



WHY IS PESACH EVE DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER HOLIDAY EVES?

Among the many *halachot* of Pesach, there is one that is often overlooked. The Mishnah in Pesachim states that there are varying customs as to whether one may perform labor on *Erev Pesach* before midday. The Talmud Bavli (Pesachim 50b) focuses on the assumption underlying this Mishnah; namely, that there is a unique prohibition against performing labor on *Erev Pesach* from midday onward (the sixth halachic hour) which is not subject to local custom. However, the Bavli cites a *Baraita* which appears to contradict this:

“One who performs labor on Shabbat eves and Festival eves from *mincha* onward never sees a sign of blessing.”

The implication of the *Baraita* is that on the eves of all holidays one may not do work. Why then, asks the Bavli, does the Mishnah single out *Erev Pesach*? The first answer offered is that there is a quantitative difference at play. On the eves of other holidays and Shabbat, the prohibition begins at the earliest time one may recite *mincha* (the 6 ½ hour of the day), whereas on *Erev Pesach* it begins at midday. The Bavli then suggests there is a qualitative difference as well: the prohibition on the eve of other holidays/Shabbat is less severe, whereas forbidden labor on *Erev Pesach* is a definitive prohibition incurring excommunication. (Whether this prohibition is Biblical or Rabbinic is debated among the medieval commentators.)

The Bavli does not explain why *Erev Pesach* is distinct, but the parallel Yerushalmi *sugya* explains that this prohibition is directly linked to the *korban* Pesach, which was offered on *Erev Pesach* beginning at midday. As an extension of the rule that an individual who brings a *korban* may not do work while their sacrifice is being offered, work was forbidden for everyone while

the Pesach sacrifices were being slaughtered and their blood sprinkled in the Temple.

Rashi, however, explains that the singularity of *Erev Pesach* is due to the *mitzvot* one may neglect to perform properly if allowed to engage in everyday work. These include not only the *korban* Pesach, but also destroying *chametz* and preparing the foods required for the *Seder*.

Several differences arise between these two reasons. For instance, in the situation this year, when *Erev Pesach* coincides with Shabbat, according to Rashi's reasoning, since one cannot prepare for the *Seder* on Shabbat but must do so on Friday, the prohibition against performing labor is transferred to Friday. According to the Yerushalmi's explanation, it is not extended to Friday for the ban is linked to the *korban* Pesach, which is always offered *Erev Pesach*, even on Shabbat (*Chok Ya'akov Orach Chaim* 468:1).

A further difference is whether the prohibition remains in effect today. The Ba'al HaMe'or argues that according to the Yerushalmi's logic, the prohibition is no longer applicable since we no longer offer the *korban* Pesach.¹ *Erev Pesach* is now treated like the eves of other holidays and subject to *minhag*. The Ramban counters that whether the reason still applies is irrelevant, for “once a proclamation is made, it requires another *beit din* to repeal.” Moreover, since Rashi's reason (destroying *chametz* and preparing for the *Seder*) remains operative, so too does the prohibition. This is the view of the majority of *Rishonim* and codified in the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 468). They clarify that the prohibition applies to paid work, whereas fixing an object for the purpose

of the holiday is permitted, as is writing in the course of learning Torah. While it is debated whether one may have a non-Jew perform labor on one's behalf (such as cutting hair) the Shulchan Aruch concludes that the custom is to be lenient.

Ultimately, this prohibition reflects both an imperative tied with the past (per the Yerushalmi), and one that is still in effect (per Rashi). Through abstaining from work on *Erev Pesach* we impart significance to the day itself, in consonance with a time when the *Beit HaMikdash* stood and the day was dedicated to offering the *korban* Pesach. At the same time, it is a conduit to enhance our experience of the *Seder*, encouraging us to devote the day toward preparations so we can be fully present and attentive as we re-experience the redemption from Egypt.

¹ Pesachim, *dapei haRif* 15b.

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