HONORING SHABBOS (II)

SHABBOS MEALS

On Shabbos we are obligated to have three meals. This is alluded to by the three times that the word havayim (“today”) appears in Moshe Rabbeinu’s words to the Yidden about the mon of Shabbos.

For the third Shabbos meal, the Rebbeim would generally not wash and eat challeh, and instead would eat other foods. Since the third Shabbos meal corresponds to the advanced stage of the Geula when there will be no eating, they marked this by not eating a full meal. This is also alluded to in the above posuk, where the third “hayom” is followed by the word “lo,” implying that the mon will not fall on Shabbos.

In a naamor the Rebbe Rashab emphasizes that although one does not need to eat bread at the Third Meal on Shabbos, one ought to eat something.

One should not have an unusually big meal on erev Shabbos so that one will be able to enjoy the Shabbos meal properly in the evening.

Recognizing that family members can sometimes drift apart, in 5734 (1974) the Rebbe called for an effort to increase cohesion within families by utilizing the togetherness of Shabbos meals. (In fact, this call is listed among the Rebbe’s activities for that year, at the beginning of HaYom Yom.)

The Rebbe noted that even many frum families need to invest effort in this direction, since during the week family members are all preoccupied with their individual responsibilities (as indeed they ought to do). By coming together for the Shabbos meal, and discussing ideas that are befitting and relevant to Shabbos, they will be fortifying the unity of a healthy family, which will continue to be felt throughout the following week.

AMBIANCE OF SONG

The Tzemach Tzedek said that the reason that the Alter Rebbe did not include the traditional zemiros in his Siddur was that he hoped that his chassidim would discuss Chassidus at the table. The Rebbe Maharash said that he hoped that they would sing niggunim instead. The Rebbe Rashab reconciled both of these statements.

Reb Yosef Yitzchok, son of the Tzemach Tzedek, married the daughter of Reb Yaakov Yisroel of Tcherkas, son of Reb Mottl Chernobyl and son-in-law of the Mitteler Rebbe. He settled near his father-in-law in Hornosteypol, and from time to time would visit his father and brothers in Lubavitch. During the lifetime of the Tzemach Tzedek he became rov in the town of Ovrutch and a Rebbe to the Chernobyl chassidim there.

CONSIDER

What are the respective roles of (a) the food and (b) the spiritual atmosphere? Why are they both necessary?

Why would chassidim prefer discussing Chassidus or singing niggunim—over zemiros?

Which is easier?

During one of those visits to Lubavitch, Reb Yosef Yitzchok asked his father at the Shabbos table why it is not our custom to sing or recite the zemiros that are customarily heard among Yidden everywhere. (Why “sing or recite”? Because in many chassidic communities, the words of these zemiros are neither sung to a structured melody, nor recited, but are chanted in a certain traditional singsong.) The Tzemach Tzedek’s response was, “Say!” The room was quiet and Reb Yosef Yitzchok began to say the zemiros as they would do in Chernobyl.

The Tzemach Tzedek then said: “The Alter Rebbe did not include those zemiros in the Siddur, because he wanted people to exchange words of Torah during the meal. As to the practice of people who say neither divrei Torah nor zemiros – like Reb Moshe (a certain simple man who lived then in Lubavitch), and instead eat soup and noodles, noodles and soup…. that was not the Alter Rebbe’s intention.”

That man’s sons, who were respected chassidim, were present. Alarmed by the harsh words of the Tzemach Tzedek, they quickly ran home, only to find their father almost choking on his soup and noodles...

For Shabbos Selichos 5637 (1877), many guests arrived in Lubavitch. At the Friday evening meal the Rebbe Maharash related that at certain times the previous Rebbe used to say zemiros at the Shabbos table. He then added: “My great-grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, held that the zemiros of Shabbos ought to flow forth spontaneously (darfn zich zogn). Moreover, when words of that kind do in fact flow spontaneously, such words are real, whereas if they are simply mouthed, they don’t count as words at all.”

The Rebbe Maharash then began to sing the zemiros, and all those present joined in. The Rebbe Rashab later recounted to his son, the Frierdiker Rebbe, that at that time those zemiros had such a moving impact on him that he had to restrain himself with all his might not to burst out in tears.

Regarding the assertion of the Alter Rebbe that the zemiros of Shabbos are only worth saying when they issue forth naturally, the Frierdiker Rebbe remarked, “It goes without saying that this path is only for tzaddikim. If a person utters words that are real, whereas if they are simply mouthed, they don’t count as words at all.”

The Rebbe Maharash wanted his sons, the Rebbe Rashab and the Raza, to be fluent in the Chassidus. It is alluded to by the three times that the word hayom (“today”) appears in Moshe Rabbeinu’s words to the Yidden about the mon of Shabbos.

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FISH ON SHABBOS

Can I remove bones from fish on Shabbos?

One of the prohibited melachos on Shabbos is borer, separating. Thus, if two things are mixed or mingled, you may not separate one of them from the mixture. However, if it is done in the manner of eating (derekh achila), it’s considered eating and not borer.

To qualify as derekh achila, it must meet these three conditions: (1) You take the item you want from the ones you don’t want; (2) without a special sorting device; (3) close to the time when you wish to eat or use it. Taking away the bad, on the other hand, is considered fixing the food and constitutes a melacha.

One who wishes to serve boneless fish may remove the fish from the bones just before the meal starts, but one may not remove the bones from the fish. The skin, however, may be removed close to the meal, just as one is allowed to peel fruit, since people don’t commonly reach the food otherwise and this is considered derekh achila.

If one removes the bone along with some fish attached, and will discard them both, it is debated amongst poskim whether the attached fish is sufficient to make the bone be considered “good,” or is it insignificant since it will be discarded with the bone. The Alter Rebbe in Shulchan Aruch seems to allow a similar case regarding a fly in the soup, yet in the Siddur he labels it all as “waste” and forbids removing it.

What about during eating? Some rishonim hold that while actually eating, even removing the bones is considered “derekh achila” and not fixing or preparing the food. The Alter Rebbe doesn’t discuss this scenario. The Mishna Berura rules stringently, but adds that one need not protest those who follow the lenient opinion.

One is certainly allowed to remove the bones from his mouth while eating as that is “derekh achila.”

How about small thin bones? The Tzemach Tzedek suggests that perhaps removing small bones (such as in herring) should be “derekh achila” since one can’t eat the herring without separating them, and more so since they were never noticeable as something distinct (and is akin to dividing one entity). Contemporary poskim allow removing it for young children who cannot remove them in their mouths, and this is considered derekh achila.

The Chidushei Harim of Ger would often ask R. Shilem about the Tzemach Tzedek and Chassidus Chabad.

Once, R. Shilem quoted an explanation from the Alter Rebbe in Likutei Torah, but the Chidushei Harim said that it can’t be, since he’s fluent in Likutei Torah and he doesn’t recall it. R. Shilem directed him to the section on Shir Hashirim, of which the Chidushei Harim had been unaware. The Chidushei Harim asked to borrow it and he later said that he learned from it only when he had “pure thoughts.”

On another occasion, the Chidushei Harim asked whether the Tzemach Tzedek used twelve challos on Shabbos and wore a kittel to the seder. When R. Shilem replied in the negative to both practices, the Chidushei Harim replied, “The Tzemach Tzedek studied by great Rebbes; we can only imitate our Rebbes.”

R. Shilem and his wife didn’t have children for many years. Once, while in Warsaw, his wife pleaded with the Chidushei Harim and didn’t want to leave until she would get a promise. The Chidushei Harim told her to ask her grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek, since he can help her without a doubt if he wishes, and he told her to say so in his name. She relayed the message to the Tzemach Tzedek and she was indeed blessed with a child.

THE HIPPIE’S MITZVAH

Reb Leibl Schapiro of Miami relates:

A bochur in a non-chassidish yeshiva, who had been inspired by Chassidus, began becoming more stringent in his mitzva observance. After a while, he also stopped shaving his beard, to the dismay of his peers and teachers.

One day, his rosh yeshiva chastised him for the new path he had taken. “Your beard makes you look like a hippie,” he quipped.

Feeling forlorn, this bochur poured out his heart to the Rebbe. He also repeated the remark his rosh yeshiva had made about his beard.

The Rebbe responded, “The Torah (Vayikra 19:27) states clearly that it is forbidden to destroy one’s beard. According to many authorities, this means that cutting the beard is a lav d’oraisa (biblical transgression).”

“And indeed,” concluded the Rebbe emphatically, “tell your rosh yeshiva, that if a Jewish hippie lets his beard grow, then he indeed fulfills this mitzva every single day!”

(As heard from Reb Leibl Schapiro)