ב. יש להזהר בליל פסח שאוכלים בהיסבה, שלא להשיח בסעודה כלל, שמא יקדים קנה לושט, ויבא לידי סכנה. ומכל מקום מותר לספר ביציאת מצרים, ושומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע. [חזו"ע ח"ב עמ' קה]

ג. מצוה על כל אדם ללמוד תורה על שלחנו, שכל שלחן שלא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים [ראה אבות ג, ג]. וילמד משנה או הלכה או אגדה או ספרי מוסר, ואינו יוצא במה שמברך ברכת המזון. ועכ"פ יאמר איזה מזמור. וטוב לומר אחר ברכת המוציא מזמור ה' רועי לא אחסר שהוא דברי תורה ותפלה על מזונותיו. [משנ"ב סק"א]

On the Seder night

2) On the Seder night when the custom is to eat while reclining, one must take care not to speak during the meal since then the danger of food entering the trachea instead of the esophagus is a genuine possibility. Nevertheless, it is permissible to discuss the topic of the Exodus from Egypt. No harm can come from fulfilling a mitzvah.[268]

Discussing Torah

3) During every meal, the people partaking of it must discuss Torah. Any meal at which the participants did not speak any words of Torah is considered a meal consisting of food offered to idols. Therefore, at every meal one should make sure to recite a mishna, a halakha, a midrash or an ethical teaching. One cannot fulfill this obligation simply by reciting *Birkat Hamazon*. At the very least, one must recite a chapter of *Tehillim*. It is recommended to recite chapter 23 of *Tehillim* (*Hashem Ro'i lo ehsar*) immediately after reciting *hamotzi* [and after eating some bread].[269]

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268. This was explained in the previous footnote. See the *Yalkut Yosef Pesah English Edition*, page 329.

269. ***Birkat Hamazon* as Torah Study**

Our Sages taught (*Avot* 3:3): Ribbi Shim'on said, "If three people eat together at one table and do not discuss Torah topics, it is as if they have eaten food that had been offered to idols. If three people eat at one table and discuss Torah topics it is as they have eaten at God's Table. Rabbenu Ovadya of Bertinoro commented that by reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, it is as if the people at the meal have discussed a Torah topic. The *Tosefot Yom Tov* retorted that he is uncomfortable with this ruling. Certainly the first part of the mishna is not speaking about nonobservant people who would eat and not bother to recite *Birkat Hamazon*, which is a Torah obligation. In general, the subject of tractate *Avot* is the behavior of pious people. Therefore, he explained that the people eating must discuss some Torah topic besides reciting *Birkat Hamazon*. The *Mishna Berura* (170:1) concurred with the stringent opinion.

Harav Yaakov of Emden (cited by Harav HIDA in *Petah Enayim*) defended Rabbenu Ovadya from the attacks of the *Tosefot Yom Tov*, but a number of *Aharonim* cited proof from Rabbenu Yona and Rabbenu Shimshon bar Tzemah that it is necessary to actually discuss Torah during a meal and that reciting *Birkat Hamazon* is insufficient. They also cited a passage from the holy *Zohar* (*parashat Teruma* page 153b) to this effect. The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (157:17) offers a recommended list of passages to be studied during a meal.

The *Mishna Berura*, citing the *Shene Luhot Haberit*, recommended reciting chapter 23 of *Tehillim* at the beginning of the meal. This is based on the holy *Zohar's* teaching (*parashat Beshalah* page 62a) that it is necessary to pray for one's food before eating.

After the meal but before *Birkat Hamazon*

Rabbenu Moshe Alshikh (commentary to *Vayikra* 16) recommended that one recite a Torah passage after having eaten and staved one's hunger, since a person can understand the depths of Torah knowledge much better when he is calm and satisfied physically. This is alluded to in the mishna (*Avot* 3:3), "Three people who *have eaten* at one table and have not spoken words of Torah...." Since it states "who have eaten" and not "who are eating" it means that the proper time for discussing Torah subjects is after eating.

The *Seder Hayom* (Unit *Birkat Hamazon*) states that if the person did not discuss Torah during the meal he should discuss Torah after eating but before reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, explaining that "the table and the food can

ובבן איש חי כתב שמנהג מר זקנו הג״ר משה חיים ז״ל היה לומר קודם נטילת מים אחרונים ״מים אחרונים חובה״, ולפעמים היה סומך על הלכה זו במקום דבר תורה שאומרים על השלחן קודם ברכת המזון כשאין שהות לומר דברי תורה, כי זו הלכה מתורה שבעל פה [ראה ש״ע ר״ס קפא], ודבר בעיתו מה טוב. [באו״ח פי שלח לך הלכה ז]

Harav Yosef Hayim, author of *Ben Ish Hai*, wrote that his grandfather, Harav Moshe Hayim, had the practice of declaring, "One is obligated to perform the mitzvah of *mayim aharonim* [before reciting *Birkat Hamazon*]," just before he fulfilled that mitzvah. When he was pressed for time he fulfilled his obligation of studying Torah during the meal with this simple declaration. After all, this is a halakha and it is part of the Oral Torah. Since he declared this just as he was about to fulfill that halakha, it is even more fitting and commendable.[270]

receive God's blessing only after Torah has been discussed at the table. Without Torah, the table does not gain the status of the Altar, nor is it considered to be in God's Presence, since a person who eats without discussing Torah has demonstrated that he has eaten purely for the sake of his own physical enjoyment. Any activity performed for one's physical gain only and is not geared for any spiritual gain is an activity that belongs to the forces of evil, where there is none of God's blessing." According to this, it is clear that there must be a Torah discussion at the table before *Birkat Hamazon* is recited.

Singing praises to God

The pious Rav Yosef Yaabetz, cited in *Reshit Hokhma* (Unit *Kedusha*, chapter 15), wrote that "during the time that the *Bet Hamikdash* stands one receives atonement through the sacrifices and the accompanying song of the *levi'im*. Nowadays, we feed the poor in place of offering sacrifices and we discuss Torah topics in place of the *levi'im's* song. Some people sing poems or psalms after eating, and this fine practice helps to protect one from punishment. Nevertheless, the greatest protection is achieved through discussing halakhot or a novel interpretation of some verse or midrashic passage. There are thus three categories. The most pious are those who discuss Torah, the ordinary people sing God's praises and the wicked do nothing. An impure spirit contaminates those who refrain from discussing Torah, but a spirit of holy purity descends on those who discuss Torah."

Thinking about Torah during the meal

In the same passage of *Reshit Hokhma*, Rav Yaabetz and another, anonymous source are quoted saying that while someone chews his food he should think about Torah topics, besides the Torah discussion during the meal. This complements the instructions given to Maran Harav Yosef Karo by the angel, as written is *sefer Maggid Mesharim* (*parashat Behar*): "It would be admirable if you would meditate on *mishnayot* while you are eating. Then your act of eating and drinking will be considered equal to *korbanot* and wine libations for the Blessed Holy One."

Eating alone

The *sefer She'elat Rav* (page 257) states that although the mishna speaks of three people eating at a table, when a person eats alone he likewise must recite words of Torah. The mishna mentions three people because their obligation is much greater since the lack of Torah discussion between them is apparent to any onlooker. Furthermore, the impression made by three people discussing Torah together is superior to that of one person alone, but one person reciting Torah passages to himself is also an important accomplishment. This can be compared to the lesson taught in *Avot* 3:2, that when two people discuss Torah together God's Presence joins them, but the act of one person studying Torah alone is likewise praiseworthy.

Eating cake

The *sefer She'elat Rav* claims that all this applies only to a meal with bread but when eating other foods without bread it does not apply. There is no proof that this is so, however, and logic dictates that it should apply to any session where people eat. This matter needs more research.

Another point stated in *sefer She'elat Rav* is that one cannot fulfill this obligation by studying Torah just before the meal, even if the discussion is on the subject of the meal. Also, it suggests that yeshivah students are not obligated to discuss Torah during their meals, but it is questionable whether this ruling is reliable.

270. The *Ben Ish Hai* (preface to *parashat Behar*) emphasized the importance of studying Torah during meals. When a Jew eats, he releases sparks of holiness from places

ד. שנים ממתינים זה את זה בקערה, שאם ישבו שנים לאכול מקערה אחת, והאחד מסלק את ידו מן הקערה בשביל לשתות או בשביל לחתוך לחם, חבירו מפסיק מלאכול עד שיגמור השני. אבל אם הם שלשה אין השנים פוסקין בשביל האחד. [ש"ע סי' קע ס"ב]

ודוקא אם אוכלים בקערה אחת צריך האחד להמתין לחבירו, אבל אם אוכל כל אחד בקערה לבדו פשיטא דאין צריך להמתין. [כה"ח ס"ק טז]

Eating from a common bowl

4) If two people are eating together from one common serving bowl and one of the two stops eating in order to drink or slice some bread, the other person must stop taking food from the serving bowl while the first person is occupied.[271] If three or more people are eating together, it is not necessary for two people to refrain from taking from the serving bowl just because one person is busy doing something else.[272]

All of this applies only if both people are eating from the same serving bowl. If each person has his own bowl, there is no reason for one to stop eating when his colleague interrupts his meal.[273]

where they have been imprisoned and enables them to rise to their proper domain. His food, which is either of vegetable or animal origin, rises to the level of human beings when he consumes it. Through studying Torah during the meal, he raises these holy sparks into the realm of the spirit. The act of reciting the passage of *Patah Eliyahu* is particularly efficient in accomplishing this spiritual goal.

271. Our Sages taught this in *Berakhot* 47a, and Maran included it in the *Shulhan Arukh* (170:2).

Interrupting one's meal to wait for a colleague

When two people eat together from one common serving bowl, one must refrain must taking from the bowl while his friend is drinking, as mentioned in this halakha. The *Levush* explained that this is necessary since the person drinking might spy his colleague taking from the serving bowl, become upset and choke on his beverage.

It does not appear that Rabbenu Yona agreed with this interpretation, however. He explained that it is necessary to wait while one's colleague is busy drinking or getting a piece of bread because this is proper etiquette. Accordingly, this halakha applies to other situations besides when one person is drinking. This is likewise the opinion of the *Magen Avraham*, the *Mishna Berura* (170:13) and the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (170:17). In fact, the *Halakha Berura* (page 21) demonstrated that Riveva"n and Rabbenu Mano'ah ruled that this halakha applies even when one person turns to attend to something unrelated to the meal altogether.

The *Eliya Rabba* (cited in the *Mishna Berura* 170:12 and the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 170:16), citing the *Tzeda Laderekh*, ruled that it is necessary for one person to wait for the other only if the interruption is momentary. It does not apply if one person stops eating to converse.

272. The *Hesed La'alafim* (170:3) wrote that if people are eating together with a great Torah scholar, or with one of their parents or an older brother, it is proper that they all refrain from taking food from the serving bowl while that person has interrupted his meal.

273. This is the ruling of the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (170:16) and the *Arukh Hashulhan* (170:4). The *Halakha Berura* (page 22) commented that this appears to concur with the ruling of Rabbenu Menahem Hame'iri and Rabbenu Aharon Halevi, but that the *Nimuke Yosef* states that a person must refrain from eating his portion until his colleague receives his portion, and it seems from this that this halakha applies even when each person has his own bowl. It could be, however, that the *Nimuke Yosef's* rule applies only when the second person has had nothing to eat yet. In a case where both friends are eating already, each from his own bowl, it could be that when one person stops to drink the other person does not have to stop eating. Nevertheless, the *Halakha Berura* concluded that even when each person has his own portion, one should wait for the other.

In practice, no one observes such a stringency. We can certainly rely on the *Kaf Hahayim*.