

THE MITZVAH OF SEPARATING CHALLAH

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

It is a time honored custom for women to bake challos for Shabbos, both because it enhances kavod Shabbos⁽¹⁾ and because it is an opportunity for them to set aright Chavah's sin on the first erev Shabbos of Creation⁽²⁾. For this reason, it is halachically preferable that a woman be the one who separates the challah rather than a man.

Although Shulchan Aruch cites challah-baking as a worthy custom "that should not be abandoned⁽³⁾", many women find it difficult to bake Shabbos challos on a steady basis. But even some women who do not adhere to the custom regularly make a point of baking challah for the Shabbos after Pesach, for it is a tradition that baking challos immediately after Pesach is a segulah for parnasah. Many follow the additional custom of baking challah in the form of a key or pressing a key into the dough (schlüssel challah) to symbolize "the key of parnasah"⁽⁴⁾. Let us, therefore, review some of the halachos pertaining to separating challah.

THE PROCEDURE OF SEPARATION:

Those who usually recite l'shem yichud before performing a mitzvah should do so before performing this mitzvah as well⁽⁵⁾.

The woman should stand while the challah is being separated and the blessing recited⁽⁶⁾. If she did so while sitting, however, the challah separation is still valid⁽⁷⁾.

The proper time to separate challah is before baking the dough while the batter is raw. If, however, one forgot to separate challah before baking the dough, she must do so after the dough has been baked⁽⁸⁾.

A small piece of dough is removed from the mass. Preferably, the designated piece should be at least a k'zayis⁽⁹⁾ (approx. 1 oz.).

The designated piece of dough should be held with the right hand. A left-handed person should hold it in her left hand⁽¹⁰⁾.

Immediately before the separation of the designated piece(11) - with no talking in between - the blessing should be recited. The following is the correct text:

"Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeynu Melech Haolam Asher Kidshanu B'Mitvosav V'tsivanu L'hofrish Chalah."

Some follow the custom of adding two words to the end of the blessing: "Min Hae'esah". One who does not have this tradition should not add these two words(12).

After the separation of the challah, it is proper to recite (in any language): This piece is [separated for] challah(13).

DISPOSING OF THE CHALLAH

The designated piece should be burned until it is no longer edible. The ashes may then be discarded. Under extenuating circumstances, when the challah cannot be burned, some poksim permit carefully wrapping the challah in a bag and throwing it in the garbage(14). In such a case, less than a k'zayis should be separated.]

The piece of challah that was separated is forbidden to be eaten. In effect, it is a non-kosher food. Care should be taken that it does not touch the rest of the baked goods, either in or out of the oven.

If the challah is burned inside the oven [in which other items are being baked] it should be left tightly wrapped in silver foil so that steam from the non-kosher challah does not penetrate the oven walls. B'dieved, however, if it was not wrapped, the oven does not become non kosher and does not need to undergo a koshering process(15). If, however, the challah comes into physical contact with the other baked goods while they are in the oven, the baked goods may become non-kosher(16). A rav must be consulted.

THE MINIMUM AMOUNT OF FLOUR(17) WHICH REQUIRES SEPARATION OF CHALLAH:

A dough which contains less than 10 cups of flour (approx. two and a half to three pounds) is completely exempt from challah.

A dough which contains more than 10 cups of flour requires separation of challah, but no blessing is recited.

A dough which contains more than 16 cups of flour (over 4 pounds) requires separation of challah with a blessing(18).

It is possible that a dough which was originally baked with less than the prescribed amount of flour would ultimately require separation of challah: If several small doughs are combined, they are halachically considered as one dough. In the following three cases the doughs may be considered as one dough(19):

If the doughs are [or were previously] pressed together tightly enough so that when they are

separated they will stick to one another, they are considered as one dough and challah must be separated from one of them.

Even if the doughs are not [or were not] pressed together but are placed in one deep utensil(20) and are touching each other(21), they require hafroschas challah and challah must be separated from one of them. Note that even if the doughs have been baked into bread or cakes and then placed together in one utensil, they will require hafroschas challah at that point.

Even if the doughs are not [or were not] pressed together and are not [or were not] placed in one utensil, but are lying on a counter or on a table and are touching each other and are completely wrapped up in a cloth, they are considered as one dough and challah must be separated from one of them(22). Note that even if the doughs have been baked into bread or cakes and then wrapped together, they will require hafroschas challah at that point.

The following exceptions to the above rule apply: If the two doughs have different sets of ingredients and thus taste different from each other, or even if they taste the same but were made by two different people, or even if they were made by one person but she does not want to mix them or combine them, or even if she does not care whether they are mixed but the flours are from grain grown in two separate years - then they are not considered as one dough, even if they are pressed together or touching each other in the same utensil.

An oven, a refrigerator or a freezer is not considered as a utensil which combines small doughs or baked goods into one big unit, particularly if the items are individually wrapped(23).

The above information is useful for women who are baking several doughs, each of which contains less than the minimum amount of flour. Women who would like to incur the obligation and fulfill the mitzvah of challah have one of the three following options. They are all l'chatchilah:

They could firmly press the doughs together;

They could place the doughs, while touching each other, in one deep utensil;

They could leave the doughs on the counter or table and completely enwrap them in a towel or sheet.

After one of these options is followed, challah may be separated as described above.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rama O.C. 242:1.
2. Mishnah Berurah 242:6.

3. Rama and Beur Halachah, ibid.
4. See Ta'amei ha-Minhagim 596-597 for the origin of this custom.
5. Kaf ha-Chayim O.C. 457:12. The appropriate nusach is quoted there.
6. Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 328:2; Aruch ha-Shulchan 328:5.
7. Mishnah Berurah 8:2. See Magen Avraham 8:1.
8. Mishnah Berurah 457:5.
9. Rama Y.D. 322:5.
10. Mishnah Berurah 206:18.
11. Chochmas Adam (Sha'arei Tzedek 14:32). See also Meiri, Challah 2:2.
12. Kaf ha-chayim 457:10. One who separates challah after the dough has been baked, definitely should not recite those two words.
13. R' Akiva Eiger Y.D. 328:1; Chochmas Adam, ibid.
14. Chazon Ish (oral ruling quoted in Practical Guide to Kashrus, pg. 101); Teshuvos R' Yonson Shteif 276; Minchas Yitzchak 4:13 and 4:102.
15. Since dough, generally, is not liquid and hardly emits steam. Even if it will, it is negligible and will be bateil beshishim.
16. See Leket ha-Omer 14, note 3.
17. Water and other ingredients are not included in the minimum amount.
18. Ruling of Harav T.P. Frank which is followed by many women. Some poskim maintain that a blessing should not be recited unless five pounds of flour are used - Harav Y.E. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael 40).
19. Based on Mishnah Berurah 457:7 and Beur Halachah.
20. The utensil must be sufficiently deep so that no dough [or baked item] will protrude from it.
21. Minchas Yitzchak 8:109 maintains that even if the doughs are in individual pans or bags and the pans are touching each other [and they are placed in one big deep utensil] the doughs are considered combined. Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42, note 39) disagrees.
22. Beur Halachah 457:1.
23. See Beur ha-Gra Y.D. 325:3 (concerning an oven). See also Machzeh Eliyahu 111 and Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42, note 39.

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