



Parashat BeShalach  
Rabbi David Silverberg

Parashat Beshalach tells of the manna, the miraculous food that sustained *Benei Yisrael* throughout their forty years of travel in the otherwise uninhabitable wilderness. Generally, each person received a daily portion in the morning, which would spoil if it was left over till the next day. The exception was Friday, when two daily portions fell, one of which could be safely stored for the following day, Shabbat. On the first Shabbat, when the people awakened to find their extra portion intact, Moshe instructed them to eat it and not be concerned: “Moshe said: Eat it [the extra portion] today, for today is Shabbat for the Lord; today, you will not find it in the field” (16:25).

The Talmud (Shabbat 117b) famously understood this verse as establishing a general protocol for Shabbat for all times, and not only with regard to the manna. According to the Gemara, Moshe here introduces the obligation to eat on Shabbat. More specifically, the three instances of the word *hayom* (“today”) in this verse allude to the obligation to eat three separate meals on Shabbat. On the basis of the Gemara’s discussion, some *Rishonim* (including the *Yerei'im*, 92) maintained that eating three meals on Shabbat constitutes a Torah obligation.

Maimonides, however, clearly approached the Gemara’s comments differently. He codifies the obligation of the three Shabbat meals in the final chapter of *Hilkhot Shabbat* (30:9), amidst his discussion of *oneg Shabbat* – the obligation to enjoy oneself on Shabbat. As Maimonides writes in introducing this chapter, the requirement of *oneg Shabbat* does not originate from the Torah, but rather stems from the prophecy of Yeshayahu: “You shall call Shabbat a [day of] enjoyment” (“*Ve-karata la-Shabbat oneg*” – Yeshayahu 58:13). Maimonides makes no mention of the verse from Parashat Beshalacha which the Gemara cites as the source for the three-meal obligation. Instead, he simply includes it as one of several details concerning the *mitzva* of *oneg Shabbat* established by Yeshayahu.

Apparently, Maimonides viewed the Gemara’s inference from the verse in Parashat Beshalach as an *asmakhta* – a subtle allusion in the Biblical text to a provision enacted later. In his view, the true source of this requirement is the general obligation of *oneg*, rather than a specific command issued in Parashat Beshalach.

Maimonides’ perspective on the obligation of *shalosh se’udot* (“three meals”) may yield a number of interesting ramifications. For one thing, it will affect the question of whether one must eat three meals if this would cause him discomfort. Quite obviously, once we classify *shalosh se’udot* under the category of *oneg Shabbat*, then, by definition, these meals cannot come at the expense of one’s physical enjoyment. Indeed, Maimonides writes, “But if one is ill from excessive eating, or if he always fasted, he is exempt from three meals.” According to the position viewing *shalosh se’udot* as an independent, Torah obligation, it would seem that one would be required to eat these

meals even if it would cause him discomfort (unless it would endanger his health), as Torah obligations are not waived out of concern for comfort.

Another practical issue at stake is a custom – which was apparently quite common during some periods – to divide the main Shabbat meal, rather than eat a third meal. Especially in the winter months, when eating two meals before sundown is not always feasible, some people would simply recite *birkat ha-mazon* in the middle of the meal, and then recite a new *berakha* over bread. They would thus be considered as having partaken of two meals that day (in addition to the Friday night meal) and thereby fulfill the *shalosh se'udot* requirement.

According to Maimonides, however, it is doubtful that there is any value to breaking up the daytime meal. If *shalosh se'udot* is required by virtue of the *oneg Shabbat* obligation, then it stands to reason that each meal must provide an additional dimension of enjoyment. If one's meal extends until late afternoon, he does not achieve any additional *oneg* by pausing, reciting *birkat ha-mazon*, and partaking of another piece of bread. In such a situation, Maimonides would likely advise the individual to simply continue his meal as usual. And if not enough time remains for him to develop an appetite for the third meal, then he need not eat a third meal, for, as we saw, Maimonides exempts one from this obligation if it would cause him discomfort.

If, however, we approach *shalosh se'udot* as an independent obligation to eat three meals, then we might indeed require a person in this situation to break up the meal, so that formally he will have eaten three separate meals. Or, one might argue that the obligation to eat three meals refers to three meals at three separate parts of the day. Indeed, Rabbi Yaakov of Marvege records his work of responsa (*Min Ha-shamayim*, 14) receiving this ruling in a nocturnal vision. He was told that just as the word *hayom* appears on three separate occasions in the verse, similarly, the three meals must be eaten at three separate points during Shabbat – nighttime, morning, and afternoon. For Maimonides, of course, the word *hayom* has no bearing on this *halakha*, as this verse is not truly the source of the *shalosh se'udot* obligation.

Interestingly, Maimonides adds in this context (30:9) that the *shalosh se'udot* obligation applies even on Yom Tov. In light of Maimonides' classification of *shalosh se'udot* as a *halakha* that stems from *oneg Shabbat*, we must seemingly conclude that Yom Tov, too, features a requirement of *oneg*, like Shabbat. This conclusion, however, is somewhat surprising and does not seem to have a basis in earlier sources. In reference to Yom Tov the Torah and the Gemara speak of an obligation of *simcha* – an experience of joy achieved, in part, through meat and wine. The concept of *simcha* is quite distinct from *oneg*, which refers to physical enjoyment itself, rather than an inner feeling of joy engendered through eating. It thus seems difficult to explain why Maimonides extended the *oneg* requirement to Yom Tov.

(Based on a *shiur* by Rav Moshe Lichtenstein)