

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY**

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**Shiur #12: Using Candlelight for Bedikat Chametz**

The first mishna in Masekhet Pesachim establishes that bedikat chametz should be performed by candlelight, and an ensuing gemara (4a) explains that candlelight is the most effective means of searching for chametz. As discussed in a previous shiur (#11), some claim that a candle is radiant only during nighttime, and therefore candlelight bedika must be performed at night. Others, however, felt that candlelight is sufficiently effective during daylight, as well, and thus should be utilized even in the rare, exceptional situations of sanctioned daylight bedikat. In any event, both these views cast the candle as the most practical and effective manner of bedika. Therefore, in situations where a candle is irrelevant or unnecessary, it would not be required.

An interesting gemara in Pesachim (8a) supports this contention when it claims that an akhsadra – a veranda with plentiful sunlight - may be searched by sunlight (in a daytime bedika). Seemingly, candlelight is not an absolute, objective necessity, and may be replaced by sunlight- under appropriate circumstances.

By contrast, Rashi's comments to Pesachim (4a) suggest that he recognized a formal requirement to always utilize a candle for bedika. He writes (s.v. ve-or) that candlelight is most effective – or only effective – at night, and adds that the option of non-candlelight bedika is unacceptable, given that the gemara (7a) derives the use of a candle from pesukim. This appears to establish candlelight as an objectively required standard, rather than the most practically effective method of bedika. Similar sentiments emerge from the comments of Rabbenu Peretz to Pesachim (4a).

The gemara to which Rashi refers (7a) presents an intricate series of similar words which combine to instruct the use of a candle for bedika. When introducing the prohibition of chametz (Shemot 12:19), the Torah employs the word 'yimatzei' ('lo yimatzei' – 'shall not be found'), a word that appears elsewhere (Bereishit 44:12) in conjunction with the term 'chipus,' which in turn is mentioned in a context of candles (Tzeiphania 1:12). Yet, although the gemara extracts the candle requirement from a convoluted process of extrapolation, Rashi, in the aforementioned passage, points specifically to the term 'chipus' as the basis for the requirement to use a candle. Perhaps, Rashi felt that only a candle can create an experience of active searching, by applying a light source to particular areas being inspected. Sunlight may cast powerful light, but it cannot be directed to particular areas. Therefore, Rashi may have felt that the process of 'chipus' demands candlelight.

Regardless of whether we accept this 'searchlight theory' as the basis for Rashi's view, he clearly required a candle as an indispensable component of bedika. How, then, according to Rashi, does the gemara allow searching a veranda by sunlight? Indeed, the Rambam interprets the gemara's ruling to mean that although a veranda must be checked by candlelight, nevertheless, in the event that it was searched by sunlight – be-di'eved - no further bedika is necessary. However, the straightforward reading of the gemara implies that it may indeed be checked by sunlight, even on the level of optimal performance (le-khatechila). How would Rashi explain this halakha, if, in his view, candlelight bedika constitutes a formal, objective requirement, rather than a pragmatic measure?

Possibly, Rashi would claim that any area which requires bedika DOES indeed require candlelight. However, certain areas, for various reasons, are excluded from the formal obligation of bedika. The mishna (2a) already indicates that areas into which no chametz could possibly be taken are excused from bedika. The gemara also allows a chatzer (courtyard) where many birds reside to remain unchecked, since any food left there would inevitably be eaten. The common denominator between these two situations is the impossibility of the presence of chametz, in the first instance because chametz is

never brought there to begin with, and in the second, because any leftover chametz will immediately be eliminated. This same logic might perhaps be applied to an akhsadra - a veranda flooded with light. No 'unfound' chametz will ever remain in such a room, since any leftover food would be conspicuously visible in the daylight. Therefore, a cursory glance into such a room suffices to ascertain the absence of chametz- even without the formal procedure of bedika. For this reason, perhaps, the standard rules of bedika do not apply, and thus, even according to Rashi, an akhsadra may be searched by sunlight.

This explanation - based on the model of akhsadra - might depend upon a closer reading of the gemara's syntax. The gemara's precise formulation – 'akhsadra le-ora nivdeket' ('a veranda may be checked by its own sunlight') – does imply that a veranda requires a bona fide bedika, but not with a candle. This would conflict with our understanding of Rashi's reading, that all bedikot must be conducted by candlelight, but a veranda does not, strictly speaking, require bedika at all.

Leaving aside the syntactical issue, our understanding of Rashi perhaps hinges on a debate as to when the search of an akhsadra should take place. Rabbenu David claims that an akhsadra must be searched on the day of the 13<sup>th</sup> by its sunlight. One cannot delay the search until the 14<sup>th</sup>, since by then the timeframe of bedikat chametz will have elapsed. This claim suggests that an akhsadra is obligated in bedika – albeit through a different light source – and therefore the halakhot governing the schedule of this search correspond to the guidelines for bedikat chametz in general. Rashi, however, claims that an akhsadra may be checked on the 14<sup>th</sup>, after the general time for bedika has passed. This would seemingly confirm the theory that an akhsadra does not require formal bedika, and one must simply take a quick "glance" on the 14<sup>th</sup> as a final inspection, to ensure that no chametz remains. It emerges, then, that areas included in the formal obligation of bedika require a candle, whereas an akhsadra, a chatzer, and other areas excused from formal bedika, require no candle.

Having developed this theory - that locations with abundant sunlight (akhsadra) or built-in removal mechanism (chatzer) may not be obligated in bedika – and having

enlisted it to justify searching these areas by sunlight, let us now address the scope of this exemption. Would this bedika exemption apply to all locations flooded with light, or only to areas which are not integrated into the house itself? Possibly, the Chakhamim installed a universal bedika obligation upon the entire residential domain of the home, regardless of the likelihood of chametz, but allowed peripheral areas to remain unchecked if there is no chance that they contain chametz. According to this possibility, an akhsadra is exempted because it meets two criteria: it is considered outside the residential domain of the home, and the absence of chametz in such a room is practically guaranteed.

This issue perhaps underlies the Yerushalmi's discussion (Pesachim 1:1) concerning bedikat chametz in a Beit Keneset or Beit Midrash. The Yerushalmi assumes that these locations require bedika, but queries whether they may be checked with sunlight, like an akhsadra. (Public areas, particularly places of worship with high ceilings, typically, enjoyed greater amounts of sunlight than private quarters.) According to most positions, formal bedika does not require candlelight, and hence a naturally illuminated akhsadra is examined with its sunlight. From this standpoint, the Yerushalmi's question is perplexing. If a shul contains sufficient sunlight, it should be comparable to akhsadra; and if the shul does not enjoy abundant sunlight, it should require a candle at a practical level, similar to a normal residence.

According to the system we suggested for Rashi, the Yerushalmi's question seems viable. Residential areas require a candle at a formal level, in order to fulfill the formal bedika requirement imposed by Chazal on living quarters. Only peripheral areas (chatzer and akhsadra) which also leave no chance for unnoticed chametz are excused from formal bedika and do not require a candle. The Yerushalmi, then, is probing the status of a shul or Beit Midrash. On the one hand, we might classify these buildings as 'peripheral,' given that they are not used for residence. As such, given their plentiful light, a formal bedika is unnecessary. However, since they are utilized with greater frequency and duration than a chatzer or akhsadra, they might be deemed 'residential' and thus earn inclusion in the formal institution of bedika which, according to Rashi, demands candlelight.

An interesting consequence of the two different approaches to understanding the status of an akhsadra is raised by the Sha'arei Teshuva (O.C. 433). He claims that if a person owns only an akhsadra and performs a bedika, he should recite the standard berakha over this search. Evidently, he accepted Rabbenu Dovid's view, that an akhsadra is basically obligated in bedika, and hence it warrants a berakha. According to the theory we advanced in explaining Rashi, an akhsadra does not warrant a berakha, since no formal process of bedika is required in such an area.

This theory, that only marginal areas which carry no chametz concerns are exempt from bedika, is severely challenged by a final case - a skylight. The gemara (8a) asserts very clearly that the area directly underneath a skylight does not require candlelight bedika. This halakha is easily understood according to the majority view, that bedika generally does not require candlelight; the natural concentrated light from a skylight may therefore supplant candlelight. However, according to our approach in explaining Rashi, all residential areas require candlelight bedika; only peripheral areas that are clearly free of chametz are excused from formal bedika. Why, then, does the gemara allow searching the area of a skylight, which is located within residential premises, without a candle?

We might respond that a location so powerfully illuminated cannot possibly be obligated in 'bedika,' since the items are so clearly evident. Shuls and verandas are peripheral areas are not obligated to formal bedika; as they also possess excess light sources a casual glance to assure that there is no chametz present, suffices. A skylight is so illuminated that even though it is an integrated part of the residence, no bedika is necessary.