



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

It's a little big mitzvah.

It requires almost nothing in material terms, and can be accomplished in mere minutes. It's often neglected, overshadowed by the many more significant-seeming mitzvot with which it shares space. Yet the most remarkable things are said about it. The Talmudic sage Reb Yosi aspired to share a place in the world to come with the people who faithfully fulfilled this mitzvah. Aruch HaShulchan believes that it was revealed to Moshe at Sinai. Kabbalistic literature refers to it as "the Meal of Perfect Faith, the Joy of the Holy King".

The little big mitzvah is Seudah Shlisheet, the third Shabbat meal. What makes it so big is certainly not the ceremony that surrounds it. Though Rambam ruled that we ought to recite Kiddush (the same as at Shabbat lunch) at Seudah Shlisheet, it is our practice not to recite Kiddush. Further, the requirement for "Lechem Mishnah" (double loaves) that characterizes the earlier Shabbat meals is considerably weaker - and quite possibly non-existent - at Seudah Shlisheet. In fact it's not even clear that bread is required at all. What makes Seudah Shlisheet "big" is not the ceremony; it's the timing.

In terms of technical Halacha, the mitzvah of Seudah Shlisheet can be fulfilled as early as a half hour into Shabbat afternoon. But in lived reality it is eaten later, in Shabbat's final hours. In purely practical terms this is a time when Shabbat is often barely hanging on. Our minds have already begun to drift toward Sunday, and we

may even find ourselves counting down the time until the business of the week can be commenced. In spiritual terms, the intensity of the Divine intimacy that settled on Friday night is becoming attenuated, thinning out with each successive hour. Which makes a decision to hold on to Shabbat, to cherish the waning hours, to make them no less "shabbosdik" than Shabbat's earlier hours, to amp up the sense of intimacy and even arouse a longing for the holiness that will soon be departing, is a profoundly pious gesture, one which reflects a deep and mature understanding of Shabbat and appreciation of its character.

And the vehicle of choice for both Halachists and mystics, is Seudah Shlisheet.

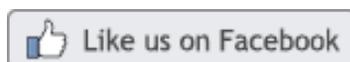
Which is Reb Yosi desired to spend eternity with the Seudah Shlisheet crowd.

More to come next week, but don't wait!

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