

The Proper Time to Eat the Purim Seudah

While some are *yotzei* the Purim seudah with breakfast on Purim day, others just barely wash before sundown. When is the proper time to eat the Purim seudah, and why? This year, whereas Purim falls on Friday, when would be the appropriate time to begin the meal? Can the Purim seudah begin on Friday and continue into Shabbos? Why is eating a large meal on Fridays generally forbidden, and what should be done in walled cities (Jerusalem) this year, where Purim for them is on Shabbos?

Purim that falls on Shabbos is called *Purim Meshulash*. Today, Purim can fall on Shabbos only in walled cities. Why are the Purim celebrations divided into three (hence the name: '*Meshulash*' – triangular), and what is done on each of the days?

Purim-Time

The Rama (Orech Chayim 695:2) writes that the Purim seudah should be served after Mincha and most of the meal should be eaten during the day, before nightfall. One who wishes to eat it in the morning is permitted to do so.

The Magen Avraham (ibid, footnote 5) explains that since the morning hours are usually devoted to the other mitzvos of Purim – hearing the Megillah and giving out gifts of charity (Matanos L'Evyonim), the seudah is postponed till after Mincha. The Gra (ibid) adds that since most people are not finished their other activities before it is time to daven Mincha, and once the time for Mincha has arrived one is forbidden to start a long meal before davening, the seudah only takes place after Mincha.

This explains why the Rama permits eating the meal in the morning if one so wishes. If the time for Mincha has not yet arrived, one is permitted to wash for a large meal, and he is not obligated to be concerned he might become inebriated and forget to daven Mincha (unless it is a high possibility, in which case it is preferable to daven Mincha before the seudah).

The Mishna Brura (695:9) quotes the Shela (Maseches Megilla, Ner Mitzva, 9) and Eliya Raba (695:4) who maintain that the preferable time for eating the seudah is in the morning.

Morning Meal

Why is it better to eat the seudah in the morning? The simple answer is *zrizim makdimim l'mitzvos* — those who are alacritous – rush to do mitzvos. Extenuating circumstances might arise and the mitzva could then be lost. Therefore, one who loves the mitzvos and wishes to display his joy and excitement with them, rushes to perform each mitzva as soon as possible. This is especially true on Purim, when many things can happen, and one might find himself at the end of the day, drunk and sleeping, without having eaten a proper Purim seudah of bread, meat and wine.

Another reason is mentioned in the Shela (Maseches Megillah, Ner Mitzva, 9): the seudah commemorates the feast Ester served Achashveirosh and Haman, which surely was held during the morning hours, as kings customarily eat in the morning (see Koheles 10:16). Haman was hanged during this banquet, therefore the morning hours are the appropriate time for the Purim seudah.

Kaf Hachayim (Orech Chayim 695:23) quotes the Sidur Harashash that the kabalistic custom is to eat the Purim feast in the morning. The Shela adds, that postponing the feast to the late afternoon results often with missing the mitzva of nighttime Krias Shema and Maariv.

Another reason mentioned by Rabbi Seraya Devlitzky (Purim Meshulash, chapter 1, footnotes) pertains to the mitzvos of Purim. The fundamental part of the Purim seudah is becoming drunk during the meal to a degree of mixed comprehension — not knowing the difference between *Arur Haman* and *Baruch Mordechai*. Today, whereas many people cannot tolerate wine and prefer to

follow the Rama's leniency of sleeping instead of drinking to reach the required state of mind, eating the seudah late in the day will not allow for enough time to sleep on Purim.

The poskim mention the Trumas Hadeshen (110); the Gra (Maase Rav, Purim 248); Pri Megadim (695:5) and others, who were careful to eat their Purim seudah in the morning.

Eating in the Afternoon

Despite the above-mentioned sources, most people eat the Purim seudah late in the afternoon. This timing, as we mentioned previously, is cited in the Rama.

Terumas Hadeshen was questioned regarding this custom, especially in relation to those who just barely wash before sundown and eat most of the seudah at night. He answers a three-tiered answer:

1. Eating and rejoicing on the 15th of Adar is also part of *simchas*. He proves this from the Riva who notes a halacha: Pranks deemed acceptable by the local authorities are not required to pay for damages starting from the first reading of the Megillah (on the night of Adar 14th) till the end of the night of the 15th, i.e. – two nights and one day. Hence, there seems to be a continuation of *simchas* Purim also on the night of the 15th of Adar.
2. The question, however, still remains: the mitzva of eating the Purim seudah can only be observed during the day. Although rejoicing does pertain to Purim night, why would the main part of the meal not be during the day as part of the mitzva of rejoicing? Terumas Hadeshen answers that because during the day people are busy with the other mitzvos and eating early will not allow them to enjoy their meal properly, people delay the meal until they are finished with their other obligations.
3. It still remains a question if this is a proper practice. Trumas Hadeshen proves it is permissible, as the Tosefos (Chulin 83) writes that on the first day of Succos people customarily eat a smaller meal than on other holidays because they are busy before the holiday preparing the succah and purchasing the Arba Minim. This serves to prove that when busy with a mitzva, one can make a smaller seudah than appropriate.

Although the Terumas Hadeshen justifies the custom, he writes that his own rebbes, as well as the ancient Jewish communities on the Rhine, would customarily eat the Purim seudah in the morning.

L'halacha, the Rama follows Sefer Haminhagim (Tirnav, Purim) ruling that the seudah should be eaten after Mincha, while at the same time ensuring that most of the meal is eaten during the day. (This deviates from Terumas Hadeshen's ruling who justifies those who eat most of the meal after nightfall.) The Magen Avraham writes that this ruling also follows the Terumas Hadeshen's second reasoning – the meal is postponed to enable people to eat it joyfully without other concerns and distractions.

Summary – Purim Mealtime

Every year, due to various reasons mentioned above, it is preferable to eat the Purim seudah before midday. However, since there are many mitzvos and people are busy on Purim, if they eat the meal in the morning they will not be able to eat calmly and rejoice properly. Therefore, it is accepted to eat the seudah in the afternoon. Since it is already time for Mincha, one must first daven Mincha and only then wash to eat. Despite the many obligations and mitzvos of Purim, one must make sure to start the meal early enough so most of the seudah will be eaten before sundown. Postponing the seudah until just before sundown is improper.

Moadim V'zmanim (volume 2, chapter 190) writes that one must have eaten meat and drunk wine before sundown on Purim because that is the core obligation of the mitzva of *seudas* Purim.

One who is organized enough to sit down to a calm, joyful feast before noon merits performing the mitzva of *seudas* Purim most properly.

In the earlier times, when all food preparation had to be done on the same day and the mitzva of Matanos L'evyonim and Mishloach Manos was mainly preparing and delivering food to those who lacked it, there was indeed a lot of hassle involved in the mitzvos of Purim. Today, however, most things can be prepared ahead of time. The mitzva of Matanos L'evyomin is best performed by giving money to the local charity funds who deliver it to the poor in an honorable fashion, preferably earlier in the day so they can use the money towards buying food for the Purim seudah. Mishloach Manos can be prepared before Purim, and in general, there is much less work involved in the mitzvos than was in the past. While eating during the morning may not be feasible, after an early Mincha it is usually possible to sit down to a leisurely, joyous feast.

Eating earlier in the day is especially recommended for families with young children who often find themselves forced to keep the little ones occupied if mealtime is scheduled for the later part of the day.

Early Planning

The Magen Avraham (693:2) and Mishna Brura (footnote 6) add that on Purim one should arise especially early for Shacharis. The Machatzis Hashekel (2) explains that there are many mitzvos on Purim, and the morning davening is longer than usual. Therefore, one must rise earlier than usual to allow enough time for proper mitzva performance. Here, correct planning of the day is halachically mandated to enable a calm and joyful performance of the day's mitzvos.

Indeed, many have the custom to arise early and daven *vasikin* on Purim (usually, these minyanim allow hearing the Megillah without noisy children or half-drunk teenagers). Immediately after Shacharis one can send his Matanos L'evyonim to the shul tzedakah coordinators or send an envelope to a needy acquaintance, and then, after distributing Mishloach Manos, one is free to begin the seudah at a decent time, as required by halacha.

This year, whereas Purim is on Friday, this practice is particularly recommendable.

Purim Meal on Friday

The above is true on a regular year, when Purim falls in the middle of the week. However this year, whereas Purim falls on Friday, and in walled cities – on Shabbos, the halachos are different.

The Rama (Orech Chayim 695:2) writes that when Purim falls on a Friday, the seudah must take place in the morning before midday. Sefer Haminhagim (Tirnav, Purim) explains that eating the Purim seudah after midday on Friday will detract from the honor of Shabbos. Even one who is able eat two meals will not be eating the second with too much enthusiasm. Therefore, one should ensure the Purim seudah is eaten early enough to allow him to develop an appetite for the Shabbos meal in the evening.

The Mishna Brura (ibid, 10) writes that *l'chatchila* the seudah should take place in the morning. However, if noontime passed and the seudah has not yet been eaten, one can rely upon the Maharil's opinion (56) that meals can be eaten on Fridays until the end of the 9th hour of the day (a time known as *Mincha Ketana* – the halfway point between noon and sundown). The Mishna Brura quotes the Yad Efraim (ibid) saying that before the 10th hour it is preferable to wash and eat bread, rather than fulfilling the obligation of the Purim seudah with other foods.

If the 10th hour has passed, the Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chayim 249:2) and Mishna Brura (footnotes 13-14) write that in extenuating circumstances it is permitted to eat a Purim seudah of the same amount he would have eaten at that time on a weekday, since it is a *Seudas Mitzva*. One should nevertheless be careful not to eat or drink too much so as not to ruin his appetite for the Shabbos night meal. An egg-size slice of bread and an olive-size piece of meat will suffice in this case.

Purim Seudah — Kiddush – Shabbos Meal

The Beis Yosef (695) quotes from the Orchos Chayim two possible times for the Purim seudah when Purim falls on Friday – one possibility is eating the seudah on Friday morning as mentioned above. Another option is eating the seudah close to Shabbos, and then when Shabbos comes — spreading a tablecloth in honor of Shabbos, reciting Kiddush, and continuing the meal. This results in one long meal beginning on Purim and continuing onto Shabbos. (This option is mentioned in the Meiri [Kesubos 7b] as the custom in his locale.) The Rama writes (Darkei Moshe) that our custom is only to eat the seudah on Friday morning. This seems to follow the ruling of the Maharil (chapter 56, Leket Yosher p. 156:4). Although it is permitted, we don't usually follow the practice of eating one long meal. Nevertheless, wherever this custom is accepted, one can rely on it. However where it is not accepted, if one was unable to eat in the morning, he should eat a small amount of bread, meat and wine for the Purim seudah, leaving ample appetite for the Shabbos meal. Then, on Friday night, he should recite Kiddush and eat a regular Shabbos meal.

Purim Meshulash

While Jerusalem and the ancient Iranian city of Shushan are the only two in which Purim is *only* observed on the 15th, many other ancient cities observe Purim on both days due to the *safek* (doubt). Some of these cities are Chevron, Yafo, Lod, Tzfat, Haifa, Beit She'an, Be'er Sheva, Tveria and others. How is Purim observed on Shabbos?

When Purim falls on Shabbos, the mitzvos of Purim are divided into three parts (Shulchan Aruch Orech Chayim 685:6):

The mitzvos of reading the Megillah and distributing Matanos L'evyonim are observed on Friday.

Al Hanisim is added to davening and benching only on Shabbos. The Torah reading for Purim is added to the regular Shabbos Torah reading and the haftara is the same as the previous week's haftara, that of Parashas Zachor.

Mishloach Manos and Purim seudah are observed on Sunday.

Regarding Mishloach Manos and the Purim seudah, the poskim mention a number of additional opinions.

The Mishna Brura (ibid, footnote 18) quotes the Ralbach's opinion that Mishloach Manos and the Purim seudah should take place on Shabbos. Family members sitting at the Shabbos table can exchange plates in observance of the mitzva. However, the Mishna Brura disagrees with it, noting that most poskim disagree with this opinion and follow the Shulchan Aruch. The Sha'ar Hatziyun (30) quotes the Pri Chadash who maintains that preferably one should observe the mitzvos of eating the Purim seudah and deliver Mishloach Manos both on Shabbos and on Sunday. Therefore, one who wishes to meet both obligations should intend his Shabbos meal to also be in honor of Purim and exchange his plate with another person at the table to fulfill the mitzva of Mishloach Manos. The main Purim seudah remains, however, on Sunday.

The Chazon Ish (Orech Chayim 155:1) offers a third option: Mishloach Manos should be delivered both on Friday *and* on Sunday. This is also the opinion of the Kaf Hachayim (685:35) quoting the Knesses Hagedola. He cites the other opinions as well, concluding that a G-d fearing individual should make sure to deliver Mishloach Manos on all three days.

Seudah Timing

This year, since walled cities only observe the mitzvos of Mishloach Manos and the Purim seudah on Sunday, it is possible to eat the meal earlier in the day, perhaps even during the morning hours. Especially this year, whereas large family gatherings are not recommended due to Covid considerations, it might be more feasible.

In addition, while on most years there is room for continuing the seudah into the night following Purim; in walled cities, where the next night is Adar 16, and especially this year that it will already be the 17th, only food eaten until sundown can be counted towards the mitzva of *seudas* Purim.