

The 'Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh' Story

As I have often said, I consider knowledge of our Calendar to be in the spirit of the mitzva of HACHODESH HAZEH LACHEM. It also helps if you enjoy statistics...

The 29th of a month is Erev Rosh Chodesh, regardless of whether the Rosh Chodesh following it is one day or two.

When the 29th of a month is Shabbat, we have Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh, and we have a potential Machar Chodesh haftara.

The reason the word 'potential' was used, is because the Machar Chodesh haftara is pre-empted when the Shabbat is also Parshat Sh'kalim or Parshat HaChodesh or Parshat R'ei.

Machar Chodesh usually pre-empts the regular haftara of the sedra. And, as mentioned above, it is pre-empted by Sh'kalim or HaChodesh.

In the case of R'ei, its regular haftara stays - it is NOT pre-empted by Machar Chodesh, so that the 7 haftarot of Nechama (consolation) from after Tish'a b'Av until right before Rosh HaShana remain intact.

(Interestingly, when Rosh Chodesh Elul itself is on Shabbat, the Rosh Chodesh haftara DOES pre-empt R'ei's haftara, because -

(1) the R"Ch haftara is also from the consolation chapters of Yeshayahu;

(2) R'ei's regular haftara will be tacked on to the haftara of Ki Teitzei, because it follows it in Tanach.)

So, we are looking for all 29ths of months that fall on Shabbat, and the subset of those Shabbatot on which we read the Machar Chodesh haftara.

There are 14 different year-types in the Jewish Calendar.

Five year-types have only one Erev R"Ch on Shabbat. Of those, four have one Machar Chodesh and one year-type has none.

Five year-types have two ER"Ch on Shabbat. Of those, only one has Machar Chodesh both times - the other four have only one Machar Chodesh.

Four year-types have three ER"Ch on Shabbat. Of those, only one has Machar Chodesh all three times; the other three year-types have only one Machar Chodesh each.

Machar Chodesh haftara is read once in 11 of the 14 year-types, not at all in one year-type, twice in one year-type, and three times in one year-type. The average is a bit more than once a year.

The 29ths of the following months never occur on a Shabbat: Kislev, Tevet, Sivan, Tamuz, and Elul.

This year, 5784, is a MEM-ZAYIN-CHET year. MEM is for M'UBERET; ZAYIN is for Shabbat, the first day of Rosh HaShana this year. CHET is for CHASEIR, deficient, meaning that both Marcheshvan and Kislev had 29 days.

We had Machar Chodesh once - on Shabbat B'reishit, which was on the 29th of Tishrei, Erev Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan. We have another Erev R"Ch - this coming Shabbat. The haftara for Sh'kalim will be read - not Machar Chodesh.

Know that S'faradim add the first and last pasuk of the Machar Chodesh haftara on a Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh when the Machar Chodesh haftara is pre-empted. Ashkenazim do not add any p'sukim. (If your Ashkenaz shul does, it is a borrowing fro the S'faradi custom, not an official practice of the Ashkenazic minhag.)

And now, a practical point concerning The 'Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh' Story

This is a relatively small point, but we have a lot of those in Jewish observance, and all details of halacha and minhag deserve our attention.

Seuda Sh'lishit on Erev Rosh Chodesh sometimes presents an interesting halachic question. If Seuda Sh'lishit continues into the evening and Birkat HaMazon is said after dark, do we say R'TZEI for Shabbat, or Yaaleh v'Yavo for Rosh Chodesh? Technically, it is

Rosh Chodesh when you bench, even though you have not yet ended Shabbat.

Three opinions on this issue exist.

The TAZ (TUREI ZAHAV, R' David HaLevi Segal, 1586-1667) says that if his meal began on Shabbat and continued into Rosh Chodesh, he should say both R'tzei and YvY.

Others object to that ruling, stating that it is a contradiction, since to say both would be to claim that it is Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh - which it is not.

It seems that the TAZ does not consider it as such, but rather an overlap of the sanctity of Shabbat and R"Ch, similar to the situation of Yom Tov that follows Shabbat when we merge Kiddush for Yom Tov with Havdala for Shabbat.

As such, most other sources instruct one to say R'tzei only, because it is the beginning of a meal that determines what to add to Birkat HaMazon - or - to say only YvY, according to those who say that it is the end of the meal - when one is benching - that determines what to add.

The prevailing opinion is that one would say only R'tzei.

However, Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that one should avoid the controversy - even though there is a prevalent p'sak of what to do - by ending Seuda Sh'lishit this Shabbat, by sunset, or at least eat no more bread after sunset. Then

everyone would agree that one says only R'tzei.

If one's Seuda Sh'lishit does extend into the night, if one ate at least a kazayit of HaMotzi, his benching should include only R'tzei.

However, if that is not the case, and his eating was only after dark, then YvY should be said, and not R'tzei. And if one is not sure whether he ate enough bread before dark, he should say both R'tzei and YvY in benching.

The confusion of the last two paragraphs justifies Reb Moshe's advice to have an early Seuda Sh'lishit on Shabbat with is Erev R"Ch.

Take-aways from this discussion:

- Little details of halacha and minhag help us fine-tune and improve our observance of mitzvot.
- It is preferable, when possible, to avoid a situation of doubt or machloket, rather than being in such a situation - even though a p'sak halacha will show us how to handle the situation.
- Sometimes, opinions that we don't follow in normal circumstances, can be implemented under unusual circumstances. That is (one of) the reasons that we preserve all opinions in a situation, rather than just the accepted p'sak halacha.
- And that the CC&BW of PhiloTorah is obsessed (hopefully, in a good way) with the Jewish Calendar, and with numbers in general.