

Making “Early Shabbos” Without an Early Arvit Minyan

סעודת שבת ויום טוב מוקדמת וקודם ערבית

Context

Summer is here, days are long, and Shabbat begins very late. Many advance the acceptance of Shabbat while it is still day by participating in “Early [*sic*] Shabbos” - praying Mincha with a Minyan before Pelag HaMincha and Arvit afterwards - in order to have a normal meal with the family awake. Doing so claims the time between Pelag (1.5 hours prior to nightfall) and Shekiah (sunset) as night instead of day. But what if there is no Pelag Arvit Minyan? Some communities do not have enough manpower to support more than a “Late [*sic*] Shabbos” minyan that prays at the usual time, while some, especially Sepharadim, follow the poskim who rule leniently about making a “*Tarte deSatre*,” a self-contradiction - praying Mincha *after* Pelag and Arvit *before* Shekiah essentially declaring the time to be both day and night. Some are more lenient especially on Erev Shabbat.¹

What is one to do if he would like to have an early meal but doesn't have the requisite Arvit Minyan to pray with after Pelag? One gets home from the late Minyan at 9:15PM, begins the meal at 9:20PM, is barely awake alongside his wife and children who are falling asleep in their soup, and only gets to open a Sefer after bentching and helping his dear wife clean up at 11:30PM the earliest. Then he remembers that he missed a Shalom Zachar and has to daven Hashkama tomorrow morning to go to three different kiddushes for a Bar Mitzvah, Aufruf, and Sheva Berachot. Needless to say, this is a distressing situation for a day that's supposed to be Kulo Menuchah, Shalom, and Me'ein Olam Haba! Perhaps there's another way to order the evening for it to be more engaging.

The relevant Gemara in Pesachim (100a) relates how one who is in middle of a [probably inadvisably late] meal on Erev Shabbat as Shabbat enters should “Pores Mappah uMekadesh” - spread out a table cloth, recite Kiddush, and continue his meal. The Gemara implies that one does not have to pray Arvit before reciting Kiddush. Indeed, some employ this when Purim or Shushan Purim occurs on Friday, by praying Mincha early, having the Purim Seudah in the late afternoon, and, at Shekiah, reciting Kabbalat Shabbat and Kiddush before continuing the meal. Afterwards, they pray Arvit.²

Based on this Gemara, the Magen Avraham (271:10) writes a novel idea that one may first recite Kiddush, have the Seudah and then go pray Arvit. Meaning, from the Gemara's case of one already in midst of a meal he extrapolates to even one who wishes to *begin* a meal before praying Arvit. A number of other commentators, such as the Taz, Elyah Rabbah, and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc), concur, provided one ensure to start the Seudah a half hour before Zeman Keriat Shema³ (Machatzit HaShekel ad loc).

¹ See Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 267:2) and commentaries.

² I partially participated in this spectacle at Yehivat HaKotel on Shushan Purim 5772 as a visiting villager [from Sha'alvim], and I vividly remember dancing down to the Kotel with the yeshiva after the Purim-Leil Shabbat meal to pray Arvit with the venerable Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Yeshayahu Hadari, zatzal (who gave me a slap in the cheek the next morning along with his Shabbat Shalom).

³ Let's say Tzeit HaKochavim for our purposes.

Seemingly, therefore, the issue is open and shut: there is no problem switching the order of Seudat Shabbat and Arvit, as long as one prays Mincha before Pelag and starts the Seudah early enough. For instance, one can pray at the office Mincha minyan, come home, have the meal after Pelag, and then walk to shul in time for the community's Arvit. He can then enjoy the rest of the evening learning and then sleep at a normal hour. However, some more research yields three major issues with this practice - in Peshat, Lumdus, and Kabbalah - based on the Vilna Gaon, Rambam, and Arizal.

The Vilna Gaon's Striking View

Talmidei HaGRA⁴ record how the Vilna Gaon's careful read of a different Gemara lead him to believe that reciting Kiddush before Arvit as the Magen Avraham understands would be improper, as the Gemara (Berachot 27b) relates that Rav first prayed *and then* recited Kiddush, and Shmuel did the same. The necessity to state that Rav prayed *prior* to Kiddush indicates that when one accepts Shabbat early, he *must* first pray before having his meal. Acharonim debate the weight of the GRA's read; regardless, the Vilna Gaon at least thought the Magen Avraham's suggestion is not so simple. The simple Peshat of the Gemara in Berachot suggests otherwise – but one should note that the Mishnah Berurah and others quoted above were not deterred from simply quoting the Magen Avraham LeHalacha and don't even cite the Vilna Gaon's opinion.⁵

The Rambam's Schedule for Shabbat

To reinforce the Vilna Gaon's position, Rav Soloveitchik points out two fascinating statements of the Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 30:10 and Yom Tov 6:19), in which the Rambam depicts the ideal agenda for Shabbat and Yom Tov. On each of them, we split the day between the spiritual and the physical – designating part for Torah and Tefillah and part for physical pleasures like the Seudah. The Rambam illustrates how the morning of Yom Tov is spent immersed in prayer and Talmud Torah, and only after Chatzot does one partake in the physical Oneg of Yom Tov in the form of the meal. In a similar vein, on Shabbat, one prays *prior* to each meal. Therefore, switching the order to eat *before* praying, would be a shortcoming in fulfillment of this imperative. As such, one cannot partake in the meals before praying the corresponding Tefillah - Arvit before Seudah Rishonah; Shacharit and Mussaf before Seudah Sheniah; and Mincha before Seudah Shelishit.⁶ As we see, both in Peshat and Lumdus, there is reason to abstain from this practice.

⁴ Ma'aseh Rav (Siman 117), Imrei Noam (Berachot 27b), see the critical editions of both for the back and forth

⁵ In a recent issue of a HaMaayan (Tishri 5779) Rav David Stern suggests an alternative interpretation of the GRA. The GRA is assuming like the Rambam that there is no Mitzvah of Tosefet Shabbat, or it's, at most, MiDeRabbanan. One cannot fulfill the Mitzvah of the Seudah during this time of Tosefet, as it's not visibly Lichvod Shabbat yet, unless one raises the bar by praying Arvit first. Therefore, the GRA will argue that the Gemara about Pores Mappah is referring to a case when the sun set on a person during his meal, while Rav and Shmuel were accepting Shabbat much earlier. For further elaboration of the GRA's position, Rav Stern points us to Rav Naftali Yeiger's article in Yeshurun vol. 5 page 358. [Rav Yehoshua Pfeffer](#) makes the observation about the Acharonim not citing the GRA.

⁶ Nefesh HaRav page 158. On Yom Tov to fulfill the Mitzvah of "Shabbaton," we split the day "Chetzzyo LaShem" and "Chetzzyo Lachem," half for Hakadosh Baruch Hu and half for us, while on Shabbat, it's entirely for Hashem. As such, Rav Soloveitchik explained further that the Rambam sees Tefillot Shabbat, the manifestation of Kedushat HaShabbat (the Mitzvah of Shabbaton), as a Mattir for Oneg Shabbat, which we fulfill via Seudot Shabbat (on Yom Tov, the Oneg is actually *an integral part* of the Kedushah itself). Although the split between Tefillah and Seudah is the same on both Yom Tov and Shabbat, the difference is that Chatzot is the divider for the two parts of Yom Tov and Tefillat

At the same time, one should note how Rabbeinu Tam and the Rosh disagree with this Rambam and recommend one eat Seudah Shelishit *before* Mincha, to avoid Achilah Gassa and mystical issues. Even though the Tur and Rama both give preference to the Rambam, later Acharonim admit that one could still switch the order lechatechilah if it's too hard to have Seudah Shelishit afterwards, such as when one would be too full or when the only Mincha Minyan will finish too late to begin Seudah Shelishit.⁷ Therefore, it seems that if we are willing to forgo this Rambam in situations when it's challenging to fulfill, our case by Arvit before Seudah Rishonah would be no different.

Kabbalistic Considerations

Rav Ya'akov Chaim Sofer was a student of the Ben Ish Chai who moved to Eretz Yisrael in the early twentieth century. In line with his rebbe's methodology of blending Peshat and Kabbalah, he authored a ten-volume treatise known as *Kaf HaChaim* summarizing halachic issues raised by classical Poskim, while fusing them with Kabbalistic considerations. After quoting the lenient position of the Magen Avraham that we quoted above, the Kaf HaChaim⁸ writes, according to the Arizal, switching the Leil Shabbat order of Kiddush and Arvit could have celestial consequences. The normal order of Kabbalat Shabbat, Barechu, Keriat Shema, Amidah, Vayechulu, Me'ein Sheva, and Vayechulu again at Kiddush accomplishes certain things in the upper worlds. Changing the order would be detrimental. Accordingly, it would be unwise to play around with the order by praying Arvit *after* one's Seudah, from all three perspectives – Peshat, Lumdus, and Kabbalah.⁹

A Word from The Mekubalim

We often take Kabbalistic matters into account, especially in our Tefillot, and in the Sepharadi world in particular. Astonishingly, in this case, the Kaf HaChaim's own rebbe, the Ben Ish Chai did not raise this Kabbalistic concern: he rules explicitly in line with the Magen Avraham!¹⁰ One would have assumed that he would honor the Arizal's appreciation of the set order of Leil Shabbat! Rav Yitzchak Yosef, the Rishon LeTzion, therefore, discounts the Kaf HaChaim's concern, due to the Ben Ish Chai's explicit permission to follow the Magen Avraham.¹¹ This resolves our Kabbalistic concerns.¹²

Mincha is for Shabbat. For the full treatment of the Rambam's view in the eyes of Rav Soloveitchik, see my father-in-law, Rabbi David Pahmer's write up of the Rav's shiur in Beis Yitzchok vol. 24 page 60.

⁷ See Tur-Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 291:2) and commentaries at length, as well as Ben Ish Chaim (Shanah Rishonah, Chayei Sarah 14), Ohr LeTzion (vol. 2 21:7), Yalkut Yosef (Shabbat 5773 edition vol. 1 part 4 page 656-657, Siman 291:7-8). Note how many write how we ideally are strict for the the Zohar and Arizal who hold that even Bediavad one would not fulfill the mitzvah of Seudah Shelishit in that fashion. Thanks to Rav Meir Gavriel Elbaz for pointing me towards this resolution.

⁸ Kaf HaChaim (Orach Chaim 271:22, 26)

⁹ HaRav Hershel Schachter suggests that the Vilna Gaon's proof from the order Rav and Shmuel prayed and then recited Kiddush could also be rooted in Kabbalistic considerations.

¹⁰ Ben Ish Chai (Shanah II, Parashat Bereshit 18)

¹¹ Yalkut Yosef (Shabbat vol. 1 part 3 page 60 and 271:4). A similar ruling is echoed in Divrei Benayahu (Dayan, vol. 26 Siman 32:4). It's interesting how neither the Kaf HaChaim, nor Rav Yitzchak Yosef, quote the Ma'aseh Rav.

¹² See the Teimani Mekubal and Admor, Rav Avner Afjin's Divrei Shalom (vol. 5 page 215) where he details the Kabbalah and writes in defense of the Arizal and Kaf HaChaim. He argues the Gemara in Pesachim about Pores Mappah is not a challenge, as the Gemara could have been talking about an uncommon occurrence. Also, the Sefer Ben Ish Chai was written for the laypeople, not Mekubalim,(!) so issues not dealt with explicitly by the Arizal are omitted. The Ben Ish Chai himself may indeed share the concern of the Kaf HaChaim and just didn't have the forum to express it, surmises Rav Afjin. Thus, Rav Afjin rules like the Kaf HaChaim and extrapolates that it's better that one

Logistic Issues

Of course, in practice, employing this schedule would require one live close enough to a Beit HaKeneset to walk there in time for Arvit and to ensure he does not get caught up in things and forget to go. One who follows the stringent view to eat another kazayit of bread after Tzeit HaKochavim on a regular early Shabbat should keep this in mind.¹³ If one lives close enough, he can leave in middle of the meal to pray Arvit, return, and then have more bread, should the laws of Shinui Makom be factored in correctly.¹⁴ On the other hand, praying Arvit later ensures that one recite Keriat Shema and Arvit after Tzeit HaKochavim.

Yom Tov Sheni

It is common for Sepharadi communities to have an early Yom Tov Sheni Minyan, by davening Yom Tov *Rishon* Mincha *before* Pelag and Yom Tov *Sheni* Arvit *after* Pelag. One lights and begins eating the Seudah a half an hour before Zeman Keriat Shema, thereby avoiding any issues of preparing for Yom Tov Sheni while it is still Yom Tov Rishon. This is the recommendation of the Ben Ish Chai.¹⁵

Although in communities like Great Neck, Queens, and Teaneck such Minyanim exist, this option was not available to me this year, as we spent Shavuot in YU and the yeshiva Arvit Minyan was at 9:15PM. I considered praying Mincha early, having the Yom Tov Sheni Seudah after Pelag, and then attending Arvit in the Beit Midrash. Afterwards, I could learn an enjoyable night seder and go to sleep at a normal time.

In addition to the above permitting Cheshbonot, although Rav Soloveitchik and the GRA would not agree, perhaps the Kaf HaChaim would allow it in this case. A Mekubal I am not, but one should note how the Kaf HaChaim makes no mention of the order of influences the celestial spheres being an issue on *Yom*

recite Kiddush *after* Arvit over bread than to do so *before* Arvit with wine! One would deflect that *we* are not Mekubalim, so either way *we* don't have to be concerned.

¹³ See Mishnah Berurah 267:5

¹⁴ See Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 178) and commentaries

¹⁵ Ben Ish Chai (Shanah I Bamidbar 2) and Rav Pe'alim (Orach Chaim 4:23). See Yom Tov Sheni KeHilchato by HaRav Yerachmiel Fried pages 36-37 for a variety of views – including Rav Shlomo Zalman's lenient leaning view and Rav Elyashiv's concern for the possibility of people doing Melachot when they are not permitted to. See also [Rabbi Jachter's article for a summary](#).

Although the Yom Tov Sheni KeHilchato categorizes the Ben Ish Chai's recommendation in Rav Pe'alim as one reserved for Sha'at HaDachak, in my humble opinion, it is clear from his formulation in Ben Ish Chai that he meant it LeChatechilah. First, the Ben Ish Chai writes how Kiddush on the first evening of Shavuot *must* be after Tzeit, then how Kiddush on the second night can be recited while it is still day, and then he writes how *Aderaba*, it's preferable to do so early. Meaning, *not only* is there no issue making early Yom Tov Sheni, it is *also* preferable. According to Rabbi Fried's read, there is an implicit discouragement of Making Yom Tov Sheni early that is missing from the sentence. Additionally, the whole thrust of the Teshuva in Rav Pe'alim is towards dealing with the Hachana issues of candle lighting while it is still day, and he spends no time justifying or discouraging the practice of making early Yom Tov Sheni. With all this in mind, I would consider the Ben Ish Chai to not be speaking about Sha'at HaDachak situations similar to the insect issues of the time and argue that "Ma'aseh Shehayah Kach Hayah." When HaRav Fried was asked to consider this reasoning, he agreed via electronic communication that this is the correct interpretation of the Ben Ish Chai. One should note how Rav Mordechai Lebhav (in an unpublished Teshuvah) is unsure whether one should follow this Ben Ish Chai based on contemporary Acharonim, but that is beyond the scope of our discussion.

Tov,¹⁶ and, one who regularly prays with a Sephardic Siddur would know that there is no order of accepting Kedushat Yom Tov at different points of Tefillah like there is by Shabbat. I discussed this with HaRav Ike Sultan and HaRav Meir Gavriel Elbaz, who agreed that it would be completely fine to execute, but, ultimately, there was way too much food at lunch for it to be an oneg to eat more before 10:00PM. If anything, it would have been Tza'ar.

Closing

All in all, this is *not* a call to change the standard Mincha-Arvit-Seudah order of Shabbat that has been canonized in our communities. It's rather a helpful finding that individuals can execute when beneficial.¹⁷ If the times are changing and eating the Seudat Shabbat before praying Arvit would be advantageous in one's situation, there is plenty to rely on leMa'aseh and much Peshat, Lumdus, and Kabbalah to discuss at the Shabbat table before heading to Arvit.¹⁸

¹⁶ True, Piskei Teshuvot (271:14) claims the Kaf HaChaim says it applies to both, but, with much apology and respect, the words do not appear in the Kaf HaChaim.

¹⁷ In fact, my father-in-law Rabbi David Pahmer told me after I shared this article with him that he arrived in shul on the longest Friday of the year to find out that he missed the Pelag Arvit Minyan completely. He turned right around, went home, had the meal, and then went back out to shul to catch the late Arvit Minyan. This could also be a handy strategy for Simchat Torah, allowing one to recite Kiddush and have the Yom Tov meal with his family before going to shul for Arvit and Hakafot.

HaRav Avigdor Nebenzal reports that in 1948 Daylight Savings Time was *two* hours not just one ([known as Double Daylight Savings time, which Israel participated in that year](#)), so it Shabbat began terribly late, and people didn't want to wait till so late to have the meal. Therefore, they would have the meal first before going to pray Arvit. (Yerushalayim BeMoadeha, Shabbat vol. 2 page 76) That is quite extraordinary.

¹⁸ HaRav Mordechai Willig agrees one could do this any Shabbat of the year, but not on Yom Tov Sheni except for in pressing circumstances. HaRav Hershel Schachter also allows one to rely on the Magen Avraham on Shabbat and Yom Tov Sheni – as it's a Sha'at HaDachak – in order to preserve one's Oneg. On Yom Tov, it wouldn't make sense though if one's custom is to recite numerous piyutim and won't be able to eat before the required time.