



Do It Again

[This is the second essay in a series on Halachic ramifications of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).]

We will begin this week's essay with the powerful words of the Steipler zt"l (*Orchos Rabbenu* 4, p53):

You must remember that the entire Torah is from Hashem. The One who established the stringencies is the [same] One who established the leniencies in Shulchan Aruch and Poskim. The One who said these said those. If a person says that he is more careful than the Shulchan Aruch, he may believe that he is glorifying and exhibiting care over the Mitzvos, but in truth, he is breaching the fence of the Torah. It is one of the plots of the Yetzer [haRa] to make the yoke of servitude weighty [and] a heavy load. Through this he will eventually push a person to throw off the yoke of Torah, God forbid. This is [a] known [phenomenon] – we have seen cases like this – Hashem should have mercy. Certainly, one should have no concerns at all about that which there is nothing to be concerned about Halachically.

A person who finds himself with great anxiety about observing the Torah should act only per the instructions of a Chacham. He should not enquire after the Chacham's reasoning at all. This is tried and tested – he should not know of the rationale, only the simple rulings – and he should observe them. If not, he may worsen his condition and eventually cease to observe the Torah at all, God forbid.

Many who exhibit obsessive and/or compulsive behavior in Mitzva observance (e.g., performing Mitzvos repeatedly) believe that they are only trying to fulfill the *Shulchan Aruch*. This is a twofold error:

1. In most cases, they have already fulfilled their obligation when performing the Mitzva the first time.
2. Obsessive behavior of this kind may eventually lead to abandoning the Mitzvos entirely, as the *Steipler* warns.

Though this is self-evident, it is worthwhile – for the sake of *Bnei Torah* who are *Yirei Shamayim* – to present the Halachic bases for the above. We will give several examples:¹

¹ Some of the contents of this essay are based on an anonymous paper: “*Yirah Tehora*”.

Positioning the Tefila shel Rosh

People with OCD often obsess over positioning their *Tefila shel Rosh* in precisely the right position on the head. After all, it cannot be placed too far back or forward, and should be positioned exactly in the middle – “between the eyes”. The *Steipler* would instruct people with the words of the *Divrei Chaim* (O.C. 2:6):

Looking in a mirror to see whether the Tefillin are in the middle [of the head] is boorish behavior. Even if they are not exactly positioned, one is Yotzei, as we know that there is space on the head to place two Tefillin (Eruvin 95b).

The *Divrei Chaim's* view may not be widely accepted. However, all the Poskim agree that it is sufficient to check the position of one's Tefillin once. Checking more often only leads to confusion (*Orchos Rabbenu* 4, p185).

Drying Hands for Netilas Yadayim

Some take immense care to ensure that their hands are dry before *Netilas Yadayim*. This is due to the *Chazon Ish's* ruling on the matter (O.C. 24:20). Many are unaware that the *Biur Halacha* rules leniently (162). People with OCD should certainly follow the lenient view, particularly given the fact that drying one's hands normally usually suffices.

A Guf Naki for Tefila

OCD sufferers are often inordinately concerned about Davening with a *Guf Naki* (not needing to use the bathroom). They may spend several hours attempting to evacuate their bowels completely. This is based on the *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling (O.C. 92:1): “One who needs to relieve himself should not Daven. If he Davens, his Tefila is an abomination, and he needs to Daven again.”

However, the *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling is the ideal conduct. *Bedieved*, if he was able to delay evacuation the amount of time it takes to walk a “*Parsa*”, he has fulfilled his obligation.

In addition, regarding urination there are some Poskim who hold that a person is never obligated to Daven again, even if he would not have been able to hold it in for a *Shiur Parsa*. Though we are generally stringent in this matter (even though the *Biur Halacha* asserts that we cannot decide this *Machlokes*) and repeat the Tefila (as a *Nedava*), a person with OCD should not do so, lest he take to Davening over and over again or constantly interrupt his Tefilos in the middle. He should use the bathroom before Davening and then not think about it again.

The *Aruch haShulchan* has some pertinent words on this subject (O.C. 2:11):

A person should accustom himself to using the bathroom morning and evening. This is a matter of "Zehirus, Zerizus, and Nekiyus". He should do no more than attempt to empty his bowels. If he did so and nothing was excreted, though he may believe that he needs to, he is nevertheless considered to have a Guf Naki and is obligated to Daven. God forbid to allow the last time for Krias Shema to pass because of this. The Torah was not given to Malachim. What else is he supposed to do? Many err in this matter – one should reprove them.

The *Steipler* also discusses this (*Karyana d'Igresa, Igeres Sha'ah*):

Those concerns about needing the bathroom are certainly based on the fear of violating Bal Teshaktzu. This is common nature: whenever a person thinks that he perhaps needs to relieve himself, he immediately has the [physiological] feeling that he does need to. I will tell you an important fact. The Eshel Avraham rules that a feeling of needing to relieve oneself that passes with Hesech haDa'as does not constitute "Nitzrach l'Nekavav". His Guf does not need to excrete now – just his thoughts prompted a feeling as though he needs it. It is certainly correct that everyone should act according to the Eshel Avraham's ruling.

It is also worth mentioning that Rav Shmuel Vosner zt"l (*m'Beis Levi* 11) ruled that one who feels very full but does not feel the need to relieve himself (and, based on his experience, knows that his *Guf* is not yet ready to do so) may Daven. He is not "Nitzrach l'Nekavav".

One further ruling: If a person is unsure whether he will be able to Daven all of *Shemona Esrei* without passing gas (though he is not certain that he will) should not allow the *Zman Tefila* to pass due to this concern (*Mishna Berura* 80).