



A collection of Torah thoughts produced by the Maor Centre, Melbourne

המאור

Light reading
HaMaor

ISSUE 7

Parshas Matos Masei, Tammuz 5784

BEIS HAMIKDASH THOUGHT

The Nikanor Gate

Celebrating the Death of our Enemies

The eastern gate that led from the Ezras Nashim to the Ezras Yisrael was called the Nikanor Gate. The double doors of this gate were covered in intricately embossed copper. Even when the other gates were later covered in gold, the Nikanor gate was left in its original copper design.

According to the Talmud Bavli, these beautiful gates were donated to the Beis Hamikdash by a Jew named Nikanor. He commissioned them to be made by the finest craftsmen in Alexandria and transported them to Jerusalem. The Gemara records a well-known miracle that happened with these gates, as a reward for Nikanor's sacrifice in bringing them.

However the Talmud Yerushalmi that offers a different explanation for the name of this gate.

Nikanor was a Selucid Greek general, an enemy of the Jewish people who threatened to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. When the Chashmonaim defeated him, they cut off his head, hands and feet and hung them at the eastern gate of the Temple. This is how the gate came to be called the Nikanor Gate.

It makes sense to name the gate after its donor. But why would the main gate of the Temple courtyard be named after such an evil person?

The name was given to make an eternal remembrance and celebrate the victory over our enemies and to give thanks to Hashem.

This week, 2 of the most senior terrorists who threatened the Holy Land and its inhabitants, were killed. Let us remember this moment of victory and thank Hashem for delivering our enemies into our hands.

Israel and the Diaspora, Forever United

As Bnei Yisroel were poised to enter Eretz Yisroel, the tribes of Reuven and Gad set their sights on the recently conquered eastern bank of the Jordan. It was a fertile land that would be ideal for grazing their large flocks. They petitioned Moshe to be given this land as instead of their portion in Eretz Yisrael.

Moshe was angered by their request and harshly rebuked them. The commentaries suggest different explanations for why Moshe became so angered.

Some suggest that it was because they were turning away from the Holy Land of Eretz Yisrael and choosing to live in Chutz Laaretz. Further, they were doing this because of their desire for material success, prioritising this over holiness.

Other commentators explain that Moshe thought that they were afraid of battle, showing a lack of Bitachon in Hashem. Their fear in battle, particularly the tribe of Gad who were known to be warriors, would sow fear in the hearts of the rest of the people and discourage them from wanting to enter the land.

This is why Moshe likened the actions of Bnei Gad and Reuven to the spies. With their reports of the formidable Canaanite nations, with giants and fortified cities, the spies frightened the Jewish people who refused to enter the Land, resulting in the 40 years of wandering in the desert.

And finally, Moshe questioned their very morality, asking; האחיכם יבואו למלחמה ואתם תשבּוּ פה, "Will your brothers go out to war and you sit here?" How could it be that your fellow Jews will go out in battle to conquer the Holy Land, risking their lives, and you will dwell comfortably in Chutz Laaretz?

Accepting Moshe's rebuke, the tribes of Reuven and Gad declared that before they would settle in the comfort of the Eiver Hayarden, they would go out to fight together with the tribes entering the Land and lead from the front. A number of times they use the words לפני ה', "before Hashem", to show that they did have Bitachon that they would be victorious.

Moshe accepted their proposal and allowed them to take their inheritance on the other side of the river. But then strangely, Moshe adds half of the tribe of Menashe to join them on the eastern bank.

The commentaries grapple with this. Menashe did not ask to settle on the eastern bank, why were they included? Further, after Moshe's rebuke to Bnei Gad and Reuven, why would he 'relegate' more of Bnei Yisrael to settle outside of the borders of the Holy Land? And why only half of the tribe of Menashe?

In last week's Parsha we read how the daughters of Tzelofchad came before Moshe and the elders to demand that they be able to inherit their deceased father's portion in Eretz Yisroel. At a time when the men had spurned the Holy Land, asking to return to Egypt, these five women demonstrated a great love of the Land and a desire to dwell there.

The Torah traces their lineage as being the daughters of Tzelofchad son back to Menashe, son of Yosef. Despite having reached the pinnacle of financial success, Yosef yearned for the Holy Land. His dying wish was that he eventually be brought to burial in the holy soil of Eretz Yisrael.

Yosef's great love of the Land even while in Egypt, was encapsulated in the name given to his firstborn son, Menashe. Yosef explained the significance of this name; for G-d has caused me to forget (nashani)... my father's home. Menashe reflected Yosef's desire to retain his connection to his ancestral homeland.

This love was passed down from generation to generation. This was the love which motivated the daughters of Tzelophchad in their demand.

Menashe, said Moshe, would live on the eastern bank of the Jordan to ensure that the Jews of Chutz Laaretz would retain their love and longing for Eretz Yisroel.

In his commentary, the Shach writes that the reason for having half of Menashe in Eretz Yisrael and half in Eiver Hayarden, was; שלא תשתכח האחוה - so that the brotherly love not be forgotten. Having the single tribe of Menashe span both sides of the Jordan shows that the Jews of Chutz Laaretz and Eretz Yisroel remain one people; united in our love of one another and united in our love of Eretz Yisroel.

Over the last 300 days, as our brothers and sisters fight a war against the evil terror regimes that attacked the Holy Land and its inhabitants, we who live in the comfort of Chutz Laaretz have not forgotten our brotherly love and connection. We felt the pain of the lost lives of the Shemini Atzeres attack and the hostages taken from their homes. We feel the loss of every heroic soldier. With our prayers, Tehillim, Tzedaka, extra Mitzvos and Bitachon along with protests and missions, we hope to give strength and draw down protection for our people and our soldiers in Eretz Yisrael.

May we have an immediate and complete victory over our enemies and our captives safely returned. A may we see the realisation of the time when Hashem will extend our borders (of which Eiver Hayarden was the start) and we will live in peace and tranquillity.

Washing Hands when Eating Dipped Foods

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

One of the most famous Takanos of Chaza"l is washing our hands before eating bread. Lesser known is that Chaza"l¹ also made a requirement to wash Netilas Yadaim before eating foods which are dipped in liquid.

This is limited to the 7 halachically defined liquids; water, milk, olive oil, wine, dew, bees honey and blood. Fruit juices, other oils, meat and fish juice etc. do not qualify as liquids regarding this halacha.

Even though the term used in the sources is foods which have been 'dipped' in liquids, the Takanah applies irrespective of how the foods became wet e.g. if they were washed².

The reason Chaza"l included foods which are moist with liquid in the requirement to wash, is because in the laws of purity and impurity, liquids are more susceptible to impurity. Further, liquids when touched with unwashed hands take on a higher level of Tumah and are able to pass on Tumah to other foods³.

Two opinions

Most of the Rishonim hold that there is a Chiyuv to wash. Rashi, Rambam, Rosh and Mordechai quoting his teachers. According to these opinions not only is one obligated to wash for moistened foods, but does so with a Bracha. This is also the opinion of the Tur⁴.

In contrast, Tosfos⁵ write that washing for moistened foods is not a Takanah and was only an issue of purity and impurity and only applied in the times when they would eat their foods in a state of purity. Nowadays we are not careful with the laws of purity and impurity and therefore there is no requirement to wash for moistened foods.

Other Rishonim who hold like Tosfos include the Maharam Rottenberg, Rashbam, Or Zarua and Baal Haitur. According to this view to make a blessing over washing hands would be a Bracha Levatala.

Because of this Machlokes, the Mechaber⁶ rules that one should wash but should not make the Bracha because of the principle ספק ברכות להקל. This view is accepted by the Ram"o as well.

Magen Avraham⁷ notes that the custom in Ashkenaz is not to wash for foods which have been dipped or moistened with liquid. He quotes the Lechem Chamudos⁸ who justifies

this custom saying that they follow the opinion of Tosfos quoted above. Aruch Hashulchan⁹ writes that nowadays we are lenient.

The Alter Rebbe¹⁰ writes that therefore, whilst one should not protest those who act leniently, the technical halacha follows the majority of Rishonim who do require Netilas Yadaim. (Although because of the dispute a Bracha is not made). Mishna Berura¹¹ rules similarly.

Mateh Yosef¹² writes that one who does not wash for moistened foods is considered as one who is mezalzel with Netilas Yadaim who is driven from the world and liable for Nidui. Therefore every G-d fearing person should be careful to wash and not rely on the Minhag. Others who are Machmir include Ben Isha Chai, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Shala"h.

(Of note is the opinion of the Vilna Gaon who not only requires washing but also requires a Bracha although this is not followed).

Some Halachic guidelines

Even if only part of the food is dipped in the liquid and that part that one is holding is dry, Netilas Yadaim is still required. This is a precaution either lest one come to touch the moist part¹³ or lest they dip the entire food¹⁴.

The same is true even if the food is eaten with a fork or spoon if it is of a type of food which is usually eaten by hand. Foods which are often eaten by fork or spoon were not included in the Gezeira that one may touch them while eating. Therefore one need not wash even though they may come to touch the food while on the fork¹⁵. If they are eaten by hand Netilas Yadaim is required.

The Takanah only applies to foods dipped in liquids or moistened with liquids. Liquids themselves were not included in the Gezeira. Therefore one may drink water from their hands or dip their finger into a liquid without requiring Netilas Yadaim¹⁶.

The requirement to wash is only for one who is eating these foods. Handling these foods does not require Netilas Yadaim.

If the food item has been dried, Netilas Yadaim is not required. On the contrary, one who washes for fruits (which are not wet) is considered an act of arrogance i.e. acting overly pious. If one's hands are dirty or one is washing for hygiene, there is not concern¹⁷.

Foods which have been pickled or cooked in one of these liquids are subject to the following halachos; The liquid absorbed in the food during the cooking or pickling is considered to have become part of the food item itself. Therefore it no longer qualifies as a liquid. Nonetheless the liquid on the surface of the food is still considered liquid and does require washing¹⁸.

A practical case would be eating a pickle by hand. If the pickle has been dried on the surface, one may eat the pickle without Netilas Yadaim even if the juice inside the pickle will come out and moisten the pickle.

Liquids which have hardened or congealed on top of a food so that they are no longer moist to the touch (and are טופח ע"מ) (להטפוח) do not require Netilas Yadaim¹⁹. If the liquid subsequently melts or becomes moist again, they will necessitate Netilas Yadaim.

There are Poskim²⁰ who are lenient and do not require Netilas Yadaim for moistened foods if one eats less than a Kzayis volume. Mishna Berura writes that one may rely on this especially as many Poskim do not require washing for moist foods at all. The Alter Rebbe does not bring this leniency.

If one does not have water to wash they may wrap their hands in order to eat moistened foods²¹.

1. Pesachim 115a
2. Shaarei Teshuvah 158:2
3. See Rashi bid and Rabbeinu Yonah Brchos 41a
4. OC 158
5. Pesachim 115a
6. OC 158:4
7. OC 158:8
8. Divrei Chamudos Chullin 8:41
9. OC158:4
10. OC 158:3
11. 158:19
12. Quoted in Baer Heitev 158:11
13. Pesachim 115a. Ram"o 158:4. Shulchan Aruch Harav 158:3
14. Mishna Berura ibid. A Nafka Mina between the 2 reasons is for doos which are never entirely dipped in liquid. An example brought in the Poskim is dipping cookies into tea or coffee where one never submerges the entire cookie. According to the reason of the Alter Rebbe, washing would still be required.
15. Shulchan Aruch Harav ibid
16. Ibid. Beis Yosef quotes Rashba who does require one to wash their hand – even when drinking from a cup.
17. Shulchan Aruch 158:5
18. Shulchan Aruch Harav 158:6
19. Shulchan Aruch Harav 158:7. See there that honey is possibly an exception based on the opinion of Rambam and is considered a liquid even when no longer moist.
20. See Mishna Berura 158:14, Birkei Yosef 473:7 and others.
21. Seder Netilas Yadaim 22