

HEALTH REASONS

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

"You will be drawn after your body" (Melachim I 14,9). Chazal explain that the phrase "your body" (go'vechah) can also be read to mean "haughtiness" (ge'echah). Hashem says of a person who eats before praying, "After you acted with haughtiness by eating and drinking, then you accept the yoke of heaven on yourself!" (Berachos 10b)

However, food that is necessary for healing oneself is not considered haughtiness (Mahari Abuhav cited in Beis Yosef). Therefore, a sick person is allowed to eat whatever he needs to make him feel better (Shulchan Aruch 89,3). Even if he could wait to eat until after he has prayed, since his eating is for health reasons, he is not obligated to wait (Biur Halachah 89,3).

Nevertheless, praying before eating outweighs other considerations. Therefore, if a person is sick, but has enough strength to pray at home, it is preferable for him to pray on his own at home, rather than eating and then going to shul. After he has prayed at home and eaten something he can go to shul to make up the parts that he missed because he prayed without a minyan (Biur Halachah 89,3).

Although a person who is sick may eat before he prays, he should say Shema beforehand (Mishnah Berurah 89,22), preferably stipulating that he fulfills his obligation only if he is unable to recite it again later. In doing so he accepts the yoke of heaven on himself before he takes care of his bodily needs (Teshuvos V'Hanhagos 1,73). In addition to Shema, he should say a tefillah containing praise, request and thanks to Hashem as well. If one said Modeh Ani upon arising he has already fulfilled the need to say praise and thanks, and just needs to make a request (Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach as cited in Halichos Shlomo 2,2).

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