

## 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:

ויהיה שולחנו ערוך מבעוד יום, כדי לאכול מיד כשתחשך... משום שמצוה למהר ולאכול בשביל התינוקות שלא ישנו.  
אבל לא יאכל קודם שתחשך... דזמן אכילת מצה אינו אלא בלילה

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 Halakah 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:

רבינו יעקב בן רבינו אשר, טור אורח חיים, הלכות פסח, סימן תעב:

ויהיה שולחנו ערוך מבעוד יום, כדי לאכול מיד כשתחשך. ואף אם הוא בבית המדרש יקום, משום שמצוה למהר ולאכול, בשביל התינוקות שלא יישנו. אבל לא יאכל קודם שתחשך, אף על גב דבשאר שבתות וימים טובים יכולין להוסיף מחול על הקודש, פסח שאני דזמן אכילת מצה אינו אלא בלילה דומיא דפסח

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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 בנבנישתי, כנסת הגדולה, אורח חיים, תמד: אין לסדר השולחן לצורך הלילה אלא יסדרהו מערב שבת (מהר"י וייל ז"ל), וכן כתבתי אחרי רואי דברי הרב ז"ל. ונראה לי שהוא הדין דאין מסדרין השולחן ביום ראשון של פסח לצורך הלילה דאין יום טוב מכין לחבירו ולא ראיתי נזהרים בזה

רבי חיים פאלאצ'י, חיים לראש, עמוד יז: ובוודאי יש לדון לכף זכות כי אין להם בתים ועליות מרווחים ומה יעשו כיוון דצר לו המקום ללון, והטוב הוא דאחר שעה י"ב יסדרו הכל

רבי שמעון גרינפעלד, שו"ת מהרש"ג, חלק א, סימן סא: משום הכנה משבת קודש על ימי החול אין לאסור... דהיינו אם בכוונת העושה להרוויח הזמן שלא יצטרך לעשות בימי החול... ורק יען שבשבת הוא פנוי הוא רוצה לעשות הדבר הזה בשבת כדי להרוויח הטירחא או הזמן במוצאי שבת... אם רוצה להציע מטות או להדיח כלים בשביל שהבית יהיה נאה יותר... מותר

שו"ת מים חיים חלק א סימן כד

רבי חיים דוד הלוי, שו"ת מים חיים, א, כד: ולכאורה פשוט שיכול להבדיל להוציא הצבור ידי חובתם, וכדגרסינן בברכות (כז ב) ר' יאשיה מצלי של מוצאי שבת בשבת, ואמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל מתפלל אדם של מוצאי שבת בשבת ואומר הבדלה על הכוס. וכתב הטור (או"ח בסימן רצ"ג) וזו לשונו: ופירש רב האי גאון שהיה להם שום אונס שלא היה להם יין להבדיל במוצאי שבת או שהיו צריכין להחשיך על התחום לצורך מצוה... כי דבר פשוט הוא שלא היו ממהרים להתפלל של מוצ"ש בשבת אם לא בשביל אונס עכ"ל. וכך פסק מרן בשו"ע (או"ח סימן רצ"ג סעיף ג') מי שהוא אנוס כגון שצריך להחשיך על התחום לדבר מצוה יכול להתפלל של מוצאי שבת מפלג המנחה ולמעלה ולהבדיל מיד, אבל לא יברך על הנר, וכן אסור בעשיית מלאכה עד צאת הכוכבים עכ"ל