Reciting מעריב early on Erev Shabbat By Rabbi Dr. Barry Leff

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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 פלג המנחה, מעריב, 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

RESPONSE

Most of traditional sources are pretty clear that in general the earliest time you can recite מעריב is מעריב. Gerald Skolnik gives an excellent summary of the halacha in his teshuva on the earliest times for מנחה 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 מעריב after, or with the Rabanan and daven מנחה before מעריב (sunset) and מעריב after, but in these times we allow davenning both מעריב between מעריב between פלג המנחה

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 פּלג המנחה. Hence this teshuvah, as a search for whether such a practice can be permitted.

Terumat Hadeshen (15^{th} 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 נוהגין, בימים ארוכים בימי הקיץ, לקרות ק"ש של ערבית, ולהתפלל תפלת ערבית, או ד' שעום למנהג 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

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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

early. This fact notwithstanding, he cites many generations, including Rav Hai Gaon, where the communities prayed very early, at a time when the rabbis felt it was not yet the proper time for prayer, and the rabbis did not make the people stop. Terumat Hadeshen concludes בראה דאפילו ת"ה, אם הוא בצבור, שמקדימין להתפלל ולקרוא את שמע בימים הארוכים, אם "It seems that even a rabbinic scholar, if he is with the community, that prays and recites the Shema early in the long days of summer, if he cannot separate himself from the community, he does not need to separate from them, rather he prays with them and recites the Shema with them, and he has fulfilled his obligation."

Terumat Hadeshen does not find a basis for why it would be permissible to daven so early, other than it has been a custom for many generations. There is, however, perhaps some justification that could be found as follows:

In the Talmud in Brachot 27a there is a discussion between R. Yehuda and the Sages about the proper time to recite מנחה. R. Yehuda maintains the latest time is פלג המנחה, while the Sages maintain you can daven מנחה until sunset. In Arukh Hashulhan this is elaborated on, and it is written "it is a clear and obvious matter that once the time for reciting מעריב has passed, the time for reciting מעריב has begun. On this matter, the Tosafot, the Rosh, and all of the poskim agree.³"

It is well known that it is a desirable thing to add to the Shabbat—which is one reason why we light candles well before sundown. The Talmud brings a story of R. Joseph's wife who used to kindle the Shabbat lights late; after being chastised by her husband, she thought to light very early. An old man said to her: It was taught: providing that one is not too early or too late.⁴

It is generally understood that "too early" means not before פלג המנחה. However, the Rosh describes the example of Rav, who said the prayers for Shabbat from *plag* onward and after 3 stars came out he recited the Shema as required, and even though he didn't put redemption next to tefilah (he didn't recite the Amidah immediately after the blessing for redemption, the blessing after the Shema), since his intent was for the mitzvah of adding to the holy from the profane (adding to Shabbat) there is no concern about this. 6

The Shulhan Arukh states that the concern about lighting candles too early, i.e., before פלג המנחה, would be that it is not recognized that the candle lighting is being done for the sake of honoring Shabbat.⁷

We can apply the logic that by accepting Shabbat early we are doing it for the sake of honoring Shabbat. In these days, when most of us don't ordinarily light candles when it is still light out—in fact most people don't ordinarily light candles at all except for

³ Arukh Hashulhan Orah Hayyim 235:8

⁴ Talmud Bavli Shabbat 23b

⁵ Shulhan Arukh OH 363:4

⁶ Rosh, Brachot 4:6

⁷ SA op.cit.

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 מעריב, it is clear that it is time for מעריב, and there is no reason you cannot daven 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 מַערִיב early on Erev Shabbat, even before מַערִיב, 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.