

Parsha Halacha - Parshat Vayeira

Pat Yisrael;

Its History and Applications

Sponsored by Mr. Jacks Sterenfeld and family in memory of Jack's uncle, Shmuel Moshe ben Mordechai HaLevi, Moyses Sterenfeld, whose Yahrzeit is on Sunday, 21 Cheshvan. May his Neshama have an Aliyah.

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In the Torah portion of Vayeira we find Avraham hosting three guests who turn out to be angels. The Chumash tells us ([Gen. 18:5](#)) that Avraham said to his wife Sarah, “מְהֵרָה שְׁלֵשׁ סְאִים - קַמְחַ סֵּלֶת לֹשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עֲגוֹת - Quick, take three *se'ahs* of choice flour, knead, and make cakes!” The commentaries point out that three *se'ahs* is quite a large amount of flour, and they offer various explanations as to why it was necessary for Sarah to make so much bread. (Each *se'ah* is the volume of 144 eggs.) Here are some explanations:

- **Meal for Many**

The Ramban writes that in honor of their important guests, Avraham and Sarah prepared a meal for their entire household which included a large number of people.

- **Sifted Flour**

The Chizkuni writes that the volume of three *se'ah* was of קִמַּח, coarse flour. After Sarah sifted it, however, and made it into סֵּלֶת, fine flour, the volume of flour became one *issaron* per person (the volume of 43.3 eggs). According to the Talmud ([Eiruvin 83b](#)) this is a usual amount of bread for a person to eat on a daily basis. The coarse flour which had been sifted out was made into a dough that was used to seal the pot and draw out the scum (Rashi).

- **Filling the Oven**

Alternatively, the Chizkuni suggests that Avraham's oven fit the volume of three *se'ahs*. As such, he told Sarah to bake this amount even though they had no need for it at that time because when an oven is filled, the heat is distributed more evenly and the bread bakes better (see [Beitzah 17a](#) and [O.C. 507:6](#)).

- **For the Road**

The Shela (cited in Etz Yosef on Bereishit Rabbah 48:12) writes that Sarah prepared extra food for the guests to take with them on their further travels.

While we're on the topic of bread, we will discuss some of the history and laws regarding *pat yisrael*, eating bread baked only by a Jew.

Pat Akum

The Talmud says that the sages forbade the eating of certain foods prepared by gentiles in order to minimize the fraternizing of Jews and gentiles and thus prevent intermarriage. One of these foods is bread. The prohibition of consuming bread baked by a gentile applies even if all of the ingredients and utensils used are kosher.

Defining the Terms

- The term ***pat akum*** means bread baked by a pagan or gentile (which is forbidden, but see below for exceptions).
- ***Pat yisrael*** means bread baked by a Jew (which is permissible).
- ***Pat palter*** means bread baked by a gentile baker (which some say is permissible, see below).
- ***Pat ba'al habayit*** means bread baked by a private gentile person (which is almost always forbidden, see below).

History

- **Daniel in Babylonia**

Some say (Ramban on Avodah Zarah 36a) that Daniel (advisor of the Babylonian kings) decreed against eating gentile bread, as the verse says ([Daniel 1:8](#)), "Daniel resolved not to be defiled by the king's bread, food, or by the wine he drank." Others interpret the verse to mean that he refrained only from food and wine but not from bread (see Tosfot on *ibid*, D.H. Asher), while yet others hold that he personally abstained from these foods but didn't decree against eating them for the public at large (Ritva on Avodah Zarah *ibid*).

In any case, even if he enacted a decree, it was not accepted by the Jewish community and therefore not considered binding.

- **Students of Hillel and Shammai**

The Talmud (Shabbat 13b and 17b and Avodah Zarah *ibid*) recounts how the students of Hillel and Shammai once went to the attic of Rabbi Chanaya ben Chizkiya ben Garon to visit him when he was ill. While there, they took a count and realized there were more students of Shammai than of Hillel. Since they were in the majority, the students of Shammai took the opportunity to enact 18 decrees. (The students of Hillel were generally not as strict as the

students of Shammai, and had Hillel's students been in the majority these decrees would not have passed.) One of those 18 decrees was not to eat gentile bread.

- **Repealed or Not?**

The Talmud (ibid 37a) recounts that Rabbi Yehudah Nesi'ah (a grandson of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi) wanted to repeal the decree of *pat akum*. But since he had already permitted two other things (see there), he didn't want to permit a third thing and be considered an overly lenient *beit din*. According to the Jerusalem Talmud (Avodah Zarah 15a and b) however, the rabbis repealed the prohibition of *pat akum* in a place where there is no *pat yisrael* to be found.

- **Accepted or Not?**

Tosfot says that we can infer from the fact that Rabbi Yehudah Nesi'ah considered repealing this law that it was *not* accepted by the Jewish community at large. For, had it been accepted, it would have been impossible for him to repeal it (see Avodah Zarah 36a). Tosfot writes that this explains why many people are not particular about these laws as a Rabbinic decree that was not accepted is not binding. (But see Ramban who writes that it is binding in the places where it was accepted.)

Mitigating Factors

- **Bakery Bread**

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 35b as explained by the Ran) quotes opinions that say one may be lenient and eat the bread of a non-Jewish baker. This is called *pat palter* (bread of a baker) as mentioned above.

- **No Jewish Bakery**

Some say that one may only eat *pat palter* if there is no Jewish baker in the city (Rashba and Ran).

- **On the Road**

Others allow one to eat *pat palter* only if one is traveling between towns, and there is no *pat yisrael* available nearby (Rambam, Laws of Ma'achalot Assurot 17:12).

Practical Applications: Four Opinions

In practice there are four opinions as to how to apply this law. Please note that any leniency to eat bread baked by a non-Jew applies only when one is certain that the ingredients are 100 percent kosher.

1) Careful People

Those who are careful should follow the strictest opinion and not eat *pat akum* even if it is baked by a baker and even if there is no Jewish baker in town. Rather, they should bake their own bread or turn on the ovens in the local bakery and thus turn that bread into *pat yisrael*. (The details of this are beyond the scope of this article.) If, however, one

is traveling in between cities and there is no *pat yisrael* available within 2 miles, even a scrupulous person may partake of *pat palter* (Y.D. 112:15 and Aruch HaShulchan 18). It seems that in the era of the Talmud, the Torah scholars were strict in accordance with this opinion. In those days, if a Torah scholar acted leniently in this regard, he was censured by his colleagues (Avodah Zarah 36b on the bottom as explained by the Ramban).

2) **Sefardim**

Sefardim who wish to follow the letter of the law may eat bread of a non Jewish baker if there is no Jewish baker in that city (Y.D. 112:2). If there is a Jewish baker but the bread baked by the non-Jewish baker is of higher quality, one may buy this bread as well. The same is true if the non-Jewish baker bakes a particular type of bread which the Jewish baker does not (Y.D. 112:5).

3) **Ashkenazim**

The Rama rules that one may eat *pat palter* even in places where there is a Jewish baker. This is based on the opinion of the Mordechai (Avodah Zarah *ot* 830, see above) and the Jerusalem Talmud (Avodah Zarah 15a and b). This is the accepted practice for Ashkenazim. Despite this, the Shach (Rabbi Shabbetai HaKohen of Lithuania 1621–1662) recommends (Y.D. 112:9) that one should be strict and only buy *pat palter* if there is no Jewish baker in the city. The Chochmat Adam (cited in Chelkat Binyamin, *tziyunim*, 112:95) writes that a *ba'al nefesh* (scrupulous person) should follow this view.

4) **Difficult Situation**

Some say that one may even eat *pat ba'al habayit* (kosher bread baked by a private non-Jewish person) in a situation where there is no *pat yisrael* or *pat palter* available in the entire city (Y.D. 112:5). This is based on the opinion of Tosfot (see above) and on others who hold that the decree of *pat akum* was never accepted by the Jewish people. This also has a basis in the Jerusalem Talmud (see above) which says that the decree was repealed. One may rely on this opinion in case of need because bread is considered a staple of life.

Special Times

● **Challah for Shabbat and Yom Tov**

It is customary for people to bake their own challah for Shabbat and Yom Tov. One of the reasons for this custom is that it ensures that the bread eaten on these holy days are *pat yisrael* and are absolutely kosher. As the Shulchan Aruch HaRav writes (242:13), “In places where people eat bread baked by non-Jews throughout the week, it is desirable that they not eat anything other than ‘kosher’ bread which was kneaded at home for *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* as this honors these special days.” Despite this, if one has no access to *pat yisrael* on a given

Shabbat or Yom Tov he should rely on the main halacha and use *pat palter* in order to fulfill the mitzvah of having bread for the Shabbat or Yom Tov meals (Mishnah Berurah 242:6).

- **The Ten Days of Repentance**

Even those who are not strict regarding *pat akum* during the rest of the year should be strict during the Ten Days of Repentance (the days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur), i.e., they should follow the first opinion mentioned above not to eat *pat palter* even if there is no Jewish baker in the city. During those ten days, they should either bake their own bread or turn on the oven in the local bakery to turn the bread into *pat yisrael*. One who is traveling between cities during these ten days and has no access to *pat yisrael* within approximately 2 miles, may eat *pat palter* as this is permissible even according to the strict opinion as explained above ([Shulchan Aruch HaRav 603:1](#)). One who was strict during the ten days need not continue that practice for the entire year even if he did not say *bli neder* (without the strength of a vow) when he began to be strict during the ten days. This is because it is self understood that he never intended to accept this stringency for the entire year (Beit Yosef O.C. 603).

G-d willing, we will continue to discuss this topic in the near future.

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom UMevorach!

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