

The Chicken and the Egg

Anyone who has studied the Torah account of creation has no doubt that the chicken came before the egg. But how to view the egg which comes from the chicken presents an interesting problem — is it like fruit produced by the chicken or like juice flowing from it?

An egg laid on a holiday, the first *mishna* in this *mesechta* teaches us, may not be eaten on that day. The next couple of pages explain the reason for this rabbinic decree. The explanation offered by two of the Sages, Rabbi Yosef and Rabbi Yitzchak, are similar — but with a crucial difference:

Rabbi Yosef compares such an egg to fruit which falls from a tree. The Sages decreed that fruit which falls from a tree on a Shabbat or holiday is forbidden to be eaten on that day, lest it mislead one to pick fruit from a tree in violation of Torah Law. And when the Sages made this decree, they extended it to include anything like fruit, such as an egg, which drops from its source.

Rabbi Yitzchak, however, compares the egg to juice which flows from fruit. The Sages decreed that juice which flows on its own from fruit on a Shabbat or holiday cannot be consumed on that day, because it might mislead one to actually squeeze fruit for juice in violation of Torah Law. And when they made this decree, they included anything resembling juice, such as an egg, which flows from the source in which it is absorbed.

In explaining the difference between these seemingly similar approaches, the *gemara* focuses on what we might laughingly describe as two sides of the egg. Since Rabbi Yosef views an egg as food which is eaten rather than drunk, he concludes that it bears a closer resemblance to fruit than to juice; thus, it is more likely to lead one to pick fruit rather than squeeze fruit for juice. Rabbi Yitzchak, however, views the egg's relationship to its source as the criterion: Both the egg before it is laid and the juice before it is squeezed are not visible, as is the fruit on the tree. Consumption of the egg is therefore more likely to lead one to squeeze fruit to acquire its concealed juice than it will to pick visible fruit from a tree.

There is indeed more than one way to view an egg, just as there is more than one way to eat an egg — provided that it is not laid on a holy day.

Beitza 3a

Fruits For Jerusalem

Fruits in *Eretz Yisrael* that grow in the fourth year of a tree's life have a special status. They are no longer forbidden as those that grow in the first three years. But neither can they be eaten in regular fashion like those which grow in succeeding years.

These fruits are called "*revai*" and in the time of the *Beit Hamikdash* they could be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem or redeemed. In the latter case, the money used for redemption had to be spent on food which would be consumed in Jerusalem, while the redeemed fruit could be eaten anywhere. (Today the fruit is redeemed for token value and consumed, and the coin is eliminated.)

During one period of Jewish history there was a rabbinic decree in effect that the fruit grown anywhere within the radius of a day's journey to Jerusalem had to be brought to Jerusalem for consumption and could not be redeemed. The purpose of the decree was to beautify the marketplaces of Jerusalem with an abundance of fruits.

Rabbi Eliezer owned a vineyard located between Lod and Jerusalem close enough to the latter to disqualify the option of redemption of his fourth-year crop. Bringing such a large crop to Jerusalem presented too much of a burden so he considered relinquishing ownership of the grapes and allowing the poor to claim them and bring them to Jerusalem. His disciples reminded him, however, that this was not necessary because his colleagues, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and his court, had already abolished that decree and redemption of the fruit was once again possible.

This incident is cited as an illustration of a major halachic point — that a decree made by the Sages is in effect until it is annulled by the Sages, even if the original reason for the decree no longer applies. Jerusalem, in the time of Rabbi Eliezer, was in Roman hands; there was certainly no longer any reason to bring fourth-year fruits there to beautify the marketplaces of the heathens. Nevertheless, Rabbi Eliezer felt compelled to do so until he was informed that a formal annulment of the decree had been made.

Beitza 5b

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