

Eating before Tekias Shofar

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Rosh Hashanah is a day of prayer when we connect with Hashem and coronate Him as King of the world. Since the davening on these two days contain some of the most unique Tefillos on the Jewish calendar, it is readily understandable that in many Jewish communities around the world, the davening on Rosh Hashanah often concludes considerably later than on a regular Shabbos, sometimes finishing as late as 2 or 3pm. Although spending time in prayer on this Day of Judgment is certainly most worthwhile, it can be extremely difficult not to eat anything until that late in the day. True, the halachah generally dictates that one may not eat before davening in the morning, but might it be permissible in this situation to eat something before going to shul? Alternatively, could one eat something after reciting Shacharis but before blowing the Shofar? This essay will attempt to discuss and answer these questions.⁸⁵

Eating before performing a time bound mitzvah

Let us begin by discussing the second scenario presented above where one has already davened Shacharis. The issue is eating before performing a mitzvah. There are a number of examples where chazal forbade eating prior to fulfilling rabbinic mitzvos. First, the Mishnah (Shabbos 9b) forbids eating a meal, among other activities, prior to reciting Minchah in the afternoon. Although there is a debate among the rishonim and the poskim concerning the details *and* parameters of this prohibition⁸⁶, the basic principle, as explained by Rashi, is that we are afraid the person will get carried away with what he is doing and forget to daven Minchah. A second example of such an issur is eating before the Megillah reading on Purim night, even after Taanis Esther is over, which seems to be prohibited by the Tosefta (Shabbos 1:4).⁸⁷

We also find a number of examples of Torah mitzvos where Chazal prohibited eating beforehand. For instance, the Gemara (Berachos 4b) says that a person should not eat and drink prior to reciting kerias shma *and* shemoneh esreh at night because he may forget to do so and fall asleep beforehand. Another example is the Mishnah (Sukkah 38a) that rules that netilas lulav must precede eating your meal even if you are already at the table. While there is a debate

⁸⁵ For complete summaries of sources and opinions concerning this topic, see Piskei Teshuvos (585:2), R. Moshe Harari, Mikraei Kodesh Hilchos Rosh Hashanah pp.289-292, R. Chaim Jachter, www.koltorah.org, and R. Doniel Neustadt, The Monthly Halachah Discussion, pp.312-316.

⁸⁶ See the rishonim such as Baal HaMaor and Rabeinu Yonah there, as well as the summary of the Beis Yosef (OC 232) quoting the various opinions concerning eating during minchah gedolah vs. minchah ketanah, a seudah gedolah vs. seudah ketanah, and other details.

⁸⁷ This is the version that appears in the Toseftas in the Vilna Shas. Rama (692:4) also rules that one should not eat before reciting Megillah, though he cites the Terumas HaDeshen (109) as opposed to the Tosefta. Perhaps this is because he adds that he should not eat even if the fast is difficult for him, which does not appear in the Tosefta. See below for more concerning this Tosefta.

regarding certain aspects of this halacha, such as one who already started eating, it seems clear that in principle there is indeed an *issur achilah* before taking the lulav.⁸⁸ Here, too, Rashi (Sukkah 38a) explains that we are afraid the person may get carried away with his meal and forget to take the lulav and esrog.

Should the same prohibition apply to eating before *tekias shofar*? On the one hand, the logic offered in all of these cases would seem to apply to *shofar*. Furthermore, the *Tosefta* (Shabbos 1:4) states explicitly that we stop eating in order to perform the mitzvos of *shofar*, *lulav*, and *megillah*. On the other hand, the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, classic *rishonim*, and *Shulchan Aruch* never explicitly make reference to such a ban before *tekias shofar*.

The *Kaf HaChaim* (585:26) tentatively suggests (though he does not seem to *pasken* this way in the end) that perhaps the *issur* indeed does not apply since there are no earlier sources that mention it. R. Moshe Shternbuch (*Moadim Uzmanim* 1:4), in defending the lenient custom of some who do eat before the *shofar*, suggests a possible explanation for such an approach that perhaps *shofar* is different than *lulav*, since you can fulfill the mitzvah of *lulav* in one moment by simply picking up the four species. However, fulfilling *tekias shofar* requires an extended amount of time, and we do not complete the mitzvah until after *Musaf*, which could be hours after the mitzvah was begun. Therefore, suggests R. Shternbuch, perhaps *chazal* did not prohibit eating beforehand in this situation. *Teshuvos Hisorerus Teshuvah* (225) also claims that since this *issur* is not mentioned in the *Gemara* and *rishonim*, it does not exist, and suggests that this is because on the *Yom HaDin*, when we are fearful of Hashem's judgment, we are not concerned that anyone will forget to blow *shofar*, especially since this is one of our most powerful weapons against the *midas hadin*.

The majority of *acharonim*, however, beginning with the *Magen Avraham* (692:7)⁸⁹, indicate that there is indeed an *issur achilah* before *tekias shofar*, out of the same concern that one might forget to perform the mitzvah. They might explain that *chazal* and *rishonim* don't quote this halachah in regards to *shofar* because they don't always bother to explicitly extend applications to all cases of their principles, and simply chose specific examples to illustrate the rules. This more stringent approach is shared by *Teshuvos R. Akiva Eger*, *Teshuvos Besamim Rosh* (74), *Teshuvos Har Tzvi*, R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and many other *acharonim* and contemporary *poskim*.⁹⁰

Te'imah/tasting before doing a mitzvah

Even if we accept the approach that eating is forbidden prior to *Tekias Shofar*, we must still determine exactly what quantities of food and drink consumption are forbidden. May one eat cake or other foods in small amounts, and if so how much is allowed, or are all foods forbidden?

⁸⁸ *Shulchan Aruch* (652:2). We should note that *Rif* and *Rambam* do not quote this *Gemara*, and many commentaries, such as *Rosh* (Sukkah 3:27), struggle to understand why. R. Moshe Shternbuch (*Moadim Uzmanim* 1:4) suggests that perhaps *Rambam* does not believe there is any real prohibition here, and it is simply what he terms a "mitzvah," a recommended practice to abstain from eating before performing the mitzvah.

⁸⁹ *Magen Avraham* mainly discusses *Megillah*, and cites the above *Tosefta* and extends its rule to *Megillah* as well.

⁹⁰ See also *Teshuvos Maharsham*, *Teshuvos Beis Yitzchok*, *Teshuvos Bnei Banim* (1:14), *Sefer Mikraei Kodesh Hilchos Rosh Hashanah* (by R. Harari) citing R. Shaul Yisraeli, R. Avraham Shapira, R. Mordechai Eliyahu, and others, and *Sefer Piskei Teshuvos* (585:2). *Kaf Hachaim* himself also is *machmir* on the basic issue.

In the context of eating before Minchah, the Gemara (Berachos 28b) claims that we do not *pasken* like R'Yehoshua ben Levi who says it is prohibited to “taste” anything before reciting Musaf or Minchah. Based on this passage, the Tur and Beis Yosef (OC 232:3) rule that *te'imah*, tasting, is permitted before Minchah.⁹¹ The reason for this lenient approach would seem to be that we are not afraid that a person will forget to recite Minchah when he is not eating a complete meal. Although the Terumas HaDeshen (109) disagrees and claims that even *te'imah* is assur, the Shulchan Aruch (OC 232:3) rules that tasting is permitted. Mishnah Berurah (235:16) applies the same rule to permit *te'imah* before *maariv*.

What is the quantitative difference between tasting or snacking and a full meal? The Shulchan Aruch says that one may eat less than a *k'betzah*⁹², the volume of an egg, of bread, and an unlimited amount of fruits. So apparently the definition of a *seudah* in this context is someone who eats at least a *k'betzah* of bread. Other foods are also permitted even in large amounts. Regarding eating a *k'betzah* of foods whose *berachah* is *mezonos*, Pri Megadim (Ashel Avraham 431:4) says that the same rules and limitations apply as for bread. However, Mishnah Berurah (232:34) quotes the Divrei Chaim who claims that one can eat *Pas HaBa B'kisnim* until the amount of *kevias seudah*, a full meal, which would total 3 *k'betzim*. These two approaches would be relevant in a case of eating more than a *k'betzah* but less than 3 *k'betzim* of cake before *shofar* blowing.

This allowance for *te'imah* is applied by many *acharonim* to other *mitzvah* contexts as well, such as eating before *bedikas chametz*,⁹³ *netillas lulav*⁹⁴, and *kerias megillah*.⁹⁵ However, the Magen Avraham (*ibid.*), followed by the Mishnah Berurah there, adds that *te'imah* is permitted only for “*tzorech gadol*,” a great need. He quotes the stringency of the Terumas HaDeshen (109), that even *te'imah* is prohibited before reading the Megillah, so it seems that Magen Avraham is saying that out of respect for his opinion, we should not be quick to rule leniently. Interestingly, the Mishnah Berurah (652:7) also applies this *chumra* of the Magen Avraham to eating before taking the *arba minim* (even though Magen Avraham himself didn't mention it there), based on the Bikurei Yaakov (652:5) who introduced the *chumra* here as well, based on the same ruling of Terumas HaDeshen.⁹⁶

⁹¹ The Beis Yosef notes that although the Rashba (Berachos 28b) actually says *lechatchilah* this is assur, in one of his *teshuvos* the Rashba limits this statement to an actual *Seudah*, but not to all cases of tasting.

⁹² According to R'Chaim Naeh, a *K'betzah* equals 57.6 grams, while according to Chazon Ish, it is equivalent to 100 grams.

⁹³ See Magen Avraham (431:4) and Mishnah Berurah (431:6) citing the Bach and Maharil who rule this way.

⁹⁴ See Magen Avraham (652:4) and Mishnah Berurah (652:7) who yet again cite this leniency (though Magen Avraham wonders whether *Tosafos* may indicate he believes otherwise).

⁹⁵ Magen Avraham (692:7), Mishnah Berurah (692:14), Aruch HaShulchan (692:8), and others.

⁹⁶ It is somewhat difficult to understand why the logic of Terumas HaDeshen should be extended to cases other than Megillah. In the actual *teshuvah*, he simply argues that there is a greater concern for falling asleep before Megillah than for Kerias Shma, and Megillah is so important that it overrides any other *mitzvah* (see Megillah 3a), so if one cannot taste anything before reciting Shma at night, certainly one should not taste anything before the Megillah. Both of these arguments appear to be relevant specifically to the *mitzvah* of megillah and wouldn't apply to lulav or shofar, and Terumas HaDeshen himself does not mention any other *mitzvos* in this context.

Tei'mah before Tekias Shofar

Should we apply this stringency (allowing te'imah only when there is a tzorech) to Rosh Hashanah as well? Many places, especially yeshivos, do have a practice of breaking for everyone to eat before tekias shofar. Is this correct? The answers to these questions are not clear-cut, and are debated by the poskim, who fall into three general categories.⁹⁷

Assur: From the fact that Mishnah Berurah (692:15) groups shofar together with lulav and megillah regarding this issur achilah, it would appear that he would agree that for shofar te'imah is permitted only for a real necessity, a tzorech gadol, such as an ill or elderly person whose health may be damaged by not eating. This approach is adopted by many acharonim and contemporary poskim in various degrees, including R. Shaul Yisraeli,⁹⁸ R. Mordechai Eliyahu,⁹⁹ R. Akiva Eger,¹⁰⁰ Teshuvos Maharsham (1:1), Teshuvos Bnei Banim (1:14-15),¹⁰¹ Teshuvos Btzel Hachochmah (4:147)¹⁰², and others. Many of them argue that even if strictly speaking it is permitted to taste a little, this is absolutely not appropriate on Rosh Hashanah, the Yom HaDin when we stand in awe and fear in front of Hashem.

Mutar lechatchilah, with limitations: Other poskim claim that since the strict halachah does permit eating minimal amounts, we can permit this, especially in locations where this is the commonly accepted custom to do so. This approach is followed by R. Avraham Shapira,¹⁰³ R. Yosef Shalom Eliashiv¹⁰⁴, R. Moshe Sternbuch (Moadim Uzmanim 1:4)¹⁰⁵, Teshuvos Hisorerus *Teshuvah* (225), Teshuvos Tzitz Eliezer (6:7), Kaf HaChaim (585:26, 588:11)¹⁰⁶ and

⁹⁷ See Piskei Teshuvos (585:2) for a more complete list of sources and opinions concerning this topic. See also R. Moshe Harari, Mikraei Kodesh p.289, as well as R. Chaim Jachter.

⁹⁸ Sefer Mikraei Kodesh p.289, where R. Shaul Yisraeli is reported as arguing that those who eat before shofar are practicing a mistaken minhag, and are not allowed to partake of food at that time, even in small quantities.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Sefer Psakim V'takanos of the Gaon R. Akiva Eger. In this sefer, he reports the story that when the cholera epidemic attacked Europe, a time when many individuals were forced to eat on Yom Kippur, he still did not allow his congregants to eat before Shofar. He even recommended to them to eat in between the shofar blasts rather than eat before any of them. This last position seems a bit radical since Shulchan Aruch (592:1) rules that unnecessary interruptions are forbidden in between the first and last set of blasts. Nevertheless, R. Akiva Eger and the Ashel Avraham of Botchach both suggest that one should eat after the first set of Tekios rather than before, since the former is based on a prohibition of the Geonim, while not eating beforehand is based on a ruling of Tanaim in the Tosefta.

¹⁰¹ R. Yehudah Herzl Henkin cites the opinion of his grandfather, R. Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, who was strongly opposed to the custom of eating before Tekias Shofar, and agreed with R. Akiva Eger that it was preferable to eat after the first set of Tekios rather than eat beforehand.

¹⁰² R. Betzalel Stern distinguishes between people that are truly ill or simply will be extremely hungry if they do not eat: in the former it is permitted, while in the latter it is not.

¹⁰³ As reported in Sefer Mikraei Kodesh (p.290) based on personal conversations with R. Shapira.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* R. Eliashiv stresses that this heter only applies to someone who will find it difficult to wait until the end of davening to eat, but not anyone else. We should note that despite his limitation, he is still more lenient than the poskim in category A who allow only if there is a true illness or chance his health will be damaged.

¹⁰⁵ He argues, among other points, that the heter is based on a "tzorech gadol," as the Mishnah Berurah prescribed it. See below for the nature of his "tzorech gadol" in this case related to the problem of fasting on Rosh Hashanah.

¹⁰⁶ Kaf HaChaim suggests that because there is no direct source in the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch for this halachah, and because many allow te'imah, therefore the custom of some is to be lenient for individuals who feels his strength has ebbed and is not able to wait (to eat) until after shul. Note here that as opposed to the first category where the poskim

others. However, many of them caution against eating any amount of bread (despite the fact that the strict halachah permits this), against eating too much Mezonos food,¹⁰⁷ and that the person's main intention in eating must be to increase his ability to concentrate on the Tefillah and Tekias Shofar during the duration of the davening.

Better not to eat, but bedieved acceptance of the custom: Some poskim take a middle approach that one should be machmir not to eat anything, but since the custom of eating before shofar has become prevalent, an individual who needs to may rely on this. This is the basic approach taken by the Mateh Efraim (588:2), Beis Meir, Sdei Chemed (Rosh Hashanah 2:31),¹⁰⁸ R.Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvos Yabia Omer 4:22), and others.

Appointing a Shomer

The Rama (232:2) and Mishnah Berurah (235:18) rule that in places where someone reminds people to go to shul or daven minchah or maariv, it is permitted to eat a regular meal before davening, since we are not afraid he will forget to daven if someone reminds him. Would a person be allowed to appoint a shomer to remind him to blow shofar, thus allowing him to eat even more than a k'betzah before tekias shofar? Furthermore, many argue that if one is part of a group then we assume that they will all remind each other to daven and it is permitted to eat beforehand.¹⁰⁹ If so, why can't we simply argue that eating would be permitted before shofar since everyone is davening together, so an announcement will be made when the time comes to reconvene in the shul? The Piskei Teshuvos (585:2), after noting this question, also notes that none of the achronim discussing eating before any mitzvah ever suggested this option of appointing a shomer.¹¹⁰ We must therefore conclude that the notion of shomer is not viable to permit eating before more infrequent mitzvos, such as shofar and lulav, and only works for more regular mitzvos, such as tefilla. The Piskei Teshuvos suggests that perhaps the reason for this is that an additional dimension of the issur achilah prior to time-bound mitzvos is demonstrating that the mitzvah is important and dear to us ("chaviv"), similar to the Kaf Hachaim's logic discussed above. If so, we want to avoid eating prior to these mitzvos regardless of whether we might forget to do them or not.

only permitted eating for those who were truly sick or weak and would be harmed if they didn't eat, Kaf HaChaim apparently accepts the custom of those who eat even if they are simply hungry and find it difficult to wait.

¹⁰⁷ Some permit eating only up to a k'betzah, as per the halachah discussed above, and others, such as R.Shapira, are lenient even up to 3 k'betzim, which is the measurement of kevias seudah, an actual meal upon which one must wash netillas yadayim. Interestingly, R'Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is cited by R.Harari as reporting that in many yeshivos the custom was to eat more than a k'betzah, which R.Harari understood to mean that R'Shlomo Zalman Auerbach did not directly protest this practice.

¹⁰⁸ In truth, the Sdei Chemed does not really accept the leniency and believes it is incorrect, but he says that he did not protest when he saw people relying on it, thus it is possible to classify him in the third group of poskim.

¹⁰⁹ See Piskei Teshuvos (235:7-8) for discussion of this and other aspects of this halachah.

¹¹⁰ Truthfully, Mishnah Berurah (692:16) does mention this suggestion of requesting someone to give a reminder, but he only mentions this in a case where the person is weak and not eating may harm his health. In that case, Mishnah Berurah is willing to allow the use of a Shomer, but the implication is that a shomer is normally not a solution. R.Moshe Shternbuch (ad loc.) also proposes the idea that if a person's purpose in going to shul is to daven the order of Tefillah with the group, we can assume he will not forget to continue davening after eating.

Kiddush and Kiddush B'Makom Seudah

In addition to the issues discussed above, there are a number of other factors which are relevant to our discussion of eating before tekios, the first of which is making kiddush. According to those who do allow te'imah before a mitzvah (either only in a tzorech gadol or in other cases as well), one would need to make kiddush before eating. This is because the Shulchan Aruch (289:1) implies, and the Mishnah Berurah (286:7) states explicitly, that the obligation of kiddush on Shabbos or Yom Tov morning begins immediately after davening Shacharis.¹¹¹ Although the Shulchan Aruch (OC 286:1) does say that one is not allowed to eat before davening Musaf, he does allow te'imah even before Musaf,¹¹² so this does not pose any additional problems with the practice of making kiddush before the tekios.

Another issue relevant to making kiddush at this time is the requirement of kiddush b'makom seudah. We generally require one to eat a seudah together with the kiddush (Shulchan Aruch 273:1), and a k'zayis of bread or mezonos¹¹³ is necessary to qualify (Shulchan Aruch 273:5).¹¹⁴ If so, then if we do allow making kiddush before tekios, one would need to eat a k'zayis to be yotzei, or else it is as if he ate without making kiddush at all.¹¹⁵ It therefore becomes important to carefully monitor exactly how much food one eats: he must eat more than a k'zayis (for kiddush b'makom seudah) but less than a k'betzah (to avoid the issur achilah before tekios). Alternatively, a person could also drink one or two revi'is's of wine/grape juice¹¹⁶, since this also qualifies as a Seudah in this context.

Issur Taanis on Yom Tov and Shabbos

Another important factor to consider in this context is the prohibition of fasting on Shabbos and Yom Tov. According to the Shulchan Aruch (OC 288:1), one cannot fast on Shabbos or Yom Tov past chatzos, midday. Now, this may create a problem for anyone who does not eat anything before tekios, since many minyanim do not conclude davening until after Chatzos, which is often between 12 and 1pm on Rosh Hashanah, after chatzos. For this reason, R.Shternbuch (Moadim Uzmanim 1:4) and R.Tzvi Pesach Frank (Mikraei Kodesh Siman 29)

¹¹¹ Although the Yad HaLevi (Siman 50, cited by Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 52:11) holds that the obligation for Kiddush doesn't start until Musaf, that is not usually accepted. See also Teshuvos Yabia Omer (5:22) where R.Ovadia Yosef cites other rishonim and acharonim that agree that the obligation for kiddush begins only following Musaf. R.Ovadia is actually willing to combine this with other factors to allow eating before Musaf, both on Shabbos as well as Rosh Hashanah, without making kiddush when he is not able to do so.

¹¹² This is the approach of most acharonim, including the Taz and Mishnah Berurah against the Bach, who allows eating even a whole seudah.

¹¹³ Kiddush using mezonos foods is not discussed explicitly by the Shulchan Aruch. However, the Mishnah Berurah (273:25 citing Magen Avraham) states that this is included as well, because Shulchan Aruch allowed drinking wine to qualify as a "seudah," so certainly real mezonos food would be included.

¹¹⁴ According to R.Chaim Naeh, a shiur k'zayis is 28 grams, while according to Chazon Ish, the shiur is 50 grams.

¹¹⁵ For more on this topic of eating before kiddush and a discussion of the rishonim who hold that one may indeed eat a bit before kiddush on Shabbos, see Teshuvos Yabia Omer (2:19:4-8) concerning people who only eat a bit of fruit following kiddush without any sort of seudah.

¹¹⁶ Mishnah Berurah (273:27) cites a machlokes whether there is a requirement to drink two revi'is's to fulfill kiddush b'makom seudah or not. We should note in any case that Mishnah Berurah (273:25) discourages relying on this option of reciting kiddush over wine.

suggest that avoiding this issur is sufficient reason to allow te'imah before shofar blowing, and would therefore permit this practice.¹¹⁷

But now the tables have turned. How will those that are stringent not to eat anything beforehand respond to this? How can they not make kiddush before tekios if otherwise they will violate this issur? Perhaps they can respond in one of the following ways.

First, the Mishnah Berurah (OC 288:2) cites the Eliahu Rabbah and Bigdei Yesha who claim that this prohibition does not apply to people that are in the middle of davening or learning Torah. Although the Rama there holds that the issur does apply in these situations, the machmirim can claim to follow the Mishnah Berurah here against the opinion of the Rama.

Second, it is possible that Rosh Hashanah has different rules regarding fasting than other Yomim Tovim. Although we are not normally allowed to fast up until chatzos, the Rama (584:1) says that on Rosh Hashanah we lengthen the davening (through piyutim and extra tefilos) until chatzos, which the Mishnah Berurah (584:5) understands (based on the Magen Avraham and others) to mean at least until chatzos, but apparently longer than that is also permitted (except on Shabbos). The Mishnah Berurah (597:2) also confirms that although the Shulchan Aruch (597:1) says that we must eat and rejoice on Rosh Hashanah, it is still mutar to daven through chatzos (without eating). Thus, not eating before tekios is certainly permitted on Rosh Hashanah.

Third, even if we do not accept these defenses for not eating, one could have a drink of water before going to daven in the morning, a suggestion offered by R. Harari (p.377), which is certainly permitted before tefillah as well as before tekias shofar, but presumably would obviate the problem of fasting in the same way that one is not allowed to drink water on other fast days such as Tzom Gedalya or Asarah B'Teves.

Eating before davening

If one davens in a place which does not have a kiddush before tekios and is concerned he or she will not be able to daven properly without eating, the only practical way one could eat would be to do so before davening.¹¹⁸ Is this allowed?

The Shulchan Aruch (89:1) forbids eating before tefillah due to haughtiness, based on the Gemara (Berachos 10a). Here, te'imah is not a heter. The only allowance according to the Mishnah Berurah is for certain simple drinks, such as water, coffee¹¹⁹, and apple cider. Based on

¹¹⁷ R. Frank adds that just as the Shaarei *Teshuvah* (652:4, 584:3) states that one who is waiting for a shofar or lulav to arrive should not avoid eating past chatzos, so too in our case if davening extends past chatzos, one can eat something beforehand.

¹¹⁸ Of course, if he is able to bring food with him and make kiddush at shul during the short break before the tekios, this may be preferable according to some. Furthermore, if it is difficult to make kiddush at this point, R. Ovadia Yosef (*Teshuvos Yabia Omer* 5:22), as mentioned above, does permit eating a small amount of food (te'imah) without making kiddush. However, it is not clear that the accepted opinion among contemporary poskim is in accordance with R. Ovadia on this point.

¹¹⁹ See Piskei Teshuvos (89:17) who summarizes the contemporary discussion concerning putting milk and a bit of sugar into the coffee. Many of the poskim he quotes maintain that our generation finds it much more difficult to daven without this than previous generations, and therefore it is permitted. This could be an interesting precedent for the possibility raised that this "weakness of the generation" could allow eating before shofar.

this, eating a piece of cake, a bowl of cereal or even fruit in the morning on Rosh Hashanah would appear to be problematic. Of course, an ill or weak person would be allowed to eat before davening and is not included in the prohibition, as recorded by the Mishnah Berurah. But what about people that are generally healthy and feel perfectly fine in the morning but will become extremely hungry and weak or simply not be able to concentrate on davening if they do not eat until 2 pm in the afternoon? Is this included in the heter of a weak person?

Perhaps one can argue that someone who will not be able to function or daven well due to his hunger is also included in the category of “weak” and would therefore be allowed to eat. In fact, the Shulchan Aruch (89:4) categorizes those who are very thirsty and hungry as “cholim,” ill individuals, if they cannot concentrate on their davening as a result. R'Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is quoted (Sefer Halichos Shlomo 2:1) as permitting eating for a person who is healthy but is suffering from tremendous hunger to the point that his strength is weakened, and his mental capacity is not capable of davening with concentration as he usually does, and through eating his mind will be more calm and his strength will return.¹²⁰ Based on this ruling, one could argue as well that even if he is not currently feeling ravenous or weak, but will reach that point during his davening so that he will not be able to continue praying with kavanah, it would be permitted for him to eat something even now when he feels fine. However, R'Shlomo Zalman Auerbach stresses that if this individual feels that eating less than a k'zayis (or a k'zayis drawn out longer than kdei achilas pras, which he defines as four minutes) is sufficient to curb his hunger, then he should suffice with this. But if he does not feel that this small amount will suffice for him, then he can eat as much as he needs to retain his strength (but not more), as per the rules of weak individuals mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch (89:4). Based on the Beur Halachah (s.v. vlo leechol), this individual can and should recite shma before he eats.

Women eating before Tekias Shofar

According to the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch, women are not obligated to perform the mitzvah of shofar, since it is a time-bound positive mitzvah from which women are exempt. Nevertheless, R. Akiva Eiger (Siman 1) reports that women today have unanimously accepted upon themselves to fulfill this mitzvah of shofar. Does this custom of acceptance place them in the same category as men regarding the issur achilah beforehand and would they be subject to all of the rules discussed in this essay, or do we say that since they are not actually obligated, they may eat whatever they want before shofar blowing?

The Chayei Adam (141:7), Ashel Avraham (589:3), and others (cited by the Piskei Teshuvos 589:4) essentially follow the second side and argue that because women are not chayav to blow the shofar, those who are weak, nursing, or expecting may be quite lenient and eat as much as they need before tekios. Using R'Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's logic, we can extend this to say that even women who are healthy but will lose their strength if they don't eat now would be allowed to do so.

This logic will only permit her to make kiddush before the tekios, but regarding eating in the morning before Shacharis, it would seem that women would also follow the same rules as men

¹²⁰ It is possible that many of the poskim that rejected this as a legitimate heter in the context of eating on Rosh Hashanah would also reject this premise of R'Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in the context of eating before davening.

above, since the Gemara (Berachos 20b) and Shulchan Aruch (106:1) rule that they also have an obligation to daven.¹²¹

Summary and conclusion

We have analyzed a number of factors and approaches in trying to understand whether eating is permitted before blowing the Shofar. To eat before davening is clearly assur normally but in our case it seems to depend on whether a person who may get very hungry later in the day is included in the category of the weak, which is not 100% clear. Furthermore, according to the majority of acharonim, it is indeed assur to eat before tekios even after davening Shacharis, unless one is sick or very weak. However, te'imah, tasting, is subject to a machlokes poskim whether this is permitted for anyone after making kiddush or only in more pressing situations. There is no clear decisive ruling on the part of contemporary poskim, and there are certainly different minhagim in different places, many who specifically do eat, and many who specifically do not. Our goal in whichever opinion we follow is to do so l'shem shamayim and to experience a most meaningful tekias Shofar and tefillah on Rosh Hashanah.

¹²¹ This is the ruling of R.Dovid Auerbach in Sefer Halichos Besah (Siman 6) and indeed seems to be quite logical that the issur achilah before Tefillah is linked with the chiyuv Tefillah. However, Teshuvos Igros Moshe (OC 4:101) tentatively defends the practice of some women to simply recite a short Tefillah, eat, and then daven the complete set of prayers, but remains uncertain whether this is correct. See Halichos Besah who discusses the merits and weaknesses of this position.