

SHABBOS AND PESACH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

As we are all aware, this year erev Pesach, the day before the holiday and the Seder, falls on Shabbos. This phenomenon occurs at irregular intervals within the confines of the Jewish calendar. Sometimes, it comes every four or five years as it has during the last few decades and as it will occur again in this decade, and then at times it does not occur for many years. In any event, whenever it does come out that way it always raises special halachic and practical questions. There has been much written in rabbinic literature about the commemoration of that Shabbos, and the material produced appears to be almost inexhaustible. The Talmud tells us that Hillel rose to the position of nassi -- the head of the Sanhedrin and the religious leader of the Jewish people -- when the Bnei Beteira resigned that position, because of their inability to determine whether or not the Paschal sacrifice should be brought on Shabbos. Many of the commentators state that it was the failure of the Sanhedrin, which was under the leadership and direction of Bnei Beteira, to arrange the calendar so that erev Pesach should not fall on Shabbos, that was the real reason for their resignation and the transference of power to Hillel. Since the fixing of the permanent Hebrew calendar in the fifth century CE, having erev Pesach fall on Shabbos has, of necessity, occurred numerous times. But, when viewing the entire scope of the years involved, it actually comes rather infrequently. And, as there are so many other rules that have to be observed in fixing the dates of the holiday, having erev Pesach on Shabbos cannot always be avoided.

Taanis Bechorim - the Fast of the Firstborn -- occurs this year on Thursday before Pesach. This is because we avoid any fast days on Friday (except for the Tenth of Tevet) and certainly on Shabbos itself. Bedikas Chametz -- the search of the house to find any hidden chametz -- takes place on Thursday night, and on Friday morning, the burning of the chametz occurs. Those who still intend to eat chametz on Friday night and/or Shabbos early morning, should not recite the traditional bitul chametz on Friday morning after

burning their chametz. Since this is the nullification of any chametz that may still be in their possession, this should be recited on Shabbos morning after completing the early morning meal. Those who do not intend to eat any chametz after the burning of the chametz on Friday morning may recite the bitul chametz after the burning of the chametz. Any chametz served on Friday night or Shabbos morning should be completely consumed and any crumbs swept up carefully and flushed down the toilet. Because of the obligation to eat "bread" on Shabbos, those who do not intend to use actual bread, which is naturally chametz, may use egg matzo as their Shabbos "bread". Most people who still eat chametz on Shabbos usually do so while eating in a special place such as the porch or the balcony, not the regular dining room. The times for the burning of the chametz on Friday and the bitul chametz on Friday or Shabbos (as explained above) are the times that would normally be used on a regular erev Pesach, not falling on Shabbos.

On Shabbos it is obligatory to eat a seudah shlishis -- a third meal. This meal is usually eaten in the afternoon of Shabbos. However, since there is a prohibition to eat a meal on erev Pesach in the afternoon so that one may have a good appetite to fulfill the mitzvah of matzo at the Seder, there is a problem as to when and how to eat the seudah shlishis. There is a custom to divide the early Shabbos morning meal into two, saying birchas hamazon after the first course, then washing our hands once more and eating the "bread" with the rest of the meal and reciting birchas hamazon again at the completion of the meal. There are others who follow the custom of only eating some fruit and macaroons in the afternoon and fulfilling the minimum requirement for seudah shlishis but do not eat a meal on the afternoon of erev Pesach.

The obvious benefit of erev Pesach falling on Shabbos is that we all arrive at the Seder well rested and spiritually uplifted to celebrate the greatest night of the Jewish year. It is the genius of halacha and tradition that allows us to celebrate the time of our joy and freedom properly and in an inspiring fashion.

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