



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

Women are obligated to eat Seudah Shlisheet.

That's the entirety of the Halacha 4 of Chapter 291 of the Shulchan Aruch. This ruling is derived from the words of Rabbenu Tam, the 12th century giant of Franco-German Jewry (and grandson of Rashi.) Rabbenu Tam is cited approvingly in both Sephardic and Ashkenazic sources, and there is not a dissenting opinion to be found anywhere.

Mishna Brurah, commenting on this uncontested Halacha, offers two reasons for Seudah Shlisheet's non-gendered identity (the second one borrowed from the Talmud's statements about women being fully included in the obligations to light Hanukah candles, read the Megillah, and to drink the four cups at the Seder) : "*for when it comes to all matters of Shabbat, men and women are equal.... And also because women too were beneficiaries of the miracle of the manna from which the obligation of three Shabbat meals is derived.*"

Why is this so interesting (to me at very least)? Because we are Orthodox Jews. We are Shabbat-loving Orthodox Jews. We are Shabbat-loving Orthodox Jews who are sensitive to gender inclusiveness. All of which should make Seudah Shlisheet a mitzvah that we enthusiastically embrace, not one we dismiss as optional. It's time to give Seudah Shlisheet the love and respect it deserves.

Maybe the reason we haven't done so heretofore is that an act of eating just doesn't feel to us like a real Mitzvah. Eating doesn't have the same feel as visiting the sick, or feeding the poor, or comforting

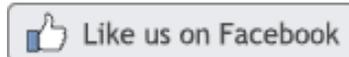
the mourner, or putting on tefillin. What we need to do is to think about this eating in a different way. What the Halacha is asking us to do is to experience this eating as being a physical anchor for a spiritual experience. This late-day sitting down and eating in honor of Shabbat is intended to extend and expand our weekly immersion in holy time, to lengthen our experience of Shabbat, and to grant Shabbat maximal opportunity to launch us into the coming week as holy people. Seen this way, Seudah Shlisheet is as real a Mitzvah as they come.

As the Aruch HaShulchan writes, *"and many great and awesome matters are bound up with Shabbat's three meals"*.

I love feedback!
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