

A Note About Beginning the Passover Seder Early

When the Seders are on Weekdays or Friday night:

The halachic conversation surrounding the timing of the Seder is dominated by those voices that forbid starting the Seder and reciting the Festival Kiddush before nightfall. However there is an alternative tradition permitting starting the Seder early, but timing the end of the *Magid* (the “Telling” part of the Seder – the recounting of the story) to coincide with the emergence of stars, so that matzah is eaten after dark. See: R. Yosef Molcho. In his work *Shulhan Gavoah*, he asserts that R. Ya’akov of Corbeil and all other rishonim only emphasize the importance of eating after dark and would in fact permit all prior parts of the Seder to be done earlier; and the *Hatam Sofer*, in his comments on *Pesachim 99b*, more actively permits starting Kiddush early and timing the end of the haggadah for the emergence of stars.)

As our own Hazzan Jack is a direct descendant of the Hatam Sofer, we opt to follow this ruling and begin our Second Seder early.

HOWEVER: When the Seder is at the end of Shabbat, ie. on Saturday Night

Here there is a significant added complication, as lighting yuntif (Festival) candles for the second day of Pesach while it is still Shabbat would not only be a violation of Shabbat, but untruthful! How could we proclaim that it is the second day of Pesach while it is still very obviously day one. Further, the lighting of the candles is how we make havdalah at the end of Shabbat! The havdalah paragraphs that end Shabbat are actually part of the Festival Kiddush, ie. part of drinking the first cup of the Seder for the second day. Thus lighting candles and making the Festival Kiddush over the first cup of wine for the Second Seder at the end of Shabbat definitely cannot happen until dark. That makes a Second Seder on Saturday night begin VERY late.

OY! ***What to do***

Here is a creative solution.

There is no prohibition against enjoying a festive Pesach meal late Shabbat afternoon in the waning hours of Shabbat. Every Shabbat offers the opportunity for a Seudah Shlishit, a third meal. That third meal can include quite a lot of what one might do and say at a Seder. You can drink cups of wine and make a “borei pri ha-gafen” bracha over the wine without doing the long Festival Kiddush. You can have a beautiful dinner with symbolic foods and a feast. You can sing Pesach songs and have great conversations about our once-and-future liberation from all forms of oppression. Just save candle-lighting and the full festival Kiddush for after dark, at the end of your meal, perhaps near desert! Remember to include the Havdalah paragraph in your Kiddush.

Enjoy your Pesach feast and end Shabbat in style.