

When the First Seder Occurs on Saturday Evening

Questions and Answers prepared by Rabbi Howard R. Buechler

based upon Halachic sources and Rabbinic Responsa

Whenever Passover commences on a Saturday evening, many of the practices, which are customarily performed on the night or the day prior to Pesach, are moved back to Thursday as well as Friday in order to observe the proper observance of the Shabbat.

HOW OFTEN DOES THIS OCCUR?

The most recent occurrence of the first Seder on a Saturday night was in 2005. The next time will be in the year 2025 and then not again until 2045 !!

THE FAST OF THE FIRST BORN?

Normally, the Fast of the First Born is held on the morning prior to Passover. The fast is obligatory upon all firstborn over the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah – whoever is firstborn in the family – and is observed in gratitude of our ancestors escaping unscathed while the Egyptian firstborn were slain in the tenth and final plague. A siyum (public completion of the study of a tractate of the Talmud) is held and followed by a seudat mitzvah (a festive meal which follows the performance of a mitzvah). Therefore, a first born (of any gender) who is present has their obligation to fast superseded by the obligation to celebrate in the festive meal.

The Fast Of The First Born cannot be held on a Shabbat or a Friday. Therefore, it is held this year on Thursday morning, March 25, with our prayers commencing at 8:00 am (on-site and on Zoom) and lasting approximately one hour. In order to maintain health protocols, a break-the fast snack (pre-packaged) will be distributed following the services.

HOW AND WHEN DOES ONE PREPARE FOR PASSOVER?

The search for the hametz is usually done the evening before the first Seder. Due to the coincidence of the Sabbath, we search for the hametz in our homes on Thursday evening March 25. The Appropriate blessing is to be recited and may be found in the opening pages of any hagadah. The Kol Hamira prayer is also recited - based upon my recommendation that bread will not be used for the Shabbat meals (see below). The Kol Hamira is a formula for nullifying unseen hametz. It is customary to use a candle, wooden spoon and feather in the search for hametz (complimentary kits containing these items are available in the synagogue office).

The burning of the hametz, which formally disposes of the hametz, takes place Friday, March 26, by mid-day. At this point in the day, your home is to be kosher for Passover and we no longer are to eat any bread or hametz products (even though we start Pesach on Saturday evening!) All cleaning and preparations for Passover are to be completed prior to candle lighting for the Shabbat (by 6:57 pm Friday March 26). This includes any kashering of utensils, etc.

All cooking for the first Seder must be completed prior to Shabbat, as actual cooking is never permitted on the Sabbath. The Shabbat concludes by 7:57 pm on Saturday March 27 at which point the cooking which is permitted on yom tov (the holiday) may commence (so enjoy a leisurely and late night seder!) This is a Jewish late Saturday night live!!!

WHAT FOODS ARE EATEN ON SHABBAT?

1. All foods which are eaten on this Shabbat (March 27) are to be Kosher for Passover. They must have been cooked in Kosher for Passover pots and only Passover utensils are utilized.
2. There is one firm Halachic opinion which permits the use of challah or challah rolls only on Friday evening and until 9:24 am, Saturday morning. This is predicated upon the reality that everything else in the home is Kosher for Passover. As will be noted below, this is a most confusing practice which leads to the awkward situation of bread being found in an already Kosher for Passover home; and this practice greatly increases the risk of errors and is NOT recommended.

WHAT IS USED INSTEAD OF CHALLAH ON THIS SABBATH?

1. The Talmud Yerushalmi clearly forbids the use of matza on the day prior to Passover so that our first taste of matza at The Seder will be meaningful and unique (most customs extend the prohibition against consuming matzah from the beginning of the month of Nisan until the first Seder).
2. The use of bread, though technically permissible until 9:24 am Saturday morning, is most complicated and in practical terms NOT feasible or desirable since the home is already Kosher for Passover.
3. Therefore, what does one use “to make motzi” on Friday night and at Shabbat lunch? The solution that our congregations should follow was first proposed 800 years ago by Rabbenu Tam. It was also recommended by a famous Rabbi and halachic scholar in Prague, Rabbi Yehezkel Landau over 200 years ago and confirmed again in the last century by The Hafetz Hayim.
4. The answer is EGG MATZAH. In order to fulfill our obligation to make motzi on the Shabbat prior to Passover, it is my firm halachic decision that EGG MATZAH should be used. Egg Matzah is produced under Rabbinic supervision as Kosher for Passover and is unquestionably permitted the day prior to Passover. The only time that egg matzah cannot be consumed is at the Seder itself as egg matzah is not considered to be “lachma anya” – regular matzah (only the ill or infirm can consume egg matza at the Seder).
5. Egg matzah on this Shabbat permits one to make motzi and is a simple, sensible and unimpeachable halachic solution to the status of this unique Shabbat.

CONCLUSIONS:

The practices relating to Pesach which begins on a Saturday evening are outlined above. Please make certain that your home is entirely Kosher for Passover prior to Friday evening, March 26, 2021. Make certain to use egg matza on this Shabbat. Should you have any other questions, please call Rabbi Buechler at the Synagogue during regular business hours or e-mail him at rabbibuechler@gmail.com