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The Third Meal Of Shabbos

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya Freeman

When should the Third Meal of Shabbos be eaten?

Must one eat bread for the Third Meal?

The special meals, or *se'udos*, of Shabbos are an integral part of honoring and enjoying Shabbos. Indeed, the Gemara (Shabbos 118a) says that one who is careful to eat three meals on Shabbos will be saved from three things: the travails preceding the arrival of Mashiach, the judgement of *Gehennom*, and the war of Gog and Magog.

The Friday night and Shabbos day meals are easily fulfilled, and most observant Jews hold an extravagant feast for these two meals. However, the third meal, traditionally known as *Shalosh Se'udos* among Ashkenazic Jewry and as *Se'uda Shlishit* by Sefardic Jews, can pose a challenge, especially during the fall and winter months when Shabbos afternoons are short and one must eat the Third Meal not long after having completed the main Shabbos day meal. This article will examine the halachos the third meal.

Source of the obligation: The Mishna in Shabbos (117b) teaches that there is a Rabbinic limitation on rescuing items from a fire on Shabbos, due to a concern that one will be so busy saving his possessions that he will forget himself and extinguish the fire, thus desecrating Shabbos. The Mishna continues that one may rescue enough food for three meals, so as to have food for the three meals that one is obligated to eat on Shabbos. The Gemara (ibid.) cites a *beraisa* which cites a dispute between the Rabbanan (Rabbis) and Rav Chidka as to how many meals one is actually obligated to eat on Shabbos. The Rabbanan require three meals, whereas Rav Chidka requires four meals.

The Gemara explains that their dispute is based upon the interpretation of a verse in the Torah. In the section discussing that a double portion of *mon* (manna) fell on Friday but none fell on Shabbos, the Torah states (Shemos 16:25), "Moshe said: Eat it today, for today is Shabbos to Hashem, today you shall not find it in the field." The three times the word "today" is mentioned allude to three meals that are to be eaten on Shabbos. Rav Chidka maintains that these three meals are all to be eaten during Shabbos day, besides the nighttime meal. Thus, one must eat three meals during the daytime in addition to one on Friday night. The Rabbanan, however, maintain that these three meals include the evening meal, and so one meal is to be held at night and two by day.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 291:1) rules in accordance with the Rabbanan that a total of three meals should be held during Shabbos. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) writes that one should be very careful to eat three meals on Shabbos. He continues that even if one is full, one should fulfill the minimal requirement and eat a *kezayis* of bread¹. However, if a person is unable to eat, he is not obligated to cause himself discomfort by forcing himself to eat. One should therefore plan ahead and not eat too much at the Shabbos morning meal so as to be able to eat the Third Meal later. It is important not to misinterpret the language of the Shulchan Aruch and conclude that while one should be careful to eat the meals, they are not actually obligatory, as the Gemara clearly states that they are obligatory. Rather, the Shulchan Aruch is stressing the need to take steps and ensure that one is able to fulfill the obligation.

DiOrayso or diRabanan?: The Ran (Shabbos 44a *dapei haRif* s.v. *vekasav*) discusses whether women are obligated in the three meals of Shabbos. Seemingly, women should be exempt, since the three meals are a time-bound mitzvah, from which women are generally exempt. The Ran cites Rabbeinu Tam, however, who says that women

are obligated in the three meals, as they were included in the miracle of the *mon*, which, as discussed earlier, is the source for the obligation. The Ran writes that even without this reasoning, women must eat the three meals on Shabbos, since women are obligated in all the mitzvos of Shabbos, both positive and negative. This is based upon the Gemara (Brachos 20b) that points out that the first time the *Aseres Hadibros* (Ten Commandments) are stated in the Torah in the Book of Shemos, the verse says (Shemos 20:8) "*Zachor es yom haShabbos*," "Remember the Shabbos day." In the Book of Devarim, when the *Aseres Hadibros* are repeated, the verse states (Devarim 5:12) "*Shamor es yom haShabbos*," "Guard the Shabbos day." The Medrash, cited by Rashi (Devarim ibid. s.v. *shamor*), explains that both words were uttered simultaneously by Hashem (an impossible feat for a human). The Gemara (Brachos 20b) states, based on this, that anyone obligated in "guarding" the Shabbos – a reference to avoiding the forbidden activities of Shabbos – is obligated in "remembering," which refers to the positive activities one must do on Shabbos such as kiddush, three meals and *lechem mishna* (using two loaves of bread for each meal). Women are generally exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos, but they are included in time-bound prohibitive mitzvos. Since they are obligated to "guard" Shabbos and avoid all types of *melacha* (forbidden labor), they are obligated to "remember" Shabbos, as well.

It can be said that these two reasons hinge on whether the mitzvah of three meals on Shabbos is a *diOraysa* (Torah-level) or *diRabanan* (Rabbinic) obligation. The idea that women would be obligated in a time-bound mitzvah because "they, too, were included" in the event or miracle upon which the mitzvah is based is found only in regards to time-bound *mitzvos midiRabanan* such as reading the Megilla on Purim and the Four Cups of the Seder (see Tosafos Megilla 4a s.v. *she'af*). The reasoning of "whomever is obligated in *shamor* is obligated in *zachor*" is a *diOraysa*-level reason applied to *mitzvos midiOraysa*.

The Mishna Berura (291:1) rules that the three meals are a Rabbinic obligation, and the verse cited in the Gemara is an *asmachta*, an allusion to the mitzvah. However, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 291:1) cites the Levush who says that it is a *diOrayso* obligation. He continues that even if it is not *midiOrayso*, it was, at the very least, instituted by Moshe himself.

Proper time to eat the Third Meal: The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 291:1) rules that the Third Meal should not be eaten earlier than a half hour past *chatzos* (halachic midday), a time known as *mincha gedola* (since it is the earliest time one may recite *mincha*). If one eats earlier, he has not fulfilled his obligation. This ruling is based upon the aforementioned Mishna, which states that if a fire occurred on Friday evening (before the nighttime meal), three meals may be saved. If a fire occurred on Shabbos morning (before the morning meal), only two meals may be saved. If it occurred on Shabbos afternoon, only one meal may be saved. Tosafos (Shabbos 118a s.v. *bemincha*) infer from this halacha that each meal has its proper time during which it should be eaten. The third meal is meant to be eaten in the afternoon, during the time that one may recite *mincha*. However, the Magen Avraham (Introduction to Orach Chaim 291) rules that if one is only able to eat the meal prior to this time, he should do so, as there are a number of Rishonim who disagree with Tosafos and rule that that one may do so².

¹ It should be noted that there is a question whether one who plans on eating less than a *kebeitzah* (egg's volume, equal to two *kezaysim*) of bread recites the blessing of *al netilas yadayim* when washing hands for bread. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 158:2; Shaar Hatziyun 158:9 quoting the Gra; Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:41.

² This is quite relevant when Erev Pesach occurs on Shabbos, as it does this year. One may not eat matzah at all on Erev Pesach, and bread may not be consumed past the fourth hour of the day. It is thus impossible to have any sort of bread or matzah for the Third Meal. According to the Magen Avraham, one should begin the Third Meal earlier

There is a disagreement regarding starting a meal prior to *mincha gedola* and continuing the meal into the proper time. The Magen Avraham (291:3) rules that if one began before the proper time but inadvertently ended up eating after *mincha gedola*, he has fulfilled the mitzvah. However, one may not intentionally begin eating before *mincha gedola* knowing that the meal would continue after *mincha gedola*, since one may not hold a meal once the time for prayer has arrived. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 291:6) argues that the contrary is true. If one happened to start eating prior to *mincha gedola*, he does not fulfill the mitzvah, since he began at the wrong time. However, if one began early but had in mind to continue eating after *mincha gedola*, he does fulfill the obligation, since he began with the intention that the meal extend into the proper time. The Mishna Berura (ibid.:7) rules that one may extend the meal past *mincha gedola* and makes no distinction between whether this was planned or coincidental. Indeed, in Sha'ar Hatziyun (ibid.:4), the Mishna Berura notes that he did not cite the Magen Avraham's ruling that planning to continue past *mincha gedola* is forbidden, since it is difficult to understand.

There is a question whether one should *daven mincha* prior to eating the meal. Rabbeinu Tam, cited by Tosafos (Pesachim 105a s.v. *vehani mili*), is of the opinion that one should not recite *mincha* before eating the Third Meal. Tosafos relate that Rabbeinu Tam was upset with Rabbeinu Meshulam for eating between *mincha* and *maariv*, because the Medrash (Shochar Tov 11:6) states that one who drinks on Shabbos between *mincha* and *maariv* is considered to be stealing from his deceased relatives³. The Rema (Orach Chaim 291:2) mentions this opinion, explaining that eating after *mincha* would be problematic due to a concern that one will come to drink.

However, the Rema mentions several other opinions of the Rishonim that limit the scope of this Medrash. One opinion says that the Medrash is discussing water drawn from a river on Shabbos, not water found in one's home, and certainly not other beverages. A second opinion says that the Medrash only applies to a mourner during the first year following the passing of a parent. The third opinion says that the Medrash is referring to Erev Shabbos, not Shabbos itself. The Rema himself rules that one should avoid drinking water drawn from a river on Shabbos⁴ during this time.

A second opinion regarding reciting *mincha* is that of the Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 30:10), who rules that one should *daven mincha* before eating the Third Meal. The reason for this is because one is not allowed to begin a meal once the proper time to *daven* has arrived. This opinion is cited in the Rema (ibid.), and he says that this is the common custom. In addition, the Ben Ish Chai (Chayei Sarah 2:14) writes that according to Kabbalah, one must eat the Third Meal after one has already recited *mincha*.

The majority of Rishonim make no mention of *davening mincha* before or after the Third Meal. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 291:4) and the Mishna Berura (ibid.:11) rule that in a situation where it is not practical to eat the Third Meal after reciting *mincha*, one can rely on the majority opinion and eat it prior.

The Mishna Berura (299:1) rules that one should begin the Third Meal before sunset. If one did not do so, however, he may still begin until thirty minutes before nightfall⁵. However, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:69[6]) questions this ruling. Rabbi Feinstein himself (cited in The Radiance of Shabbos [Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen] pg. 88 fn. 36) allows beginning only until nine minutes after sunset.

What to eat: There are four progressively lenient opinions cited in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 291:5) regarding what must be eaten for the Third Meal. The first opinion requires one to eat bread at the Third Meal. The second opinion says that cake or similar foods that require a *mezonos* blessing suffice. The third opinion says that that eating meat or fish suffices. The fourth opinion says that even fruit is enough. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 291:2) strongly advises that one in the day before the fourth hour has passed.

³ Tosafos does not provide details as to what this means; see Medrash Shochar Tov ibid. for further details.

⁴ It is interesting to note that Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was careful not to drink anything during the third meal (Radiance of Shabbos pg. 157 fn. 42).

⁵ The time of nightfall is a complex discussion and is beyond the scope of this article.

should have bread for the Third Meal.

Why does the food requirement of the Third Meal differ from the other two meals, where one is required to eat bread? An answer to this can be found in the words of Rabbeinu Tam (cited in Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah Brachos *dapei HaRif* 36b s.v. *birchas*). He explains that at the first two meals, where kiddush is recited, one is required to eat bread to fulfill the requirement of *kiddush bemakom se'uda* (holding the meal in the place where kiddush is recited)⁶. The third meal, however, does not require kiddush, and so other foods may suffice to fulfill the obligation.

The Shelah (Pesachim 20) cites the Zohar that says that one can fulfill the obligation of the Third Meal with words of Torah. The Magen Avraham (444:2) also cites that Rabi Shimon bar Yochai (the author of the Zohar) would learn Torah to fulfill the Third Meal. However, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 444:6) questions how Rabi Shimon bar Yochai could have done this. He therefore concludes that Rabi Shimon bar Yochai only did this when Erev Pesach would occur on Shabbos, when one could not have a real meal, as matzah is prohibited the entire day, and *chametz* is prohibited after the fourth hour of the day⁷. Rabi Shimon bar Yochai therefore studied Torah in lieu of bread for the Third Meal.

Splitting the morning se'uda in two: There is a discussion regarding whether a morning Shabbos *se'uda* that will extend past the time of *mincha gedola* may be split in two to fulfill the Third Meal, as well. In such a situation, would one be allowed to stop mid-meal, recite *birkas hamazon*, wash and have bread again (once the time of *mincha gedola* has arrived), and complete the *se'uda* as the Third Meal? The Tur (Orach Chaim 291:3) says that his father the Rosh (Rabbeinu Asher) would actually do this, explaining that although there is usually an issue with causing additional blessings to be recited needlessly, in this case it is permitted, since otherwise it would be difficult to fulfill the Third Meal later in the day since he would still be full from the first *se'uda*. However, Tosafos (Shabbos 118a s.v. *bemincha*) cites the Ri who says that there is indeed an issue with causing blessings to be recited needlessly in this case.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 291:3) rules in accordance with the Rosh that one may split up the morning meal⁸. The Mishna Berura (291:14), citing Acharonim, says that one should have a break, such as taking a walk, in between the meals. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 291:8) writes that this is a good practice but not a requirement.

In concluding, it is worth noting the reason given in the Ta'amei Haminhagim (297) as to why many refer to the Third Meal with the odd name of *Shalosh Se'udos*, which literally means Three Meals. The Taamei Haminhagim explains that people often eat the first two meals of Shabbos more because they are hungry than to honor the Shabbos. However, if one is careful to properly fulfill eating the Third Meal, even when he is not particularly interested in eating, he has clearly honored Shabbos through this meal, and thus rectifies the other two meals as well, showing that he is, indeed, looking to honor the Shabbos through all three meals. All three meals are thus contingent upon this Third Meal, leading to the name *Shalosh Se'udos*⁹. One should therefore endeavor to properly fulfill the Third Meal of Shabbos.

⁶ This answer is somewhat difficult to understand according to the opinions that rule that one may fulfill *kiddush bimakom se'uda* with *mezonos* food such as cake, as well as those who say that one may even fulfill it with wine.

Another possible answer is that the primary honor of Shabbos is expressed by the first two meals, and so bread is a requirement at these meals.

⁷ Although the Magen Avraham (cited earlier) rules that one may fulfill the Third Meal even before *mincha gedola*, this is not the mainstream opinion, and the Aruch Hashulchan himself says that when Erev Pesach occurs on Shabbos, there is, in fact, no obligation to eat the Third Meal. This view appears to follow the opinions that require one to have bread, as according to the other opinions, one may eat the other foods discussed above to fulfill the Third Meal.

⁸ It seems, however, that this is limited to a case of necessity to ensure fulfilling the Third Meal. See Mishna Berura ibid. 15,16.

⁹ See Kaf Hachaim (291:3) in the name of the Chida who expresses a similar idea regarding the Third Meal rectifying the first two.

Points to Ponder:

May one eat the Third Meal after sunset if one is not eating bread?

May vegetables or shehakol foods besides meat or fish be eaten to fulfill the Third Meal?

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