

The Prohibited Labor of Kneading (*Lash*)

Is it permitted to pour water onto flour without mixing them together?

Is it permitted to wash one's hands over sand or dirt?

Does one violate the prohibition of Kneading by making coffee?

The prohibited labor of Kneading is the opposite of the labor of Grinding, as well as the labors of Threshing, Winnowing, Selecting, and Sifting. All of those labors **separate different materials from each other**: One who threshes, winnows, selects, or sifts separates the wheat (or flour) from various types of undesired material (*pesolet*). One who performs Grinding crushes the wheat into small pieces. By contrast, **Kneading is a labor that binds**. One who kneads **binds small particles into one unit** (though there is apparently a tannaitic dispute as to a precise definition of this prohibited labor, as we will see below).

The prohibited labor of Kneading applies not just to foods, such as the forming of dough from flour and water, but also to other substances. For example, **kneading water and dirt** together is prohibited by Torah law as a subcategory (*tolada*) of Kneading (Rambam 8:16, based on the Gemara on 18a).¹

1. The *Aḥaronim* address the question of why kneading water with dirt is a subcategory and not a primary category (*av*); see, e.g., *Avnei Nezer, Orah Hayim* 126; *Shevitat HaShabbat, Lash*, Introduction, 14.

Not only is Kneading prohibited by Torah law, but **rolling out dough** with a rolling pin is also prohibited by Torah law, because it is part of the process of kneading (*Yerushalmi*, 7:2).

As we will see below, there is a dispute as to whether the prohibited labor of Kneading applies to substances that do not fully combine during the kneading process. Similarly, a distinction must be made between different types of mixtures that are formed, such as dough and batter. The forming of some mixtures is prohibited by Torah law, some by rabbinic law, and the forming of some is permitted, as we will see below.

The prohibited labor of Kneading is a very complicated topic. We will attempt to study its basic principles and then to examine the practical applications of those principles.

Combining flour and water without kneading

The tannaitic dispute

The **Gemara** (155b) cites a tannaitic dispute as to what renders one liable for Kneading:

If one person places flour and another person places water into it, the latter is liable; this is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda says: One is not liable until he kneads.

According to **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi**, simply **pouring water onto flour** renders one liable for Kneading, whereas according to **Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda**, one is liable only for actually **kneading** flour and water **until they form dough**.

The root of the dispute

What is the root of this dispute? It is possible that this dispute relates to the essence of the prohibited labor of Kneading. According to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, the essence of this labor is the very act of **mixing** different ingredients. According to Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda the essence of this labor is the fact that two ingredients **bind together and form one entity**. This is how the *Eglei Tal* (*Lash* 9:13) explains the dispute.

Yet, there are other possible explanations of the dispute.² It is

2. One can question this analysis of the dispute: All agree that one is not

possible that all agree that the essence of the prohibited labor of Kneading is **the combining of two ingredients and forming them into a single entity**. The dispute is that according to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi one can be considered liable for any **significant action** that brings this result closer, even if the ultimate aim has not yet been achieved. This is similar to the ruling that even **partial cooking** (beyond the level of “*Ben Derosai*”) renders one liable for Cooking (see p. 275).³ Conversely, according to Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda one

liable by Torah law for creating a runny mixture, as will be explained below (pp. 1040–1042). Therefore, it would seem incorrect to explain that according to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi one is liable for the very **mixing** of the ingredients. One might suggest a different explanation, that all agree that mixing flour and water is considered Kneading, but according to **Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda**, since the person is simply pouring the water onto the flour and the mixing of the ingredients occurs on its own, the labor is considered to have occurred via **indirect causation**, and one is liable only for a **direct action**. Yet, the **Gemara in Zevahim** (94b) states that one who pours water onto flax seeds is liable according to all opinions because the water and flax bind to one another and form a single dough-like substance (see pp. 1109–1110). This implies that even according to Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda one can be liable for Kneading even without a direct action.

3. It is possible that there is a practical difference between these two explanations with regard to the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi: In a case where one adds water to flour **before Shabbat**, would it be permitted to knead the mixture on Shabbat? According to the **second explanation**, it is clear that this would be prohibited by Torah law, as the kneading, which binds the flour and water together, is the essence of this prohibited labor. According to the **first explanation**, it is possible that this would be permitted, as the essence of the prohibited labor is simply combining the ingredients together, and once they have been combined, no additional act is classified as Kneading. That said, it is possible that even according to this explanation, the actual kneading would still be prohibited on Shabbat, as it strengthens the binding of the flour and water. In fact, the *Beur Halakha* (321:14, s.v. *ein megablin*) writes that even if the water was added to the flour before Shabbat, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would concede that it is prohibited by Torah law to knead the mixture on Shabbat. He adduces support for this position from the statement of the **Yerushalmi** cited above, that even one who merely rolls out the dough is liable. This implies that even after the actual kneading has been done, **one**

is rendered liable only for an action that leads to the **final result** of a single unified dough.⁴

The halakhic ruling

The *Rishonim* and *Aḥaronim* disagree with regard to the halakhic ruling concerning this issue:

The *Rif* (67b in the pages of the *Rif*), **Rambam** (21:34), and **Rosh** (24:3) rule in accordance with the opinion of **Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda**, that one is liable **only for forming dough**. This is in accordance with the straightforward reading of the *mishna* (155b).

Conversely, the *Sefer Yere'im* (274), *Sefer HaTeruma* (220), *Semag* (prohibition 65, *Lash*), and *Semak* (280) rule in accordance with the opinion of **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi**, that one is liable even **for adding water to flour**. This is in accordance with the principle that the *halakha* is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi in his disputes with any of his individual colleagues.

The *Shulḥan Arukh* (321:14–16; 324:3) first records the lenient opinion (Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda) as an unattributed opinion and then adds that some say one must be stringent, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. In such cases, it is generally accepted that the ruling of the *Shulḥan Arukh* is in accordance with the first cited opinion. Here, that means the ruling is in accordance with the lenient opinion **that there is no prohibition by Torah law to add water to flour without kneading them together**. This is stated

who improves the kneading is liable. This relates to the topic of kneading after kneading; see below (pp. 1076–1078, note 4).

4. With regard to the opinion of Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda, there is room to discuss whether the prohibited labor of Kneading pertains **only to the act of kneading**, which combines the flour and water into a single, unified entity, whereas the initial mixture of the water and flour is not a part of the prohibited labor, or whether the prohibited labor includes **the entire process** from when the water was added to the flour until they became a unified mass. A practical ramification would be in a case where one person poured the water onto the flour and another kneaded them into dough: Would the second be liable? Would they both be exempt, as neither one performed the entire process? Another ramification would be in a case where the water was added to the flour before Shabbat and the kneading was performed on Shabbat. See *Eglei Tal* (*Lash* 2), who addresses these issues, and see below, p. 1055 note 11.

explicitly in the *Maamar Mordekhai* (321:13), and is the ruling of Rav Ovadia Yosef (*Leviyat Hen* 67) and the *Menuḥat Ahava* (2:9 end of note 9).

Conversely, the *Rema* (321:16; *Darkhei Moshe* 324:1) implies that one should preferably follow the stringent opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi that **adding water to flour is prohibited by Torah law**. The *Ben Ish Hai* (Year 2, *Mishpatim* 18) implies that even Sephardim should be stringent in this regard, and this is also the ruling in the *Kaf HaHayim* (324:14).

It should be noted that even Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda, who holds that there is no prohibition by Torah law to pour water onto flour, concedes that there is **a prohibition by rabbinic law**, as he states that “**he is not liable** until he kneads,” but does not state “it is permitted unless he kneads.” This is stated by the *Ritva* (155b), *Meiri* (18a), and the *Beit Yosef* (324, s.v. *aval haTosafot*).⁵

Consequently, pouring water into flour without kneading them together is prohibited both for Sephardim and for Ashkenazim. According to Sephardi authorities this is prohibited by rabbinic law, whereas Ashkenazim are concerned for the opinion that this is prohibited by Torah law. Nonetheless, we will see later that even Ashkenazim rely on the lenient opinion in certain cases.

5. It is possible that this question as to whether, according to Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda, it is prohibited by rabbinic law to pour water onto flour depends upon the question raised above (see note 4): If Rabbi Yossi bar Yehuda holds that the prohibited labor of Kneading includes **the entire process**, but one is liable only for the **completion** of the process, it stands to reason that it is prohibited by rabbinic law to start the process. But if he holds that the prohibited labor is confined to **the actual kneading**, it is possible that pouring water onto flour, which is not connected to the prohibited labor, is entirely permitted. Yet, it is also possible that even according to this latter interpretation, pouring water onto flour is prohibited by rabbinic law because it **leads to** the prohibited labor of Kneading.

KNEADING

