Starting Seder Early and Preparing on Shabbat and Yom Tov

Q: As much as I have tried, I cannot keep my kids from falling asleep halfway through the Seder. Is there an opinion which allows starting the Seder early?

A: This is a common problem, and since the whole idea of the Seder is to convey the message of the Exodus to the children, it is a shame that they would be the ones to miss that experience.

There is indeed a tendency to start the Seder late and stretch it almost indefinitely. If not for the requirement to eat the Afikoman before midnight (to be discussed in a future post), I believe people would have carried on with the Haggada until dawn. Some people enjoy this kind of Seder and they are entitled to it, but when the participants at a Seder, whether they are children or adults, are at risk of losing the whole experience because of fatigue, a solution should be presented.

That solution exists, and it appears in none other than the Tur Orah Hayyim (472), the Halakhic compilation by Rabenu Yaakov ben Rabenu Asher:

וייהו שלחנו ערוך כדי יום,_colors:blue,green; מבע לאכול מידי השבת... משומ שמאלה למעלה ולאameda בשבי הלוחות שלא ישנו.
אבל לא אוכל קודה ששתר... ודנ מאמל הממצ אינו אלא בليل...

One should have the table set in advance in order to eat at nightfall… since it is a Mitzvah to eat as soon as possible so the children will not fall asleep… one cannot eat before darkness because the time for eating Matzah is at night.

It is true that some commentators did not feel comfortable with the Tur’s ruling that the Seder could start that early. They have interpreted his statement as referring to the first eating of the night, which is the dipping of the celery, or karpas. However, it is clear from the phrasing of the Tur that he refers to the eating of the matzah itself. First, he says that the reason for starting early is that the children will not fall asleep, and if we wait for darkness to start the Kiddush, we have gained nothing. Secondly, and more importantly, he says: “one cannot eat Matzah before darkness”, meaning that other things, such as Kiddush and karpas, could be consumed before darkness.
The definition of darkness is contested in Halakha and it varies between 50 and 72 minutes after sunset. However, the simplest tool to measure darkness is our eyesight.

Conclusion: The earliest you could eat Matzah is after darkness. Calculate the time of darkness in your area, either by adding 50-72 minutes to sunset, or by going outside the night before Pesah to see when it gets dark. Then figure out how much time you need to get from the Kiddush to מוציא מצה – the point in the Haggada where we eat the Matzah, and start your Seder so you will be able to eat Matzah after it gets dark.

Sources:

Q: Can I start the Seder early on Saturday night, before the official time for Havdala?

A: Following yesterday’s Halakha several readers asked if the ruling that one could start the Seder earlier applies also on the second night, which falls this year on Saturday night.

They had two concerns, which I will present here and address one at a time:

A) One is not allowed to prepare from Shabbat to Yom Tov, so how can we set the table and get ready for the second Seder?

This concern is not unique to our situation. It also exists when the second Yom Tov falls on a weekday, since one is not allowed to prepare from one Yom Tov to another.

Interestingly enough, When we refer to the Halakhic literature we find that until the 15th century the concept of preparation from Shabbat to a weekday or to Yom Tov was much more limited than it is today. It was understood as a prohibition of benefiting on Yom Tov from something which was created on Shabbat. The creation of a new thing could have occurred through human action (such as chopping vegetables) or natural processes (eggs laid on Shabbat). Today the
practice is to avoid any action on Shabbat which can save time on Motzae Shabbat. This practice was first presented and promoted by rabbis of 16th century Germany.

This analysis, of course, does not come to diminish the status of the practice today, but it could be used to make concessions when we encounter a special situation.

That special situation, the preparation for second Yom Tov, was discussed by R Hayyim Benveniste, who lived in 17th century Constantinople:

“[If Pesah falls on Saturday night] one should not set the table on Shabbat but rather on Friday afternoon… I also think that one should not prepare the table for the second day on the first Yom Tov, but people do not keep this practice”

A century later, the great R Hayyim Palachi of Smyrna explained why people prepare the table on Yom Tov: “we must say that they are righteous [and not sinners] because they do not have ample houses. If they set the tables on Friday for Saturday night, they will have no room to sleep. They should therefore start setting the table after midday on Shabbat”

Note that R Palachi did not suggest that people will start setting the table after Shabbat is over, because then the Seder will start too late. As explained in the previous post, the concern for the ability of the children to stay alert, and of the guest to enjoy the Seder, is a serious Halakhic consideration. By extension, any activity which is allowed on Shabbat for the sake of Shabbat or on Yom Tov for the sake of Yom Tov, could be performed for the upcoming Yom Tov.

The consideration, as appears in the writing of R Hayyim Palachi, and as intuitively understood by many generations of observant Jews, is that one cannot fully enjoy the current Shabbat or Yom Tov if he is stressed and worried about celebrating the second Yom Tov.

Similarly, R Shimon Grinfeld of Hungary (1860-1930) rules that if the activity is done on Shabbat in order to alleviate stress and feel better, and not in order to save time, it is not considered preparation. In our case also, people are not preparing in order to save time, but rather because waiting until after Havdalah will cause irreparable damage to the Yom Tov celebration, which in turn is now ruining their Shabbat experience as well.
The example which R Grinfeld uses is washing dishes, even if they are not going to be used on Shabbat, because the sight of dirty dishes is bothersome. This was also the practice of my grandfather Hakham Shaul Fetaya, and it was also confirmed to me personally by R Yitzhak Abadi of Lakewood, who allows even scrubbing of pots and pans for that reason.

The second concern regarding early Seder is:

B) The Havdalah is included in the Kiddush, and the Kiddush is the first part of the Haggada, so if we start the Seder early we will be saying the Havdalah before Shabbat is over.

This concern does not apply on a weekday Yom Tov because there is no Havdala between the first and second Yom Tov. However, the question whether one is allowed to recite Havdala early was raised in different circumstances. For example, if one needs to travel on Motzae Shabbat, or in places where Shabbat ends very late.

The answer to that question was that one can say Havdalah before Shabbat is over, but he should postpone the blessing on the candle for later.

**Conclusion:**

One can prepare for the second night as early as needed to start the Seder on time, but not earlier than midday of Shabbat or first Yom Tov. On the Shabbat preceding Yom Tov only activities which are permitted on Shabbat should be performed. On the first Yom Tov, only activities which are permitted on Yom Tov should be performed.

When starting the Seder before nightfall, one can recite the Kiddush with the Havdalah, but skip the blessing on the candles and say it later when Shabbat is over. When that time comes, one can stop reciting the Haggada in order to say the blessing of בורא מאורי האש - and then light Yom Tov candles. After this, he can resume the reciting of the Haggada.

**Sources:**
רבי חיים בנו נבנישטי, מסכת הגרות, אורה חיים, ח落ち: מכימו השולחן להפרש היוםيناו אלאgaardו מערב שבת
(אזרח"י, וירל"ל), เมษายน החזור אחרון דבי ורב ח"ל. דישהו הלכתי עד ראשית השולחן בים רחמן של
פסח לפורך היוםינהו אלי שבת מברך חלבי על רחובות ממאית הגרות בו.

רבי חיים פאלאצ'י, דית הלשון, עמודי ג: רבינו נביי ייש הלך ל복ה כתיב כא עלה בתיו עליה מרורות ופה ישבו כל
ובるもの הלחי, וꦔה הוה רחוב בשעה י"ב מדרים כל

רבי שמואל גודנטל, דית הגרות, ח' חקיקא: מזכיר סעופת כולם וחלפי שמלת触摸 על די חולא כי לא אכד... קווריא וא
זכות חיה והʐויהו חומז שיא להשיית באל חולו... וירק ושרשאואו אלי ופיור ואור ארכו לשון העזרות
בשכוף כי להרודו הפרור ואהמ מוצאי ששת קייד מרגיע שבחות קיוד nào
יחד... מומר

ש"ת מעות חיל חלק א kısmı כ
רבי חיים דוד הלוי, דית הגרות, שע"ת מ伸び: כל: הלכורת משות ישכול להבודיל להרהר הזרחים עד חלחלה, חכירו
ביברת (כ"ב) ל. ע"בשהמשלש על מוצע שבח שבח, ואר诤ר ב"ۃ יהודה כותב שמלת מחפלシリ שמלת מוצאי שבח
ושריפ ושאר שPrefab-threat לחרים. חמישה מברך חלפי שמלת דחי על רחובות י"ב חזרות הלכתיים... כי דברpusプte hook שולח
שלא הלכה ייח לבודהים בקיצה שבת אלי שחרי ולהקシステム על התווה לזרחים... כי דבר pusプte hook שולח
ומכיר לחשופת על מוצאי שבת קיוד לבודהים בקיצה שבת מוצאי שבת פמולות המנועה לבהבדיל
מידי, אבל לא יברך על תום, וב EditorGUI בנסים יולה על צאצא המוכרים 숲.