

# PRACTICAL HORA'OS

A CLOSER  
LOOK AT  
SOME OF  
THE REBBE'S  
HORA'OS

## EATING BEFORE DAVENING

THE REBBE'S HORAOS  
ON THIS UNIQUE  
CHASSIDISHER HANHAGA.<sup>1</sup>

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ההתקשרות לכ"ק אדמו"ר

נדפס ע"י  
הרה"ת ר' יצחק מאיר וזוגתו  
מרת לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
שפאלטר

Halacha dictates that when a *mitzvah* needs to be done by a certain time, *Shofar*<sup>2</sup> *Lulav*<sup>3</sup> and *Bedikas Chametz*<sup>4</sup>, for example, we don't eat before performing the *mitzvah*. A similar prohibition applies before fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *davening Shacharis*. The Shulchan Aruch<sup>5</sup> states that one may not eat or drink anything (besides water) before *Shacharis*, as it is an act of haughtiness to take care of one's own needs before *davening* to Hashem. The Alter Rebbe continues, however, and says that one who would not be able to concentrate on the *davening* as well without eating prior, may do so.<sup>6</sup>

In general, *chassidim* don't look for *heteirim*. Indeed, Lubavitcher Chassidim do not eat before *bentching esrog* or hearing *Shofar* and the like. But the eating of *mezonos far'n davenen* is all but ubiquitous.

In the *Hayom Yom* entry for Yud Shevat, the Rebbe quotes the Frierdiker Rebbe, who told the following story:

When my grandmother, Rebbetzin Rivka, was eighteen (in 5611, 1851) she fell ill and the physician ordered her to eat immediately after waking up. Not wishing to eat before *davening*, she *davened* very early, then ate breakfast. When her father-in-law, the Tzemach Tzedek, learned of this he said to her, "A Jew must be healthy and strong. The Torah says about *mitzvos*, 'V'chai Bohem (to live with them),' meaning to bring *chayus* (life and vitality) into the *mitzvos*. To infuse *mitzvos* with *chayus*, one must be strong and joyful." He concluded, "You should not be without food. Better to eat for the sake of *davening* than to *daven* for the sake of eating." He then blessed her with long life. [She was born in 5593 (1833) and passed away on Yud Shevat, 5674 (1914) at the age of 81.]

My father [the Rebbe Rashab] repeated this teaching of the Tzemach Tzedek to someone in *yechidus*, adding: "And this must be done with joy."<sup>7</sup>

In numerous instances, the Rebbeim permitted people to eat before *davening* when there were health concerns. The Rebbe wrote in a letter,



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“If you don’t do so already, you must eat *mezonos* before *davening*, in addition to drinking ...

Many members of *anash* were instructed by my father-in-law, the Rebbe, for health reasons, to eat before *davening*, and not suffice with only drinking. Conducting yourself in this manner will be beneficial to both your health and your business.”<sup>8</sup>

In another letter, the Rebbe writes,

“You must safeguard your health. Since what should be eaten and drunk is one of the things the Torah put in the responsibility of doctors, you must do what they tell you. I don’t understand what you wrote - that because of this you can’t involve yourself in *davening*. If you mean that you don’t eat before *davening*, the *acharonim* and our holy *nesiim* ruled that when necessary for health reasons, one may eat before *davening*, and in fact, it is a *mitzvah* and an obligation.”<sup>9</sup>

The Rebbeim also encouraged eating before *davening* when doing so would enable the person to have proper *kavanah*. Especially for someone *davening b’arichus* — at length — an empty stomach can interfere with their *kavanah*. The Rebbe writes:

“In these matters, it depends on the method of the person’s *avodas hatefillah* — whether or not his *davening* is lengthy. The Tzemach Tzedek’s statement that “better to eat for the sake of *davening* than to *daven* for the sake of eating” is well known, and simply stated, it’s better to eat before *davening* if by doing so, his *davening* will be more organized.”

Finally, the Rebbeim encouraged eating before *davening* in cases when the person’s *davening* would not be completed until a late hour, as hunger will interfere

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with the *davening*. The Rebbe wrote:

“I spoke to your father, the *rav*, and to my bewilderment he told me about your eating and drinking habits, which are not the proper way, and this despite the fact that we see clearly that not having a *seder* in [eating and drinking] causes physical weakness, which is immediately followed by weakness in learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*. As is well-known, my father-in-law, the Rebbe demanded that all of the *yeshiva bochurim* have a proper *seder* in matters related to eating, drinking and sleeping. I hope that at least as soon as you get my letter, you will fix this.

The Tzemach Tzedek’s aphorism that ‘Better to eat for the sake of *davening* than to *daven* for the sake of eating’ is well-known. With the weakening of our generation, it is permitted to eat even *mezonos* before *davening* (of course, after saying the morning *Krias Shema*) for those who will

finish *davening* a while after waking up. One should not be stringent in this, because ‘*hachumra mevi’ah likula*’, such stringency leads to leniencies in your *avodas Hashem*.<sup>10</sup>

Upon awakening, a *chossid* should spend time studying *Chassidus*. Then, each word of davening should be said unhurriedly, with *kavanah*. So the *chossid* recites *Birchos Hashachar* and *Krias Shema*, eats and drinks something, and can then *daven* like a *chossid*.

In conclusion, we will cite the following from the notes of the venerable Chossid, Reb Zalman Duchman:

“I told the Rebbe [in *yechidus*] that I heard from Reb Binyomin Althois, who heard from Harav Meir Shlomo [Yanovsky], the Rebbe’s grandfather, that a doctor once instructed him to eat something before davening. When he asked the Rebbe Rashab what to do, he was told, ‘Nu, you will have to recite Shema in tefillin first, and then say Shmoneh Esrei as well...’ Obviously, he did not end up eating before davening...”

“Another Chossid, Reb Yehoshua Beshenkovicher, told me that he was once instructed by a distinguished doctor in Vitebsk to eat before davening. So he went to Lubavitch, and the Rebbe Rashab told him: ‘The doctor didn’t say you must eat before davening; he said you must eat earlier in the day. Make sure to finish davening earlier and then eat.’

“The Rebbe listened to my stories and then commented, ‘This was true only about the great Chassidim of yesteryear. In today’s generation, we should eat before davening. But not the way it is done in Kfar Chabad; [a full meal] with bread and herring.’<sup>11</sup> **T**

1. Thanks are due to Rabbi Chaim Rapoport, whose writings on this topic serve as the source material for much of this article.

2. *Mateh Efraim* 588:2.

3. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 652:2.

4. *Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch* 431:5.

5. *Orach Chaim* 89:3.

6. *Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch* 89:5.

7. *Hayom Yom* 10 Shevat, pg. 18. Translated by Kehos.

8. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 6 p. 142.

9. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 7 p. 322.

10. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14 p. 18.

11. *L’Sheima Ozen* (new edition) p. 357.

12. *Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz* Vol. 10 p. 2.

13. 2 *Adar I*, 5689.

## KRIAS SHEMA IN TEFILLIN FIRST?

As mentioned, before eating, one must fulfill the *mitzvas asei mideoraisa* of reciting *Krias Shema*. Should this *Krias Shema* ‘*ketana*’ be recited in *tefillin*?

In *Tomchei Temimim* in Lubavitch, different *temimim* received varied *hora’os* from the Rebbe Rashab on whether and how to eat before *davening*. Some were instructed to wash and eat bread, some to eat a little, and some not to eat at all. Reb Shmuel Levitin related that he was told by the Rebbe Rashab, “If you need to eat, it should be after putting on *tefillin* and saying *Krias Shema*.”

The Frieddiker Rebbe wrote, “Regarding those *temimim* who ask about eating before *davening*, certainly they are careful to first say *Krias Shema ketana* in *tefillin*, after which they can eat *mezonos*.<sup>12</sup>

The Rebbe’s father, Harav Levi Yitzchok, wrote to the Rebbe<sup>13</sup> that he should not fast — the Rebbe had been fasting until *Mincha* each day — and went on to detail when the Rebbe should eat:

“Do not do this [fasting each day] under any circumstances; not only [should you not fast] until *Mincha*, but you shouldn’t even [fast] until after *Shacharis*. You should eat breakfast (‘*pas shacharis*’) each day before *davening*. (You should, however, say *Krias Shema* beforehand, and if you can do so in *tefillin*, all the better.)”

In a *sicha* on Shabbos Parshas Shelach, 5712, the Rebbe spoke about wearing *tefillin* for *Krias Shema ketana*. The Rebbe begins with the premise that *chassidim* generally don’t say *Krias Shema ketana* in *tefillin*. He then discusses the concerns that arise from saying *Krias Shema* without *tefillin*, explaining that not only is it not problematic, but that there are *ruchniyusdike* benefits in beginning with the sanctity of *Krias Shema* before moving onward and upward to the sanctity of *Tefillin*.

What about eating before putting on *tefillin*?

In the context of the above-mentioned *sicha*, one bochur asked whether it is necessary to put on *tefillin* and say *Krias Shema ketana* before eating. The Rebbe wrote,

“כעצת רב חבד”

“As per the advice of a Chabad rov.”