STARTING THE SEDER EARLY

A Step-by-Step Guide

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The following is a step-by-step guide for starting the Pesach seder early for both the first night of Pesach (when Shabbat leads into Yom Tov) and the second night of Pesach.

Halakhic Issues at Stake

A. Making an early seder

1. *The possible halakhic problems with doing an early seder*

    a. It is common during the summertime to bring in Shabbat early and to make kiddush and have our Friday night meal before it gets dark. This is based on the principle of *tosefet Shabbat*, extending the sanctity of Shabbat into the day before.

    b. However, when it comes to Pesach, many Rishonim rule that matzah may not be eaten before it is full nightfall (*tzeit hakokhavim*) because of a number of verses that state that matzah and the *korban pesach* (Pesach sacrifice) must be eaten in the evening (Ex. 12:8,18).

    c. Later poskim, starting with the Trumat HaDeshen in the 15th century, and including Shulkhan Arukh (OH 472:1), extend this to apply to all parts of the seder, beginning with kiddush (the first of the 4 cups).

2. *The basis for permitting an early seder when necessary*

    a. Not all Rishonim rule that one must wait for nightfall to eat matzah, and even those who do require nightfall, do so only for matzah. As noted, it was not until the 15th century that this requirement was extended to the 4 *kosot* and other parts of the seder.

b. Once it is sunset, we enter a period of dusk (*bein hashmashot*). Dusk is possibly day, possibly night (*safek yom safek leila)*. For rabbinic mitzvot, we are generally prepared to treat *bein hashmashot* as night, especially when there is a serious need.

c. The two Biblical mitzvot of the night are *matzah* and the telling of the story (*sippur yitziat mitzaryim*). Thus, matzah and the core parts of *maggid* may be done only once it is *tzeit*. Below (section D), we identify the core parts of *maggid*.

d. **Our approach is to <u>say the maggid in order</u> including the core sections that will need to be repeated stopping before רבן גמליאל היה אומר (the part of *maggid* that names pesach, matzah and marror). Once it is nightfall, go back and repeat the core parts and then continue from רבן גמליאל היה אומר.**

e. All other parts of the seder such as kiddush, the 4 cups of wine, reclining and *karpas* are rabbinic requirements. It is permissible to be lenient in these cases and begin the seder at sundown and the onset of *bein hashmashot*. This is because it might already be night (see 2b), and because it is questionable if night is required for these parts of the seder (2a).

f. When there is a pressing need to start earlier than sunset, one may begin at *plag* (1¼ halakhic hours before sunset), waiting until *tzeit* to recite the key parts of *maggid* and eat matzah. In doing so, we rely on the Rishonim who do not require full night for anything other than matzah (2a). Once night is not a relevant factor, we then follow the generally accepted ruling that the mitzvot of Yom Tov, especially those of a rabbinic nature, may be done during the period of *tosefet Yom Tov*, which begins as early as *plag*. This is what those who begin Shabbat early in the summertime do; beginning Shabbat at *plag* and having the Shabbat meal before sunset on Friday night.

g. [When it comes to the second seder, <u>all the mitzvot are rabbinic</u> since it is the second day of Yom Tov. As a rule, we treat the second night with the same severity as the first. When there is a pressing need, one may recite the core parts of *maggid* and eat matzah after sunset, before full nightfall.]

B. Making an early seder when Shabbat Leads into Pesach

1. Additional concerns

b. The kiddush of the seder on a Friday night includes Shabbat havdalah; we make the blessing המבדיל בן קודש לקודש "Who separates one holy day (Shabbat) from another (Yom Tov)."

b. When there is a pressing need, havdalah may be said before Shabbat is over and fulfill the mitzvah of havdalah. However, Shabbat is not over until *tzeit*. (SA OH 293:3). The practice of making havdalah before Shabbat is over is discouraged by the poskim for two reasons. One, because it can be confusing and one might think that Shabbat is over and do a *melakha* (such as cooking or making a fire) before nightfall (MB 293:9). Two, there is no *tosefet Shabbat*—extension of Shabbat—into Saturday night.

2. *Reasons to permit, when necessary, even when Shabbat goes into Yom Tov and what else to attend to:*

a. Although making an early havdalah is discouraged by poskim, it is, as a matter of halakha, permitted when necessary (see Beiur Halakha and, in particular, SA HaRav 299:10).

b. **You may not light the havdalah candle or do any *melakha* until *tzeit hakokhavim***. This means that one will make kiddush with havdalah but without the havdalah candle and the bracha of בורא מאורי האש. One does not light Yom Tov candles until *tzeit*, pausing during the seder then to light the candles.

c. Making kiddush and omitting the bracha of havdalah till *tzeit* is not an option, as one will not be permitted to drink the first *kos* or eat the *karpas* until after havdalah.

d. What about the concern that making an early havdalah will confuse people and lead them to do a *melakha*?

i. This can be addressed by educating people and making sure that the instructions on how to do the seder and when various things may be done are clear (see the or step-by-step guide below).

ii. The person making kiddush should also announce: “Although we are making havdalah now, Shabbat is not over until (time of *tzeit*). So we will not be using a havdalah candle now and we will only light Yom Tov candles at *tzeit*. Everyone should remember that using fire and cooking may not be done until that time.”

iii. The fact that the havdalah candle will not be used during kiddush/ havdalah and that Yom Tov candles will be lit only later, also serve as reminders that *melaka* is still forbidden.

C. The circumstances that justify an early seder

1. The standard practice, in accordance with the ruling of Shulkhan Arukh, is to wait to begin the seder until it is *tzeit*, and this is what should be practiced as a rule. If there is a concern that the children will not be awake for the seder, parents should first try to find ways to address this (e.g. have them nap earlier in the day) before turning to the option of doing an early seder. Similarly, if the primary concern is getting to the songs at the end earlier for the sake of the kids, consider starting the seder on time and singing the songs earlier on in the seder.

2. However, if experience has shown that waiting until *tzeit* will mean that some of the children will not have a meaningful Pesach experience, then the seder may be started at sunset following the instructions below.

3. Other scenarios that would justify an early seder include: a guest who is elderly and will not be able to stay up beyond a certain hour or having a seder with parents or in-laws who insist on starting early.

4. If even starting at sunset would significantly exclude some people's participation or lead to serious friction, then one may start at *plag,* following the step-by-step instructions, below.