

THE ANONYMOUS HAGGADAH - Urchatz

Contributed by [Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons & Significant Others](#)

Source: THE ANONYMOUS HAGGADAH

URCHATZ

The Leader of the Seder only, now washes his/her hands from an ewer into a bowl held by another celebrant, wiping them dry on a hand towel. We have accepted the need for leadership, we wash the leaders's hands. This small, formal act of service is a symbol of our recognition of their leadership. This is an ancient Jewish ritual in and of itself.

At this point in the Seder, washing the hands has a specific purpose other than to punctuate and elect. It is a statement of purpose, an elevation from the mundane. It symbolizes the wish to be relieved of the bondage of self. Before the Cohen (priest) could perform any of his duties in the Temple, he had to wash his hands and feet from the copper urn in the courtyard. Silently he prayed as we do before we begin the Seder.

"Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Your will. Make me an instrument of Your purpose, take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Your power, Your love and Your way of life".

The Washing of hands refers back to the Great Copper Urn and further back to the Jewish women and the mirrors they used in Egypt. That was the prime example of an action that served Hashem's purpose. The way water flows between the fingers as it passes over the hands leaving them cleansed, copies the action of lust as it flows through the body. Water always tries to shed its energy and come to rest after doing so. So too do the sensations of lust and longing.

When we eat dry foods, washing the hands is not necessary. But as soon as liquids are involved, as with the ritual of KARPAS we are about to perform when we will dip vegetables into salt water, we must prepare our hands by washing them. It is easily explained in terms of hygiene and cleanliness. But in light of what we just said, it attains a far deeper significance. Whenever hunger, lust or the expression of any of our needs comes over us, we beg Hashem to help us express His will. We ask Him to ensure the lust or the hunger washes over us passing through our fingers. Leaving us cleansed the way

washing our hands does.

Washing of hands, (before the advent of theories regarding hygiene) is a singularly Jewish ritual with no counterpart in any contemporary or adjacent cultures and religion. Greeks and Romans had no such symbolical actions in their lives. So its real meaning is closely reflected in the metaphor "I wash my hands of it".