# Interrupting a Meal for Shabbat

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We were taught Arvey Pesahim in high school but we didn’t get too far. We spent a very long while on the second page of the chapter. The problem is here:

*Rabban Shimon b Gamliel, R. Yehuda and R. Yosei were reclining in Acre. The Sabbath arrived. Rabban Shimon b Gamliel said to R Yosei: With your permission, let us interrupt [our meal] and respect the words of our colleague Yehuda? R. Yosei responded: all your life you admire my words more than Yehuda’s, and now you admire Yehuda's words more than mine, “Will he rape the queen when I am at home”* (Esther 7:8). *Let’s not interrupt because the students might see and establish the halakha for generations. They didn’t move from there until they established the halakha like Rabbi Yosei*–Pesahim 100a [1]

Our high school teacher had a hard time trying to explain how the quote from the Megilah was relevant. How could one Rabbi suggest that the other Rabbi was Haman? Who exactly was Esther and why?

They’re talking about when to say Kiddush if you start a meal Friday afternoon and continue eating into the night. R. Yehuda’s opinion is to say Kiddush in the middle of the meal (after moving the table away), when the night falls and Shabbat begins. R. Yosei opines that you finish the meal first and recite the Kiddush afterwards when the meal is over. [2]

The Gemarah is usually explained this way: Rabban Shimon b Gamliel followed the lenient view of R. Yosei. He normally made Kiddush after the meal had ended. However, this time, because R. Yehuda was present(?) [3], R Shimon b Gamliel asked R. Yosei’s permission to follow the stricter opinion of R. Yehuda, i.e., interrupt the meal, and make Kiddush at the start of Shabbat. R. Yosei refused. He feared (or according to some versions Rabban Shimon b Gamliel feared) that the students would mistakenly assume that R. Yehuda’s view was the Halakha and establish that practice for generations to come. [4]

This explanation is difficult. Prior to this Shabbat, the students saw Rabban Shimon b Gamliel observe the practice of R. Yosei. Following this Shabbat, they will again see him follow the practice of R. Yosei. If he interrupts the meal one time only as per R. Yehuda, why would the students think that the Halakha follows R. Yehuda?

Another difficulty: Today, we appreciate the idea of following a more stringent practice in order to satisfy many divergent opinions, but this approach didn’t exist in Talmudic times. (I heard that this innovation is attributed to R. Meir of Rothenburg of the 13th century, who was influenced by the Hasidei Ashkenaz movement.) If R. Shimon b Gamliel agrees with R. Yosei, why would he think to be stringent according to the view of R. Yehuda, and why only this one week?

Tangentially, why were the sages and their students eating a meal on Friday afternoon as Shabbat was starting. They should have been in Synagogue saying the evening prayers together with everyone else. Dr. Daniel Goldschmidt explains why they stayed home at that time. The evening prayer was voluntary. The community didn’t pray in the evenings and didn’t attend shul in the evenings either. [5]

It’s interesting that the original dispute whether the evening prayer is required or not, was between Rabban Gamliel (the head of the Sanhedrin) and R. Yehoshua. What exactly happened then isn’t clear. Did they resolve the halakha in favor of Rabban Gamliel or did the sages interrupt the proceedings, dismiss Rabban Gamliel from his post and rule according to R. Yehoshua. Maybe no decision was actually taken. However, barely a generation later, Rabban Gamliel’s son, Rabban Shimon b Gamliel doesn’t follow his father’s opinion. He doesn’t even volunteer the evening prayer to satisfy his father’s more stringent view. [6]

The Gemara mentions that the meal and discussion took place in Akko [7]. None of the participants lived there. R. Yosei lived in Zippori (Sepphoris). R. Yehuda lived in Usha. The Sanhedrin was also in Usha and Rabban Shimon b Gamliel the head of the Sanhedrin lived there as well. Rabbi Yehuda was מוריינא דבי נשיאה or מוריינא דנשיא—the halachic authority in the house of the Nasi. According to Rashi: “all their practices followed R. Yehuda’s decisions”. In Usha, R. Shimon b. Gamliel followed the decisions and rulings of R. Yehuda. He must have interrupted his Friday afternoon meal to make Kiddush as soon as Shabbat started. [8]

In Akko, R. Shimon b Gamliel thought to do as he usually did at home. Apparently, he was the host (his name is mentioned first) and he was in charge. If R. Yehuda was present, his presence may have added to the Usha like atmosphere.

R Yosei refused to follow R. Yehuda’s view. He explained his position this way: The Nasi doesn't usually have the opportunity to follow my words but now that we are in Acco, there's no longer reason to follow the ruling of R. Yehuda. R Yosei quotes from the book of Esther to support this idea.

R. Amos Hakham , in his commentary to the Book of Esther writes: [9]

We usually think that the drunken (foolish) king attributed intent to Haman that Haman didn’t have . . . But even if the king understood and knew that Haman was begging for his life from Queen Esther, the king still had the right to punish Haman. In falling on the Queen’s couch, Haman acted against the self-respect and modesty of the Queen. That act of Haman’s was punishable.

R. Hakham continues (in a footnote):

Odysseus faced a similar situation (in Book IV). He debated whether to clasp the knees of a princess as a suppliant does, or whether to keep his distance from her and speak with courteous words . . . Odysseus finally decided to make his request from afar and his request was granted.

We can build on R. Hakham’s explanation a little. Haman's fatal mistake was his petitioning the queen, instead of begging for his life from the king. The affront to the queen didn’t bother the king as much as the personal insult. “When I’m not here, you may plead for your life from the queen; but I am here and I am the authority. You should address your pleading to me.” [10]

Of course, we’re not dealing in the Gemara here with egos or murderers, but R Yosei is saying in *drush* something similar to what Ahasuerus said. In R. Yosei’s *derasha,* R. Shimon b Gamliel is acting like Haman by recognizing R. Yehuda’s authority where R. Yosei’s is the real authority. Accordingly R. Yehuda is Queen Esther. Rabban Shimon b Gamliel took back his suggestion and then publicized a ruling that agreed with R. Yosei: “They did not move from there until they established the halakha in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yosei”. [11]

Nevertheless, the ruling barely lasted two generations. We read: “Rav Yehuda said in Shemuel’s name: The halakha is not in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, nor is it in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yosei, instead, (when Shabbat starts), spread a cloth over the table and recite Kiddush.” [12]

We read (Shabbat 25b): “This was the custom of Rabbi Yehuda bar Elai. On Shabbat eve, they would bring him a tub full of hot water and he would wash his face, hands, and feet. He would drape a fine linen cloak over his shoulders and would sit and wait. He resembled a prophet of the Lord of hosts.” [13]

I don’t know how R. Yehuda prepared himself on that Shabbat eve in Acre. Did he follow his usual custom or did he defer to the others and minimize his preparations in order to join them in the meal? There does however seem to be something in common with his preparations for Shabbat and his saying Kiddush immediately when Shabbat begins.

R. Soloveitchik spoke about R. Yehuda’s preparations. They included three things: washing, wearing a tallit, and anticipating the arrival of Shabbat. The same three things are also involved in preparations for the daily prayer. One washes before prayer. One wears a special garment–tallit during prayer. One puts himself in a serious frame of mind (כובד ראש), and then pauses or waits a bit before beginning the prayers. R. Soloveitchik explains that both the arrival of Shabbat and daily prayer share a common motif of standing before the divine presence (shekhinah). Therefore, one’s mode of preparation is similar. [14]

We can now explain in an intuitive way, why we interrupt the Sabbath meal in order to recite Kiddush (on rare occasions when we start a meal before Shabbat and extend the meal into the night) and maybe why we attend synagogue Friday nights. The overriding factor is the encounter with the shekhinah, or (to use mystical language) we identify with the “elevation of the worlds”. The symbolic value of this was so important that it pushed aside the practice of continuing a meal into the Shabbat, and pushed aside the custom of making Kiddush at the end of the meal. Kiddush at the beginning of the meal was established as the halakha for generations (קבעו הלכה לדורות).

[1]

ומעשה ברבן שמעון בן גמליאל ור' יהודה ור' יוסי שהיו מסובין בעכו וקדש עליהם היום אמ' לו רבן שמעון בן גמליאל לר' יוסי רצונך שנפסיק וניחוש לדברי יהודה חבירנו אמ' לו כל ימיך אתה מחבב דברי לפני יהודה עכשיו אתה מחבב דברי יהודה בפני הגם לכבוש את המלכה עמי בבית לא נפסיק שמא יראו התלמידים ויקבעו הלכה לדורות אמרו לא זזו משם עד שקבעו הלכה כר' יוסי

I’ve copied from Columbia 294-295, a Yemenite manuscript at genizah.org. Other versions differ slightly.

# [2] This explanation is given by R. Shaul Lieberman in Tosefta Ki-fshutah Berakhot page 73. He quotes it from the author of Halachot Gedolot. Even according to R. Yehuda there was to need to say the Birkat Hamazon and start the meal anew. (The standard commentaries on the page understand that R. Yehuda requires one to recite Birkat Hamazon before making Kiddush.)

[3] The Venice Edition of the Talmud omits R. Yehuda’s name; his name is included (in square brackets) in all the modern editions. The Yerushalmi (Pesahim 10:1) also omits R. Yehuda’s name. The Tosefta includes his name (Berakot 5:2). Seven out of eight Bavli manuscripts available at bavli.genizah.org include his name as well. (The eighth one has Rabban Gamliel, R. Yehoshua and R. Yossi, which is obviously incorrect.)

[4] It was common to begin a meal early enough on Friday afternoon and continue the meal into the night. See a similar occurance in Pesahim 105a with the deciples of Rab. See also the Beraita on the bottom of page 102a in Pesahim בני חבורה שהיו מסובין וקדש עליהן היום.

[5] *Kidush v’Habhdala* printed in *Mahanayim* 85-86, Tishri-Heshwan 5724. Available here <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/mahanaim/kidush-2.htm>

[6] תפלת ערבית רבן גמליאל אומר חובה ר' יהושע אומר רשות

Berakwt 27b. The Gemara records two opinions: the evening prayer is voluntary, the prayer is obligatory. The majority of Rishonim understand that today the evening prayer is voluntary, although over time, Israel accepted the evening prayer as an obligation (Maimonides Tefilah 1:6, quoting Rabbi Yitshak al-Fasi.)

[7] “Even during the Second Temple period when the Hamonean dynasty was at its zenith, Akko remained outside the boundaries of the land of Israel and was in fact a Greek city.” - Rabbi Adin Even-Israel on Gittin 2a. A Tanna of that generation, namely R Yehuda b Igra Ish Kfar Akko, presumably lived there but he isn’t mentioned in this context.

[8] Menachot 104a, Yerushalmi Shabbat 8:1. Both Tosafot and Rashi understand that R. Yehuda was the posek for the house of R. Yehuda HaNasi (Rabban S himon b Gamliel’s son). In any case, if he was the halakhic authority in Usha in the time that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was in Usha, he must have held the same position during the tenure of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s father. The Talmud mentions that a community’s practice followed the local authority: (Shabbat 130a) In R Eliezer's place they chopped trees to make charcoal to make an iron (circumcision knife) on the Sabbath (for a Sabbath circumcision). In R Yose Ha Galili's place, they ate fowl with dairy.

[9] Daat Mikra Esther summary of the end of chapter 7, page 47.

[10] Something like the words of Vespasian to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkaiאי מלכא אנא עד האידנא אמאי לא אתית לגבאי if I am a king, why did you not come to me before now? – Gittin 56a, Apparently not petitioning the king was a capital crime.

[11] I don’t know in what way R. Shimon b Gamliel always admired R. Yosei’s words or how R. Yosei knew this. Later sages considered R Yosei a greater authority than R Yehuda. (Eruvin 46b) “the law follows ... R Yose (when he argues) with his colleagues...”

[12] אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אין הלכה לא כר' יהודה ולא כר' יוסי אלא פורס מפה ומקדש

Pesahim 100a. The rishonim aren’t sure if Shemuel is agreeing with R. Yosei as Rabban Shimon b Gamliel previously decided) but is being strict (Rasbam), or if he is presenting an opinion which is close but not idendical with R. Yehuda’s (Tosafot). According to the Hikhot Gedolot, the difference between Shemuel and R. Yehuda is whether we remove the table or just cover the table (and food) with a cloth (see above footnote 2). The Shulhan Arukh rules like Shemuel.

[13]

כך היה מנהגו שלר' יהוד' בר' אלעאי ערב שבת מביאין לו עריבה מליאה מים חמין ורוחץ בהן פניו ידיו ורגליו ומתעטף ויושב בסדינין המצויינין ודומה למלאך יי צבאות

I’m copying a manuscript version (Friedberg manuscript from the Genizah 12th-13th century), which has “fine linen cloak” המצויינין, instead of the more common, “linen cloak with ritual fringes” המצוייצין. Sefer haSheeltot also has המצויינין. The Shulhan Arukh agrees with this custom of R. Yehuda—260:1

[14] Kibud and Oneg Shabbat in Shiurim l’zeher Aba Mori Z”L, volume 1, page 62. The similarity of daily prayer and Shabbat might be alluded to in the Kuzari 3:5: the daily prayers are the climax of the day just as the Sabbath is the goal of the week (quoted in The World of Prayer Volume 1, page 5).