

CHAPTER 11 - EATING A MEAL

by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld

When a meal begins with bread, the bread is grasped with both hands (167:3-4); a significant piece (but less than the size of an egg for each person) is partly detached from the side of the bread (see 167:1); the blessing "...Who brings bread out of the earth" is recited (167:2); and the piece is detached. The person who recited the blessing should eat some of that bread (167:20) immediately; if there was an irrelevant interruption, the blessing must be repeated (167:6,7). If several people are eating together (see 167:11-13), the host should recite the blessing (see 167:14) and distribute bread to the others (167:18) after they answer "Amen" (167:16). He should not recite the blessing for them unless he too is eating (see 167:19-20); they should not eat before he does unless they have their own bread (see 167:6,15), and he should also be offered the other dishes first (167:17). On errors and cases of doubt about the blessing see 167:8-10. There should be salt on the table before bread is eaten (see 167:5); on the importance of eating salt and drinking water see 170:22 and 179:6.

A person should preferably eat only with people whom he knows; see 170:20. When several people are eating together, they should not talk (170:1), should not stare at each other (170:4), should behave politely (see 170:2,6), and should do whatever the host asks (170:5). A person should not be greedy (see 170:7-13) or behave in ways that others might find distasteful (170:14-17,22). On giving some of the food to servants or outsiders see 169:1-3 and 170:3,18-19,21. When it is required to wash the hands between courses (see 173:1-2), they must be washed in water and dried (173:3). On washing after going to the toilet during a meal see 170:1. Food should not be treated disrespectfully or in a way that may spoil its appearance (see 171:1-5), and crumbs should be properly disposed of (see 180:4).

After the blessing on bread has been recited, separate blessings need not be recited on other foods that are served as part of the meal; but foods that are not ordinarily part of the meal require separate blessings unless they are eaten with bread (see 168:8;176:1;177:1-5). When a separate blessing is required, it need be recited only the first time that food is served; see 179:5. Wine served during a meal requires a blessing ("...Who creates the fruit of the vine"; 174:1) unless it was also served before the meal (see 174:4) or was expected (see 174:5;179:4); but other beverages served during a meal or after wine do not require separate blessings (174:2,7). If a second type of wine is drunk, the blessing "...Who is good and does good" is recited unless it is not as good as the first wine (see 175:1-3,6); this is not done by a person who is eating alone (175:4). One person may recite the blessings on wine for everyone if they agree; see 174:8 and 175:5.

A person should not leave the room during a meal except to fulfill a religious obligation (see 178:2,6), but if he intends to return or takes food with him (see 178:4) he need not say grace (see Ch.14) before leaving (see 178:2), and if he has kept his mind on the meal, or if others remained in the room, he need not repeat the blessings when he returns (see 178:1-2). On a person who is eating out of doors see 178:2-3. Dozing during a meal, or leaving to go to the toilet, is not considered an interruption (178:7).

When preparations for saying grace have begun, a person should not eat or drink without making a new blessing; see 179:1-3. The tablecloth should not be removed, and bread should not be removed from the table, before grace is said (180:1-2), and the knife should be covered up (180:5). Crumbs should be cleared away from the place where the hands will be washed; see 180:3. The fingers should be washed (and dried; see 181:8) after the meal (see 181:1,4-5,10), but no blessing is recited (181:7). Any liquid may be used (181:9), but it should not be very hot (181:3), and it should not be spilled on the ground (181:2). When many people are eating together, on the order in which they wash see 181:6.

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