YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**ThePurim Meal**

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We read toward the end of the *Megilla* (9:20-22) that Mordekhai sent letters to the Jews of the provinces of Achashverosh, announcing the establishment of the Purim festival. In his letters, Mordekhai wrote:

… that they should keep yearly the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.

Mordekhai enacted three components to the Purim celebration: “feasting and gladness,” “sending portions one to another” (*mishlo’ach manot*), and “gifts to the poor” (*matanot la-evyonim*).

In this shiur, we will discuss the details and parameters of the festive meal of Purim, known as the *se’udat purim*. This is one of the central components of the Purim holiday, both experientially and halakhically, as the *Megilla* itself characterizes the days of Purim as "days of feasting and gladness."

When should one conduct this festive meal? The Gemara records:

Rava said: one who eats the festive Purim meal at night has not fulfilled his obligation. What is the reason? It says: "days of feasting and gladness."

Rav Ashi was sitting in front of Rav Kahana; it became dark, and the Rabbis didn’t come. He said to him: Why didn’t the Rabbis come? Maybe they were busy with the festive Purim meal.

He (Rav Kahana) said: Was it not possible for them to eat [their Purim meal] the previous night?

He (Rav Ashi) responded: Didn’t [you] hear that which Mar said in the name of Rava: one who eats the festive Purim meal at night has not fulfilled his obligation? … (*Megilla* 7b)

Rava clearly rules that the festive meal must be eaten during the day of Purim, and not the previous night. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Megilla* 2:14), the Rashba and Ritva (*Megilla* 4a) rule in accordance with this Gemara, as does the *Shulchan Arukh* (695:1).

The Mordekhai (*Megilla* 787), however, cites the Ra’avya (R. Eliezer ben Yoel Ha-levi, d. 1225) as arguing that just as the *Megilla* is read both at night and again during the day, similarly, one should hold a festive meal both at night and during the day. Apparently, he recognized an additional, albeit lower, level of the *mitzva* that requires holding a meal at night, as well. The Rema (ibid.) also writes that one should "rejoice at night as well, and slightly increase in one's meal."

The Rema records that it is customary to begin the Purim meal after praying the *mincha* service, in the afternoon. The *Mishna Berura* (8) explains that people are generally busy delivering *mishlo’ach manot* during the morning hours, and therefore the festive meal is commonly held in the afternoon.

In many communities, especially where people must work on Purim, it is customary to begin the festive meal very late in the afternoon. The Rema rules that the majority of the meal should be eaten during the day, and speaks very critically of those who begin late and eat most of their meal after dark.

Very often, the Purim meal is concluded only after nightfall, giving rise to the question of whether one should insert *al ha-nissim* in *birkat ha-mazon*. The *Orchot Chayim* (*Hilkhot Purim*, 35), cited by the *Hagahot Maimoniyot* (Hilkhot Megilla 2:14), rules that one inserts *al ha-nissim* even if the meal extended into the nighttime hours. The *Tur* (695), however, cites his father, the Rosh (see *Teshuvot* 22:6), as ruling that one should not insert *al ha-nissim* after dark. The Maharil (56) records that the custom in *Ashkenaz* followed the first opinion. The *Shulchan Arukh* (695:2) cites both views, and the Rema adds that it is customary to insert "*al ha-nissim*."

Interestingly, the *Peri Megadim* (*Eishel Avraham* 5) lauds the practice of those who eat the *se’udat Purim* in the morning. The Rema, citing the *Sefer Ha-minhagim*, rules that this should be done when Purim falls on Friday.

What should one eat at the festive Purim meal? The *Magen Avraham* (695:9) writes, "We haven't found [a source indicating] that one is obligated to eat bread on Purim." Accordingly, the *Birkei Yosef* (695) and *Eliya Rabba* (695:7) rule that one need not eat bread at the *se’udat purim*. Others, however, maintain that one must eat bread at the Purim meal, just as *Halakha* requires eating bread at *Yom Tov* meals (see *Shulchan Arukh* O.C. 529:1). This is the view accepted by the *Arukh Ha-shulchan* (695:7) and the Netziv (*Ha-emek She'ela* 67:1, attributing this view to R. Achai Gaon).

This question may impact upon another issue, namely, whether or not one who forgets to insert *al ha-nissim* must repeat *birkat ha-mazon*. The *Mishna Berura* (15) cites a debate surrounding this issue. The *Magen Avraham* (9) and *Peri Megadim* (ibid.) link this question to the issue of whether one is obligated to eat bread at the Purim meal. Those who require one to eat bread should also require one to repeat *birkat ha-mazon* if he forgot *al ha-nissim*, as the recitation of *al ha-nissim* was mandatory as a result of the obligation to eat bread. Conversely, those who do not require eating bread should not demand that one repeat *birkat ha-mazon* in this case. The *Aruch Ha-Shulkhan* (12), however, contends that even those who require the consumption of bread would not demand that one who omits *al ha-nissim* repeat *birkat ha-mazon*, as *birkat ha-mazon* should be treated no more stringently than the *amida* prayer. One who forgets to add *al ha-nissim* in the *amida* does not repeat the *amida*, despite the fact that the inclusion of *al ha-nissim* is clearly obligatory, and hence we would not require one to repeat *birkat ha-mazon*, either.

As for the final *halakha*, the *Mishna Berura* applies to this case the principle of "*safek berkhot le-hakel*," meaning, one never recites a *berakha* if there is some uncertainty as to whether it is warranted. Hence, in light of the different views surrounding this issue, one who forgets to add *al ha-nissim* in *birkat ha-mazon* should not repeat *birkat ha-mazon*.

Must one eat meat at the Purim meal? The Rambam (Hilkhot Megilla 2:15) and *Shulchan Arukh* (696:6) strongly imply that one must eat meat at the Purim *se’uda*. Some even express uncertainty as to whether one fulfills the obligation by eating poultry (*Yechaveh Da'at* 6:33)! The *Magen Avraham* (696:15), however, questions whether one must actually eat meat. The *Acharonim* relate this issue to the question of whether one must eat meat on *Yom Tov* to fulfill the commandment of *simchat yom tov*.