

Seudat Purim

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The Megilah declares that the days of Purim were established as ימי משתה ושמחה, days of feasting and rejoicing. This pasuk seems to be the source for one of the mitzvot of Purim day, that of seudat Purim. In this article we will briefly discuss some halachik issues related to the seudah. In particular we will discuss some of the issues related to what should be consumed and the best time to have the Seudah.

The Obligation to Eat Bread

Is one obligated to eat bread as part of the Purim seudah? The Maharshal (Responsa #48) was asked a related and potentially interdependent question. If one forgets to recite Al Hanisim in the Birchat HaMazon on Purim is he required to go back to the beginning and repeat the Birchat Hamazon? The Maharshal cites a manuscript of the Mordechai (as edited by R. Yaakov Polak) which seems to have conflicting opinions on the matter. The Maharshal resolves the seeming contradiction by saying that if one forgot Al Hanisim in tefillah one would not have to repeat it, while if one forgot it in the Birchat HaMazon, it would have to be repeated. He also cites the Rosh in Masechet Berachot who is of the opinion that there is an obligation to eat bread at a Yom Tov seudah because of the mitzvah of simchat Yom Tov. The Maharshal¹ extends this and argues that if one is obligated to eat bread on Yom Tov because of Simcha, then of course one should be obligated to eat bread on Purim which was established as a day of mishteh vesimcha. The Maharshal concludes that since one is required to eat bread one would therefore have to repeat the Birchat HaMazon if he forgot to recite Al HaNisim.²

On the other hand, R' Ovadia Yosef (Yechave Daat 1:89) quotes other Rishonim who seem to disagree with the conclusion of the Maharshal. The Rambam (Hil. Brachot 2:13) rules that one does not have to repeat Birchat HaMazon on Purim if he forgot to recite Al HaNisim. This is also the opinion of the Terumat Hadeshen (1:38) as well as the Tur and Beit Yosef in OC 187 as well as the Rema (187:4). These opinions presumably hold that one is not obligated to eat bread as part of the seudat Purim. Regarding the opinion of the Rosh that bread is required for Seudat Yom Tov because of simcha (and therefore one would be required to eat bread during the Seudat Purim as well), R' Yosef cites the opinion R' Akiva Eiger (OC #1 in Hashmatot) that according to the Rambam (Hil. Yom Tov 6:6) the obligation to eat bread on Yom Tov is not because of simcha but rather because of kavod and oneg like on Shabbat. Therefore, the

¹ See also Maharam Shick (OC 340).

² This link between repeating Birchat HaMazon and requiring bread is based on the Gemara in Brachot (49b), which states that on Shabbat and Yom Tov, when one is required to eat [bread], one would repeat the Birchat Hamazon if the special addition for the day was omitted, but on Rosh Chodesh when one is not required to eat [bread] there would be no requirement to repeat the Birchat Hamazon if Yaaleh V'Yavoh was omitted.

obligation to eat bread on Yom Tov would have no bearing on the obligation to eat bread for the Seudat Purim.

The Magen Avraham (695:9) quotes the opinion of the Maharshal and argues that it doesn't make sense to be more machmir regarding the Birchat Hamazon than regarding tefillah – and one is certainly not required to repeat the tefillah if he omitted Al HaNisim.³ Even though he seems convinced that one is not obligated to eat bread as part of the Seudat Purim, the Magen Avraham appears to defer to the Maharshal but concludes that if this is not the first meal of the day on Purim one certainly should not repeat the Birchat Hamazon.⁴ For purposes of our discussion the Magen Avraham sees no reason why one would be obligated to eat bread as part of the Purim meal. Rav Yaakov Emden (Mor UKetzia 695), in attempting to explain why Birchat Hamazon would be more stringent than tefillah, suggests that since tefillah would have to be recited irrespective of the holiday, therefore, fulfilling one's obligation is not dependant on mentioning the holiday. However, the obligation to recite Birchat Hamazon is only engendered by the seudah which is because of the holiday, and therefore the omission of the Al HaNisim would invalidate the Birchat Hamazon.

The Birkei Yosef (695:1) quotes an opinion that one is not obligated to eat bread and later (695:3) quotes from the same source that one would not be required to repeat the Birchat Hamazon if one omitted Al HaNisim. The Mishna Berura in one place (682:5) seems to assume this as well (regarding Al HaNisim) and more explicitly (695:15) says that because of the principle of safek brachot lehakel one would not repeat the Birchat Hamazon (and therefore presumably does not require one to eat bread). This is also the conclusion of the Kaf Hachaim (695:32) and R' Ovadiah Yosef (Yechave Daat ibid.). R' Yosef does recommend that, if one can, one should try to follow the stringent opinions and have bread as part of the seudah. In sum, the conclusion of the majority of the poskim seems to be that one would not be required to eat bread during the seudat Purim and therefore would not be required to repeat Birchat HaMazon if Al HaNisim was omitted. However, it would seem praiseworthy to try to eat bread if one is able to.

An interesting middle opinion is that of the Aruch HaShulchan. On the one hand, he writes (695:7) that one has not fulfilled his obligation of seudat Purim unless he eats bread. He argues that Purim should be like Shabbat and Yom Tov. He also cites a proof from the pasuk regarding Lot (Bereshit 19:3) "He prepared a mishteh for them. And he baked matzot and they ate." The pasuk implies that mishteh requires some sort of bread. However, later (695:12) he writes that if someone forget to recite Al HaNisim in the Birchat HaMazon he would not have to repeat it, based on the assumption that Birchat Hamazon shouldn't be stricter than tefillah. Even though the Gemara in Berachot (49b) seems to directly link the obligation of having bread with repeating Birchat HaMazon if the special recitation is omitted, according to the Aruch HaShulchan, the Gemara must only be referring to Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh.

Even if one follows the opinion that the Birchat Hamazon does not need to be repeated, the Rema (187:4) quotes from the Kol Bo that if one has not completed the Birchat Hamazon, one

³ This objection to repeating the Birchat HaMazon already appears in Terumat HaDeshen (1:89).

⁴ He cites the opinion that even on Shabbat if one is eating a meal which is in addition to the three meals that one is obligated to eat, one would not repeat Birchat HaMazon if Retzei was omitted in that meal.

should recite Al HaNisim during the ‘HaRachaman’ section. This is also the opinion of the Mishna Berura (682:5) and R’ Ovadia Yosef (ibid.) amongst others.

Eating Meat on Purim

In order to understand whether or not the simcha of Purim obligates one to eat meat, it may be helpful to first determine whether the mitzvah of vesamachta bechagecha on Yom Tov generates an obligation or even a mitzvah to eat meat. The Rambam (Hil. Yom Tov 6:18) rules that simcha only comes through meat and wine. However, the Beit Yosef (529) quotes a seemingly contradictory Gemara in Pesachim (109a) which states that when the Beit Hamikdash is standing simcha only comes through meat, but when there is no Beit Hamikdash, simcha only comes through wine. This implies that today, when there is no Beit Hamikdash, there is no longer an obligation to eat meat on Yom Tov. Accordingly, R’ Yosef Karo makes no mention of a requirement (or even a mitzvah) to eat meat in his discussions of simchat Yom Tov in the Shulchan Aruch (529⁵).⁶ However, despite the lack of obligation (or mitzvah) to eat meat on Yom Tov, the Mechaber implies (696:7) that there would be an obligation of eating meat on Purim.⁷ The Magen Avraham (696:15) wonders why this would be so (given the seeming lack of obligation on Yom Tov) but doesn’t give an explanation.⁸

A closer look at the Beit Yosef would perhaps suggest a solution. The issue the Beit Yosef had with the Rambam was not the mitzvah to eat meat on Yom Tov but rather that the Rambam writes that there is no simcha without meat, which implies that one is obligated to eat meat on Yom Tov and has not fulfilled his mitzvah of simchat Yom Tov without it. It could be that the Beit Yosef agrees that if one enjoys eating meat there would still be a mitzvah of eating meat on Yom Tov as a means towards generating the simcha that is necessary on Yom Tov. The Biur Halacha (529 s.v. keitzad mesamchin) similarly concludes that although there is no obligation to eat meat on Yom Tov because there is no Beit Hamikdash, there is still a mitzvah. On the other hand, regarding Purim, R. Moshe Halberstam in Shu”t Divrei Moshe (1:40) suggests that in addition to the mitzvah of simcha (which may be subjective) there is also a requirement of mishteh which the Chachamim established as an absolute obligation to eat meat. Therefore, we can understand that although the Shulchan Aruch does not seem to mention any obligation to eat meat on Yom Tov (the obligation was only when there were korbanot) there is still an obligation on Purim generated by the halacha of mishteh.

R’ Ovadiah Yosef (Chazon Ovadiah Purim pp. 173-178 and fn. 3) also rules that one should eat meat and adds that preferably one should try to consume beef based on the Gemara in Chagigah

⁵ In 529:3 he mentions meat in passing, but it doesn’t seem to be an obligation. It is interesting to note that he doesn’t make any mention of the mitzvah to drink wine on Yom Tov either, even though in the Beit Yosef he seems to favor wine as the means of fulfilling the mitzvah of simchat Yom Tov. This could downplay the significance of his not mentioning meat.

⁶ See Yam Shel Shlomo (Masechet Beitzah, 2:5), Aruch LaNer (Sukkah 42b) and Bach (OC 529) who attempt to explain the opinion of the Rambam in light of the question of the Beit Yosef.

⁷ The Shulchan Aruch states that an onen would be allowed to eat meat on Purim – implying that eating meat on Purim is an obligation.

⁸ The Rambam is consistent in requiring meat both for Yom Tov and for Purim (Hilchot Megilah 2:15).

(8a-8b) which states that one can only fulfill his obligation of simchat Yom Tov with animals that can be used for a Korban.

The Time of the Purim Seudah

The Gemara in Megilah (7b) records that one who eats the seudat Purim at night does not fulfill his obligation and Shulchan Aruch (695:1) rules accordingly. The ideal time during the day to eat the seudah is still an open question. The Vilna Gaon (see Maase Rav) held that one should intend to fulfill his obligation of the Purim seudah in the morning but didn't explain why.⁹ The Kaf Hachaim (695:23) cites the Sidur Rashash who also recommends (albeit for Kabbalistic reasons) eating the seudah in the morning. The Mishna Berura (695:9) cites the Shlah (Masechet Megilah, Amud Hatzedaka) who also says that it is praiseworthy to have the seudah in the morning, for two reasons. The first was a practical concern: The normal custom of the people was to pray Mincha and Maariv together later in the day. However, on Purim they would pray Mincha earlier and then have their seudah. The Shlah describes that people would then not get together to pray Maariv and would perhaps forget to pray Maariv altogether. However, if they had their meals before praying Mincha (he doesn't specify morning in this section) they would then be able to follow their regular schedule of praying Mincha and Maariv as a community. This concern seems to be more pragmatic than fundamental and doesn't seem to be focused on the time of the seudah inasmuch as the juxtaposition to tefillah times. (He even acknowledges that people would be stopping in the middle of their seudot in order to go pray Mincha and Maariv.) However, he then quotes the custom of the Terumat HaDeshen and his teachers (see below) to have the meal earlier in the day and says that our seudah corresponds to the seudah which Esther had with the king; this seudah was certainly in the morning as that is the time when kings normally dine.

Regarding having the seudah later in the day, the Terumat HaDeshen (Shu"t #10) discusses the custom of some to begin the seudah during the day but have a majority of the seudah at night (of the 15th). He does provide some justification for such a practice based on people's preoccupation with the other mitzvot hayom, but concludes by saying that his custom and the custom of his teachers is to have the seudah in the morning. The Rema (695:2) cites that the common custom is to begin the seudah after Mincha but he requires one to have a majority of the seudah during the day.¹⁰

Reciting 'Al HaNisim' After Sunset

Given the prevalent custom of beginning the Seudah so late in the day a common question arises: should one recite "Al Ha Nissim" in the Birchat Hamazon if the meal continues until after

⁹ However, see "Mekorot U'Beiurim" in the 5769 edition of Maase Rav who understood the passage in Maase Rav that the Vilna Gaon himself would have his seudah in the afternoon after Mincha and finish before the day was over. The statement that he would recommend having the seudah in the morning was only a recommendation so people wouldn't have their seudah too late in the day and therefore fail to eat a majority of the meal before sunset. The notes in the back of that aforementioned edition suggest that the Vilna Gaon was particular to finish before sunset because he was concerned for the opinion of the Rosh (cited below) that one may not recite Al HaNisim after sunset on Purim.

¹⁰ The Rema does say, however, that if one wishes to eat the Seudah in the morning he does have that option.

sunset? Regarding Shabbat, the Beit Yosef (188:10) cites the opinion of the Rosh that if one continues his Shabbat meal after nightfall he should not recite Retze V'Hachalitzenu because Shabbat has concluded. And in the context of Purim, the Tur (695)¹¹ cites the Rosh saying that the same thing is true regarding a meal on Purim that is concluded after sunset. However, the Beit Yosef there cites the opinion of the Hagahot Maimoniyot (Hilchot Megilah 2:14:1) who in turn cites the Maharam who is of the opinion that one should still recite Al HaNisim even after sunset. The Shulchan Aruch (188:10) rules that one should recite Al HaNisim or Retze (or Yaale VeYavo on Rosh Chodesh) even if his meal continues into the night. The Shulchan Aruch in Hilchot Purim (695:3) repeats that one should recite Al HaNisim but, interestingly, also quotes a dissenting opinion that one should not (which was not quoted in the earlier discussion in Shulchan Aruch.) The Rema says that the prevalent custom is like the first opinion but the Kaf HaChaim (188:43, 695:33) says that since according to some opinions one would not have to repeat Birchat Hamazon if he didn't mention it at all "*shev veal taaseh adif*" and one should not recite "Al HaNisim" after sunset. The prevalent opinion seems to be that of the first opinion in the Shulchan Aruch and that of the Rema, that one would recite Al HaNisim even if one is saying Birchat Hamazon after sunset.¹² Parenthetically, the Magen Avraham (695:10) points out that if one is reciting the Birchat Hamazon after sunset and one neglected to say Al HaNisim one would certainly not have to repeat the Birchat Hamazon.

¹¹ The actual responsum of the Rosh (Klal 22, #6) cited by the Beit Yosef, is not speaking about Purim.

¹² See Nefesh HaRav (p. 20 fn. 28) in which Rav Hershel Schachter records an interesting related story about a visit with the Soloveitchik family in Onset, MA. The group of students who were there had just finished praying Mincha on Rosh Chodesh (close to sunset) when they sat down to wash and eat dinner. Reb. Pesia Soloveitchik (the Rav's mother) observed what was happening and said to the students that she was surprised that such learned Yeshiva students were getting themselves involved in a sfeika d'dina, due to the machlokes haposkim as to whether saying Yaale VeYavo follows the beginning of the meal or the time of Birkat Hamazon. (Rav Schachter brings this story as an illustration of Rav Soloveitchik's tradition of pesak which often entailed being concerned for fulfilling the opinions of all the Poskim.) Rav Schachter himself told me that he tries to say Birchat Hamazon before sunset on Shabbat and Purim to avoid getting involved in this issue.