

Pineapple Kugel

by Rabbi Yisroel Casen

Shimon Cohen has strong feelings about pineapple noodle kugel. Noodle kugel itself is fine—but pineapple mixed in? Absolutely not. During the main course of his Shabbos seudah, he takes a piece of kugel and wonders what to do with the pineapple. He devises a plan: remove the pineapple pieces now and save them to eat later with vanilla ice cream for dessert. Is this a Borer concern? Will Shimon violate Shabbos? This is actually the subject of a fascinating machlokes haPoskim.

What Is Borer?

The melacha of Borer is the act of sorting or selecting something from a mixture in a way that improves the item or the mixture. For example, if pebbles are mixed into grain, removing the pebbles refines the grain and is considered Borer. Similarly, separating a jar of mixed jellybeans by color to eat at a later point is an improvement for someone who wants one type without searching through the jar. By contrast, selecting food as part of immediate eating is not Borer. When a person eating a salad chooses a piece of tomato, he is not refining the mixture for later use; he is simply choosing what to eat next. Borer means improving a mixture for future use, while ordinary eating is merely selecting food in the course of eating it now.

The Three Conditions

To distinguish what is characterized as ordinary eating and not Borer, Chazal taught that three conditions must be met. First, one must take the desired item. In the salad example above, when a person places a piece of tomato on his fork intending to eat it, he is not sorting the salad; he is simply choosing his next bite. Second, the selection must be for immediate use; the tomato is being taken to be eaten right away. Third, it must be done by hand, or with a utensil used in the normal manner of eating. A fork is acceptable because it does not make the sorting process more efficient; it merely helps the person eat properly. By contrast, a sieve or strainer is not an eating utensil, but a tool designed for separating, and its use would indicate an act of Borer rather than eating. When these three conditions are satisfied, the act is considered eating rather than Borer. These same principles apply to non-food items as well: choosing a desired article of clothing from a pile of laundry is permitted only when it is needed for immediate use.

What Counts as “Immediately Before”?

The second condition—that the selection be done immediately before use—is understood somewhat broadly by Chazal. Even if the item will not be eaten at that exact moment, selecting it as part of meal preparation immediately before the meal is still considered part of eating. For example, if a person wants to

prepare a salad before the Shabbos seudah and must select desired items from a mixed assortment in the refrigerator, this is permitted so long as it is done within the reasonable amount of time that person needs to prepare the meal. If he plans to begin eating at 12:00 p.m. and normally needs 45 minutes to prepare, he may begin selecting from 11:15 onward. This entire period is considered immediately before eating, and the selecting need not be saved for the final task before the meal. Moreover, the whole meal may be prepared during this time; even selecting items needed for dessert may be done before the meal begins.

Back to the Kugel

This brings us back to Shimon Cohen and his kugel. At first glance, he has violated Shabbos by removing an unwanted item—the pineapple—which would be an act of Borer rather than eating. But is the pineapple truly unwanted? Shimon removes it with the specific intention of eating it later for dessert. The pineapple is unwanted during the main course, but desired for dessert. Can his later interest in eating it change how we define the act taking place now? Since one may select desired items shortly before a meal, selecting during one course for the next course is certainly permitted. If so, removing the pineapple could be viewed as preparation for dessert: a desired item is being selected from a mixture. On the other hand, if the primary purpose of the act is to make the kugel pineapple-free, then the pineapple must be treated as the unwanted item. The question, then, is how to classify Shimon's action: is it permitted preparation for dessert, or forbidden Borer during the main course?

What do you think?

The Poskim Weigh In

This question is the subject of a machlokes haPoskim. Sefer Ayil Meshulash (chapter 6, note 47) cites Rav Moshe Feinstein, who draws an important distinction. If Shimon's main intent is to remove the pineapple from the kugel, and eating the pineapple later is only an afterthought, then the act is defined by that primary intent and is prohibited. However, if he removes the pineapple for a dual purpose—both to make the kugel pineapple-free and to eat the pineapple separately later in the meal—it is permitted. In that case, he intended from the outset to eat the pineapple, so the act is classified as selecting a desired item.

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, by contrast, ruled that both scenarios are permitted, even when Shimon's main goal is to remove the unwanted pineapple from the kugel. Although the act begins with a desire to make the kugel pineapple-free, both the kugel and the pineapple are ultimately wanted for this meal. Therefore, the act is not classified as removing an unwanted item.

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