



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 חיה שרה כ"ב חשוון תשע"א

Lesson #8: Wash Your Hands

(Prepared by Yisroel Meir David)

From a very young age, even before pre-school, children are inundated with reminders regarding the importance of keeping themselves clean. Toddlers' dirty hands are constantly being washed, and their faces wiped. On their dirtiest days they may even be bathed more than once or twice. Hopefully, as a child matures he takes on the responsibility of being a clean and neat adult.

Why is it that this lesson is given so much more attention, and is so much more universally taught than other lessons? Why does the Board of Health require hand washing directions to be placed in certain public facilities?

The answer is obvious. Chazal refer to the hands as Askaniyos, very busy. As a result the hands tend to pick up all kinds of potential hazards. At the same time, we use our hands in all aspects of our lives and as a result, the probability of our hands causing some sort of damage, even without or thinking, is very great.

This potential for damage and therefore the need to clean applies to two different arenas. Sometimes a child is told to wash their hands so as not to harm themselves, for example, the child who comes in from making mud pies and would like to eat apple pie. This is usually the reason that very young children's hands need to be cleaned, as they are constantly putting their hands into their mouths. The lesson that one must take care not to harm themselves inadvertently will be addressed at another time.

Today's lesson focuses on the need to wash one's hand so that they should not incidentally harm others. A classic application of this need can be understood by observing the mother who marches her children into the bathroom immediately after they have finished finger painting. "Don't touch the walls, or the doors, or the towels, or the faucets, or your faces until all of that paint is washed off." Even with very young children, one needs to be aware of the potential for a mess, as they seem to love touching others parents right after eating messily with their hands.

Adults need to "wash their hands" as well. In other words, we need to constantly make sure that we are not hurting others as we move through life, busy and focused on whatever task or event we are involved with. How often does it happen that as one opens the car door, in their haste to exit they accidentally slam or scratch the car parked next to theirs?

The story is told about the Steipler Gaon that he showed up unexpectedly at the Bar Mitzva Seuda of a local boy. After showing the boy great honor by participating in the Seuda, the Steipler asked Mechila from the boy, who had now become an adult Halachically. Several years earlier the Steipler had inadvertently embarrassed the boy, and he waited for the first opportunity to ask Mechila from him as an adult. Much can be learned from this story; however, for our purposes let us focus on understanding how careful the Steipler must have been that his actions should never harm others.

It is ironic that although small children constantly need to be cleaned, the image that represents purity and harmlessness is that of a small child. Chazal say that the word Keruvim of the Aron Hakodesh comes from the shoshonim, "Ki Ravi", like a child. The Keruvim's resembled small children as a reminder for Klal Yisroel to always remain pure.