

Reciting מעריב early on Erev Shabbat
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14 Iyar 5765
May 23, 2005

QUESTION

Is it permissible to recite מעריב (the evening prayers) before פלג המנחה (one and a quarter halachic hours before sunset) on Friday night?

In communities where in the summer months sunset comes well after 9pm, even the customary “early” time to recite מעריב, מנחה, will be after 7:30pm. This can be a burden for people who want to follow the traditional practice of reciting their prayers before eating the Sabbath meal, but who have children or others who would have a hard time waiting until after 8:30pm to eat dinner. On those occasions, is it possible to recite מעריב earlier than פלג המנחה?

RESPONSE

Most of traditional sources are pretty clear that in general the earliest time you can recite מעריב is פלג המנחה. Gerald Skolnik gives an excellent summary of the halacha in his teshuva on the earliest times for מנחה / latest times for מעריב which was approved by the CJLS in 1994.¹ There is a leniency in the Skolnik teshuva, in that the sources say you should EITHER go with R. Yehuda and daven מנחה before פלג המנחה and מעריב after, or with the Rabanan and daven מנחה before שקיעה (sunset) and מעריב after, but in these times we allow davening both מנחה and מעריב between פלג המנחה and שקיעה.

There is another source which shows the truth of the teaching from Kohelet that there is nothing new under the sun. The author of this teshuva chose to write it because he took a position with a congregation which was following a custom of having Friday night services during the summer at 6pm, a time much earlier than פלג המנחה. Hence this teshuvah, as a search for whether such a practice can be permitted.

Terumat Hadeshen (15th century Ashkenaz) brings the following question: ברוב הקהילות נוהגין, בימים ארוכים בימי הקיץ, לקרות ק"ש של ערבית, ולהתפלל תפלת ערבית, ג' או ד' שעות לפני צאת הכוכבים. אם יש שום ישוב או טעם למנהג זה; כי גם הרבה ת"ח עם ההמון עם במנהג זה? Most congregations have the custom of reciting the evening Shema and Amidah three or four hours before nightfall during the long days of summer. Are there any sources to rely on, or reasons to justify this custom? *For there are many rabbinic scholars who follow this custom with the masses.*²

Terumat Hadeshen says this was a common problem even in generations long before his. He indicates that even by working with the definition of “hour” in summer vs. winter, you still can’t even justify davening מעריב two hours early, let alone three or four hours

¹ Gerald Skolnik. “Two Questions on the Timing of Prayer Services: How Late May One Recite Minhah and How Early May One Recite Maariv,” Responsa of CJLS 1991-2000 p. 50.

² Terumat Hadeshen 1

Shabbat and holidays—it would be very clear that we are lighting candles (accepting Shabbat) early, even before פלג המנחה, in honor of Shabbat. Therefore it does not seem necessary to prevent people from accepting Shabbat before *plag*. Once Shabbat has been accepted it is no longer the proper time to recite the weekday מנחה Amidah. Following the universally accepted logic described by Arukh Hashulhan, if it is no longer time for מנחה, it is clear that it is time for מעריב, and there is no reason you cannot daven מעריב, even though it is before פלג המנחה.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from reviewing the teshuva of Terumat Hadeshen that at one time the preference was given to prayer with the public over reciting the prayers at the proper time. It is also clear from looking at the later sources that at some point reciting the prayers at the proper time came to be seen as the more important issue. We hereby affirm the wisdom of the earlier approach, that in these days when the majority of people, even our observant “elite” are not going to wait until after 9pm to eat, that we should prefer to encourage public prayer even if it means compromising on the proper time for prayer. Therefore, during the summer days it is permissible to recite מעריב early on Erev Shabbat, even before פלג המנחה, with the caveat that one still needs to recite the Shema again after dark.

This leniency only applies on Erev Shabbat or Yom Tov, as the rationale for it is tied to accepting Shabbat early, and the need for it is tied to wanting to eat the Sabbath meal AFTER officially accepting Shabbat and saying the evening prayers. On other days of the week, one should not daven מעריב before *plag* as in ordinary circumstances the time for the evening prayers should be at least close to evening, and the sources are clear that the proper time for מעריב is at the earliest פלג המנחה.