

THE MITZVAH OF SEPARATING CHALLAH

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

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 and Yom Tov, both because it enhances kavod Shabbos and kavod Yom Tov⁽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 and other reasons⁽³⁾, 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⁽⁴⁾", 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 on that Shabbos 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 (schlissel challah) to symbolize "the key of parnasah"⁽⁵⁾.

CHALLAH SEPARATION: QUANTITY of BATTER:

A batter which contains less than 10 cups of flour (approx. two and a half to three pounds) is completely exempt from challah separation. A batter which contains more than 10 cups of flour⁽⁶⁾ requires separation of challah, but no blessing is recited.

A batter which contains more than 16 cups of flour (over 4 pounds) requires separation of challah with a blessing⁽⁷⁾.

It is possible that 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⁽⁸⁾:

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⁽⁹⁾ and are touching each other⁽¹⁰⁾, they require hafroshas 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 hafroshas challah at that point. [An oven, a refrigerator or a freezer is not considered a utensil which combines small doughs or baked goods into one big unit, particularly if the items are individually wrapped(11).]

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(12). Note that even if the doughs have been baked into bread or cakes and then wrapped together, they will require hafroshas challah at that point.

The following exception to the above rule applies: If the two batters 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.

This 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 below.

CHALLAH SEPARATION: DOUGH TYPE

Challah is separated from a dough made out of flour derived from the five species of grain - wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats. Rice, corn and soy flour are exempt.

When flour is mixed with any amount of water, one is obligated to separate challah with a blessing. Flour mixed with fruit juice or with eggs only, requires hafroshas challah without a blessing(13). When flour is mixed with olive(14) oil, wine, milk or bee's honey there is a difference of opinion. Most require separating challah with a blessing(15) while others recommend separating challah without a blessing(16).

Challah is separated not only when baking bread but when baking other items as well. The following rules apply:

Thick dough from which cake or cookies will be baked requires challah separation if a minimum of 10 cups of flour are used. If a minimum of 16 cups of flour are used, the blessing is recited when separating the challah. [Other ingredients do not count towards the minimum amount of flour.] Thick

dough which will be fried or cooked requires hafroshas challah without a blessing(17).

A liquid batter which will be fried or cooked is exempt from challah. If it will be baked, it requires hafroshas challah with a blessing(18).

THE PROCEDURE OF SEPARATION:

Those who usually recite l'shem yichud before performing a mitzvah should do so before performing this mitzvah as well(19). The woman should stand while the challah is being separated and the blessing recited(20). If she did so while sitting, however, the challah separation is still valid(21).

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(22). A small piece of dough is removed from the mass. Preferably, the designated piece should be at least a k'zayis(23) (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(24). Immediately before(25) the separation of the designated piece - with no talking in between - the blessing should be recited.

Some follow the custom of adding two words to the end of the blessing: Min ha-isah. One who does not have this tradition should not add these two words(26). After the separation of the challah, it is proper to recite (in any language): This piece is [separated for] challah(27).

DISPOSING OF THE CHALLAH:

The designated piece should be burned until it is no longer edible. The Ashes may then be discarded. Flushing the designated piece of challah down a toilet or tossing it in a river is not the same as burning it and should be avoided(28). Under extenuating circumstances, when the challah cannot be burned, some poskim permit carefully wrapping the challah in a bag and throwing it in the garbage(29). [In such a case, less than a k'zayis should be separated.] It is prohibited to feed it to one's pet or to derive any benefit from it(30).

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. [For this reason it is not recommended to remove the designated piece of challah with a fork or a knife. Since dough tends to stick, some crumbs may remain on the utensil and possibly render it - or other dishes washed along with it - non-kosher when washed with hot water later on.]

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(31). 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(32). A rav must be consulted.

CHALLAH SEPARATION: SPECIAL SITUATIONS:

QUESTION: While sitting at the Shabbos table, a woman realizes that she forgot to separate challah from her challah loaves. What should she do?

ANSWER: It is prohibited to separate challah on Shabbos or Yom Tov(33) unless the dough was made on Yom Tov(34). Accordingly, there is nothing that can be done(35) and the challah loaves may not be eaten(36). [If she realizes her oversight during bein hashmashos, and neither she nor the shul where her husband is davening has recited kabbolas Shabbos, she may still separate challah [even if she has already lit Shabbos candles], as long as the family has no other challah loaves for Shabbos(37).]

If this oversight occurred outside of Eretz Yisrael(38), however, the challah loaves could be eaten so long as the lady intends to separate challah after Shabbos from whatever will remain of the challah loaves she had baked. She must follow this procedure(39): She must make sure that a small piece [e.g., one slice] remains from the loaves she had baked; Separate a designated piece from that remaining slice after Shabbos or Yom Tov is over(40). That piece is then burned like any other separated challah. No blessing is recited over this type of challah separation(41).

QUESTION: What can be done if the designated piece of challah, after being separated - regardless of whether a blessing was recited or not - gets mixed in with the rest of the dough?

ANSWER: If the designated piece of challah is mixed in with dough which is 101 times greater in volume than the designated piece, then the entire dough may be baked and eaten(42).

If the dough is not 101 times bigger than the designated piece, the dough may still be eaten - but only after the challah piece, which is forbidden to eat, is "removed" from the dough. This is done by halachically annulling the piece of challah so that the dough no longer contains the forbidden challah piece. The woman [or her husband(43)] recites the following in the presence of a bais din of any three adult males(44): "I regret that I designated that piece of dough as challah, and had I known that I would regret it, I would not have designated it for challah(45)." The bais din can then repeal her designation as they do with any other vow(46). Another piece of dough is then separated for challah.

The same procedure would apply if the woman realized after baking her challah loaves that she mistakenly baked the designated piece of challah with them, or if somehow the designated piece got mixed up with any other food.

When the challah loaves or other food are needed, this procedure may be followed on Shabbos or Yom Tov as well(47).

QUESTION: A woman prepares dough with the required amount of flour [16 cups] in order to recite the blessing, then divides the dough in two - half she bakes immediately while the other half is frozen to be baked at a later time. Does she separate challah?

ANSWER: This issue is debated in the poskim(48). It is recommended, therefore, to separate challah but not to recite the blessing(49).

FOOTNOTES: 1 Rama O.C. 242:1; 529:1. 2 Mishnah Berurah 242:6. 3 See Bartenura Shabbos 2:6. 4 Rama O.C. 242:1 and Beirur Halachah (s.v. vehu). In O.C. 529:1 Rama refers to this custom as a "mitzvah." 5 See Ta'amei ha-Minhagim 596-597 for the origin of this custom. 6 Water and other ingredients are not included in the minimum amount. 7 Ruling of Harav Z.P. Frank (quoted in Siddur Korban Minchah, pg. 40) 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). 8 Based on Mishnah Berurah 457:7 and Beirur Halachah. 9 The utensil must be sufficiently deep so that no dough [or baked item] will protrude from it. 10 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. 11 See Beirur ha-Gra Y.D. 325:3 (concerning an oven). See also Machzeh Eliyahu 111 and Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42, note 39. 12 Beirur Halachah 457:1. 13 Taz Y.D. 329:9. In practice, however, a dough [of 10 cups of flour or more] should not be prepared unless it contains either water, wine, olive oil, milk or bee's honey. 14 Mishnah Berurah 158:15. 15 Pischei Teshuvah 329:2; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 35:7; Aruch ha-Shulchan 329:3. 16 Oral ruling heard from Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in Oholei Yeshurun, pg. 58) based on Bais Hillel Y.D. 329:9. 17 Shach Y.D. 329:4. 18 Y.D. 329:2. 19 Kaf ha-Chayim O.C. 457:12. The appropriate nusach is quoted there. Some women have a custom to give charity before performing this mitzvah, as they do before lighting candles; Ben Ish Chai (Lech Lecha, 6) 20 Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 328:2; Aruch ha-Shulchan 328:5. 21 Mishnah Berurah 8:2. See Magen Avraham 8:1 and Shulchan Aruch Harav 8:3 who allow separating challah and reciting the blessing while sitting. 22 Mishnah Berurah 457:5. 23 Rama Y.D. 322:5. 24 Mishnah Berurah 206:18. 25 Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 5:11; Chochmas Adam (Sha'arei Tzedek 14:32); Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 35:1; Mikdash Me'at 328:1. Some have a custom that they separate challah while reciting the blessing while others separate challah after reciting the blessing; see Piskei Teshuvos 457, note 3. See Mikraei Kodesh, Pesach vol. 2, pg. 73-74 for an explanation of this issue. 26 Kaf ha-Chayim 457:10. One who separates challah after the dough has been baked, definitely should not recite those two words. 27 R' Akiva Eiger Y.D. 328:1; Chochmas Adam, ibid. Many women, however, do not recite this statement; Ha'amek Shaeilah 73:3. When challah is being separated without a blessing, this declaration is even more significant; see Imrei Shalom 3:60. 28 Chochmas Adam (Sha'arei Tzedek 14:34). 29 Chazon Ish (Demai 15:1; Teshuvos R' Yonson Shteif 276; Minchas Yitzchak 4:13 and 4:102; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42, note 53. 30 Rama Y.D. 322:5. A kohen, however, may derive benefit from it while burning it; Rama Y.D. 331:19. 31 Since dough, generally, is not liquid and hardly emits steam. Even if it will, it is negligible. 32 See Leket ha-Omer 14, note 3. When the hot, burned piece of challah is removed from the oven, it should definitely not be removed with a utensil. 33 Mishnah Berurah 339:26. B'dieved, if she mistakenly separated challah on Shabbos or Yom Tov, the food may be eaten. If, however, she was aware that it is forbidden to do so and she did so anyway, the food is

forbidden to be eaten; Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 339:26. 34 If the dough was prepared on Yom Tov, challah is separated with a blessing but the dough is not burned until after Yom Tov is over. Once the piece is set aside, it may no longer be moved, since it is muktzeh; Mishnah Berurah 506:29. 35 If this occurred on the first night of Pesach or Sukkos when it is a Biblical obligation to eat a k'zayis of matzah or bread, a solution can be found. A rav must be consulted. 36 A possible solution is to prepare on Yom Tov another batch of dough and then separate challah from the new dough for both. See Rama O.C. 506:3 and Mishnah Berurah for the details. 37 Mishnah Berurah 261:4 and 28. Outside of Eretz Yisrael, though, this should not be done, since in the Diaspora it is permitted to separate challah after Shabbos, as detailed in the next paragraph. 38 If the item was baked in Eretz Yisrael but is now outside of it, e.g. matzos, a rav should be consulted; see Cheshev ha-Eeifod 2:43. 39 Rama O.C. 506:3. 40 Rama Y.D. 323:1. If she forgot to separate challah from more than one dough, she must follow the same procedure with each dough. 41 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42, note 57). 42 Rama Y.D. 323:1. 43 Aruch ha-Shulchan 323:14. 44 While her husband may not be one of the three, her children, her father and other relatives may; Y.D. 334:57. 45 This action does not render the original blessing made on this hafroshas challah as a brachah l'vatalah; Chasam Sofer Y.D. 320 and 353. 46 Rama Y.D. 323:1. While some poksims (see Taz 323:2) do not agree with this procedure, most poksims concur with the Rama's ruling; see Chochmas Adam (Sha'arei Tzedek 14:6); Pischei Teshuvah 323:3; Aruch ha-Shulchan 323:14. 47 Sha'arei Teshuvah O.C. 341:1. Since, however, a new piece cannot be separated on Shabbos or Yom Tov, this leniency would apply only outside of Eretz Yisrael, as explained earlier, see Shevus Ya'akov 3:27. 48 See Y.D. 326:2, Beiur ha-Gra 7 and Pischei Teshuvah 2; Chazon Ish Y.D. 198:3. 49 Leket ha-Omer 7:3; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42, note 45).

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