our popular culture tells us not to care what others think of us, to not be concerned by those who would “judge a book by its cover.” Chaza”l seem to take a different view. The Halacha is that in a time of religious persecution one must give up his life even to avoid having to dress in non-Jewish clothing. The applications of this concept, that one’s actions reflect his beliefs, are far reaching. In the Sefer Chafetz Chaim, we find that if one finds himself stuck amongst talebearers and cannot avoid hearing their Lashon Harah he must be careful not to give any impression that he concurs, and must try to find a way to express his displeasure.

We can relate this idea to all facets of life. It is relevant to how we spend our free time, the topics of our discussions, the styles that we choose, and the manner in which we conduct ourselves. And it is not only relevant to how we are viewed by others, but more importantly to be aware of the message that we are sending to ourselves.