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Hilchos B'rachos part XXII

Degrading and Spoiling Food

It is forbidden to spoil or degrade food on two accounts, **בְּזִיּוֹן אָכְלִים** and **בְּלַתְשׁוּחָה**.

There is a general prohibition to spoil anything fit for human use or consumption.

What is the source?

The *Rambam* writes ¹ anyone who smashes articles, tears clothes, demolishes buildings, dams up a river and **destroys food in a destructive manner** is liable for the issur of **בל תשחית**. The *posuk* says **לא תשחית את עצה** (you shall not destroy its trees), and the *Rambam* explains that this *issur* is not limited to trees alone.

We see that destroying or wasting food in a destructive manner involves **בל תשחית**.

So what am I supposed to do with leftovers?

First we will see how the *Shulchan Aruch* deals with bread. The *Shulchan Aruch* discusses this issue in two *se'ifim*, as follows.

The first – one may not wash hands near bread (the size of a **כְּזִיתָה**), because the water might spoil the bread. ² Current

custom translates this to next to bread, the size of a *k'zayis*, because the water will render the bread inedible and one may not directly spoil bread.

The second – even though one may dispose of crumbs less than a *k'zayis*, this can cause poverty. ³ The *Mishna Berura* explains ⁴ that the *se'if* refers to degrading the crumbs such as stepping on them. Throwing them into water is permitted. We should add that some *poskim* are of the opinion that if all the crumbs together add up to a *k'zayis*, they may not be disposed of. ⁵

So back to our question, how is one to dispose of bread or food?

If the food or bread is unfit for human consumption, it may be disposed of. If still fit for human consumption, the optimal method is to wrap it in a plastic bag etc. and dispose of it. ⁶ Most people are very careful not to spoil bread and dispose of it without wrapping it, but this is not the case with other leftover food.

It is possible that leftover food on plates etc. that will not be eaten by anyone, is considered unfit, but food left in pots and pans should either spoil before being

³ *Siman* 180:4.

⁴ *Siman* 180:10.

⁵ *Sha'arei Teshuva* 180:2, cited in *M"B* ibid. The *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* does not cite this *chumra*.

⁶ See *זאת הברכה פ"ג הערכה קי* See end of *perek* ב'.

¹ *Hilchos Melachim* 6:10. It is based on *Shabbos* 105.

² *Siman* 180:3.

discarded or should be wrapped in a bag, ⁷ *siman* 171.

Why do people pick up bread in the street?

The *Shulchan Aruch* compiled an entire *siman* to deal with the correct respect we must have to food.⁷ For example, people may throw nuts at a chosson during the summer, when the floor is clean and the nuts are not wasted, but not during the winter.

Likewise, one may not sit on a flimsy box containing figs and dates, because the box may cave in and spoil the fruit.

The *Mishna Berura*⁸ writes that one who sees food⁹ on the floor must lift it and place it somewhere; one may not pass-it-by and ignore it. We see that this is not only true of bread, rather all foods that lie in disgrace must be lifted from the ground.

What else should one be careful of?

One should not cut food such as a roll or bagel in half while in one's palm, lest the knife cuts one's hand and the resulting blood spoils the bread.¹⁰ This would apply to all foods that would spoil in this fashion. It is interesting to speculate as to how the halacha would deal with something that could easily be washed and not spoil, such as an apple. If people would not consume the result, the *issur* applies.

Another topic on cutting in one's hand is quoted in the *gemora B'rachos* 8b. The *gemora* refers to cutting meat and since meat and one's hand can be said to feel the same, there is scope to say that this *issur* only applies to meat, because one may not feel the difference in the cutting and cut too deep into one's hand. Consequently, to be

⁷ *Siman* 171.

⁸ *Siman* 171:11.

⁹ That people would generally eat.

¹⁰ *M" B siman* 170:34.

safe, one should cut on the table or board and not in one's hand.

May one use bread to sweep up gravy?

If one eventually eats the bread used to sweep up gravy, yes.¹¹ There are *poskim* that prefer that one bites into the bread each time it is used so that it will not look like bread is a spoon. There is no problem to lean items on bread, such as propping a book with a loaf of bread; it is not like a *sefer* that has *kedusha*. The only problem is that one must take care not to spoil it.

Also, due to the importance of bread, one should not throw it at all, even if it will not spoil as a result of throwing it. Other foods, it seems, one may throw if they will not spoil.¹²

Vort on the Parsha

The *posuk* says that we will not know how to serve *Hashem* until we arrive there – at our destination(10:26). Why is that? The *K'sav Sofer* writes that a *Korban Todah* is brought to thank *Hashem*. *B'nei Yisroel* did not know yet how many miracles would be performed for them and how much gratitude they would be indebted for, until they reached their destination.

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לזכר נשמת חנה בת ברוך

¹¹ *Siman* 171:3 and *M" B* 15-18.

¹² *Siman* 171 and *M" B* 9.

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Note: The purpose of this series is intended solely for the clarification of the topics discussed and not to render halachic decisions. It is intended to heighten everyone's awareness of important practical questions which do arise on this topic. One must consult with a proper halachic authority in order to receive *p'sak*.