



RABBI GIDEON

**Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha**

WEITZMAN

If I Have to Eat Before Shacharit

In continuing from last week's discussion of the special leniencies that doctors have regarding prayer, we will discuss the issue of eating before praying.

The halacha (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 89:3) does not permit eating, or doing any other activities, before one prays the morning prayers. The Rabbis (Berachot 10b) explained that whoever eats before they pray is described by the verse "you cast Me behind your back" (Melachim I 14:9). The word "back" is "*gavecha*" which could also be read as *gaava*, your pride. God says that after this person ate and drank and was proud, he then remembered to accept upon himself the yoke of heaven. His own pride and concern for his own wellbeing precedes his concern for spiritual pursuits and the Lord's glory.

The Rabbis also supplied another source for the prohibition of eating and drinking prior to prayer. The verse states "do not eat with the blood" (Vayikra 19:26) which is explained to mean that a person

should not eat before they pray for their own flesh and blood.

The two verses appear to say the same thing; however there is a difference between them. The former source suggests that once someone has prayed even some of the prayers then they are permitted to eat. Once they have "broken their pride", and turned to God, they are permitted to take care of their own needs.

The latter verse suggests differently; the reason that we do not eat is that we need to ask God to sustain us before we partake of food. As such one cannot eat even after saying some of the prayers, until they have prayed the Amidah, which contains the requests and supplications that should precede eating and drinking.

This explains the comment of the Rema on the aforementioned halacha in the Shulchan Aruch. The Rema writes that some are lenient that after reciting the *Birchot HaShachar* one can eat, but he suggests that it is appropriate to be strict and not eat or drink even in such circumstances.

Therefore someone who needs to eat before prayers, for medical reasons, should recite some of the prayers before eating, such as reading the Shema (see *Biyur Halacha ad loc.*). Rabbi

Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (as quoted in Nishmat Avraham, Vol I 89:2) suggests that it is preferable to recite a verse of supplication. For example, “hear God and answer me, God be my help” (Tehillim 30:11).

More on this next week ■

The Puah Institute is based in Jerusalem and helps couples from all over the world who are experiencing fertility problems. Offices in Jerusalem, New York, Los Angeles & Paris. Contact (Isr) 02-651-5050 (US) 718-336-0603 www.puahonline.org



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