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# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## On the Air with Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Rav Aviner answers questions of Jewish Law and faith on the radio in Israel on Tuesday & Thursday nights (To listen: [www.kimizion.org/shiur/shut.html](http://www.kimizion.org/shiur/shut.html)). On the Air presents a sample each week.

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### Midrashim of our Rabbis

Q: How should we relate to midrashim of our Sages when certain things seems exaggerated?

A: Quite simply, if there is no pressing need, we understand the midrashim according to their simple meaning. If there is something which seems strange, we can read the midrash as a parable. For example, the Gemara in Eruvin (63a) says that it is forbidden for a student to give a halachic ruling in the presence of one's teacher, and one who does so is liable for death. The Gemara then relates a story in which a student gives a ruling in the presence of his teacher and died, and it provides details of the city where he was located and the city where his teacher was located, etc... The Gemara asks: Why are you providing so many details? It answers that it is in order so that you do not say that the story is a parable. Why would I say that it is a parable? Because it is strange, and difficult to believe. You die because you give a ruling in your teacher's presence?! Perhaps this is a parable. Perhaps "liable for death" is some kind of punishment, but not actual death. Our Sages, therefore, say that it follows its literal meaning and they provide details in order that you do not say that it is a parable. The Maharal wrote a book called "Be'er Ha-Golah" which is a defense of the midrashim of our Sages. Some people said that the midrashim are strange, and not correct, and not scientific, etc..., and the Maharal wrote this book to defend them. He says that from this Gemara in Eruvin we learn the general principle that if there are midrashim which are strange, we can explain them as parables. There are actually times that the commentators disagree whether a midrash is according to its simple meaning or a parable.

### Eating in the dark

Q: Is there a halachic problem or an act of piety to refrain from eating in the dark?

A: One can eat in complete darkness. One should obviously take great care not to choke on the bones if one is eating fish. If there is no potential danger, there is no problem.

Q: Perhaps a fly or something else will fall into the food?

A: I have never found a fly in my food. If you are in a place which has a lot of flies, however, you should certainly be careful. It is completely dependent on reality, but there is no halachic issue.

### Eating in a bathing suit

Q: Is it permissible to eat in a bathing suit if one is at the pool or the beach?

A: A person may eat in his bathing suit, and it is also permissible to recite a blessing before eating in a bathing suit. It is written in the codes that a person must wear respectable clothing and sit down for "Birkat Ha-Mazon" and "Al Ha-Mechiya" (blessings after eating), but eating in a bathing suit is acceptable.

Q: One must therefore get dressed in order to recite the blessing after eating?

A: It is possible that the requirement to wear respectable clothing for the blessing is respectable clothing in that place and at that time. It is clear that respectable clothing two hundred years ago is not the same as today. It is written that one needs a hat for "Birkat Ha-Mazon." I do not wear a hat for "Birkat Ha-mazon," since I do not wear a hat all day long. If I did wear a hat all day long, however, I would have to wear one for "Birkat Ha-mazon." It is possible that the usual clothing at the beach is a bathing suit, and it is therefore not a lack of respect for a person to recite "Birkat Ha-mazon" in a bathing suit there. I have not seen people, even G-d-fearing and righteous people, who ate bread there and then get dressed in all of his clothing. This seems to be the explanation.

Q: Can one also eat with his head uncovered, besides the blessing?

A: I have never seen someone who wears a kippah eat with his head uncovered. One obviously cannot swim with his head covered. When he is in the water, he is not wearing a kippah, but the obligation returns when he sits to eat. Even if he is not eating, only sitting or talking, the obligation also returns, since it is for the awe of Hashem, and all the more so when he is eating.

### Drinking in the middle of the davening

Q: A "Sheli'ach Tzibur" (one who leads davening) says that his throat gets dry in the middle of davening, and there is no problem to drink between the blessings of the Shema, and it is not considered an interruption. Is there a problem?

A: It is certainly forbidden to drink and eat in the middle of davening. It is also forbidden to eat and drink before davening, but if he needs this in order to daven or his throat will prevent him, it is not considered that he is drinking and eating for his own benefit. The source is the Gemara in Berachot (10b) that based on the verse, "Do not eat over the blood (dam)" (Vayikra 19:26), we learn that we should not eat (in the morning) before praying for your "dam," i.e. your life. It is considered haughty. You have not prayed for your blood and you eat?! Here, however, he is drinking and eating in order to be the "Sheli'ach Tzibur." If he drinks in the middle of davening, it is not called an interruption, since it is for the purpose of davening. This is similar to one who does not have a siddur in the middle of the "Shemoneh Esrei" and needs one. He can go get a siddur, because it is the same matter. Or someone is making noise and one says "shhhhh," it is not an interruption since it is the same matter. The codes discuss that someone who does not immediately say the blessing over lighting cannot recite it later, he is therefore allowed to recite it between the blessings. The Mishnah in Berachot (2:1) says that you can greet someone you fear or must honor between the blessings. Reciting a blessing to Hashem is not less than fear or honor of a person. I have to say, however, that I am only answering this because you asked me. In my eyes, it is very strange. I have never seen such a thing.

#### Rebuke for someone with a physical decline following a spiritual deterioration

Q: Should I rebuke my relative who is declining physically following a spiritual deterioration?

A: We can divide this subject into two parts. First of all, we have no proof that one's physical state which is declining is on account of his spiritual state. After all, we see that this is not the case around the world. There are people who are ethically and spiritually deficient and they are healthy. And conversely, there are righteous people who are extremely sick and even die. The assumption that anyone who is sinning is immediately punished is incorrect, and anyone who has intellect will not swallow it. Our Sages already said that there are righteous people who suffer and evil people who experience goodness (Berachot 7a). Secondly, one should certainly rebuke, but one needs to know how to rebuke, as is the case with all of the mitzvot. If I want to put on Tefillin, I need to know how to do so, not just take any boxes. Regarding the mitzvah of rebuke, our Sages say in the Gemara in Arachin (16b): Is there anyone in our generation who knows how to rebuke? Then they ask: Is there anyone in our generation who can receive rebuke, since when someone says "Remove the woodchip from between your eyes," the person responds, "Remove the beam from between yours!" This means that if I am rebuking someone maybe I have greater transgressions than he does. One must therefore seriously consider whether the person will accept rebuke. In order to rebuke someone, you have to be his good friend and you need to love him. When a person loves me, I listen to him. A person who does not love me and has never helped me and then comes to rebuke me, I do not listen. I respond: Where were you all of these years?

Why didn't you help me? My heart is not open to him. Furthermore, it is not a simple matter to rebuke a person who is not observant. There is no standard formula to speak to a person who is far from Torah. Moshe Rabbenu and all of the prophets did not know of a simple formula to help people repent. Avraham Avinu did not even know how to help Yishmael repent. Yitzchak Avinu did not know how to help Esav repent, even though the Torah explicitly says that he loved Esav. And there are others: Eli Ha-Kohain did not know how to help his sons repent, nor did Shmuel Ha-Navi, nor King David, even though they all surely loved their children. This does not mean that it is impossible to help someone repent, but it is not a one-time conversation. You need many, many, many conversations. In order to start a conversation with him, you have to know how to begin. In America, when good-mannered people want to talk about a sensitive matter, they say: Do you want to talk about it? If the answer is no, then the answer is no. If he responds positively, then a gate is open. If you want to dedicate time to this endeavor, ask him: "Do you want to talk about it?" and see what he says.

#### Solutions

Q: I have familial and financial problems. What should I do?

A: A person sometimes has distresses in life. Aside from your own efforts, i.e. if you are sick go to a doctor, if you have financial problems talk to a financial advisor, etc..., you need to repent, pray and to give tzedakah. This is obviously not a simple formula. After all, six million Jews died in the Holocaust and they certainly repented, prayed and gave tzedakah, but they were not successful. There is no trick to bend reality to our will, but we must do what we can.

#### Contractual obligations

Q: If I made an agreement with a contractor to do certain work, and it turned out that a part of the work did not have to be done, do I have to pay for all of it?

A: No, because you agreed to pay for certain work. If the work was not required, you do not need to pay for it. We saved money for the Nation of Israel!

#### Aggrieving a non-Jew

Q: Is it permissible to aggrieve an Arab?

A: As it known, it is a desecration of Hashem's Name.

#### Daf Yomi (learning a page of Gemara each day) in a class or learning alone

Q: Which is preferable – learning Daf Yomi in a class and understanding less or learning alone and understanding more?

A: Learning together.