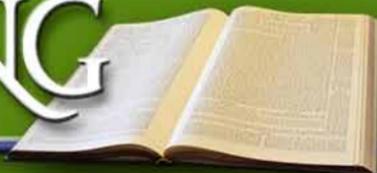


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Volume 15 Issue 2



{ TOPIC }

Soft Cheese and *Gevinas Akum*



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► Each issue reviews a different area of contemporary *halacha* with an emphasis on practical applications of the principles discussed. Significant time is spent ensuring the inclusion of all relevant *shittos* on each topic, as well as the *psak* of *Harav Yisroel Belsky, Shlita* on current issues.

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Soft Cheese and *Gevinas Akum*

Issur

The *Shulchan Aruch*¹ says the reason for the *issur* of *gevinas akum* is that non-Jews often made cheese using rennet from non-kosher animals.²

Background

The cheese-making process is rather unique. Cheese is made by souring and then coagulating the milk. When milk is coagulated, it will separate into curds and whey (see document A-1). The curd is solid and the whey is liquid. Milk can be curdled either by placing an enzyme called rennet in the milk or with acid. Cheese set with rennet is referred to as hard cheese; acid-set cheeses are called soft cheeses. Acid-set cheeses have a course curd, thus they are just bunches of casein with fat and some water from the milk. They therefore drip when lifted since they are not one unit. Rennet-set cheeses have a rubbery, smooth consistency and hold together as one unit unless cut.³

Hard Cheese and Rennet

Some examples of hard cheese are American cheese,⁴ blue cheese, Cheddar, feta, muenster, mozzarella, Parmesan, and

1 Y.D. 115:2.

2 See Levush 2; Chachmas Adam 67:7.

3 OU document, "Hamodia Milk Products."

4 Sappirim 5, page 2. Refer to Chelkas Binyamin 115, biurim "bedieved," page 161.

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Swiss.⁵ The rennet used to make the milk coagulate in hard cheese is traditionally taken from the lining of the stomach of an animal.⁶ Until recently, rennet was sourced from non-kosher animals. However, nowadays, in most places in the United States, artificial rennet is used; in Europe, non-kosher rennet may still be used.⁷ Any rennet-type of process used to curdle milk requires *gevinas Yisrael*.⁸ In order for rennet-set cheese to be considered *gevinas Yisrael* a Jew has to own the rennet⁹ or place the rennet in the vat.¹⁰ Most *kashrus* organizations require the Jew to either add the rennet himself or press the button on an automated rennet feeder.¹¹

Soft Cheeses

Acid-set cheeses—i.e. soft cheeses such as cottage cheese—are made in a different manner. The *poskim* discuss whether acid-set cheeses have the same *halachos* as rennet-set cheese. The *Chachmas Adam*¹² and the *Aruch*

5 These items are part of a list compiled by Rabbi Avraham Gordimer shlit"á from the OU.

6 Rambam, Hilchos Ma'achalos Assuros 3:13; Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 115:2; Aruch Hashulchan 16.

7 Refer to kashrus.org in an article written by Harav Avraham Gordimer; see Chelkas Yaakov, Y.D. 38.

8 Shulchan Aruch *ibid.*; Shach 19; Kaf Hachaim 57. The Seridei Eish 1:19 says it is permissible for a weak, old or poor person to eat this type of cheese.

9 Shach 20; Taz 11; Pischei Teshuvah 115:6; Chachmas Adam 67:7. The opinion of Ge'onei Narvona (Tosafos, Avodah Zarah 35a, "chada"; see Minchas Shlomo 2:2-3:100) is that *gevinas akum* is permitted in locations where they do not use animal rennet, but this is not accepted l'halachah (see Aruch Hashulchan 18). Refer to OU document A-181 on how a Jew acquires the rennet from a non-Jew.

10 Shach 115:20; Gra 14; Chachmas Adam 67:7; Aruch Hashulchan 115:19. See Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:16. Others say there is no need to add the rennet as long as the Jew saw it being added (Rema 115:2; Noda B'Yehudah 2:37; Pischei Teshuvah 6; Mishnah Berurah, O.C. 307:79; Sha'ar Hatzion 90; Aruch Hashulchan, Y.D.; *ibid.* 19; see Chachmas Adam 67:7). The minhag today is to be stringent like the Shach *ibid.* (OU document A-132, footnote 6; "The Mashgiach's Checklist" from the OU). Refer to OU document A-159 if the mashgiach did not put in the rennet.

11 OU document A-16.

12 53:38.

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*Hashulchan*¹³ seem to hold that soft cheese is included in the *gezeirah* of *gevinas akum*.

Some say that since cottage cheese may be produced without adding anything to it to make it coagulate there is no concern of *gevinas akum*.¹⁴ The opinion of others is that all soft cheeses, even if something is added to coagulate it, are not included in the *gezeirah* of *gevinas akum*.¹⁵

Harav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l*¹⁶ holds that cheese that can coagulate by just sitting out by itself is not included in the *gezeirah* of *gevinas akum*; this was specifically referring to cottage cheese.¹⁷ However, he does add at the end of the *teshuvah* that it is not proper to publicize this *heter*.¹⁸ It is reported that Harav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* let his wife eat *gevinas akum* cottage cheese when she needed it. This would be a proof that soft cheese is not included in the *gezeirah* of *gevinas akum*.¹⁹ In a different *teshuvah*, Rav Moshe says it is better to be stringent, but if one sees a person eating soft cheese that is *gevinas akum*, he does not have to rebuke him.²⁰ This would seem to apply to other soft cheeses as well if the appearance or taste is different than that of a hard cheese. Other *poskim* permit the consumption of soft cheeses that are *gevinas akum* even *l'chatchilah*.²¹ This is the opinion of Harav Yisrael Belsky *zt"l*, quoting the opinion of

13 115:16. See Aruch Hashulchan *ibid.* 20 and 28, implying that soft cheese is permitted. Refer to Chasam Sofer, Y.D. 2:79.

14 Chelkas Binyamin, Y.D. 115:60. See Shevet Halevi 4:86.

15 Refer to Chelkas Binyamin 115, page 156 (*biurim*).

16 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:48 and 1:50.

17 Refer to Seridei Eish 1:19.

18 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:48.

19 OU document *ibid.*

20 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 1:50.

21 This is the opinion of Rabbi Tuvia Goldstein *zt"l*, quoted in OU document A-132, footnote 26.

איזן על להקב"ה בעולמו אלאי יאמות של הלכה בלביד (ברכות ח)

כל השוטה הלכות בכל זום מובטח לישוא בן עולם הפא... (מדף עב)

Harav Henkin *zt"l*.²² The reality is that soft cheeses do have a different look and taste and were therefore never part of the *gezeirah* of *gevinas akum*, and the custom of some major *kashrus* organizations is to follow the lenient view.²³

The *poskim* discuss whether ricotta cheese is included in the *gezeirah* of *gevinas akum* since it is a byproduct of hard cheese. Many say that it is not included in the *gezeirah*.²⁴

Minute Rennet Added to Soft Cheese

Sometimes manufacturers of soft cheeses add a minute amount of (kosher) rennet into the milk to speed up the process. This is not considered a problem of *gevinas akum* since the amount is so minute that it has no effect on the finished cheese product. The adding of the rennet is not for the benefit of the cheese, but for the benefit of the seller in order to have the finished product ready earlier.²⁵

Bakers' Cheese

Bakers' cheese is commonly used in industrial settings to make cheesecake. Baker's cheese is an acid-set cheese to which rennet is added to give the cheese the desired texture (see footnote). If rennet would not be added, the final product would be too liquidy.

Cheese from *Chalav Akum*

We have established that soft cheese is not subject to the

22 OU document A-162.

23 OU document A-16. The Star-K is stringent and holds a mashgiach is required to add the acid to soft cheeses excluding yogurt, which is not considered a soft cheese (based on a discussion with Rabbi Rosen from the Star-K).

24 Darchei Teshuvah 115:30, quoting the opinion of the Pri Chadash; see Birchei Yosef 115:5; Kaf Hachaim 115:47 and 53 is stringent.

25 The amount of rennet used in acid-set cheeses is .7-8 ml of rennet per 1000 lbs. of milk. Rennet-set cheeses use between 60-85 ml of rennet for the same amount of milk; this is almost 100 times more rennet (OU document A-16).

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halachos of *gevinas akum*. However, may one who is *makpid* not to eat *chalav stam* eat cheese made from *chalav stam*?

The Rema²⁶ says if a Jew saw a non-Jew making cheese²⁷ but did not see the actual milking, the cheese is permissible *bedieved*. This is because we are not concerned that the non-Jew would put in milk from a non-kosher animal, since such milk does not coagulate. The Shach²⁸ says it is permissible only if there will be a great loss.

Harav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* questions why this is not a reason to permit this type of cheese even *l'chatchilah* and adds that we do not *pasken* like the Rema in this matter.²⁹ He says that *chalav Yisrael* nowadays is only a *chumrah* (since the government makes sure that no other milk is mixed into the cow's milk),³⁰ and one does not have to take the *chumrah*

26 Y.D. 115:2.

27 A hechsher is considered as if a Jew saw the cheese making.

28 Y.D. 115:22.

29 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:16.

30 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 1:47-49; see Chazon Ish, Y.D. 41:4; Journal of Halachah and Contemporary Society 5, pages 92-108. Refer to Darchei Teshuvah 115:6-8. The Pischei Halachah, Kashrus, page 107, brings a teshuvah from Harav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* that the heter only applies if you cannot obtain *chalav Yisrael* easily, but if *chalav Yisrael* is available then one should buy it (see Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:35 and 4:5). Many hold that Harav Moshe Feinstein's heter is not to be relied upon and it is always forbidden if a Jew is not watching the milking (refer to Chasam Sofer, Y.D. 107; Chachmas Adam 67:1; Aruch Hashulchan 115:5-6; Minchas Elazar 4:25; Zekan Aharon 2:44; Minchas Yitzchak 1:138, 2:21, 10:31:15; Be'er Moshe 4:52; Teshuvos V'hanhagos 1:441, 2:373; Melamed L'ho'il, Y.D. 36:4; Chelkas Yaakov 34; Chelkas Binyamin 115:16. The Melamed L'ho'il, Y.D. 33, says *chalav akum* is permitted if one is lightheaded. According to some, one may be lenient for young children and women within thirty days of giving birth (Teshuvos V'hanhagos 1:441; see Lev Avraham 74). Refer to Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:35 that yeshivos should be *makpid* on *chalav Yisrael* because of chinuch for the students (see Lev Avraham 74). Some poskim are lenient and permit powdered milk even for those who are *makpid* on *chalav Yisrael* (Har Tzvi, Y.D. 103-104, in great depth; Zekan Aharon 2:44). The Chazon Ish was lenient for sick people (Orchos Rabbeinu 3, page 77, 33; see Tzitz Eliezer 16:25). The minhag is if one is *makpid* on *chalav Yisrael* he may not eat *chalav stam* powdered milk (Harav Yisroel Belsky *zt"l*; see She'arim Metzuyanim B'halachah 38:8; Teshuvos V'hanhagos 2:373; opinion of the Star-K, Kashrus Kurrents; Tzohar 3, pages 33-34). One who only eats *chalav Yisrael* may still eat foods cooked in non-*chalav Yisrael* equipment (Harav Yisroel Belsky *zt"l*; see Bais Avi 4:180, pages 364-365). One who is on a business trip and has no *chalav Yisrael* may be lenient and drink *chalav stam*, but he should do *hataras nedarim* (Emes L'Yaakov, Y.D. 115, footnote 45). Some say if one buys coffee at a non-Jewish store that has

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a step further and be stringent with *gevinas Yisrael* cheese that is made with *chalav stam*.³¹ Although this may seem to be a great leniency for those who do not eat *chalav stam*, the *minhag* is that one who does not eat *chalav stam* does not eat cheese made from *chalav stam* either.³²

The following chart shows how much rennet is used for different cheeses.³³

<i>Cheese</i>	<i>Milliliters of Rennet per 1,000 pounds³⁴ of milk</i>
Bakers' cheese	70
Blue cheese	72
Brick cheese	86
Cheddar cheese	90
Colby cheese	90
Cottage cheese	1
Cream cheese	2
Edam cheese	128
Farmer cheese	1
Feta cheese	90
Gouda cheese	128

chalav Yisrael milk, one should make sure the non-Jew opens the milk in front of him to ensure that he puts in the correct milk (Ohr Yisrael 20, page 186). A woman who only ate chalav Yisrael before she was married does not have to be *matir neder* if she marries a man who eats chalav stam (Rivevos Ephraim 8:303:2). The major kashrus organizations rely on Harav Moshe's heter and give a hechsher on chalav stam based on it (OU; see OU document K-60; Kof-K; OK). The Star-K does not give a hechsher on chalav stam. The Star-D gives a hechsher on chalav stam but it is not directly affiliated with the Star-K (based on a conversation with Rabbi Rosen).

31 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:16, pages 240-241.

32 Harav Yisroel Belsky zt"l.

33 This list was adapted from Sappirim 6. I want to thank Rabbi Dovid Cohen shlit"א for providing me with this kuntres.

34 Which is equal to 439 liters (Sappirim *ibid.*).

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Limburger cheese	86
Mozzarella cheese	85-90
Muenster cheese	86
Neufchatel cheese	2
Paneer cheese	0
Parmesan cheese	70
Pot cheese	1
Provolone cheese	85-90
Reggiano cheese	70
Ricotta cheese	0-4
Romano cheese	70
Roquefort cheese	72
Sap Saga cheese	85-90
Sour cream	1-6
Swiss cheese	70
Yogurt	0

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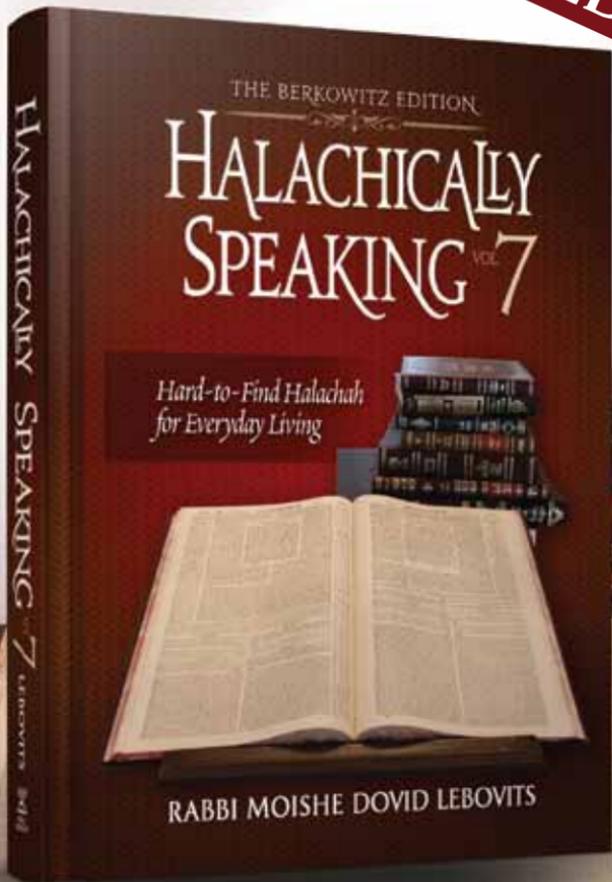
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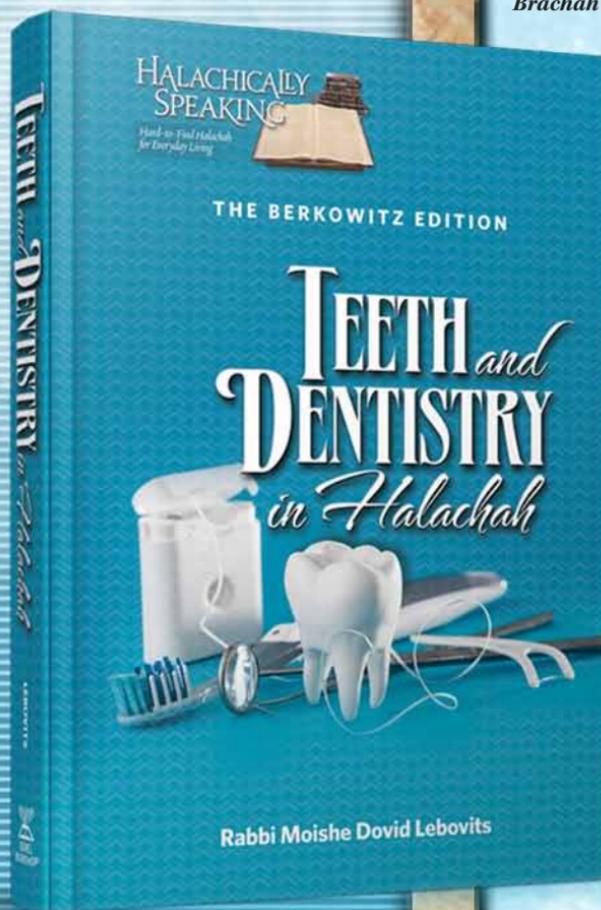


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