

PROPER CONDUCT WITH FOOD ITEMS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

QUESTION: Reference is made throughout the Talmud⁽¹⁾ to the importance of properly disposing of leftover pieces of bread. What is the correct procedure for disposing of leftover bread?⁽²⁾ What should we do with crumbs?

DISCUSSION: The answer depends on the condition and amount of the leftover bread:

1. Crumbs and leftover pieces of bread which are either moldy, inedible or have fallen on the floor and will no longer be eaten, may be thrown directly into the garbage can.⁽³⁾
2. Pieces of bread larger than a k'zayis [approx. 1 fl. oz.] may not be thrown into the garbage.⁽⁴⁾ If, after the meal is over, such pieces are left over, they should be stored [or frozen] for the next meal. If it is clear that for some reason the piece will not be eaten in the future, then it is permitted to wrap the piece [or several pieces together] in a bag, seal the bag, and dispose of it in the garbage can.⁽⁵⁾
3. Edible crumbs or pieces of bread smaller than a k'zayis which are left on the table should be treated in a dignified manner; they may not be swept off the table onto the floor, stepped upon,⁽⁶⁾ soaked with the mayim acharonim water⁽⁷⁾ or otherwise abused.⁽⁸⁾ While it is halachically permissible to carefully place crumbs in the garbage, some poskim recommend that they be disposed of in the same manner described earlier for larger pieces of bread, especially if one is disposing of many crumbs or pieces of bread at one time. If, however, this is difficult to do, it is permitted to carefully put the crumbs in the garbage.⁽⁹⁾

QUESTION: May leftover pieces of food be given to animals or birds to eat?

DISCUSSION: Leftovers which are smaller than a k'zayis [or leftover drinks less than a revi'is], or even if they are bigger than a k'zayis but are no longer edible or likely to be eaten, may be given to animals or birds to eat.⁽¹⁰⁾

Edible leftovers which are larger than a k'zayis should, preferably, not be given to an animal. Several poskim, however, have allowed doing so if there is no other food available for the animal or if animal feed is much more expensive than regular food.⁽¹¹⁾

QUESTION: Is it permitted for the head of the family to toss the slices of ha-motzi bread to those assembled around the table, or must they be handed to them?

DISCUSSION: If the bread will become dirtied or ruined when tossed, or even if there is a chance that it will, it is forbidden to toss the bread. ⁽¹²⁾ [This is true of all other foods as well.]

If, however, the bread⁽¹³⁾ will not get dirty or ruined when thrown, the Rishonim disagree⁽¹⁴⁾ whether or not it may be tossed. Most poskim, including the Mishnah Berurah,⁽¹⁵⁾ rule stringently on this issue.⁽¹⁶⁾ [Other foods, however, may be tossed if they will not become dirty or ruined.]

But handing the slice of ha-motzi bread directly into the hand of the person who will eat it is also frowned upon by the Shulchan Aruch.⁽¹⁷⁾ It is considered bad mazal to do so, since this is the manner in which we serve a mourner when he is sitting shivah.⁽¹⁸⁾ It follows, therefore, that since neither tossing the piece of bread nor handing it directly to him is appropriate, the correct method is to place the bread slices on the table within easy reach of the diners, or to pass around slices of bread on a plate, etc.

QUESTION: Is it permitted to eat food or drink that was mistakenly brought into a bathroom?

DISCUSSION: Although eating in the bathroom is forbidden,⁽¹⁹⁾ we do not find that the poskim expressly prohibit bringing food into a bathroom. Surely b'diavad, food, drinks, vitamins or medicines that were stored there do not become forbidden to ingest.⁽²⁰⁾

Similar halachos apply in other cases where a ruach ra'ah, an evil spirit, may affect food. For instance:

4. It is prohibited to touch food or drink prior to washing one's hands in the morning upon awakening. But if, inadvertently, the food [or drink⁽²¹⁾] was touched before washing, it does not become forbidden to eat.⁽²²⁾
5. It is forbidden to store [raw or cooked] food or drinks⁽²³⁾ under a bed [even if the food is wrapped and sealed in metal containers or in a suitcase] in which someone will sleep.⁽²⁴⁾ But if, inadvertently, food or drink was stored under a bed and someone slept on the bed, many poskim hold that the food does not become forbidden to eat.⁽²⁵⁾
6. Mayim acharonim may not splash on food or dishes used as eating utensils. ⁽²⁶⁾ B'diavad, if mayim acharonim splashed over dishes, the dishes should be washed well before they are used.⁽²⁷⁾ If mayim acharonim splashed over a food item, the food may be eaten.⁽²⁸⁾

QUESTION: We previously mentioned that food or drink may not be stored underneath a bed. How, exactly, do we define "underneath a bed" as regards this halachah?

DISCUSSION: "Underneath a bed" means that it was stored on the ground⁽²⁹⁾ under a bed in which someone was sleeping. Therefore:

7. It is permitted to place food on top of the bottom bed of a bunk bed, even if someone is asleep on the top bed.⁽³⁰⁾
8. It is permitted to place food underneath a baby's carriage, even if a baby is sleeping in the carriage.⁽³¹⁾
9. Most poskim permit storing food under a couch or bed which is not being used for sleeping.⁽³²⁾

10. It is permitted to place food underneath a bench [or an airplane seat], even if the bench is used for sleeping, since a bench is not a bed.(33)

Rabbi Neustadt is Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights. He may be reached at 216-321-4635 or at jsgross1836@yahoo.com

FOOTNOTES:

1 See *Berachos 52b*, *Pesachim 111b* and *Chullin 105b*. See also *Zohar*, quoted by *Kaf ha-Chayim* 180:13.

2 Cakes and pasties are included in this halachah as well.

3 See *Beis Baruch* on *Chayei Adam* 45:22.

4 O.C. 180:3.

5 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv and Harav Y.Y. Fisher, oral ruling quoted in *V'zos ha-Berachah*, pg. 18.

6 For this reason, the dining area should be swept after the meal, so that the crumbs which fell to the floor will not be stepped on; *Ben Ish Chai*, *Pinchas* 12.

7 See *Mishnah Berurah* 180:9.

8 One should be extremely careful not to mishandle crumbs and small pieces of bread as doing so can cause poverty; O.C. 180:4.

9 See *Mishnah Berurah* 180:10, *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 180:4 and *V'zos ha-Berachah*, pg. 18.

10 *Chayei Adam* and *Beis Baruch* 45:5.

11 See *Machatzis ha-Shekel* 171:1, *Mishnah Berurah* 171:11 and *Ketzos ha-Shulchan* 39:30. [When feeding animals at the zoo, therefore, the animals should be fed with animal food, not pieces of food fit for human consumption.]

12 O.C. 171:1.

13 Or cake and pastries; O.C. 171:4 and *Mishnah Berurah* 22.

14 See *Beis Yosef* O.C. 171:1 who brings the various opinions of the Rishonim. See also *Rambam*, *Berachos* 7:9 and *Levush* O.C. 171.

15 167:88; 171:9.

16 Note, however, that some poskim permit it; see *Rav Chaim Sanzer's* notes to O.C. 171:1 and

Hisorerus Tehshuvah 1:121 who writes that his father, the Ksav Sofer, used to toss the pieces of ha-motzi to those assembled around his table.

17 167:18 based on Rambam, Berachos 7:5. Although this halachah is quoted unilaterally by all of the poskim, it is not practiced everywhere; see Nefesh Chaya O.C. 167 for a possible explanation.

18 Mishnah Berurah 167:90.

19 Be'er Heitev O.C. 3:2.

20 Minchas Yitzchak 3:63. See Otzros Yosef 1:13.

21 See Beiur Halachah 4:5 s.v. lo concerning beer.

22 Mishnah Berurah 4:14. Food which does not get ruined from washing, like fruit, should be washed three times; ibid.

23 Although vitamins are also included, medications are not considered food and may be stored under a bed; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo, Tefillah, 13:17).

24 Y.D. 116:5, based on Pesachim 112a. See also Rashbam, Bava Basra 58a.

25 See Rav Akiva Eiger, Yad Efrayim, Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 116:4-5 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 116:11. The Gaon of Vilna, however, was extremely stringent even b'diavad; see Binas Adam 63:3. See also Halichos Shelomo, Tefillah, 13:17 quoting Harav S.Z. Auerbach's stringent rulings on this issue.

26 O.C. 181:2. The same halachos apply to the water used to wash one's hands in the morning upon awakening; O.C. 4:8-9.

27 See Ta'amei ha-Minhagim, pg. 11.

28 Based on Darkei Teshuvah 116:35. Food which will not get ruined from washing, like fruit, should be washed three times; based on Mishnah Berurah 4:14.

29 In the opinion of some poskim, if the ground below the bed is a finished floor, the prohibition does not apply at all; see Darkei Teshuvah 116:37. L'chatchilah, we do not rely in this leniency; see Kaf ha-Chayim Y.D. 116:42-44.

30 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo, Tefillah, 13:17).

31 Minchas Yitzchak 4:117.

32 Darkei Teshuvah 116:38 quoting Toras Chaim; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo, Tefillah, 13:17). A minority opinion holds that food should not be placed underneath a bed even if no one is sleeping there; Darkei Teshuvah, ibid. quoting Ohr Yitzchok.

33 See Kaf ha-Chayim Y.D. 116:43.

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jgross@torah.org.

Rabbi Neustadt is Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights. He may be reached at 216-321-4635 or
at jsgross@core.com.