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Parshas Devarim ✍️ Rabbi Yisroel Langer

The Melacha of Losh

The melacha of Losh – Kneading – is one of the melachos prohibited on Shabbos. Losh is defined as the binding together of small particles (such as flour) by means of a binder (such as water) to form one mass. According to the Mishnah Berurah, the binder is not limited to liquids. Accordingly, binding small particles together with a substance such as mayonnaise violates the melacha of Losh. However, Losh is only violated when the mixture results in the appearance of one solid mass. Therefore, it is permitted to mix chunks of vegetable or potato together with oil or mayonnaise; because the pieces of vegetable or potato are large, the individual ingredients of the vegetable or potato salad are still distinguishable even after the addition of oil or mayonnaise.

The melacha of Losh involves a two-step process.

Step #1 is pouring the water into the flour. At this stage some of the flour binds with the water.

Step #2 is the actual kneading of the flour and water.

The gemarah in Shabbos cites a machlokes between Rabbi and R' Yosi bar Yehuda, who discuss whether or not Step #1 of the Losh process is forbidden m'deoraisa. Most rishonim (Rif, Rambam, Rosh, etc.) concur with the more lenient opinion of R' Yosi bar Yehuda who maintains that Step #1 is not forbidden m'deoraisa. However, the Sefer Haterumah agrees with the stricter opinion of Rabbi (Step #1 is forbidden m'deoraisa). Lechatchila, we are machmir and follow this latter opinion.

The melacha of Losh pertains to two categories of mixtures:

1) Belilah Avah – a thick mixture which can not be poured. One violates the melacha d'oraisa of Losh by kneading a thick mixture.

2) Belilah Racah – a mixture thin enough to be poured, such as applesauce. Kneading a thin mixture is only prohibited m'derabanan.

Based on the aforementioned laws, it would be prohibited to make egg salad, baby cereal, and many other types of salads on Shabbos. However, unlike other melachos of Shabbos, Chazal allowed Losh to be done using specific shinuyim (mixing or kneading in an abnormal fashion). We mentioned above that Step #1 of Losh occurs as soon as one pours water into the flour. Accordingly, a shinui must be made at this stage of Losh. Chazal allowed for a shinui of “switching the order” to permit this step. If normally a food is prepared by first pouring the flour or cereal into a bowl and then adding the water, one should reverse the order and pour the water in first. If normally one first adds water, then one should begin with the flour instead. If the standard method of preparing a particular food is unknown, the Taz and the Chazon Ish hold that the food cannot be made. However, the Mishnah Berurah (321: s.k. 57) quotes the Elya Rabba which allows the cereal to be poured into the bowl first. In cases of necessity, Hagaon R' Moshe Feinstein zt”l permits one to rely on the more lenient opinion of the Elya Rabba. However, it must be noted that the shinui of “switching the order” isn't a bona fide shinui. Consequently, Chazal only allowed its use when the mixture is a belilah racah, which is only prohibited m'derabanan. However, if the mixture is a belilah avah and the pouring of water into the cereal/flour would be prohibited m'deoraisa (since we follow the opinion of Rabbi), there would seemingly be no heter to combine the water and flour. Nonetheless, the Mishnah Berurah (Shaar Hatziyun 321:84) cites the opinion of the Taz who states that if one cannot prepare the food before Shabbos (i.e., it would spoil), one may rely on the opinion of R' Yosi bar Yehuda, that Step #1 of Losh is not part of the melacha. One should still switch the order (M.B. 321: sk 68). The Chazon Ish also permits one to rely on the opinion of the R' Yosi bar Yehuda when a child will not eat cereal if it is prepared as a thin mixture.

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The shinui of “switching the order” is sufficient for Step #1 of Losh. However, another shinui is needed for Step #2 – the mixing/kneading stage. The gemara and poskim list a number of bona fide shinuyim for this step of the Losh process, which are suitable even for the preparation of thick mixtures. Because some of the shinuyim are not very practical for halacha l’maasah purposes, we will only discuss three relevant shinuyim.

1. **Criss-cross method** – Normally, mixing is accomplished through a circular motion. Therefore, Chazal permit one to mix using a utensil if the strokes are straight, alternating between horizontal strokes and vertical ones. In order to ensure that one doesn’t mix with a circular motion, the Chazon Ish recommends removing the utensil from the bowl between each change of direction (see Igros Moshe O.C. V.4 siman 74).
2. **Hands** – If one normally uses a utensil to mix, one can mix with his hands instead. The Chazon Ish (58:8) stresses that in order for this shinui to be effective one may not use plastic gloves.
3. **Handles** – Hagaon R’ Moshe Feinstein zt”l (Igros Moshe) holds that mixing using the handle of a utensil (or even the blade of a knife) is considered a shinui.

Practical Applications

1. **Baby cereal** – When mixing baby cereal (rice cereal or oatmeal) for a small child one should prepare a loose mixture, pouring the water into the bowl before the cereal (the assumption being that the normal way to do so is vice-versa). Then one should employ one of the “mixing shinuyim” (criss-cross method, hands, handles). If the child will not eat a loose mixture, the cereal can be prepared as a thick mixture, using both shinuyim mentioned.
2. **Egg/tuna salad** – If one wants to make egg salad using eggs and mayonnaise, many poskim say that Step #1 of Losh is not an issue (Orchos Shabbos ch. 6:18). Apparently, when egg salad is made with eggs and mayonnaise, the mayonnaise doesn’t actually cause the eggs to bind to each other. Instead, the eggs just stick to the mayonnaise. Losh only occurs during Step #2 when one mixes the eggs and mayonnaise together. Therefore, only the “mixing shinuyim” need to be used. Using oil as a binder is more problematic, as we don’t rely on a shinui for Step #1 of Losh if the mixture is thick. However, many righteous people prepare eggs with onions and oil without even employing any shinuyim. Many teshuvos have been written con-

doing this minhag (see Beer Moshe V G Siman 44, Tzitz Eliezer V 11 siman 36, SSK ch 8 note 81. (Note: Some of these heterim are based on the fact that the eggs and oil don’t look like one mass, whereas this may not be the case if mayonnaise is used). Poskim say that preferably one should use the shinuyim when making egg or tuna salad (SSK 8:33).)

3. **Guacamole** – If one wants to mash avocado and mayonnaise together, he may do Step #1 without any shinuyim, and may place the mayonnaise on top of the mashed avocado, as is normally done. (Note: According to the Chazon Ish, one should mash the avocado using the handle of a spoon because of Tochein – grinding.) One should then use one of the mixing shinuyim when mixing the avocado with the mayonnaise. Mixing mashed avocado with lemon juice or vinegar is more problematic. The pouring of the lemon juice onto the mashed avocado is Step #1 of Losh, and, as noted above, “the switching of the order” shinui is acceptable only if the mixture is thin. (Note: Some comment that this mixture is not an example of Losh at all, as one isn’t causing the avocado particles to stick to each other – see Kitzos Hashulchan siman 130 in Badei Hashulchan end of SK 9. However, the Chazon Ish in the end of Siman 58:9 prohibits placing a liquid into mashed banana, which is identical to mashed avocado.) A solution to this problem is as follows: One should cut the avocado into large pieces first, and then add the lemon juice. As mentioned previously, Losh is a non-issue with large pieces. One should then mash the mixture of avocado and lemon juice with one’s hands or the handle of a utensil, as these shinuyim are sufficient even if a mixture is thick.

Rabbi Langer is a full-time member of the kollel.

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