



Déjà Vu – Yom Kippur and COVID-19

On Yom Kippur there is an obligation to adhere to five *Inuyim* (forms of affliction); eating and drinking, washing, anointing or applying liquids or creams to the body, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations (*Shulchan Aruch* 615). This essay will detail several Halachos of the *Inuyim* that have particular relevance this year in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The volume of food for which one is liable for eating on Yom Kippur is "*k'Koseves haGasa*" – the size of a large date (a little smaller than an egg). However, it is even forbidden to eat a smaller volume of food due to the principle of "*Chatzi Shiur Asur Min haTorah*". Nevertheless, the Shiur of *Koseves haGasa* has relevance to those who are dangerously ill, and who can suffice with eating less than a *Shiur*.

According to R' Chaim Na'eh, the Shiur of *Koseves haGasa* is 57 cm³, but according to the majority of the Poskim it is between 45-50 cm³. In fact, we generally permit a sick person no more than 30 cm³ which is equivalent to two-thirds of an egg. These *Shiurim* are in volume, not weight, therefore, it is better to eat dense food.

An *Achila* (act of eating) of less than a *Shiur* does not combine with another *Achila* if an interval of "*Kedei Achilas Pras*" has elapsed. With regard to eating on Yom Kippur, we are stringent and consider *Kedei Achilas Pras* to be the length of time it takes to eat four eggs, estimated to be nine minutes. If the situation is pressing, we may be lenient and consider it to be 6-7 minutes.

The volume of liquid for which one is liable is "*Melo Lugmav*" – the amount an average person could hold in one cheek (which is less than a *Revi'is*). This *Shiur* should be measured by each individual thus, a person who may need to drink on Yom Kippur is advised to fill his mouth with liquid before the fast and spit it into a cup. Half of the volume in the cup is the *Shiur* that he may drink. It is widely accepted that for the average person this Shiur does not exceed the majority of a *Revi'is*, which is 40 cm³. Drinking less than this volume in intervals of nine minutes or longer does not make a person liable to *Kareis*, and is recommended for a dangerously ill person who can suffice with this volume of fluids.

Eating and drinking do not combine to comprise one *Shiur*. Therefore, during the intervals between eating, a person may drink, and vice versa.

A patient who regularly takes conventional medications (not vitamins or homeopathic remedies) and whose doctor says that he can neither take them before or after the fast nor can he skip a dose, must take them on Yom Kippur even if he is not dangerously ill.

It is forbidden to eat substances that are not fit to eat ("*Einam Re'uyim la'Achila*") on Yom Kippur, though one is exempt for doing so. Substances that are



entirely unfitting, such as earth, may be eaten. Most Poskim hold that a substance that is essentially edible but has been rendered inedible by the addition of a bitter ingredient, is still considered *Eino Re'uya la'Achila*. Therefore, one may take a bitter-tasting medication on Yom Kippur. If it is not bitter-tasting, one may wrap it in dissolvable paper and swallow it. He should swallow it without water, if he is able to. If not, he should prepare some bitter water (by adding oil, salt, or bitter tea) and use that. If he cannot tolerate bitter water and without taking the medications his life may be endangered, he should use a small amount of regular water.

These guidelines do not include only medications that prevent a person from becoming dangerously ill, but also those that prevent nausea, regulate blood pressure, or provide iron. Other medications, such as oral contraceptives or painkillers, may be taken without water.

These directives do not apply to a person who is dangerously ill. He should eat and drink on Yom Kippur (either in regular fashion or *Shiurim*, in consultation with a Rav and doctor), and should not render his food and drink inedible. In fact, if he needs to drink a small amount of fluids he should drink a sweet drink (e.g. grape juice) which has a greater caloric and carbohydrate content than water, thus allowing him to drink fewer units during the day.

Pikuach Nefesh sets aside all of the Mitzvos in the Torah, including the obligation of *Inuy* on Yom Kippur. *Pikuach Nefesh* does not only include those whose lives are already in danger, but also those whose lives will be endangered by fasting.

The obligation to fast takes precedence over all other obligations and customs of the day. Therefore, if someone would be able to fast throughout the day if he lay in bed in an air-conditioned room (in his doctor's estimation) he should do so, and not attempt to go to Shul. A person whose spouse need to rest in order to fast should remain at home and help them do so.

A patient who needs to eat on Yom Kippur but does not need to drink, is only permitted to eat, and vice versa. Many patients can suffice with drinking, and they should be permitted to drink precisely what they need. Therefore, if one liter of water would suffice, they may not drink more. This requires guidance from a physician and a Rav. Regardless, they are under no obligation to arrange intravenous fluids even if they already have an indwelling intravenous catheter (e.g. PICC line or Broviac catheter).

When is a patient considered to be in a state of *Pikuach Nefesh*? In some cases it is clear. Someone whose temperature is higher than 39°C or who is close to fainting should eat immediately. Likewise, a person who has recently undergone a significant surgery, or a woman who is within three days post-birth, is also considered to be in a state of *Sakana*. However, in most other cases, a physician who understands the gravity of Yom Kippur must be consulted, as well as a Rav. We will, therefore, not dwell



on this topic. Instead we will discuss a number of details that are relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *Magen Avraham* rules (576:2) that one does not fast during a *Magefa* (plague). The *Chasam Sofer* (6:15) adds that if physicians believe that even healthy people should not fast, they should drink *Shiurim*. However, others maintain that healthy people should fast during a *Magefa*, for many have done so and have not been harmed (*Reishis Bikurim* 33 and others). Some Rabbanim announced that any person who felt very weak should eat as necessary (*Da'as Torah*, 618:1 citing the *Mahara"sh* of Belz), and the *Sdei Chemed* (*Yom haKippurim* 3) states that one may rely upon those Poskim who are lenient. These sources are cited by the *Bi'ur Halacha*, 618. R' Yisrael Salanter also famously instructed everyone in his Kehilla to eat on Yom Kippur during the cholera outbreak of the time, as fasting may have caused more people to fall ill (*Igros Moshe*, O.C. 3:91). However, during that same outbreak, R' Akiva Eiger ruled that healthy people should not be lenient (see last week's essay). *HaGa'on* Rav Asher Weiss *Shlit"a* explains at length that Halacha is in accordance with R' Akiva Eiger's position.

Regarding COVID-19:

Those in quarantine (i.e. following an exposure) should fast, as it is likely that they are not sick. Even the minority who are infected generally experience no more than mild symptoms.

A COVID-positive patient with a temperature above 38 degrees or who feels very weak should drink *Shiurim* – approximately two liters in total over the course of the entire day. If he exhibits no symptoms, or has only lost his sense of taste and smell or his fever has passed, he is obligated to fast. If he feels very weak during the fast, he should drink *Shiurim*.

If the patient is in a high-risk demographic, such as if he has co-morbidities like high blood pressure or obesity, he should drink *Shiurim*.

COVID patients who are experiencing difficulty breathing or are coughing severely should drink *Shiurim*, if that is sufficient. If not, they should eat and drink as required.

Medical staff working with COVID patients on Yom Kippur, who are required to wear PPE that can cause a great deal of perspiration, are in danger of dehydration and possibly providing inferior care to their patients. If they do not start their shift before the fast (such that they could hydrate beforehand), they should drink *Shiurim* before the shift. During breaks they should drink as required, and not *Shiurim*, as they need to ensure that they hydrate sufficiently after many hours of grueling work. However, they should try and leave a gap of five seconds between each mouthful of 40 cm³.

Those accustomed to using alcohol gels are likely permitted to use it on Yom Kippur as necessary (*HaGaon* Rav Asher Weiss *Shlit"a*).