

# WHEN PASSOVER BEGINS ON SATURDAY NIGHT

Rabbi Kassel Abelson

*This paper was approved by the CJLS on December 9, 1993, by a vote of twenty-one in favor (21-0-0). Voting in favor: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Ben Zion Bergman, Elliot N. Dorff, Jerome M. Epstein, Ezra Finkelstein, Samuel Frint, Arnold M. Goodman, Susan Grossman, Jan Caryl Kaufman, Reuven Kimmelman, Judah Kogen, Aaron L. Mackler, Herbert Mandl, Lionel E. Moses, Paul Plotkin, Mayer Rabinowitz, Avram Israel Reisner, Joel E. Rembaum, Chaim Rogoff, Joel Roth, and Gordon Tucker.*

*The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.*

## שאלה

What practices are to be followed when the first night of Passover falls on a Saturday night?

## תשובה

Many of the practices that are usually performed on the night or the day before the seder are moved back to Thursday or Friday. This is done to assure the proper observance of Shabbat.<sup>1</sup>

## סיום בכורים – Thursday Morning

A first born (whether of the mother or of the father) should fast on the day before Passover. In commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt.<sup>2</sup> It is the custom for synagogues to make סיום (a public completion of the study of a tractate of the Talmud) on the morning before Passover. Since the סיום is followed by a סעודת מצוה (a festive meal which follows the performance of certain mitzvot), a first born who is present may eat, and having eaten, need not fast that day. Since a fast for the firstborn cannot take place on Shabbat or be moved to Friday, the סיום and the סעודת מצוה are held on Thursday morning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgments: This responsum is based on "A Statement on Pesah Observance," issued by the CJLS on 6 Feb. 1974. Thanks to Rabbi Noah Golinkin for his thoughtful paper, "When the First Seder Occurs on Saturday Night," which I consulted when writing this responsum.

<sup>2</sup> S.A. Orah Hayyim 470:1.

### בדיקת חמץ – *Thursday Evening*

בדיקת חמץ (search for leaven) is customarily done on the night before Passover immediately after sunset.<sup>3</sup> When Passover begins on Saturday night, the בדיקת חמץ is done on Thursday night. The blessing for בדיקת חמץ is recited. One may elect to keep enough חמץ for the Sabbath meals. If so, the כל חמירא (“All the *hametz*. . .” formula for nullifying unseen *hametz*) should not be recited at this time, since one does not want to nullify the *hametz* reserved for Shabbat. However, if the intention is to use מצה עשירה, then the כל חמירא is recited Thursday evening.

### ביעור חמץ – *Friday Morning*

This day should be treated as an ordinary erev Pesah in regard to ביעור חמץ (removal of *hametz*). The burning of the *hametz* should be completed by the fifth hour after sunrise. The stove should be kashered for Pesah. All cooking should be done in Pesah pots and only Pesah utensils should be used. Food required for Shabbat as well as for the first seder should be cooked at this time.

### *Shabbat Meals*

There are two traditional practices that present complications when the first seder is held on a Saturday night:

1. It is customary to refrain from eating matzah on the day before Pesah, so that one will eat the matzah with appetite at the seder.
2. It is customary to eat three meals on Shabbat. At least two of these meals should include food over which Hamotzi is recited.

*There are two acceptable ways of dealing with these complications:*

(A) Set aside enough *hametz* for the Sabbath meals. A *hametz* dish should be provided for the challot. Care should be taken to prevent any crumbs from coming into contact with the other dishes. To avoid such a problem it is recommended that plastic or paper plates and cutlery be used at both the Friday night and Shabbat morning meals.

No *hametz* may be eaten on erev Shabbat beyond a time approximately four hours past sunrise. Hence on Shabbat morning, the Shabbat services should be completed early enough to allow for the סעודת שבת, including challah, to be eaten in time. After the meal, the residue of the *hametz* should be flushed away or otherwise disposed of since, of course, nothing can be burned on Shabbat. The tablecloth should be carefully removed from the table, shaken outside of the house, and then stored with the other *hametz*. The כל חמירא formula should now be recited.

Synagogues that do not have a congregational seder or serve kiddushim during the Pesah holiday may have services early on Shabbat morning, and if they choose, serve a *hametz* meal, have non-Jewish staff dispose of the *hametz* and keep the kitchen locked during the holiday. The כל חמירא formula may be recited by the assemblage, or individually at home.

(B) Have full Pesah meals both on Friday evening and Saturday morning. This is possible because one may use מצה עשירה (enriched matzah, that is to say egg matzah) for

<sup>3</sup> S.A. Orah Hayyim 431:1.

המוציא. Though מצה עשירה may not be used for the seder, it is not *hametz*. It is produced under strict rabbinical supervision and may be used during Passover. It may not be used for the seder, for it is עשירה (rich) and what is required for the seder is לחמא עניא (the bread of poverty and affliction). And precisely because egg matzah may not be eaten at the seder, it may be eaten the day of the seder both at the Friday night meal and at the Shabbat lunch.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in the *Iggrot Moshe*<sup>4</sup> recommends that those who prefer to remove all *hametz* before Shabbat use מצה עשירה for המוציא and that Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals) be recited following the meal.

ולכן טוב לאלו שאין רוצים להניח חמץ על יום השבת משום שחוששים למכשולים שאפשר לבא מזה יקיימו מצוות שתי הסעודות במצה עשירה שכיון שקובע עליהן סעודות השבת יצטרך לברך המוציא ובהמ"ז.

Therefore, it is preferable for those who do not want to have *hametz* on Shabbat because they are concerned about all the complications that can flow (from having *hametz* in a *Pesahdige* house), to use מצה עשירה for the two meals. Since it is the staple of the meal, Hamotzi must be said and Birkat Hamazon recited.

Rabbi Feinstein maintains that the Rabbis did not require the removal of all *hametz* before Shabbat and the use of מצה עשירה because they did not want to put a burden on those who would find it difficult to do so. However,

לאלו הרוצים ואפשר להם להטריח ולאפות מצה עשירה לשתי הסעודות הוא עדיף.

Those who want to, and it is possible for them to take the trouble to bake מצה עשירה, it is preferable for them to do so.

In regard to those who might object and say that a פת (bread or regular matzah) is needed to say Hamotzi and Birkat Hamazon, Rabbi Feinstein reasons,

דכיון שאוכל אותם לסעודות שבת המחוייבת בפת אין לך קביעות גדולה מזה.

Since one eats them for the Sabbath meals where a פת is required, there is not greater designation as the staple than this.

And he proceeds to buttress his argument with numerous citations.

Egg matzah is easy to obtain nowadays. It would therefore seem preferable to avoid the complications of using *hametz* in an otherwise *Pesahdige* home, to use מצה עשירה (egg matzah) and not challah for the Sabbath meals.

Rabbi Feinstein does, however, impose a restriction to be in accord with those who hold a different view on the use of מצה עשירה.

אלא יאכלו שתי הסעודות במצה עשירה ולאוכלם רק בזמן היתר אכילת חמץ.

They should eat the two meals only during the hours when it would be permitted to eat *hametz* [until the fifth hour after sunrise].

However, since we hold that מצה עשירה may be used during Passover (except at the seder), we can use egg matzah until a later hour, until מנחה קטנה (approximately 2½ halakhic

<sup>4</sup> *Iggrot Moshe*, Orah Hayyim pt. 1, p. 274.

hours before sunset). Thus the second Shabbat meal may be eaten at the regular hour, and Shabbat services need not end especially early.

If the option of using מצה עשירה is used, then the כל חמירא formula is recited Shabbat morning before going to the synagogue. There are some congregations that recite the כל חמירא together in the course of the services.

### סעודה שלישית

Whether one follows the practice of eating *hametz* on Shabbat or of making the house *Pesahdige* and using מצה עשירה, the סעודה שלישית should not include either *hametz* or מצה עשירה. It should consist of a snack of fruit, fish or eggs. The meal should be completed by the time of מנחה קטנה (approximately 2½ halakhic hours before sunset).

### Conclusion

The practices relating to Pesah that begins on Saturday night are as outlined above. The option of making the house *Pesahdige* on Friday and using מצה עשירה is preferable. There is less chance of making mistakes, and it will provide a day of Shabbat relaxation before the seder. However, having *hametz* for the first two סעודות on Shabbat, and following the procedure as described, is an alternative possibility.