

"Halacha Sources" Highlights - Researching the Halachos of Pesach In Advance

Question: Is there an obligation to research the Halachos of Pesach in advance, as a preparation?

Answer: The Halacha regarding getting involved in the Halachos of Pesach (thirty days beforehand) depends on the interpreting of two Gemaras. As usual, we will discuss the subject in three steps:

- (1) the *contradiction* between *Pesachim* and *Megillah*,
- (2) the *resolution* of the authorities,
- (3) some "*fine tuning*" (i.e. supplementart material).

Part 1: The *Contradiction* Between *Pesachim* and *Megillah*

The Gemara in *Pesachim* (6a) quotes and explains a Baraisa:

It was taught in a Baraisa: We ask about - and delve into [i.e. in lectures] - the Halachos of Pesach, [beginning] thirty days before Pesach. [This is the position of "the first Tanna";] however, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: [we begin] two weeks [before Pesach].

The Gemara explains the reasoning of "the first Tanna": After all, [we find that] Moshe was standing "by the first Pesach" [i.e. the fourteenth of Nissan], and he was [already] warning [the Jews] concerning "the second Pesach" [i.e. Pesach Sheini (which is thirty days later)], as it says (Bamidbar 9:2): "And let the Children of Israel execute the [korban] Pesach in its [appointed] time," and [without interruption] it is written: "And it turned out [that there were] people who were contaminated by the [lack of] life of a person" [i.e. which in turn leads up to the teaching of Pesach Sheini].

In order to develop this, we need to know (1) what this Halacha of "asking and lecturing in advance" means, (2) what its *purpose* is, and (3) what the *final Halachic ruling* is in practice.

The addressing of all these three points can be begun by seeing the Gemara in *Megillah* (32a), which brings a Baraisa that seems to totally contradict the Halacha from *Pesachim*:

The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: Moshe instituted for Israel that they should [always] ask about - and delve into [i.e. in lectures] - the subject matter of the day: the Halachos of Pesach on Pesach, the Halachos of Shavuos on Shavuos, and the Halachos of Sukkos on Sukkos.

Which is it? Do we "ask and lecture" *in advance*, or only on the *Yom Tov* itself?

Part 2: The *Resolution* of the Authorities

The *Beis Yosef* (O.C. 429 - and all O.C.-based authorities cited below are here as well) brings the *Ran* [*Rabbeinu* Nissim ben Reuven, Spain, ~1320 - ~1380], who resolves the contradiction using the following Tosefta (*Sanhedrin* 7:5):

If someone has two questioners before him, one who is asking a question concerning the [relevant] subject matter - and one who is asking a question not concerning the [relevant] subject matter: he should respond [first] to the one asking the relevant question.

The *Ran* explains that this is what the Baraisa in *Pesachim* means by saying that we "ask about the Halachos of Pesach" in advance; that within the weeks before Pesach, someone asking about the Halachos of Pesach is considered to be "asking a question concerning the *relevant* subject matter," and he is answered first. [So an *obligation to actively research* the Halachos would only be on the *Yom Tov* itself.]

The *Bi'ur Halacha* points out that this explanation fits much better with the version of the Rif [*Rabbeinu* Yitzchak "Alfasi" ("of Fez" - and later Spain), 1013 - 1103] of the text in *Pesachim*, which is only "we ask about the Halachos of Pesach", *without* the term "and delve into" ["*v'dorshin*"] which implies an obligation to actively lecture and study. [In *Megillah*, in contrast, the Rif (2b) *does* include the term "and delve into" in the Baraisa there, regarding doing so on the *Yom Tov* itself.]

The *Shulchan Aruch* follows this explanation, ruling (in accord with "the first Tanna" in *Pesachim* [whose specification of thirty days is corroborated by several Gemaras]): **We ask about the Halachos of Pesach, [beginning] thirty days before Pesach.**

A second approach to the contradiction (from the *Beis Yosef*): The Baraisa in *Megillah* is referring to going over the reasons we were commanded to observe that *Yom Tov*, and the general Halachos of *Yom Tov* (which is all the Halacha there is for *Shavuos*, and for Sukkos as well a day or two in advance suffices - because most Sukkahs and four species are valid and no great effort is needed to prepare them); Pesach alone requires a month in advance to go over the Halachos - and to remove *chametz* from the homes and utensils - and to make *matzahs*).

A third approach to the contradiction (also from the *Beis Yosef*): The purpose of an advance period is so that everyone will have blemish-free offerings (as seen in *Avodah Zarah* 5b), which applies specifically to Pesach because everyone has to bring the *korban Pesach*; consequently *then* the Halachos must be clarified beforehand (and this institution stands even nowadays when there are no offerings).

A fourth approach to the contradiction is brought by the *Bi'ur Halacha* [in the name of the *Chok Yaakov* - the *Bi'ur Halacha* himself leans towards rejecting this because of the *Bavli's* not mentioning such a distinction]), based on the *Yerushalmi* that says the thirty day advance period is only for the "place of meeting" - i.e. the groups [of scholars gathered together] in the Torah study halls.

Part 3: Some "**Fine-Tuning**" (I.e. Supplementary Material)

The *Mishnah Berurah* writes that before other *Yamim Tovim*, some authorities hold there is no advance period (based on the *Beis Yosef's* second approach - see above), and only on the *Yom Tov* itself must the Halachos be "delved into". Others hold that the advance period is for Sukkos as well (and also Shavuos [at least to some extent]), although a number of authorities hold that other than for Pesach it only has the status of a *minhag*.

In practice, the *Mishnah Berurah* writes that the "delving into" includes a Mitzvah for everyone [or at least the groups of the Torah study halls, as per approach #4 above] to involve himself in the Halachos of Pesach during the thirty days, i.e. beginning with Purim (and also on the *Yom Tov* itself); but as for **lecturing**, the *minhag* is to do so on *Shabbos HaGadol* [the Shabbos preceding Pesach] (unless that falls on the eve of Pesach itself - in which case the lecture has to be given on the previous Shabbos) and *Shabbos Shuvah* [the Shabbos between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, when the "*haftarah*" of "*Shuvah Yisrael*" is read, as discussed in the Halachos of Rosh Chodesh (O.C. 428:8)]; and the focus of the lecture is teaching the various Halachos of Pesach (and on *Shabbos Shuvah* - the Halachos of Yom Kippur and Sukkos - besides the issue of repentance), and the obligation cannot be met by a lecture of "*pilpul*" or "*derush*" alone. [See the *Bi'ur Halacha* for his basis for this rejection of the *Ran's* approach, and perhaps also the rebuttal in *Yabia Omer* O.C. 2:22.]

It is worth noting that the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* [R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, a.k.a. the "*Gra*", 1745 - 1813] writes that nowadays, since Halacha is available in print, the personal study *replaces* lecturing. As for the lecture on *Shabbos HaGadol*, The *Siddur Ya'avetz* adds that the *minhag* is for the lecturer to also "reprove the congregation, and exhort them, concerning removing the 'leaven' of improper acts, and from the '*chametz*' of distorted attitudes, as well as the 'rising' of rotten character traits."

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