



RABBI GIDEON

Machon Puah for Fertility and Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

WEITZMAN

Eat, Drink and Then Pray

Last time we discussed the prohibition of eating in the morning before Shacharit. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 89:3) permits one to take medication before praying. The reason for this leniency is quite clear, since eating before prayers is prohibited either because one should first pray for their souls and only afterwards take care of their body, or that eating before praying is arrogant towards the Creator; one should first connect with God and only subsequently take pride in their own body. Taking medication is not arrogant and is not considered over involvement in physical needs. For both these reasons it is permitted prior to eating.

What about eating before praying for medical reasons? If a particular medicine must be taken with food or drink this is clearly not a problem as it is considered to be part of the medication itself, but what about a person who needs to eat or drink for their health, is this also permitted before Shacharit?

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chafetz Chayim, wrote the halachic seminal work, the Mishnah Berurah, on the first section of the Shulchan Aruch. In addition, he authored another tangential commentary to the Mishnah Berurah called the Biyur Halacha, that provides complex analysis of the legal rulings of earlier Jewish halachic authorities.

The Biyur Halacha (ad loc.) discusses whether one is permitted to eat and drink before prayers even if he could pray first and only afterwards eat and drink. He



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quotes from Rabbi Chezkiyah Da Silva, the author of the Pri Chadash, and Rabbi Yosef ben Meir Teomim, the author of the Pri Megadim, who agreed that one can eat and drink prior to prayers for medicinal reasons, even if they could wait until after Shacharit.

It appears that concern for health takes precedence over the obligation to pray before eating. Even in a case where one could first pray, and then eat or drink for health reasons, they are still permitted to eat or drink before prayers. This is not limited to the case of immediate and present danger to health. For example, Rabbi Avraham Danzig wrote, in his book, the Chayei Adam, that someone who needs to eat, due to a weak heart, is permitted to do so even though there is no threat to his life.

The obligation to be healthy and maintain a healthy lifestyle is so imperative that it can take precedence over other obligations, such as praying as soon as possible after a person wakes up.

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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