

Afikoman

The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 477:1) famously rules that one should ensure (“*yehei zahir*”) to eat the *afikoman* – the piece of *matza* eaten at the end of the *seder* in commemoration of the *pesach* sacrifice – before *chatzot* (halakhic midnight). The background to this ruling is the Gemara’s discussion in [Masekhet Pesachim \(120b\)](#) regarding the consumption of the *pesach* sacrifice. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya maintained that the *mitzva* to eat the meat of the sacrifice may be fulfilled only until *chatzot*, based on the command, “*Ve-akhelu et ha-basar ba-layla ha-zeh*” – “They shall eat the meat on this night” ([Shemot 12:8](#)). The word “*ba-layla*” is also used several verses later (12:12) in reference to the plague of the firstborn, which took place at *chatzot* (“*Va-yehi ba-chatzi ha-layla*” – [Shemot 12:29](#)), leading Rabbi Elazar to conclude that the meat of the sacrifice must be eaten by *chatzot*. Rabbi Akiva disagreed, claiming that the command to eat the *pesach* sacrifice “on this night” is intended to teach that it may not be eaten the following day. According to Rabbi Akiva, then, the obligation to eat the *korban pesach* may be fulfilled throughout the night. The Gemara cites Rava as commenting that this debate affects the observance of Pesach even nowadays, when we eat *afikoman* in commemoration of the *korban pesach*. According to Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rava states, one must ensure to eat the *afikoman* before *chatzot*.

The *Shulchan Arukh*’s ruling – “One should be careful to eat it before *chatzot*” – reflects the view of some *Rishonim* that Rabbi Elazar’s position is accepted as *Halakha*. Although we generally follow Rabbi Akiva’s rulings in his disputes with individual colleagues, several passages in the Mishna and Gemara appear to presume Rabbi Elazar’s view, suggesting that his is the accepted position. Others, however, followed Rabbi Akiva’s view. (See *Bei’ur Halakha* who summarizes the various opinions among the *Rishonim* on the matter.) In light of the different views that exist, the *Shulchan Arukh* rules that one should endeavor to eat the *afikoman* before *chatzot*.

Due to the length of most traditional *sedarim*, this requirement often poses a problem, as many people prolong the reading of *maggid* with extensive discussion, and then enjoy an elaborate, multicourse meal. Rav Avraham Borenstein of Sochatchov, in his *Avnei Neizer*

(O.C. 381), offered a famous, controversial solution to this problem, one which resulted in an entire literature of debate and discussion. The *Avnei Neizer's* proposal is based upon his novel approach to explain Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's position. As we noted, Rabbi Elazar understood that the Torah's command to eat the *pesach* sacrifice "on this night" refers to midnight, the time when the plague of the firstborn struck the Egyptians. However, the *Avnei Neizer* asks, if this is true, then why does Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya not require eating the *pesach* sacrifice precisely at *chatzot*? Why does he consider *chatzot* – the moment of the plague of the firstborn – as the deadline for fulfilling the *mitzva*, rather than the time when the *mitzva* must be fulfilled?

The answer to this question, the *Avnei Neizer's* contends, is found in the well-known rule of "*ein matirin achar ha-pesach afikoman*," which is established by the Mishna ([Pesachim 119b](#)) and forbids eating after eating the *korban pesach*. The Gemara indicates that the purpose of this prohibition is to ensure that the taste of the sacrifice remains in one's mouth after the *seder*. The *Avnei Neizer* explains that according to Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, the Torah could not require eating the *korban pesach* at the precise moment of *chatzot*, as this would be impractical, and so it instead required partaking of the sacrifice sometime before *chatzot* and then having the taste in one's mouth until *chatzot*. The taste in the mouth in a sense marks the continuation of the act of eating, such that one can be considered as though he eats the sacrifice at the precise moment of *chatzot*.

This theory led the *Avnei Neizer* to the conclusion that according to Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, the prohibition against eating after partaking of the *korban pesach* extends only until the moment of *chatzot*. After *chatzot*, it is entirely permissible to eat. This is relevant nowadays, as well, in light of the fact that *Halakha* forbids eating after eating the *afikoman*, just as it was forbidden to eat after partaking of the *korban pesach* (*Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 478:1). According to the view requiring eating the *afikoman* before *chatzot*, it would be permissible to eat other food after *chatzot*.

On this basis, the *Avnei Neizer* proposed an ingenious solution for those who fear they will be unable to eat the *afikoman* before *chatzot*. Several minutes before *chatzot*, they should interrupt their meal, take a piece of *matza*, and stipulate that this piece should be considered the *afikoman* according to the view that the *afikoman* must be eaten before *chatzot*. After eating the *matza*, they should wait until after *chatzot* and then resume their meal. Then, after the meal, they

should eat an additional piece of *matza*, stipulating that it should be considered the *afikoman* according to Rabbi Akiva's position, allowing eating the *afikoman* even after *chatzot*. This way, the *mitzva* is certainly fulfilled. Since the deadline for eating the *afikoman* is also the final time when eating after the *afikoman* is forbidden, one can satisfy the stringent view of Rabbi Elazar by eating the *afikoman* just before *chatzot* and then resuming the meal after *chatzot*. Rabbi Akiva's view is then satisfied by partaking of the *afikoman* after the meal.