

The Value of Water that has "Rested"

Source Sheet by David Katz

There is a specific term for water that is used for baking matzot. It is called "מַיִם שֶׁלְנוּ" or water that has rested overnight. Traditionally, the water is drawn from a well the evening before the matzah dough is mixed and rests overnight in a cool environment. The sources below track the history of this Halacha.

Rav Yehuda said: A woman may knead matza dough only with water that rested, i.e., water that was left indoors overnight to cool. If water is added to dough immediately after it was drawn, when it is still lukewarm, the dough will leaven at a faster rate. The Gemara relates: Rav Mattana taught this halakha in Paphunya. On the next day, the eve of Passover, everyone brought their jugs to him and said to him: Give us water. They misunderstood his expression *mayim shelanu*, water that rested, as the near homonym *mayim shelanu*, our water, i.e., water that belongs to the Sage, and

בבלי מסכת פסחים דף מ"ב עמוד א
אמר רב יהודה: אשה לא תלוש
אלא במים שלנו דרשה רב מתנה
בפפונגא. למחר אייתו כולי עלמא
חצבייהו ואתו לגביה, ואמרו ליה:
הב לן מיא. אמר להו: אנא במיא
דביתו אמרי.

they therefore came to take water from his house. He said to them: I say and meant: Water that rested [devitu] in the house overnight.

- What is מים שלנו, and why is it used for mixing matzah dough?
- What happened in פפוניא the morning of פסח?
- Explain how a misunderstanding of “שלנו” lead to this comical event. (Hint: שלי vs. לך/לינה/מלון)

THE LAWS OF LEAVING WATER OVERNIGHT

One may not knead except with water that was left overnight, whether they are waters of a pool or of a spring or whether they are waters of a river and they should be drawn while it is still day (close to the twilight period) (His own words and Haghot Maimoni perek 5) or during the twilight period. One should not knead with them until the entire night has passed.

שולחן ערוך. אורח חיים תנ"ה
סעיף א

אין לשין אלא במים שלנו בין שהם מי בורות ומעיינות בין שהם מי נהרות ושואבים אותם מבעוד יום (סמוך לבין השמשות) (ד'ע והגהות מיימוני פ'ה) או בין השמשות ואין לשין בהן עד שיעבור הלילה כולה

- **What time of day is the water drawn for matzah baking?**
- **How long does the water need to sit before it can be used for matzah baking?**

A little Matzah Science:

The colder a dough, the less change there is of any microbial activity.. Professional bakers are constantly monitoring their dough temperature based on the types of bread they want to produce. A warmer dough will rise faster than a cold dough. A slow rising, cold dough will have more fermentation and flavor than a warmer dough.

In a bakery, there is only one ingredient that can control dough temperature: water. Bakers use formulas to achieve their desired dough temperature (DDT), and the DDT is always as much a part of the recipe as the ingredients themselves. Most bread doughs come out of the mixer between 70-80 degrees fahrenheit depending on the type of bread and baking schedule. Under 70 degrees there is not much fermentation, above 80 degrees there is too much which causes a rapid breakdown of the bread structure.

In the time of the Talmud, drawing water the night before ensured that the water would be cool the following morning when the matzah dough was mixed. There were no faucets or refrigerators so this guaranteed cool water as opposed to water that was heated by the sun. This was yet another safeguard to prevent fermentation of the matzah dough.

You can try this at home. Leave a glass of water out on the counter overnight. In the morning, you will see that the water is cooler than the room's temperature.