



# Can One Fix an Unwarranted *Beracha* on *Netilat Yadayim*?

לעילוי נשמת  
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**QUESTION:** I came out of the bathroom and did netilat yadayim for that purpose, but accidentally I recited the beracha of netilat yadayim. I tried to salvage the situation by indeed eating bread as fast as I could. Did that help?

**ANSWER:** We wash our hands after using the bathroom without a beracha because it is not the fulfillment of a formal mitzva but is necessary to have clean hands for reciting matters of sanctity and for removing ruach ra'ah. (There is a beracha if it is right before Shacharit – Mishna Berura 4:30.) While it is unclear whether one should use a cup for this washing (see Living the Halachic Process, II, H-10), you apparently did. This made your washing fit for netilat yadayim for a meal (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 159:1), except that you lacked intent for that purpose.

We understand that your mistake was not that you thought you were washing to eat or that washing after the restroom is a formal obligation that includes a beracha. Rather, you washed without intention for the formal mitzva, and the beracha slipped out due to rote (i.e., you often make a beracha after washing with a cup). Thus, you

acted without kavana for what is considered a mitzva.

What you did, eating bread based on a properly performed netilat yadayim without the intention for a meal (and, thus, without a beracha) is the subject of a machloket without a clear ruling (see Shulchan Aruch and Rama, OC 158:7). This includes where one washed for eating food that was dipped in liquid, where Halacha mandates washing without a beracha due to doubt (see ibid. 4&7). The Rama therefore instructs to repeat netilat yadayim, again without a beracha because of the possibility that the first washing got the job done (Mishna Berura ad loc. 32). The opinion that the netila without kavana to eat now is valid means that there is no need for another netila before the meal; he did not fulfill a mitzva with it (see Chazon Ish, OC 25:8).

Does inserting kavana to eat based on the netila, at least within a moment (toch k'dei dibbur) of the recitation give significance to the recitation? The broad idea of fixing things toch k'dei dibbur has limitations (see Sdei Chemed vol. VI, p. 327), and I did not find precedent of it giving a quality to an action done before it (see Yabia Omer II, OC 16).

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Even if the intention could reach back to fix the beracha, the following source indicates that a beracha cannot fix the nature of the preceding netila. The Magen Avraham (158:13, accepted by the Mishna Berura ibid.) says that one cannot make a beracha after a netila without kavana because a beracha is incongruous to such a lacking netila.

One can still argue that the fact that the netila was used for the meal (according to the opinion that it works) does give it and its beracha some significance after the fact, considering the two are connected. While not negating the plausibility of that contention, the following Ritva illustrates that the washing and eating are not fully connected. The Ritva (Chulin 106b) says that one who did netilat yadayim with a beracha because he was planning to eat may change his mind and not eat, because the netilat yadayim at its time, based on the plans at that time was required; after the mitzva was completed, it is irrelevant if the meal materializes or not. He spells out that the eating is only the trigger for the obligation of netilat yadayim; it is not the end of the mitzva process (admittedly, not everyone understands it this way – see S'dei Chemed ibid., p. 328). In our flipside case, your eating is unlikely to change things retroactively, as the netilla was done without obligation.

The following would have been the best way to salvage as much as possible, besides reciting baruch shem k'vod ... on

the beracha (Shulchan Aruch, OC 206:6). We saw that to eat bread, you needed a second netilat yadayim, without a beracha. Since the beracha on netilat yadayim can work before the washing (Shulchan Aruch, OC 158:11), intending that your beracha go on that second washing might have helped (analysis beyond our scope). ■

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