

# HALOCHOSCOPE <sup>TOI</sup>

May someone sign up for a karate course to be taken in the early morning before *Shacharis*? Is there a difference between scheduling it before or after dawn?

The issues:

- (A) Timing of a *Mitzvah*; doing other things when a *Mitzvah* should be performed
- (B) *Asiyas Tzrachav*, tending to one's personal needs, before *Shacharis*
- (C) The advantages and disadvantages of doing something on a routine
- (A) *Mitzvah-timing; doing things when a Mitzvah should be performed*

Ideally, a *Mitzvah* should be performed at the first opportunity. This is based on the principle that *Zrizim Makdimin Lemitzvos*, the conscientious hurry to do *Mitzvos* early. In addition, unnecessary procrastination is discouraged, based on the dictum of *Mitzvah Hab'ah Leyadcha Al Tachamitzena*, when a *Mitzvah* comes your way do not allow it to "leaven" (or ferment or turn sour.) Both of these principles have many applications throughout the Talmud. According to some, the principle of *Ain Ma'avirin Al Hamitzvos*, invoked to decide the ideal time a *Mitzvah* should be performed, is also based on these principles.

Some consider these principles a Scriptural obligation. The Talmud derives them from *Pesukim*, either referring to the *Mitzvah* performance of Avraham Avinu, or from an interpretation of a word in the *Mitzvah* of baking Matzos. Others maintain that it is a Rabbinical obligation, linked to a *Passuk*. A third view maintains that it is not an obligation, but that one must try to emulate the Avos, forefathers. Neglecting it shows that one does not do his *Mitzvos* with proper intent, but as a habit or a burden. Putting a *Mitzvah* off to another day is considered a separate violation by some *Poskim*.

Generally, with regard to these ideas, *Mitzvos* fall into two categories. Some *Mitzvos* may be performed at any time, yet the optimum is to perform them at the first opportunity. This type is known as a *Mitzvah She'ainah Overess*. The second type is a *Mitzvah Overess*, time bound *Mitzvah*. When its time arrives, an additional consideration is the urgency of doing it before it is too late. Some of these *Mitzvos* must be performed immediately when their time starts. Though they may still be performed later, the late performance is considered *Bedieved*,

“too bad” or as some sort of a make up for the ideal time. Often the Mitzvah Overess could be performed during a span of time. The actual Mitzvah would not take very long. Thus, one might be tempted to delay its performance until it is more convenient, or simply to procrastinate it.

Obviously, if there is no pressing reason to delay it, one should not. However, when there is a good reason, this might be permitted. In a third category by itself is Torah study. This Mitzvah does not come in the form of opportunities, but is rather a constant obligation. It should be fulfilled at every moment unless one has a dispensation due to his other obligations.

The reason for delaying performance of a Mitzvah could be due to a tight schedule. It could also be due to an activity already in progress when the time of the Mitzvah begins. Or, it could be due to a conflict between this Mitzvah and another Mitzvah opportunity. Which Mitzvah should take precedence? In general, if it is possible to fulfil both, one must make this arrangement. This means that if one is Overess and the other is not, the Mitzvah Overess takes precedence, then one fulfils the other later. If they are mutually exclusive, certain rules are applied. These might include the relative importance of a Mitzvah; whether one of the Mitzvos could be performed by another person while the other one could only be performed by this person; or the importance of doing a Mitzvah in group with others who have already convened. Torah study is the most important Mitzvah of all. Nonetheless, when it is in conflict with the performance of certain other Mitzvos, it is put aside. A number of explanations are given for this. For our purposes, since it is meant to be fulfilled at all times, yet one is commanded so many other Mitzvos, it is implicitly suspended when it comes into conflict with these Mitzvos.

Another consideration when a time-bound Mitzvah opportunity presents itself is not to be preoccupied with another activity at the time. Therefore, one may not begin an activity that will stretch into the Mitzvah-time, delaying its performance. For example, the Talmud forbids starting a banquet before the time for Mincha begins. This could even be a *Seudas Mitzvah*, feast to commemorate a Mitzvah. One may not begin a bath or haircut (in Talmudic times a long drawn out activity) before Mincha. One may not study Torah before nightfall on the day before *Erev Pesach*, i.e., *Bedikas Chametz* night, or on the following day, before *Seder* night.

A related issue is *Chaviva Mitzvah Beshaata*, a Mitzvah is precious at its proper time. This is derived from the laws of offerings. It is invoked to advance the performance of a Mitzvah even when its delay would allow for a more enhanced performance, and even if it would avoid a coincidental violation. [See Shabbos 9b

Psachim 4a 68b 99b Yuma 28b 33a Megila 3a Sukah 23a Nazir 23b, etc., Poskim.]

### **(B) Doing things before davening**

The Talmud singles out the time right before Tefilla for some of these restrictions. [In fact, one version of the text derives the principle of *Zrizin Makidimin* from the alacrity with which Avraham Avinu went to pray in the morning.] Some examples have already been cited. Others include eating or drinking even small amounts, going out of one's way to greet a friend, and tending to personal affairs before davening. Some commentaries consider these restrictions in the same category. Apart from being a delaying activity it also demonstrates a certain lack of respect for Tefila and for Hashem to whom we daven. Others maintain that these are separate restrictions. Eating is a demonstration of one's preoccupation with personal needs. It would be permitted if the person eats in order to daven properly. Greeting uses the Name of Hashem which is also the word for peace. Using this word for a mundane purpose, to greet his friend before greeting Hashem, amounts to building a profane altar. Attending to personal affairs could be related to the general restriction on activity before davening. However, the Talmud bases it on a special *Passuk* of its own. The *Passuk* is interpreted to mean that one should first daven before departing on his way, presumably to do his business.

Accordingly, the Poskim forbid travelling to one's business or attending one's business, even after having recited some *Brochos*, as long as one has not yet recited *Shemone Esrei*. Bathing and haircutting is permitted before *Shacharis*. It is only forbidden before *Mincha* because it is common then. The Rabbis do not forbid something unusual. Some consider an amateur job permissible. Similarly, an activity that is not done properly, would not be forbidden. *Asiyas Cheftzav* includes buying home supplies. The exception is on *Erev Shabbos* if the stores are only open very early. Since preparations for *Shabbos* are *Cheftzei Shamayim* as opposed to *Cheftzav*, it is permitted.

In our case, the karate class seems to be a case of *Asiyas Cheftzav*. It is possible that exercising is like eating or drinking. These are personal physical needs. They are permitted if they are done for one's physical or mental state for davening. Similarly, eating or drinking for medicinal or health purposes is permitted before davening. Thus, for many people exercise is a permissible essential health activity. However, a karate course would not fit these criteria.

*Shacharis* should, ideally be davened around sunrise. *Shema* should be right before sunrise and *Shemone Esrei* immediately following it. It corresponds to the

morning offering in the *Bais Hamikdash*, which was offered before midday, and according to some before the first third of the day. Thus, the last time to daven Shacharis varies with the seasons. Though delaying davening much after sunrise is not the absolute ideal, it is still within the normal time. If it is easier to work with a steady schedule it is acceptable as the proper time before the first third of the day. After this time, but before noon, is Bedieved. In cases of urgency, Shacharis may be begun at dawn. Therefore, from dawn onwards one may not do other activities before davening. Eating and attending to business are permitted before dawn. Eating a bread meal must be started a half-hour before dawn. Whereas such a meal begun early need not be interrupted as soon as the time arrives for Mincha, for Shacharis this is a matter of debate. [See Brochos 10b 14a 26a-b, Poskim. Tur Sh.Ar. O.C. 89:2-8, 250:1, commentaries.]

### *(C) Advantages or disadvantages of a routine*

Activities forbidden due to the risk of becoming too involved and forgetting about the Mitzvah are sometimes permitted. If one has someone stop him when the time comes for Tefila, he may begin. In some cases if the activity is done on a schedule or timetable it may be done. Since the activity is allotted a fixed time, there is no risk of missing the Tefila. If the Tefila is scheduled for a fixed time, one who intends to daven then may even rely on this reminder system to begin the activity after the beginning of the ideal Tefila-time. However, the restrictions due to the demonstration of lack of appreciation of Tefila may not be dispensed with in this way. If such a schedule is set up, it would probably be even more cause for concern. By scheduling it thus, one has formally placed something else before davening. [See O.C. 232:2 235:2, commentaries. Eishel Avraham 89:3.]

Accordingly, scheduling the course after dawn would be forbidden. However, if it is scheduled before dawn, in the knowledge that it will continue after dawn, it is possible that one need not interrupt it at dawn. Though the schedule was made with this in mind, each class begins at a permissible time. There is a view that one may attend to business after dawn until sunrise, even though eating is forbidden from dawn. If one has a scheduled time and place to daven later, his having scheduled the course this way does not infringe on his scheduled davening so much. However, if he specially chooses to start going to a later scheduled Minyan because of his course, he is pushing off his davening for his course.