

סעודה שלישית Aryeh Lebowitz

Introduction. All Jews are obligated to eat three meals each שבת. We assume that the average person eats two full meals on a typical weekday, and שבת is made unique by eating a third meal. The term שלש סעודות that is commonly used to describe the third meal on שבת seems to be grammatically incorrect. After all, this meal is not “three meals” in and of itself (שלש סעודות), it is merely the third meal of שבת (סעודה שלישית). ספר קיצור הלכות שבת explains that because one eats two meals each and every weekday, there is no indication that the first two meals are in any way special for שבת. Only when he eats the third meal does it become evident that all that he has eaten today is for the sake of שבת. Therefore, in reality, by eating the third meal one has properly fulfilled the מצוה of eating all three meals of שבת. Thus the name שלש סעודות. Considering the importance of this third שבת meal, we will dedicate this week’s essay to a discussion of the many halachic details associated with the מצוה of שלישיית.

The source of the obligation. The גמרא שבת דף קיז: derives the obligation to eat three meals on שבת from the repetition of the word היום three times in the section of the תורה describing the מן. The ראשונים debate whether this is a legitimate מדאורייתא or merely an אסמכתא, in which case the obligation would only be rabbinic in nature. The ערוך השולחן writes that even according to those ראשונים who maintain that the obligation is only rabbinic in nature, it was instituted in the days of משה רבינו. It is important to point out that both men and women are obligated to eat three meals on שבת. The ראשונים only debate the *reason* for a woman’s obligation in שלישיית, סעודה שלישית, but all agree *that* she is obligated (see בדפי הרי”ף מד. ר”ן שבת דף מד.). (The lone author in classic rabbinic literature to debate this point is Rav Shlomo Kluger in his שו”ת האלף לך שלמה where he employs highly unconventional halachic reasoning to exempt women from שלישיית.)

The timing of the meal.

The earliest time. The גמרא שבת דף קיח: discusses how much food one should save from his burning home on שבת. The גמרא rules that if the fire occurs on Friday night the person should save three meals, if it occurs on שבת morning he should save two meals, and if it occurs on שבת afternoon he should save one meal for שלישיית. The ראשונים debate the possible implications of this גמרא in regard to when a person must eat שלישיית.

תוספות in their commentary to that גמרא point out that the גמרא specifically assumed that each שבת meal has its own time slot in which it must be eaten. The third meal is said to be eaten specifically in the afternoon. Therefore, תוספות argue, one does not fulfill his obligation of שלישיית if he eats it in the morning. שיטת הרשב”א. The רשב”א in his commentary to that גמרא suggests that there is no specific time during which one has to eat שלישיית. The גמרא was merely using the most common practice of breaking up the three שבת meals as an example for the הלכה of saving food from a burning building.

תוספות rules explicitly in accordance with ערוך השולחן (סימן רצ”א סעיף ב’) and suggests that one does not fulfill his obligation of שלישיית when he eats it before הצות.

The proper time for the morning meal.

שיטת הערוך השולחן (סימן רפ”ח סעיף ב’) points out that it would seem based on the above הלכה that each of the שבת meals would have to be eaten

during their allotted time slot. Thus, the שבת morning meal may not be eaten after הצות. If a shul were to extend davening past הצות they would be preventing all of the מתפללים from fulfilling the מצוה of סעודת שבת properly. The ערוך השולחן expresses astonishment that none of the earlier ספרים took note of this הלכה. שיטת המשנה ברורה (סימן רפ"ה ס"ק א') also warns against fasting past הצות on שבת, but his logic in arriving at this conclusion is vastly different than that of the ערוך השולחן. The משנה ברורה argues that it is generally considered unhealthy to fast until midday, and is particularly problematic on שבת when we are not allowed to fast. However, the משנה ברורה suggests, if one eats a small snack before הצות, there is no problem with starting his actual שבת סעודה after הצות.

Starting סעודה שלישיית before הצות. As we have pointed out, the שולחן ערוך rules that one must eat סעודה שלישיית after הצות. It remains unclear whether one can begin סעודה שלישיית before הצות and conclude the meal after הצות, making certain to eat at least a כזית of food after הצות. Although the רבה אליה rules that all meals are determined based on when they started, the (סימן רצ"א ס"ק ז') משנה ברורה rules that one does fulfill his מצוה of סעודה שלישיית by concluding the meal in the proper time.

Before or after מנחה. The טור סימן רצ"א cites a מחלוקת ראשונים as to whether סעודה שלישיית should be eaten before or after מנחה. תפילת מנחה תם cites a מדרש that equates drinking water during the twilight period of שבת with stealing from the dead, and therefore rules that the meal should be eaten before מנחה. The (פ"ל הלכה י') רמב"ם, however, in describing the schedule of a typical שבת rules that the meal should be preceded by מנחה.

The halachic ruling. As a practical matter, the רמ"א cites both opinions and concludes that the opinion of the רמב"ם should be followed. לכתחילה. However, considering the strong language employed by the מדרש he rules that one should not drink water from rivers during סעודה שלישיית. Drinking in one's home, and drinking other beverages is absolutely permissible. The (ס"ק י"א) משנה ברורה adds that if it is difficult for one to eat after מנחה he may rely on the opinion of the רא"ש and eat it before מנחה, even לכתחילה.

The latest time to start eating. Many people are under the impression that it is absolutely forbidden to begin סעודה שלישיית after sunset on שבת afternoon. This impression is based on the ruling of the ערוך השולחן that one should not eat once it "becomes dark", prior to reciting הברלה. In reality, though, the latest time one is allowed to begin the meal is the subject of considerable debate amongst the leading פוסקים:

The (סימן רצ"ט ס"ק א') משנה ברורה rules that one may begin as late as one half hour before צאת הכוכבים. A thorough discussion of the exact time of צאת הכוכבים is well beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that those who observe שבת for 50 minutes after sunset would be permitted to begin סעודה שלישיית until twenty minutes after sunset according to the משנה ברורה. In fact, Rav Aharon Kotler who was personally stringent to observe שבת until much later in the night, in accordance with his understanding of the רבינו תם, is reported to have allowed one to start eating up until 50 minutes after sunset (סימן ר"ג).

Rav Moshe Feinstein (שו"ת אגרות מושה או"ח חלק ד' סימן ס"ט אות ו') writes that it is difficult for him to understand how one would be permitted to begin eating 30 minutes before the צאת הכוכבים's רבינו תם, considering that according to the גאונים - שבת has already ended. Yet, Rav Feinstein is quoted as having ruled that one may start eating

up until nine minutes after sunset (consistent with his understanding of what the גאונים consider צאת הכוכבים).

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled that one may not start eating at any point after sunset in Israel because at sunset you are already within a half hour of צאת הכוכבים. It would follow from Rav Auerbach's ruling that one would not be allowed to eat even a few minutes *before* sunset as the צאת הכוכבים is only about twenty minutes after sunset. (שמירת שבת כהלכתה חלק ב' עמוד ר"ה). The idea that one must leave a half hour buffer zone between the beginning of his meal and צאת הכוכבים is not universally accepted. The logic for this half hour time period is similar to what we find by many מצוות where one may not begin a meal within a half hour of the time to do the מצוה. Indeed, the ברורה clearly rules that one may not begin his meal within a half hour of the end of the day (and the beginning of the מצוה of הבדלה). However, Rav Moshe Shternbuch points out that the simple reading of the רמב"ם (הל' שבת פכ"ט ה"כ) suggests otherwise, as the רמב"ם writes that one may not begin eating "once the day has left".

Reciting קידוש. The universally accepted practice in כלל ישראל is to recite קידוש before each of the first two שבת meals. What receives less attention, though, is whether we are also obligated to recite קידוש before the third שבת meal.

The רש"ב (תשובה חלק ז' א) (הו"ד בטור סימן רצ"א) rules that we do not recite קידוש prior to eating the third שבת meal. The טור explains that the obligation during the day parallels the obligation at night, and is therefore only obligatory once during each time slot. The רש"ב adds that it is counterintuitive to assume that one would have to recite קידוש on a meal that does not necessarily even require bread.

The רמב"ם (הלכות שבת פרק ל' הלכה ט') writes that one must establish the third meal with wine and bread. The טור assumes this to mean that the רמב"ם requires one to recite קידוש at סעודה שלישית. The מהר"ם אלשקר (ב"ח), however, explains that the רמב"ם does not say anything about קידוש. He merely means to suggest that one should drink wine during the meal.

לחם משנה.

Is it required? Whether or not one must have לחם משנה for סעודה שלישית may depend on how we understand the miracle of the מן.

The דעת זקנים מבעלי התוספות (שמות פרק ט"ז פסוק כ"ב) explains that if the double portion totalled four loaves of bread (twice a person's normal daily intake), it stands to reason that one loaf each was eaten on Friday, Friday night, שבת morning. This would leave only one loaf for סעודה שלישית. If the דור המדבר did not use לחם משנה for סעודה שלישית, we are certainly not required to do so.

The דעת זקנים מבעלי התוספות is troubled by the above analysis in light of the many great rabbis who were careful to have לחם משנה at סעודה שלישית. He therefore suggests an alternate understanding of the miracle of the double portion of מן. He explains that the double portion involved two miracles. First, twice the normal volume of מן fell. Second, the מן that was to be ingested on שבת itself doubled its normal output. Thus when the double portion (4 meals worth) fell on Friday, one was eaten immediately. The remaining three meals then doubled to make six loaves of bread. Since we have a נשמה on שבת we eat two full loaves at each meal, including סעודה שלישית. If this calculation is correct, we too should use לחם משנה for סעודה שלישית.

Should the bread be covered? Whether or not the bread should be covered at סעודה שלישית depends on the reason we cover bread in general. The טור (סימן רע"א) cites three opinions as to why we cover the bread. תוספות explain that covering the bread is a method of exhibiting כבוד שבת. ירושלמי explains that the bread must be covered while reciting קידוש so as not to "embarrass" the bread that we are reciting a ברכה over the wine first. The טור himself explains that we cover the bread to commemorate the coating of dew that surrounded the מן. According to the first and third reasons one should be required to cover the bread at סעודה שלישית as well, whereas according to the second reason it is completely unnecessary to do so at סעודה שלישית. There are several other practical ramifications of the possible reasons for covering the bread:

If it is to commemorate the מן, one should place something underneath the bread as well because the מן had a coat of dew underneath it as well. According to the other reasons this would be unnecessary.

If the covering's sole purpose is not to "embarrass" the bread it seems that one should only require the covering during the actual קידוש. If however, the other reasons are correct it seems that one should keep the covering on until the ברכה is recited.

What one must eat. As we have already explained, ideally one should be sure to have לחם משנה for סעודה שלישית. However, one who is unable to do so may still fulfill his מצוה of סעודה שלישית with other foods. Exactly which foods one may use to fulfill this obligation is the subject of a debate amongst the ראשונים. The following is a list of the different foods one may use according to various ראשונים. The שולחן ערוך records all of these opinions in order of preference.

סעודה שלישית rules that one must have bread for סעודה שלישית: עט:

מגן אברהם (סימן רצ"א ס"ק י') rules that any food made from the five grains would suffice.

תוספות שבת דף מט: rules that even meat or fish would suffice, but fruit would not be enough.

ר"ן rules that even fruit may be used.

דברי תורה would say רשב"י, זוהר writes that according to מגן אברהם (סימן תמ"ד) in lieu of סעודה שלישית. It is interesting to note that מגן אברהם does not mention this opinion in ערב פסח שחל להיות on סעודה שלישית a discussion of how to fulfill סעודה שלישית, choosing to save it for a discussion of הלכות שבת, clearly indicating that this opinion may only be used in a time of desperation when there are no other viable options to fulfill סעודה שלישית.

Conclusion. We have discussed many elements of the מצוה of eating a third meal on שבת. Unfortunately, many people tend to neglect this מצוה. Perhaps that is why some of the leading פוסקים go out of their way to cite extensive aggadic literature stressing the importance of this meal (see רי"ף שבת מד., ערוך השלחן רצ"ט סעיף א'). Let us conclude with the prayer of יוסי (שבת דף קיה:): - "May my portion be amongst those who properly fulfill [the מצוה of eating] three meals on שבת."