



# TREATING FOOD WITH RESPECT



On a superficial level, food appears to be a purely physical matter, totally removed from the spiritual spheres. However, our Sages teach us that food can serve as a spiritual tool when used properly. The *Mesilas Yesharim*<sup>1</sup> writes that man has the ability to elevate the mundane into the spiritual realm. When food is eaten with the purpose of acquiring energy to serve Hashem, food is elevated into a spiritual substance. The *bracha* recited before eating helps to achieve this goal, granting a spiritual dimension to a physical action. Because food has such a lofty purpose, *Chazal* gave us special instructions to ensure that we treat it with respect. (This article will not discuss the serious issue of *bal tashchis* – wasting edible food.)

## FOOD ON THE FLOOR

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> writes that if one sees bread on the ground, he may not ignore it and leave it there. The Gemara<sup>3</sup> indicates that this *halacha* applies to all foods, not only to bread. The *Mishnah Berurah*<sup>4</sup> records this *halacha* but adds a caveat: if there are grounds for suspecting sorcery (e.g. there is an entire loaf of bread on the ground), one need not pick it up.<sup>5</sup>

Some *Poskim* write that it is sufficient to move the food to the side of the road.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, many *Poskim* write that if the food is lying on the side of the road, where it is not in danger of being stepped on, one need not pick it up or move it.<sup>7</sup>

It is unclear what size food must be picked up; for example, must one pick up crumbs of bread lying on the ground? Some *Poskim* write that food measuring less than a *k'zayis* need not be picked up, although one should be careful not to step on it.<sup>8</sup> Some *Poskim* write that the obligation to pick up food applies only if it is still edible. If, however, most people would not eat the food in its present condition, one is not required to pick it up. Accordingly, if one finds bread lying on the street, there is no obligation to

move it, because in contemporary times, most people living in modern civilizations would not eat bread that is on the street.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, one must be careful not to step on the bread.<sup>10</sup>

## THROWING FOOD

The *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>11</sup> writes that food may not be thrown if it will be ruined when thrown (e.g., ripe figs). Additionally, food may not be thrown if it will land in a dirty location (e.g., ground covered with mud) because it will become disgusting.<sup>12</sup>

According to many *Poskim*, more stringent guidelines apply to the manner in which bread may be handled. Because it is a staple food, it is considered disrespectful to throw bread in the air even if it will not be ruined when thrown.<sup>13</sup> Some *Poskim* argue that bread is no different than other food and may be thrown if it will not get ruined.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, some have the custom to throw challah on Shabbos and Yom Tov to the participants of the meal after reciting *Hamotzi*.<sup>15</sup>

## FOOD DISPOSAL

Another application of bread's stringent status is with regard to the manner of its disposal. Food (other than bread) that is edible and fit for human consumption should not be discarded in the garbage in the regular fashion, because this is not a respectable form of disposal (aside from the concern of *bal tashchis*).<sup>16</sup> If it is difficult to dispose of the food in a respectable fashion, some *Poskim* are of the opinion that it may be disposed of in the regular manner.<sup>17</sup> Food that is left over after a meal on an individual's plate may be discarded in the garbage in the regular fashion, because it is no longer considered edible by most people.<sup>18</sup>

Bread, however, has different rules. Because bread is inherently respectable, it must be treated with greater care than other foods. It is forbidden to destroy bread which is the

size of a *k'zayis*; bread measuring less than a *k'zayis* may be destroyed, but doing so can lead to poverty.<sup>19</sup> This consequence applies only if one acts in a highly disrespectful manner (e.g. one walks on it), but destroying pieces smaller than a *k'zayis* in a respectful manner (e.g. throwing them into water) is permitted.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, pieces of bread left over from a meal which are larger than a *k'zayis* should be wrapped before being discarded in the trash, while those which are smaller than a *k'zayis* may be discarded without wrapping.<sup>21</sup> Some *Poskim* are of the opinion that bread must be wrapped even if it is less than a *k'zayis*, because throwing it in the garbage is disrespectful.<sup>22</sup>

It is noteworthy to conclude with the words of Harav Chaim Palagi, “One who is extremely careful not to drop even crumbs of bread on the floor will merit tremendous wealth in his house.”<sup>23</sup>

## FEEDING ANIMALS AND BIRDS

The Gemara<sup>24</sup> quotes Rav Huna that one may not feed animals [or birds<sup>25</sup>] with food fit for human consumption. *Rashi*<sup>26</sup> offers two explanations for this prohibition: 1) It is considered a lack of appreciation to Hashem to give His bounty – created for humans – to animals, and 2) feeding animals with food fit for humans is considered a waste of money. This *halacha* is recorded in the *Magen Avraham*.<sup>27</sup> The *Machatzis Hashekel*<sup>28</sup> suggests that according to the latter explanation, there may be an exception to this ruling. Because the prohibition was enacted solely to avoid wasting money, if one does not have animal food and it would be necessary to purchase special food for the animals, one may feed them regular food. This is because spending extra money to purchase special animal food would be a waste of money. Some *Poskim* suggest that this exception is true even according to *Rashi*'s first reason. The reason for the prohibition, namely, that it appears as if one is ungrateful when feeding animals with human food, only applies when one feeds animals without any useful purpose; feeding animals so that they can thrive for human consumption and the like, does not show ingratitude.<sup>29</sup>

The *Ksav Sofer*<sup>30</sup> expresses a similar idea and opines that the prohibition only applies to animals not under one's ownership. Animals which are under one's ownership may be fed regular food, because the owner's intention is to strengthen and fatten his animals. Such behavior does not show ingratitude. However, it must be noted that many *Poskim* write that the fact that this *halacha* is not recorded in the earlier *Poskim* (such as the *Shulchan Aruch*) suggests that the *halacha* does not follow Rav Huna, and one

may indeed feed animals with regular food.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, some *Poskim* are of the opinion that animals may not be fed food which is fit for human consumption, whereas other *Poskim* feel that this prohibition does not exist. The mainstream approach seems to be that one may feed animals regular food if they are his own animals, especially if buying special animal food is expensive. Feeding other animals for no particular purpose is forbidden.<sup>32</sup>

Food which will no longer be eaten by humans under normal circumstances and would normally be thrown in the garbage (e.g., meal leftovers) may be given to animals.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, bread smaller than a *k'zayis* which is left over from a meal may be fed to animals and birds.<sup>34</sup>

According to the above guidelines, allowing children to give regular food to animals in the zoo presents some *halachic* concern, because feeding animals food fit for human consumption for no valid reason is forbidden according to many *Poskim* (aside from the concern of *bal tashchis*). However, feeding zoo animals food leftovers or small, stale pieces of bread is permissible. ▲

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Perek 1
- 2 Eiruvim 64b
- 3 Baba Metzia 23a
- 4 171:11
- 5 See Dibros Moshe (Baba Metzia, siman 31, note 15) who notes that the Shulchan Aruch 180:3 seems to contest this halacha and is of the opinion that as long as one is careful not to step on bread, one need not pick it up.
- 6 Rabbeinu Yehonason, Eiruvim 19b
- 7 Bais Boruch, gloss to Chayei Adam 45:31, Eitz Hasadeh perek 16, footnote 20
- 8 see Eitz Hasadeh ibid. footnote 18
- 9 Eitz Hasadeh ibid. footnote 21, in the name of Hagaon Rav Elyashiv zt"l
- 10 Mishnah Berurah 180:10
- 11 OC 171:1
- 12 Mishnah Berurah 171:10, S.A. 171:4
- 13 Mishnah Berurah 171:9, Aruch Hashulchan 171:3
- 14 Harav Chaim Sanzer, gloss to Magen Avrohom 171:1
- 15 Ksav Sofer, cited by his son in Hisorerus Tshuva 1:132
- 16 see M.B. 171:10-11
- 17 see Eitz Hasadeh 11:1
- 18 see Eitz Hasadeh perek 16, footnote 13 and 21
- 19 Shulchan Aruch 180:3-4
- 20 Mishnah Berurah 180:10
- 21 see Eitz Hasadeh 19 footnote 7
- 22 Bais Boruch 45:22\*
- 23 Kaf HaChaim 24:48
- 24 Taanis 20b
- 25 Mishnah Berurah 171:11
- 26 ad loc.
- 27 171:1
- 28 ad loc.
- 29 see Sha'ar Hatziyun 171:13
- 30 O.C. 33
- 31 Elya Raba 171:1, Magen Giborim 171:2, Chasam Sofer, gloss to Magen Avrohom 171:1
- 32 see M.B. 171:11
- 33 Bais Boruch 45:35
- 34 Chayei Adam 45:5