

Intermediate Talmud

Tractate Berachot: Chapter 7, folio 46b-47a

Lesson Ten

With Rabbi Mendel Kaplan

[R. Sheshet asked the Exilarch:] With whom do they commence the washing of the hands before the meal? — He replied: With the senior one. Is then the senior one to sit still [he exclaimed] and watch his hands until they have all washed? — He replied: They bring a table before him immediately. With whom do they begin the washing after the meal [he asked him]? — He replied: With the junior one present. And is the senior one to sit with greasy hands until all have washed? — He replied: They do not remove the table from before him till water is brought to him. R. Sheshet then said: I only know a Baraitha, in which it is taught: 'What is the order of reclining? When there are two couches in a set, the senior one reclines first, and then the junior takes his place below him. When there are three couches, the senior takes his place first, the second next above him, and then the third one below him. Washing before the meal commences with the senior one, washing after the meal, if there are five, commences with the senior, and if there are a hundred it commences with the junior until five are left, and then they start from the senior one. The saying of grace is assigned to the one to whom the washing thus reverts'. This supports Rav; for R. Chiyya b. Ashi said in the name of Rav: Whoever washes his hands first at the end of the meal has the right to say grace. Rav and R. Chiyya were once dining with Rabbi. Rabbi said to Rav: Get up and wash your hands. R. Chiyya saw him trembling and said to him: Son of princes, he is telling you to think over the grace.

Our Rabbis taught: We do not give precedence [to others] either on the road or on a bridge or in the washing of the greasy hands [at the end of a meal]. Once Ravin and Abaye were on the road and the ass of Rabin got in front of Abaye, and he [Ravin] did not say to him,

Will your honor proceed. Said Abaye: Since this student has come up from the West, he has grown proud. When he arrived at the door of the synagogue, he said, Will your honor please enter. He said to him: Was I not 'Your honor', up to now? — He replied: Thus said R. Yochanan: One gives precedence only in a doorway in which there is a *mezuzah*. [You say] only where there is a *mezuzah*, but not where there is no *mezuzah*. If that is so, then in the case of a synagogue and *Beth Hamidrash* also where there is no *mezuzah* we do not give precedence? What you must say is, in a doorway which is suitable for a *mezuzah*.