



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 17 | Erev Pesach

An Antedated Fast

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1.

TWO PERSPECTIVES ON AN ANTEDATED FAST

When *erev Pesach* falls on Shabbos, as it does this year, the *Fast of the Firstborns* is antedated {brought forward}¹ from *erev Pesach* {Shabbos} to the preceding Thursday. The fast is not antedated to Friday, because in honor of Shabbos,² we don't, at the outset, schedule a fast for Friday.³

The question arises: If a person didn't fast on that Thursday (because he forgot, or something similar), should he fast on Friday? [After all, not fasting on Friday is (a) really only the ideal {*lechatchila*},⁴ and (b) only applies to the community. In contrast, our case {of someone who didn't fast on Thursday} (a) is after-the-fact {*bedieved*}, since Thursday has already passed, and (b) concerns an individual.]

The reasoning behind this question: The concept of antedating the fast can be explained in two ways:

a) We fast on Thursday as a make-up for {not fasting on} *erev Pesach* (Shabbos), but in essence, the obligation to fast on *erev Pesach* (Shabbos) remains.

It turns out, if one did not fast on Thursday, the obligation to fast has not been met and he would need to fast on Friday.

b) True, the fast has been antedated {to Thursday} to make up for not fasting on *erev Pesach* [and it was moved to Thursday (rather than Friday) for an ancillary reason — because we do not at the outset schedule fasts for *erev Shabbos*]. Nonetheless, once the fast has been moved to Thursday, Thursday becomes the {sole} obligatory time to fast.

¹ *Ramah*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 470, par. 2 and the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 470, par. 7.

² Not to enter Shabbos in a state of hunger or discomfort.

³ *Magen Avraham* 470:1.

⁴ {“At the outset,” or “to begin with.” In Latin, this oft-used legal term is referred to as “*ab initio*.”}

The equivalent {of these two alternative positions} can be found in the laws of Sukkah.⁵ There are two opinions regarding planks wider than four *tefachim* {cubits} {which may not be used for *sechach*}, even if “they were laid on their sides” (which would render them “less than three”⁶ {*tefachim* in width}):

According to one opinion, these planks become kosher *sechach* (having been “laid on their sides”). The second opinion, however, still considers them “unfit,” even though they’ve been laid on their sides. Having once been “designated as unfit” because “they are four *tefachim*” — “they are rendered the equivalent of metal bars” (which are in all instances considered unfit for *sechach*).

{Similar to the second opinion about the *sechach* planks,} according to the second explanation {about the antedated fast}, if (for any reason) one did not fast on Thursday — there is no need to make up the fast on the Friday, because the obligatory time for fasting has passed.⁷

2.

ATTEMPTED PROOF EACH WAY

We could seemingly resolve this question based on an explicit law concerning the Fast of Esther: When Purim is scheduled for Sunday, the Fast is antedated from {Shabbos} the 13th of Adar to the preceding Thursday⁸ {the 11th of Adar}. “If a *bris* is scheduled for (Thursday) the day of the fast,” the *Ramah*⁹ rules that “it is permissible to eat in honor of the *bris*, and those who ate should fast on the following day, Friday.”¹⁰

⁵ Cf. *Sukkah* 14b.

⁶ Cf. Rashi, loc. cit.

⁷ There is an authority who maintains that in such a case, there is no obligation to fast at all. Consequently, in such a case, there is no need to make-up for not fasting at its designated time.

⁸ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Ta’anuyos*,” ch. 5, par. 5; *Tur Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 686, par. 2.

⁹ {Rabbi Moshe Isserles, 1520 - 1572.}

¹⁰ *Ramah*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 686, par. 2.

This leads to the obvious conclusion that even though the Fast of Esther was nominally shifted and fixed for Thursday, this doesn't mean that Thursday is **the day** for fasting. Rather, it is just a make-up for Shabbos — and therefore {when one could not, or did not, fast on Thursday}, we can make up the fast {by rescheduling it} on Friday.

Based on this analogy, the same should apply in our case of the Fast of the Firstborns {i.e., we should reschedule the fast to Friday}.

However, there is a proof {for the alternative position} that the obligation of firstborns to fast is {permanently} **transferred** to Thursday {and does not get rescheduled to Friday}:

It has become a commonly observed *minhag* {custom} that instead of fasting on *erev Pesach* {in a normal year}, the firstborns participate in the *siyum*¹¹ of a talmudic tractate ({followed by} a Festive meal). Such participation automatically cancels the fast.

When *erev Pesach* falls on Shabbos, the universal custom is to conduct this *siyum* on {the preceding} Thursday.

Now, if Thursday has indeed become **the time for fasting**, we can understand why participating in a *siyum* cancels the obligation to fast on that day, obviating the need for any {further make-up} fast after Thursday.

However, if Thursday is merely a makeup date for the **later** *erev Pesach* (Shabbos) obligation, how does Thursday's *siyum* **cancel** the obligation to fast on another day — on *erev Pesach* (Shabbos)!? Accordingly, a person should have to fast on Friday, or make an **additional** *siyum* on Friday.)

¹¹ {The formal completion of the study of an entire talmudic tractate.}

3.

REJECTING THE PROOF

We could seemingly reject this proof (as indeed many *Achronim* suggest)¹² by explaining that making a *siyum* on *erev Pesach* does not (only) permit one to eat, but (also) **replaces** the fast. The Fast of the Firstborns was established as a “commemoration of the miracle when they {the firstborn Jews} were saved during the Plague of the Firstborns.”¹³ So the making of a *siyum* (along with the accompanying celebratory *mitzvah* meal) itself commemorates “the miracle.”

Even if we were to accept that fasting on Thursday is only obligated in order to compensate for not fasting on *erev Pesach*, in light of the above, making a *siyum* on Thursday would suffice, since making a *siyum* satisfies the obligation to commemorate “the miracle, etc.”

However, this line of reasoning is mistaken. If anything, the opposite case could be argued: According to this reasoning (that a *siyum* suffices to commemorate the miracle), it follows that the *siyum* should (also) be made on Shabbos, *erev Pesach*. If the “commemoration of the miracle” can be made on the day the fast was originally established (because that day {*erev Pesach*} is close to the time when the miracle actually happened), why would a person fulfill his obligation with “a commemoration” one or two days earlier?

We might justify the need to make a *siyum* on Thursday (and not fulfill one’s obligation by making a *siyum* on Shabbos *erev Pesach*) as follows: Since we have established an obligation to fast on Thursday, it cannot be replaced by a *siyum* (a commemoration of the miracle) a day or **two** later. Nonetheless, one would expect that making an (additional) *siyum* “as a commemoration of the miracle” on *erev Pesach* itself (Shabbos)

¹² *She’eilos Uteshuvos Arugas Habosem*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec.. 139.

¹³ *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 470; *Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch*, loc. cit.

would be observed as a custom (or at least as a *hiddur mitzvah* {the optimal way to fulfilling this commandment}).

And the fact that there is no custom to at least make a *siyum* (also) on Shabbos proves, as mentioned above, that there is no longer an obligation to fast on (Friday or) Shabbos (to commemorate the miracle), because the obligation has been lifted and transferred to Thursday.

[The fact that {in case of a Thursday *bris*} the Fast of Esther can be made up on Friday (see section 2) is irrelevant, because there are several distinctions between rabbinic ordinances; and obviously, one rabbinic ordinance need not be similar to another with respect to its performance or details.

This is especially true in our case — there is a reason to differentiate between the Fast of Esther and the Fast of the Firstborns:

The Fast of Esther was first established **in its time — the 13th of Adar** — because this was the day “they gathered to defend their lives.”¹⁴ Antedating the fast (to Thursday, when it would otherwise fall out on Shabbos) is an innovation that adds to the original ordinance (a make-up date).

In contrast, the date of the Fast of the Firstborns has already been **displaced**, for this fast should have been set for the 15th of Nissan (the date when the Plague of the Firstborns occurred). However, we had to antedate it, by “advancing it to the 14th, because we may not fast on Yom Tov.”¹⁵ As such, displacing the fast “because the fast can’t take place on Shabbos” is also included in the original ordinance as in any event, it will be displaced.]

¹⁴ *Rabbeinu Tam*, quoted in *Rosh* and *Ran* at the beg. of *Megillah*; see *Tur*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 686.

¹⁵ *Birkei Yosef*, sec. 470, par.7

4.

PROOF FROM A BAR MITZVAH BOY

A better understanding of this concept of antedating a fast can be developed by examining a halachic conundrum — the case of a child who reaches the age of majority on Shabbos *erev Pesach*. The accepted custom is that a father fasts on behalf of his minor firstborn son.¹⁶ As such, if a firstborn son reaches the age of majority on Shabbos *erev Pesach*, does his father need to fast for him on the {preceding} Thursday or not?

If we accept that Thursday has become **the time of obligation**, and on Thursday (the 12th of Nissan) the boy is still a child, the father should fast {on his son's behalf}.

However, if the obligation to fast **remains** on the 14th of Nissan (Shabbos), and fasting on Thursday is merely a make-up day **for Shabbos**, seemingly, if the father would fast on Thursday, he would accomplish nothing for his son. For at the time of **obligation** (Shabbos the 14th of Nissan) the boy has already reached adulthood, and at this stage, the father can no longer fulfill his son's obligation to fast. And as such, a make-up fast would not be feasible.

On this basis, we find that there is an advantage to the position that maintains that the time of the fast is moved to, and established on, Thursday: If Thursday were a make-up day, then a firstborn who becomes bar mitzvah on Shabbos *erev Pesach* would be precluded entirely from the Fast of the Firstborn: His father can't fulfil his obligations for him, as we mentioned. And even if the child were to fast himself on Thursday, while still a child, it is debatable whether a child's actions, undertaken for educational purposes, can fulfil his obligations once attaining the age of majority (in our case, the obligations of Shabbos *erev Pesach*, when he reaches adulthood).

¹⁶ *Ramah*, "Orach Chaim," end of sec. 470; the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 470, par. 4.

5.

ANTEDATED MAKE-UPS FOR BAR MITZVAH BOYS

However, we can posit that even if antedating a fast serves to make up for *erev Pesach*, a child who becomes bar mitzvah on Shabbos *erev Pesach* would **not** be excluded from the fast.

The explanation — by way of preface: As previously pointed out, when Purim falls out on Sunday, we antedate the Fast of Esther to the preceding Thursday. This antedated fast is clearly a make-up {for not fasting on Shabbos} (as mentioned above in section 2). The question is: Were a child to reach the age of majority on {Shabbos} the 13th of Adar (when Purim is Sunday), how could that young man fulfil his obligation fast for the Fast of Esther? [As mentioned above, scholars debate whether fasting as a child (on {Thursday,} the 11th) for educational purposes would fulfill his obligation upon reaching adulthood (on the 13th of Adar).]

The same question would apply in every case where we “antedate rather than postpone”:¹⁷ If the earlier day is considered a make-up day, then in cases where the child becomes bar mitzvah on the day of the obligation itself, how can he ever fulfil his obligation as an adult?

For example: In a year such as this one, when Purim for residents of walled cities (the 15th of Adar) falls on Shabbos, we antedate their *Megillah* reading to {Friday,} the 14th of Adar. As such, if the antedated *Megillah* reading is a make-up for the original obligation to read on (Shabbos) the 15th of Adar, what should a child who becomes bar mitzvah on the 15th of Adar do?

¹⁷ *Megillah 5a*.

6.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

We may explain this matter as follows: **We must** maintain that a child (and moreso,¹⁸ a person preparing to convert to Judaism) is obligated to study all the laws of the *mitzvos* (such as *tefillin*, reciting the *Shema*, and the like, which he will be expected to fulfil immediately upon reaching adulthood) **before** he reaches the age of majority. Because if he waits until he turns thirteen, he will not know then how to fulfil *mitzvos*. Meaning, even while still a child, he is **obligated** to prepare to fulfill his obligations upon becoming an adult — **as** training for *mitzvah* observance {as an adult later on}.

Similarly, in our case {concerning walled cities, when the 15th of Adar falls on Sunday}, a child *would be obligated* to read the *Megillah* on the 14th of Adar.

For we cannot imagine (something so unprecedentedly astonishing): This child was required to read the *Megillah* in previous years (for educational reasons). Similarly, he is obligated in future years {when he fulfills the *mitzvah* as an adult}. In this intervening year, however, he is exempt?! It would {likewise} be very difficult to propose that this child would be obligated to read {on the 14th} in order to educate him to do so in the future, when the same situation arises again, even though in future years, he will normally read on the **15th**!

It is more reasonable to say that his {current} duty as a child is to fulfil the obligations that he will be subject to as an adult on the 15th of Adar. Meaning, reading the *Megillah* as a child is **not** (only) for the sake of education; rather, doing so is complying with a rabbinic enactment that applies to a child, **at the outset**, to prepare him to fulfill his adult obligations.

¹⁸ “Moreso” because a non-Jew would otherwise be prohibited from studying Torah {if not for the fact that he was converting}.

Similarly, in our case {when Pesach falls on Shabbos}: Even if we were to accept the premise that the Fast of the Firstborns on Thursday is a make-up for {not fasting on} Shabbos, we could still say that a child who becomes bar mitzvah on {Shabbos} the 14th of Nisan should fast on Thursday (the 12th of Nisan). This would serve to educate him regarding the obligation that he will be subject to after becoming an adult (on the 14th of Nisan).

-Based on a talk delivered on the 11th of Nissan, 5734 (1974)