The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן תק"ז סעיף ז'

Halacha Highlight

Smoothing

Shulchan Aruch Siman 507 Seif 7

מתר לסתם פי התנור

It is permitted to seal the opening of an oven

Shulchan Aruch rules that it is permitted for one to take clay or mud obtained from a riverbank to seal the opening of his oven. However, in order for this to be permitted the clay and mud must be soft and it is necessary to mark it before Yom Tov so that he does not leave a hole in the ground when he takes the clay or mud (מ"ב סק"מ). It is not permitted for one to knead clay and mud to make it usable for sealing the oven and Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק מ"א) presents two explanations for this restriction. The first explanation is that one may only perform preparatory food activities if those activities could not have been performed before Yom Tov. Since it was possible to knead the clay or mud before Yom Tov, it is prohibited to knead them on Yom Tov. Accordingly, the prohibition against kneading the mud or clay would constitute a Biblical prohibition. The second explanation is that kneading the mud or clay to seal the oven is considered part of the cooking process and should therefore be permitted. Chazal prohibited the activity out of concern that it appears as though one is kneading the mud or clay for a construction project. From this perspective the prohibition is Rabbinic.

Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק ל"ז) explains that there is no issue of kneading the mud or clay when it was taken from a riverbank since the ground is moist and does not require kneading. He then notes that this activity should be prohibited for a different reason and that is that smoothing the mud or clay to seal the oven should violate the Biblical prohibition of ממרח—smoothing. The reason there is no issue with ממרח is that it is an activity that is done to prepare food and it could not have been performed before Yom Tov and thus is permitted. Accordingly, it is permitted to spread margarine on the inside of a baking pan on Yom Tov without regard for the prohibition against smoothing. Since it is necessary for the bread or cake to bake properly, it is permitted (פסקי תשובות אות ג').

Overview

Siman 507 Seif 7:

It is permitted to seal the opening of an oven with clay or mud taken from a riverbank provided that one softened it before Yom Tov or marked with an identifiable mark and pushed it to one side. It is not permitted to knead clay on Yom Tov. It is permitted to knead ash to seal the opening of the oven.

- Since there is so much water the clay and dirt are softened and do not require kneading. Smoothing the clay and dirt is not an issue since it could not have been done before Yom Tov and is permitted to prepare food. (M.B. 37)
- If one did not mark it off before Yom Tov it would involve making a hole in the place where the dirt was taken. There is a disagreement whether one may take dirt that was dislodged from the road provided that one intended to take it before Yom Tov. (M.B. 40)
- Preparatory food preparations are permitted only if they could not have been done before Yom Tov and in this case since it could have been done before Yom Tov, it is Biblically prohibited. According to others it was prohibited by Chazal out of concern that people would say that the kneading of the clay was done for a construction project. (M.B. 41)
- Some authorities are stringent concerning kneading ash on Yom Tov and although there is no source for this in *halacha* one who is stringent will be blessed. (M.B. 43)