INTENTIONALITY AND LIFE PROCESSES IN
THE LAW OF JUDAISM:
HALLAH AND MAKHSHIRIN

Jacob Neusner
Bard College

I. Complementary Category-Formations in the Halakhah

In the Halakhah of Hallah we uncover the counterpart and opposite of the Halakhah of Makhshirin. Both categories of the Halakhah take up the same problem, namely, the point at which, in the natural processes by which life is sustained, life commences. That is the beginning of the process of fermentation, which starts when water is mixed with flour and yeast; and it ends when the dough forms a crust. At the outset, with the deliberate addition of the water to the yeast, considerations of uncleanness take over (Makhshirin), and, at the end, with the formation of the crust and the death of the enzyme, considerations of sanctification commence and the dough-offering is owing. The one—Makhshirin—then insists on the centrality of human intentionality in the inauguration of the processes with which it is concerned; the other—Hallah—accords no consequence to what humans want or do not want to happen.

What we have in the Halakhah of Hallah and Makhshirin together is a systematic account of how holy Israel in the land of Israel triggers the working of life-processes, protecting the natural life within the living dough from the uncleanness deriving from death, protecting that same life-force for the sanctification that renews and sustains life, thus in dough-offering rendering to God his portion of the staff of life. How these concepts inhere in the Halakhah will emerge only from the details, carefully examined.

II. Hallah and Life-Processes

To begin with it suffices to note that Hallah, dough-offering, forms one of the native categories of the Halakhah devoted to marks of
God's and Israel's partnership in the Land, Israel's stipulative possession of its produce.\(^1\) That is in addition to the heave-offering, already removed from the grain. Like Terumot, the Hallah-offering is given to the priest, and, as we shall see, its Halakhah bears a message distinctive to itself and not conveyed through the laws of heave-offering. Numbers 15:17-21 states:

The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel: when you come into the Land to which I bring you, and when you eat of the food of the land, you shall present an offering to the Lord. Of the first of your coarse meal you shall present a cake as an offering, as an offering from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. Of the first of your coarse meal you shall give to the Lord an offering throughout your generations."

Sages understand the verses to require the separation of a portion from the bread; it is to be coarse meal, taken to mean unbaked bread-dough. It is comparable to the offering of the threshing flood, which sages call heave-offering. Since, as we know, heave-offering is given to the priest, so sages assume dough-offering is assigned to the priest. Havivi comments (p. 150), "Scripture describes the dough-offering as an offering of bread. The tractates authorities wish to provide a definition of bread, so that it is possible to judge with precision which types of dough are liable to the offering and which are not. Mishnah-tractate Hallah also explores two matters on which Scripture is silent: first, the precise point in the processing of the dough at which the dough becomes liable to the offering; and, second, the amount that one must separate." But as we shall see, the Halakhah emerges at the end of a long process of profound thought on the nature of life-processes in nourishing Israel in the land of Israel.

**III. The Halakhah of Hallah**

**Defining Bread:** We deal with food that humans deem edible. Only that which is fit for human consumption is liable to dough-offering; bread made for animals is not. But we do not differentiate among

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