

HALACHICALLY SPEAKING



►Compiled by Rabbi Moische Dovid Lebovits
►Reviewed by Rabbi Benzion Schiffenbauer Shlita
►All Piskei Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita are reviewed by Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita

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EATING BEFORE FEEDING ONE'S PET

Today it is very common for Jewish people to own pets. There are many *halachos* in regard to owning certain kinds of pets; however, we will focus on the *halachos* of eating before one feeds his pets. What is the source for this *halacha*? Is there a difference between taking a drink and eating? Can one “taste” food before feeding his pets? Does one have to own the pet in order for the *halacha* to apply? Does it apply to fish? All these and other questions will be answered in this issue.

Source

The *Gemorah*¹ says that it is permitted to be *mafsik* between the beracha of *hamotzei* and eating by saying the words, “Give food to my animal.”² The *hefsek* is considered a need of

1. Mesechtas Berochos 40a. The Gemorah in Mesechtas Gittin 62 says it is forbidden to “taste.”
2. Some say this is only *b'dieved* (Divrei Chamudos Mesechtas Berochos 6:64, Biur Halacha “167 mekol mokom,”



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the meal since one may not eat before he feeds his pet.³ This is derived from the *posuk*⁴ that first says, “grass for your animals” and then “you will eat.”⁵ This *halacha* is quoted by all the *poskim*.⁶ Most *poskim* are of the opinion that this *issur* is an issue *d’rabbanan*.⁷ The *halacha* applies even if the animal is not *kosher*⁸ (see below in regard to dogs, cats, birds and fish).

However, there are a few instances in the *Torah* where it seems that one may eat before feeding his animals.⁹ The *meforshim* discuss the case of *Noach*.¹⁰ *Noach* ate before feeding the animals in the *teivah*. This seems to contradict the above *halacha*. Some answer that since *Noach* took care of all the animals in the *teivah*, and they all had different feeding schedules, if he did not eat before the animals he would have not had time to eat at all. Therefore, he ate before the animals.¹¹

Another example is the incident of *Eliezer*, who drank water before the camels. The *Ohr Ha’chaim*¹² says that *Eliezer* was dangerously thirsty, and needed to drink before the camels. The *halacha* does not apply in that situation. Others prove from this incident that the *halacha* only applies to food, not to drinks (see below where this is discussed in greater detail).¹³

Reasons

There are a few reasons given for the *halacha*.

Some explain that sometimes one is not *zocheh* to food by his own merits; rather, it might be solely for the sake of his animals that his land produces food.¹⁴ Others say that it is based on the *issur* of paining an animal.¹⁵

Kaf Hachaim 56).

3. Rosh Mesechtas Berochos 6:22.

4. Devarim 11:15.

5. Sefer Chassidim 531.

6. Magen Avraham O.C. 167:18, Levush 6, Mishnah Berurah 40.

7. Shevus Yaakov 3:13, Biur Halacha O.C. 167 “mekol mokom.” Refer to Magen Avraham O.C. 271:12 who says this is an *issur d’oraisa*. The Rambam Hilchos Avodim 9:8 says this is a *midos chasidos*.

8. Har Tzvi O.C. 1:90, Kaf Ha’chaim 167:50, Piskei Teshuvos 167:15:footnote 105, V’ein Lumo Michshal 4:page 159. Refer to Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17.

9. Bereishis 1:11, 6:21, 24:32, 30:1, Bamidbar 20:7, Devarim 11:15.

10. Bereishis 6:21.

11. Gan Ravah on the above *posuk*. Also see Tzar Balei Chaim page 479.

12. Bereishis 24:19, see Yad Ephraim on O.C. 167:6.

13. Sefer Chasidim 531, Magen Avraham O.C. 167:18, Mishnah Berurah 40, see Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 18, Elya Rabbah 10, Shulchan Aruch Arav 167:9, Chai Adom 45:1, Refer to Kaf Ha’chaim 167:50, Chai Moshe 167:6:10:page 265.

14. Yad Ephraim on O.C. 167:6.

15. Sharei Teshuva O.C. 167:9. Eishel Avraham Butchatch O.C. 167. Refer to Modanei Yom Tov 1:page 95. See Chai Adom 45:1.

Tasting

An opinion in the *poskim* limits the prohibition to eating, but tasting is permitted.¹⁶ The *Chai Adom*¹⁷ says that tasting is permitted if one does not plan on eating a large meal. However, if one plans on eating a large meal, then even tasting is prohibited.¹⁸ Most *poskim* make no such distinction and tasting is forbidden in all situations.¹⁹

Nonetheless, some permit a quick snack.²⁰ Some say that if one started a *seuda* before feeding his animal, he should stop his *seuda* and feed his animal.²¹

Water²² vs. Food

Based on the first reason for the *halacha*, many say that it only applies to food. It does not apply to water, because we do not need the merit of an animal for water.²³ Others permit water for the following reason. A great deal of work is required to prepare food. Therefore, the human is considered the owner of the food and the animal is his guest. A guest is served first. However, water is drinkable without any preparation, so the human is also considered a guest. Therefore, he may drink before feeding his animal.²⁴ Another reason is because if one does not drink it is more of a danger than if he did not eat.²⁵

Finally, some say that one does not tend to get involved with a drink, but might immerse himself in a meal. Therefore, drinking before feeding animals is permitted, while eating is not.²⁶

Not Home

Even if one is not at home he is still not allowed to eat (or drink, according to the stringent opinion) before arranging with someone to feed his pet.²⁷

16. Taz O.C. 167:7, Levush 167:6, see Machtzis Ha'shekel 18.

17. Chai Adom 45:1.

18. Refer to Taz 7, Birchei Yosef 167:5, Yosef Ometz 16:6, Machzik Beracha 167:4, see Nishmas Adom 5:11:11.

19. Rosh Mesechtas Berochos 6:22, Rif Mesechtas Berochos page 28, Shulchan Aruch Harav 167:9, Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17, Kaf Ha'chaim 167:51. Refer to Magen Avraham 167:18, Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17, Mishnah Berurah 167:40, Shiurei Beracha 167:6, Shulchan Hatohar (Karmarna) 167:footnote 4, Avnei Yushfei 2:83:4, Piskei Teshuvos 167:15, V'ein Lumo Michshal 4:page 157.

20. Shulchan Aruch Harav 167:9.

21. Maharil Diskin Kesavim 17:page 61.

22. Some say this may apply to other liquid drinks as well (Refer to Al Pi Hatorah 1:14:page 259:15, Tzar Balei Chaim page 451:footnote 1020).

23. Yad Ephraim *ibid*, Elya Rabbah 167:10, Shulchan Hatohar (Karmarna) 167:footnote 4. see Igros Moshe O.C. 2:52. Some say nonetheless, if one sees that the animal is suffering from thirst then the animal should be given to drink before the owner of the animal drinks (Shulchan Hatohar *ibid*). Refer to Bamidbar 20:19.

24. Ben Yehoyuda Mesechtas Berochos 40a.

25. *Ibid*, Har Tzvi O.C. 1:90.

26. Har Tzvi O.C. 1:90.

27. Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17, Sharei Teshuva 167:9, Birchei Yosef 167:6, Kaf Ha'chaim 52, see Piskei Teshuvos 167:



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Dog²⁸ or Cat

Some say that the *halacha* does not apply to a dog or cat since they can find food on their own.²⁹ Nonetheless, it is proper to feed them before one partakes of his food.³⁰

Owning the Animal

The *issur* is only relevant if the animal is one's property. Therefore, a stray cat, another person's animal (according to some *poskim*) or dog would not be included in the *issur*, and one could eat before feeding them.³¹ Based on this, some say that *Noach* was not obligated to feed the animals in the *teivah* first since he did not acquire them (see above for other explanations). This would also explain why those who have the custom to feed birds on *Shabbos Shirah* are not particular to do so before they eat.³² Some apply this rule to explain that *Eliezer* drank before the camels since the camels did not belong to him.³³

Birds

When the earlier *poskim* quote this *halacha* as applying to animals, it applies to birds as well.³⁴

How Often

Some say that this *halacha* only obligates the owner to feed (or water) his animals a bit once during the day. There is no need to feed them any other time during the day.³⁵

Some say that as long as one provides his animals with enough food for the day, he does not have to feed them before every meal.³⁶ In addition, if one knows that it is not time for the animal to eat, then one may eat before the animal.³⁷

Young Children

One who has young children who cannot feed themselves must feed them before feeding their animal.³⁸ In addition, children who do not own an animal may eat before the owner of the animal feeds the animal.³⁹

28. Refer to Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17 about keeping a dog in one's home.

29. Eishel Avraham Butchatch O.C. 167.

30. Chai Adom 45:1, Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17, Sharei Teshuva ibid, Kaf Ha'chaim 53.

31. Pri Megadim M.Z. 167:7, Eishel Avraham Butchatch O.C. 167, Igros Moshe O.C. 2:52. Refer to Ohelecha Bamisecha page 183:14.

32. Eishel Avraham Butchatch ibid.

33. Piskei Teshuvos (red sefer) 348.

34. Shevus Yaakov 3:13, Eishel Avraham Butchatch ibid, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 42:1.

35. Eishel Avraham Butchatch ibid. Refer to Biur Halacha 334 :ha'rou."

36. Refer to V'ein Lumo Michshal 4:pages 158-159.

37. Piskei Teshuvos 167:15.

38. Igros Moshe O.C. 2:52 (end). Refer to Rivevos Ephraim 6:56:2, 92.

39. Refer to Piskei Teshuvos 167:15:footnote 115.

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Fish

Many people have aquariums in their homes.⁴⁰ The *poskim* say that the *halacha* applies to fish as well;⁴¹ therefore, one should be careful not to eat before making sure that the fish in the fish tank are fed.⁴² Some say that if the fish have edible plants in the tank, then one may eat before feeding the fish.⁴³

Seudas Mitzvah

There is an uncertainty in the *poskim* if the *issur* applies if one wishes to eat a *seudas mitzvah* (such as a *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* meal) before feeding his animal.⁴⁴

Appointing a Messenger

If one appoints a messenger to feed his animal, he may eat even if the messenger did not actually feed the animal yet.⁴⁵ The reason is that since he told the messenger to feed the animals the owner shown he is worried about them and therefore eating before them is permitted.⁴⁶

Fast Day

The *halacha* applies even if the owner of the animal is fasting.⁴⁷ Some say this applies to *motzei Yom Kippur* as well, unless he is in a lot of pain and must eat.⁴⁸

Other Activities

We do not find that any other activities other than eating are prohibited before one feeds his animal.⁴⁹ Therefore, one may *daven* or take a shower before feeding his animal.⁵⁰

Danger

If one is in danger of death by starvation then of course he may eat or drink before feeding his animal.⁵¹

Guest at Someone's Home

Some say that if one hosts a friend and his animal, he does not have to feed his friend's

40. Refer to Ateres Paz 2:Y.D. 5, Betzel Hachochmah 5:35, Be'er Moshe 2:28.

41. Sheilas Yaavetz 1:17.

42. Nefesh Kol Chai page 174:footnote 31.

43. Shevet Ha'kehusi 2:149.

44. Kesav Sofer O.C. 32, Kaf Ha'chaim 54. Refer to Biur Halacha O.C. 334.

45. Yad Ephraim on the side of the Shulchan Aruch 167:6, Avnei Yushfei 2:83:3, see Keren L'Dovid O.C. 48.

46. Nefesh Kol Chai 11:10:footnote 28*.

47. Leket Yosher O.C. page 140.

48. Melachim Emuneicha page 260, see Tzar Balei Chaim page 444:footnote 1003.

49. Nefesh Kol Chai 11:6:footnote 19.

50. Tzar Balei Chaim page 472.

51. Ohr Hachaim on Bereishis 24:19, see Yad Ephraim ibid. Refer to Nefesh Kol Chai pages 176-177.



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animal before feeding his friend.⁵² *Harav Moshe Feinstein zt"v*⁵³ disagrees.

According to the first opinion, we can understand why *Rivka* gave *Eliezer* a drink before watering the camels.⁵⁴

On the Road

If one is traveling with his animal and does not have sufficient food for both them, the owner may eat the food, and there is no need to give any to the animal.⁵⁵

Rented Animal

If one hires an animal (such as a horse and buggy ride), he does not have to feed it before he wishes to eat. This is because the animal is rented to him and he does not own it.⁵⁶

Not Human Food

If one is feeding human food to his animal then he is permitted to eat before feeding his animal. According to this opinion, the *halacha* only pertains to food which is designated exclusively for animals.⁵⁷

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52. Chasam Sofer in *Toras Moshe* on parshas Chaya Sara page 14, Kesav Sofer O.C. 32.

53. *Igros Moshe* O.C. 2:52.

54. Chasam Sofer *ibid*.

55. *Ohelecha B'amisecha* page 183:15, see *Tzar Balei Chaim* page 454.

56. *Ohelecha B'amisecha* page 183:16.

57. Refer to *Tzar Balei Chaim* pages 450-451.



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