



MITZVOT HATLUYOT BAARETZ CHALLAH

CHALLAH AND HOPE

“G-d spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: ‘At once upon entering the Land to which I am bringing you when you eat from its produce, then you shall offer up a portion to G-d. The first part of your dough, the *challah*, you shall raise up, just as you raise up a portion from the grain of the threshing floor. The first portion of your kneading you shall raise up to G-d, for all generations” (Bamidbar 15:17–21).

This section introduces the *mitzvah* of *challah*, or “taking the dough.” The Torah presents this *mitzvah* in the aftermath of the sin of the spies, after *Am Yisrael* had been condemned to perish in the wilderness and not enter the Promised Land.

The root of the word is probably derived from a stem meaning “first,” for the *challah* is the first portion of the dough separated before it is baked, and presented to the *kohen* as a gift. Today, in the absence of a Temple and laws of *tahara*, the *challah* is symbolically separated and then disposed of respectfully, to preserve the memory of the original rite. Like the meal offerings and libations the Torah speaks of at the beginning of the chapter (15:1-16), the *mitzvah* of *challah* is also contingent upon entering the Land of Israel, indicating that the judgment meted out to the generation of the wilderness would one day be rescinded.

But in contrast to the meal offerings and libations, the *mitzvah* of *challah* speaks of an unusual immediacy: “At once upon entering (בבואכם) the Land to which I am bringing you when you eat from its produce, then you shall offer up a portion to G-d,” is more direct than “When you enter the land

(כי תבאו) of your dwellings that I am giving to you.” As the Midrash Sifre explains: “Rabbi Yishmael expounded: ‘The text indicates a different form of entry concerning the *mitzvah* of *challah* than any other entry-related *mitzvah* in the Torah. Concerning all the other commandments contingent upon entering the Land, the text says ‘When you enter the Land...’ or ‘It shall come to pass when G-d brings you into the Land...’ Here, however, the text says: ‘At once upon entering the Land.’ This indicates that as soon as the people of Israel entered the Land, they were immediately obligated in the *mitzvah* of *challah*” (Sifre Bamidbar Chapter 110).



In other words, *Am Yisrael* were not obligated to fulfill all the other Land-based agricultural commandments – such as the separation of tithes from their produce or the designation of the first fruits – immediately upon crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan. First, they would have to conquer the Land and settle it, a process that took a number of years. However, they were obligated to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *challah* as soon as they partook of

the Land’s produce, even though their secure settlement of its soil may have been many years off.

Although the *mitzvah* of *challah* is a function of geography because it is contingent upon *Am Yisrael* entering Canaan, it is not Land-dependent in the narrow halachic sense. *Challah* stands in contrast to most other agricultural *mitzvot*, for only produce grown in the Land of Israel must be tithed and only the farmer in Israel must abstain from the planting of diverse seeds, etc. But after we enter the Land, anyone who kneads dough, whether they live in Israel or not, must fulfill the *mitzvah* of *challah*. In other words, *challah* connects us to the Land of Israel even though we are not yet there.

Thus, the *mitzvah* of *challah* provided profound solace to Jews throughout history who were separated from their Land. To the generation of the wilderness, the Land may have seemed far off, but *challah* suggested the Land was relevant even prior to its formal settlement. And for the many generations forced to live exiled from the Land, *challah* reminded us that one could still be symbolically connected to its holy soil even in the absence of possessing formal deed. In both situations, the point was the same: to gently remind us that living in the Land of Israel was, and remains, the goal.

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