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TIMING IT RIGHT:

The *Halachot* of Waiting Between Meals

By Avrohom Gordimer

“You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk” (Shemot 23:19).

The Talmud (*Chullin* 115b) explains the Biblical verse above as prohibiting the consumption of a domesticated animal (cattle, sheep or goat) that is cooked in milk. Poultry or venison cooked in milk or beef eaten with but not *cooked* in milk (e.g., a sandwich of cold cuts and cheese as opposed to a cheeseburger) is rabbinically prohibited.

In order to assure further separation between meat and milk, the rabbis of the Talmud added another safeguard—waiting after eating meat before eating dairy.

Why did the Talmudic rabbis determine that we must wait?

Rambam explains that meat tends to get stuck in one’s teeth, and if one consumes dairy shortly after eating

meat, the two may mix in his mouth (*Hilchot Ma’achalot Asurot* 9:28). Rashi maintains that since meat leaves fatty residue and an aftertaste, time is needed to allow them to dissipate (*Chullin* 105a).

While these reasons do not apply to poultry, waiting was mandated on all types of meat, be it fowl, livestock or wild beasts.

How long must one wait after eating meat before eating dairy?

The Talmud relates that the great sage Mar Ukva contrasted his approach to waiting after eating meat with that of his father: “If Father would eat meat now, he would not eat cheese until the next day at this time. I, though, will not eat [cheese] at this meal, but I will do so at the next meal” (*Chullin* 105a). Mar Ukva’s father was super-stringent and went beyond the requirements, whereas Mar Ukva went according to the letter of the law.

Mar Ukva’s practice of “waiting

until the next meal” is seen by halachic sources as being the basis for the requirement to wait after eating meat before eating dairy. *Posekim*, however, do not agree on how long Mar Ukva waited. Some opine that Mar Ukva simply provided us with a general rule: Do not combine dairy and meat at the same meal; and, if you eat a meat meal, you cannot have dairy until the meat meal has been completed. Any further waiting is optional. Others maintain that Mar Ukva advocated waiting a specific duration of time, and that this is what *halachah* requires.

The *Shulchan Aruch* presents various approaches. In *Yoreh Deah* 89:1, Rabbi Yosef Karo—whose authority is binding on most Sephardic Jews—states in no uncertain terms that one must wait six hours after consuming meat before eating dairy. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Rema—whom Ashkenazic Jews follow—who posits that the rule is to not consume meat

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and dairy in the same meal. While Rema maintains that, according to the letter of the law, one may eat a meat meal, recite Birkat Hamazon and then immediately begin a dairy meal, he asserts that Ashkenazic Jewry has accepted the custom of waiting between meals, and this is a practice that is binding on all Ashkenazim.

Rema further explains that though the custom in his community (Krakow) was to wait an hour between meals, one should wait six hours. Nowadays, most Jews wait six hours, though Dutch Jews wait one hour, and German Jews wait three hours.

(It should be noted that instead of stating that one must wait six hours between eating meat and dairy, Rambam [*Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot* 9:28] states that one must wait "about six hours." Rambam's intent is a point of dispute among halachic authorities. Some interpret this to allow for a five-and-a-half-hour waiting period.)

Why are there such diverse views on waiting?

It all goes back to Mar Ukva's statement about waiting "until the next meal." Some interpret the "next meal" to mean six hours, the average amount of time from lunch to dinner or from a late breakfast—"brunch"—to dinner. (In Talmudic days, most people ate only two meals: "brunch" and dinner.) Others believe Mar Ukva meant that one should wait an hour, the amount of time it takes for digestion to begin (*Chochmat Adam* 40:13). Those who wait three hours may understand Mar Ukva to be referring to the interval between breakfast and lunch, rather than that between lunch and dinner.

Sephardic Jews *must* wait six hours as a matter of *halachah*; there is no room for divergent customs or leniencies (unless there is a medical need, of course). Ashkenazim, however, wait as a matter of accepted custom, similar to the Ashkenazic custom to refrain from eating *kitniyot* on Pesach.

For Ashkenazim, it is always necessary, however, to recite the required *berachot* upon completing a meat meal before eating dairy. The *berachot* serve to separate the meals.

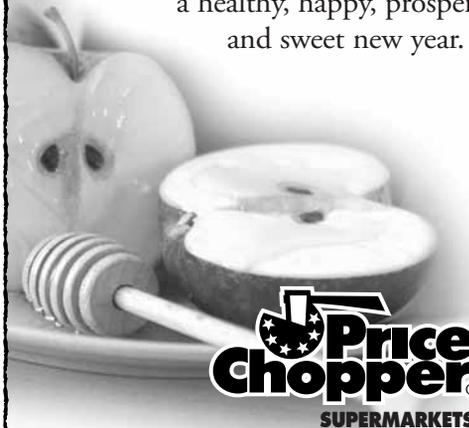
If—after waiting the requisite period of time—one finds meat stuck between his teeth, he must cleanse his teeth and rinse his mouth. There is no need to wait any longer. (There is also a *machloket* regarding the one-hour period. Some *posekim* rule that a person who always waits one hour needs to clean his mouth before eating dairy, whereas others disagree.)

Do children have to wait between meat and dairy meals?

Although children who do not yet have a basic understanding of a given halachic principle are not bound to observe it, it is prohibited for an adult to directly cause a child to violate *halachah*. Therefore, one is not allowed to feed a child—or even an infant—meat and dairy together. (The general rule is that an adult may not make a child transgress a Biblical prohibition. Some halachic authorities make exceptions for rabbinic prohibitions in certain cases. The overall

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topic is very complex and is beyond the scope of this article.)

Very young children who do not understand the basic principle of not mixing meat and dairy do not need to wait. Once a child has a minimal understanding of the prohibition, he should wait an hour after eating meat before eating dairy. As a child grows older, he should be encouraged to wait longer (unless he is from a Dutch family). The exact amount of time to wait depends on the child's maturity and ability to wait; other factors may also be considerations. (For example, if a child's younger siblings are allowed to wait less time, and this may cause him to view the halachah negatively, this must be factored into the decision.) Consult a competent rabbinic authority for guidance.

Must one wait after a dairy meal before eating meat?

After eating dairy, one can eat meat so long as he does the following: 1. separates the meals by reciting the necessary *berachot*, 2. cleanses his mouth, 3. rinses his mouth, 4. washes his hands. One may clean his mouth by eating or drinking something pareve. Any solid pareve food other than dates, raw flour and greens can be used. Steps 2-4 may be done in any order, but the *berachot* should be recited right after the dairy meal is over. One must wash his hands and clean his mouth even if he feels that they are clean. An exception for washing one's hands is made for one who used utensils and had absolutely no physical contact with the food.

If the meal to follow consists of poultry and not beef, there is no need for one to cleanse his mouth or wash his

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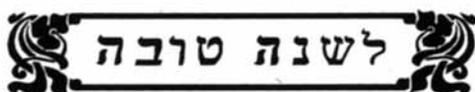
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hands. (This is because mixing poultry with dairy is only rabbinically prohibited.)

Although there is no halachic requirement to wait after eating dairy before eating meat, some wait an hour or half an hour, based on a statement found in the *Zohar*. (The *Zohar's* exact wording can be found in the commentary of the Vilna Gaon on *Yoreh Deah* 89:1.)

Isn't the halachah different after eating hard cheese?

Rema posits that if one wants to eat meat after eating hard cheese, he should wait for the amount of time that he waits after eating meat before eating dairy. Commentators note that Rema is only referring to hard, aged cheese since such cheese adheres to the mouth and leaves an aftertaste, somewhat similar to meat.

What qualifies as hard, aged cheese? According to *halachah*, this is cheese that is aged for six months or so. However, since modern manufacturing techniques enable cheese-makers to develop hard cheese in less time, contemporary halachic authorities do not agree on the matter. The *posekim* of the OU Kashrut Department have ruled that cheese that is endowed with a unique texture or lingering taste—akin to the texture or taste classically acquired via aging—qualifies as hard

cheese, regardless of the precise aging period.

Some of the cheeses that require waiting include Parmesan cheese (usually aged for ten months), Swiss cheese (aged for at least sixty days) as well as aged cheddar (aged anywhere from a few months to several years). (Please note that not all cheddar is aged. Fresh cheddar that is manufactured, packaged and sold within a period of days lacks the unique qualities of aged cheddar.)

Similarly, one should wait after eating the following cheeses (if you can find kosher versions!): Asiago medium cheese (aged for six months), Asiago old cheese (aged for a year) and Sap Sago cheese (aged for five months).

Many *posekim* are of the opinion that one need not wait after eating cheese that is melted since melting compromises the texture and flavor of the cheese. Thus, there is no need to wait after American cheese, as it is a blend of cheddar cheese and additives that has been melted and re-formed. This is the OU's position as well.

Can meat and dairy be eaten at the same table?

Dairy and meat may not be simultaneously present on the same table. This applies, though, only to a table upon which one eats; serving trays or serving tables are not subject to this rule (*Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 88:1) If this

is the case, how can one eat dairy or meat at a public table or bench (e.g., at a public park) when someone at the other end of the table may possibly be eating something that would constitute mixing dairy and meat?

The ban on having meat and dairy at the same table only pertains when the individuals eating are friendly with one another, as there is a concern that they may share their meals and inadvertently end up eating meat and dairy together. If they are strangers, or if they eat on place mats or place an object on the table to remind themselves that they should not share meals, they may eat at the same table. So, too, if a religious Jew is eating dairy at a table where another individual is eating non-kosher meat, there is no need for a place mat or any other "reminder," as there is no concern that the former will eat the non-kosher meat.

In all cases—when transitioning from meat to dairy and from dairy to meat (as well as from dairy to poultry)—the table must be fully cleaned. The tablecloth and all dishes and cutlery must also be changed, of course. Bread used with a meat meal may not be used with a dairy meal and vice versa. (Thus, leftover challah that was used at a meat meal may not be used to make [dairy] French toast.) **IA**