

Decades ago, I read a facetious description of how the houses of Congress negotiate a compromise. The House of Representatives passes a bill with an appropriation of 10 billion dollars. The Senate passes a different version of the bill with an appropriation of 15 billion dollars. A conference committee meets to negotiate a bill to be offered for passage in both houses of Congress. The outcome includes an appropriation of 20 billion dollars. To paraphrase Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois: 5 billion dollars here, 5 billion dollars there – pretty soon, you're talking about serious money.

Perhaps our tradition offers Congress the precedent that a compromise need not fall between the numerical positions considered. For how many days of Passover are we required to eat matzah? On this question, the classical commentator Rashi notes an apparent inconsistency in the Torah.

In today's Torah reading, the *Etz Hayim* begins the translation of Deut. 16:8 with "After eating unleavened bread 6 days, you shall hold a solemn gathering for the Lord your God on the seventh day...."<sup>1</sup> But this is not literal - the original Hebrew text does not contain a word for "after." The same verse is translated in the Hertz chumash more literally: "Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread ...."<sup>2</sup> So we might think from this verse that we are supposed to eat matzah on each of the first six days of Pesach. But Rashi notes Ex. 12:15 (p. 384 in the *Etz Hayim*) begins "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread...." So are we required to eat matzah on each of the first six days of Pesach, or on each of the first seven days, or, for those of us in the Diaspora, all eight days of Pesach? Rashi seems to conclude that none of the above are correct.

Rashi actually offers two explanations<sup>3</sup> of Deut. 16:8:

1. "Seven from the old (crop) or six ... from the new" (citing the *Sifre* midrash and, from the Talmud, tractate *Menachot*). I understand this to mean we are obligated to eat matzah made from "old" or stored grains for the first seven days, or matzah made from new grain for the first six days. Perhaps such a practice was more practical when matzot were not mass-produced and one could keep track of the grain used.
2. "Another interpretation: it teaches regard the eating of unleavened bread on the seventh day that it is not obligatory. And hence here you learn concerning the six days, for the seventh was in a generalization, and it departed from the generalization to teach that the eating of unleavened bread during it is not obligatory, but optional; and not to teach regarding itself did it depart, but to teach regarding the entire generalization did it depart; just as the seventh is optional, so all of them [i.e., the six days]<sup>4</sup> are optional, except the first night, which Scripture established as obligatory, as it is stated (Ex. 12:18)<sup>5</sup>, 'In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread...'" (citing the *Mechilta* midrash and the Talmud, tractate *Pesachim*). So according to this interpretation, obligatory eating of matzah is only at the first seder - at both seders in the Diaspora - despite the Torah's seeming requirements of eating matzah for six or seven days of Pesach; if we consume bread during Pesach, it must be matzah, but the requirement of eating matzah is limited to the beginning of the *yom tov*.

## References

[E] *Etz Hayim*

[H] *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Rabbi Dr. J.H. Hertz, ed., Soncino, London, 1964

[R] *The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary: Deuteronomy*, R. Abraham ben Isaiah and R. Benjamin Sharfman, eds., S.S.& R Publishing, Brooklyn, 1949

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<sup>1</sup> [E], p. 1083

<sup>2</sup> [H], p. 816

<sup>3</sup> [R], p. 154

<sup>4</sup> Inserted comment by editors of [R]

<sup>5</sup> [E], p. 385