

WHAT'S THE TRUTH ABOUT ... Seudah Shelishit?



MISCONCEPTION: One can fulfill the obligation to eat *Seudah Shelishit* (The Third Meal) on Shabbat by studying Torah in lieu of eating.

FACT: The third Shabbat meal, *Seudah Shelishit* (colloquially termed “*shalashudas*”) is an obligatory meal that should ideally include bread.

BACKGROUND: There is an obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat (Rambam, *Shabbat* 30:9; *Shulchan Aruch*, OC 291) that Chazal (*Shabbat* 117b) derive from the three-fold occurrence of the word “*ha’yom*” (today) in Shemot 16:25: “Moshe said ‘Eat it today, for today it is Shabbat for Hashem; today you will not find it [manna] in the field.’” In Talmudic times, generally only two meals were eaten each day; hence a third meal was unique to Shabbat.

The Gemara goes on to praise those who fulfill this obligation. Rav Shimon ben Pazi (*Shabbat* 118a) says that such a person is spared from three tribulations: the birth pangs of Mashiach, judgment in *gehenom*, and the War of Gog and Magog. Rav Nachman says (*Shabbat* 118b) that he is worthy of merit because he eats three Shabbat meals. Noting that this is a strange statement regarding one fulfilling an obligation, Tosafot (*Bechorot* 2b, s.v. “Shema”) suggests that although eating the Third Meal is obligatory, people were lax in its performance. The Chida

(*Petach Aynayim, Shabbat* 118b) rejected this explanation and suggests that although one can fulfill the obligation of *Seudah Shelishit* without eating bread, Rav Nachman was careful to always eat bread at the Third Meal, and hence he is worthy of merit. The Ktav Sofer (*Shu”t*, OC 39), however, understood the *gemara* differently. He observes that oftentimes *mitzvot* involving eating are difficult to perform with the proper intentions or *kavanah*; therefore, Rav Nachman was asserting that he ate three meals for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah and not for the physical enjoyment.

It is universally agreed (*Shulchan Aruch*, OC 291:6) that the obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat is incumbent upon women as well.² Despite it being a time-bound mitzvah, women are obligated either because of “*afhen hayu be’oto hanes*,” they too benefited from the miracle of the manna, which is the source of the mitzvah, or because women are obligated in the Shabbat prohibitions and all who are obligated in the negative prohibitions of Shabbat are obligated in its positive requirements as well. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 291:4) thus states that women should be encouraged to fulfill this mitzvah.

Having established the obligation, the codifiers go on to address two related issues: when the Third Meal should be eaten and what exactly should be eaten.

Ideally, the three Shabbat meals should be arranged in the following manner: one Friday night, one Shabbat morning, and one Shabbat afternoon.

Two meals at night and one in the daytime fail to satisfy the requirement (*Halichot Shlomo* 8, note 64). The *Mishnah Berurah* (334:2, in the name of the Bach) and *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 288:2) state that the second meal must be eaten on Shabbat morning before *chatzot*.

Regarding the Third Meal, the majority opinion is that it must be eaten in the afternoon. The Behag, however, does permit it to take place in the morning. The Tur (OC 291) maintains that those who split the morning meal into two do not fulfill the obligation.

It would seem that *Seudah Shelishit* should take place in the afternoon. But should it be held before or after Minchah? Rabbeinu Tam (*Tosafot Pesachim* 105a, s.v. “*v’hani mili*”) rules that one should not eat between Minchah and Maariv on Shabbat. The Rema (OC 291:2), however, rules like many Rishonim that *Seudah Shelishit* should be eaten specifically between Minchah and Maariv. The accepted opinion is that it is preferable to have the Third Meal after Minchah, but one should begin before sunset (*Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata* 56:4).

Another debate centers around which foods should be included in the Third Meal. The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 291:5) quotes a range of opinions—those who require bread, those who accept any food upon which the *berachah* of *mezonot* is recited, and those who allow just fruit. He rules that one should eat bread unless one feels too full from the previous meal. Furthermore, he states (OC 291:4) that *lechem mishnah* is required, although the

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Rema observes that there is a common practice to have only one whole loaf at *Seudah Shelishit* (see *Taz* 291:4).

A prevalent misconception is that one can fulfill the obligation of having a Third Meal with words of Torah. Where did this misconception come from? Most likely from the unique *halachot* of *erev Pesach* that falls out on Shabbat. When this occurs, and neither bread nor matzah may be eaten in the afternoon, the obligation to eat *Seudah Shelishit* is difficult to fulfill. The Talmud (*Pesachim* 13a) records that when *erev Pesach* falls out on Shabbat, one should leave over *chometz* for two Shabbat meals—Friday night and Shabbat morning. Rashi explains that food for three meals is not needed because the afternoon meal cannot be eaten; thus, when *erev Pesach* falls on Shabbat, there is a requirement for two meals only.

Some rabbinic authorities, however, do not endorse canceling the Third Meal, and they offer numerous suggestions on how to fulfill the obligation.³

1. Divide the morning meal into two meals; 2. Have the third meal in the afternoon with cooked or fried matzah meal or *matzah ashirah*; 3. Have the meal in the afternoon with fruit, meat, or products made from potato starch.

The Magen Avraham (444:2) cites a radically different option. He quotes the Shlah, who writes in the name of the Zohar (*Parashat Emor*, on the verse “*eleh moadei*,” 95a), that Rav Shimon bar Yochai (Rashbi) studied *Ma’aseh Merkavah* (Ezekiel 1) in lieu of the Third Meal when *erev Pesach* was on Shabbat. Thus it appears that according to the Zohar, the obligation to eat the Third Meal can be fulfilled via Torah study. The Gra, however, (444:7) understands the Zohar to mean that *Seudah Shelishit* can only be fulfilled with bread, and that when *erev Pesach* falls out on Shabbat, the obligation to eat *Seudah Shelishit* is canceled. So too, the Meiri (*Pesachim* 13a) opines that when *erev Pesach* falls out on Shabbat,

there is no obligation to eat *Seudah Shelishit*. This position is elaborated on by the *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 444:6), who explains that just like when Yom Kippur falls out on Shabbat there is no obligation of *Seudah Shelishit*, similarly, on *erev Pesach* that falls out on Shabbat the obligation is canceled.

Others disagree with the Gra and *Aruch Hashulchan*, maintaining that there is an obligation of *Seudah Shelishit* on *erev Pesach*. The Kaf HaChaim (444:18) says that Rav Shimon Bar Yochai did fulfill his obligation to eat *Seudah Shelishit* via learning because he understood the kabbalistic meaning behind the obligation and could accomplish the purpose of the mitzvah through his learning. The rest of us, writes the Kaf HaChaim, are obligated to eat a meal. It is best, he adds, to eat *Seudah Shelishit* and learn as well.

Erev Pesach Shechal B’Shabbat (Rabbi Zvi Cohen [Bnei Brak, 5754], chap. 21, note 30) states that based on the Zohar, the Chatam Sofer fulfilled the mitzvah of *Seudah Shelishit* on *yom tov* with Torah study. But, he then quotes the K’tzeh Hamateh as pointing out that the Chatam Sofer did this only on *yom tov* when there is no obligation of *Seudah Shelishit*!⁴

A story mentioned in *Pardes Yosef* (*Parashat Emor*, p. 272; cf. *Shu”t Divrei Yatziv, Likutim v’Hashmatot, siman* 126) relates to this topic. Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveichik of Brisk (the great-grandfather of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav) was once at an inn for Shabbat and there was no *lechem mishnah* for *Seudah Shelishit*. One of those accompanying him asked: Why don’t we fulfill the obligation with *divrei Torah*? In a clever retort, Rav Soloveichik stated that the possibility exists that one of those present might refute the *chiddushim* that he would say; in that case, there would be neither food nor Torah, and the obligation to have *Seudah Shelishit* would not be fulfilled! It’s best, he implied, that they fulfill the mitzvah by eating.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 291:1) stresses the importance of the mitzvah of eating *Seudah Shelishit*, writing that a person should be “very careful to fulfill this obligation” and should not overeat at the second Shabbat meal to ensure that he will have an appetite at the Third Meal. In fact, *Seudah Shelishit* is deemed so important that one is obligated to give charity in order to provide a poor person with three meals on Shabbat (*Shulchan Aruch*, YD 250:4).

Interestingly, one often finds people who are not conscientious about eating *Seudah Shelishit* all year long engaging in all kinds of halachic contortions to eat *Seudah Shelishit* on *erev Pesach*. Better to rely on *divrei Torah* to fulfill one’s obligation of having Three Meals on *erev Pesach* and be scrupulous about eating *Seudah Shelishit* the rest of the year. ■

Notes

1. Note that the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Ta’anit* 1:1) cites this verse as proof that if all of the Jews observed one Shabbat properly, Mashiach would come.

2. Some Chassidic sources quote the Arizal as stating that women are exempt from this mitzvah. There does not seem to be a halachic basis for this. Chabad has a custom of not eating *Seudah Shelishit*, despite the fact that the *Shulchan Aruch Harav* (OC 291) writes that men and women should be careful about fulfilling this obligation. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, *Parashat Bishalach*.

3. There are many books that deal with the topic of *erev Pesach* that falls out on Shabbat. See, for example, Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, *Erev Pesach Shechal B’Shabbat* (Alon Shvut, 5765), p. 64-69.

4. See *Shulchan Aruch*, OC 529:1; *Mishnah Berurah* 529:13, and *Prishah* 529:3. Note that there is a custom to have a third meal on the last day of Pesach.

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