



'Sabbath Mode' Ovens

How to use them .. and how not to use them! [Part 1]

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Part 1: Use of an oven in food pre-heated before Shabbos and heating on Shabbos

The advent of the 'Sabbath mode' ovens - manufactured under leading brand names some years ago - came as music to the ears of many housewives. Gone are the days of hot plates and slow cookers clogging the kitchen worktops. But are these ovens really the ultimate *halachic* solution for warming our Shabbos food?

The ovens which have made their way to homes in our communities have led to some confusion, and in the coming weeks, we will attempt to clarify how this innovation affects the Shomer Shabbos family.

The discussion in this week's article will centre around the use of ovens on Shabbos in general; we will look at the issues of *bishul* - cooking on Shabbos - and *shehiya* and *chazoro* - the prohibitions involving food which was placed on a stove or in an oven to heat from before Shabbos.

Can I heat foods in the oven before Shabbos?

The Shabbos *blech* and hot plate are an integral feature in our kitchens. The need for their use is mentioned in the *mishna* and *gemoro* in Shabbos - where the terminology which is used is '*gerufoh*' and '*ketumoh*'. These terms refer to an oven which has had its coals either removed, shovelled to the side, or covered with soot and ash to diminish their heat.

Food cooking on a fire, even when in place from before Shabbos, was considered by Chazal to be a great temptation. A concerned hostess is only a step away from stoking the fire as she may mindlessly try to improve her Shabbos foods. It is to prevent such error, that the *blech* - or as described above *gerufoh uketumoh* - serves as a safeguard. Having already diminished the fire's heat at the onset of Shabbos, one is unlikely to later stoke the fire; instead, the *blech's* presence will serve as a reminder of Shabbos and its *halochos*.

When considering the likelihood of the householder making prohibited changes to the fire, the *gemoro* records that the teaching of Chananya that once food is already partially cooked before the onset of Shabbos, then there is no concern that the fire will later be stoked. This opinion forms the basis of the *halocho* as recorded by Remo that if the food has been halfway (or in times of great need a third) cooked at the onset of Shabbos, it may be left in place even if not *gerufo uketumo* ie with no *blech* in place.

These rules remain true for food in an oven even when Sabbath mode is in use, and unless additional measures have been taken to provide *gerufo uketumo* status, the food in the oven would need to be cooked at the onset of Shabbos.

Even when on Sabbath mode, all food left in the oven must be at least a third cooked before sunset - *shkiya*. The oven is not considered to be like a *blech* and is subject to the laws of *shehiya*.

Can I heat foods on Shabbos by putting them in the oven when on Sabbath mode?

The coming section will focus on the laws of *bishul* (cooking) and of '*mechzi kimvashel*' - acts which could be perceived to be cooking.

Bishul itself is Torah-law and includes heating any raw food or liquid. A food which has already been cooked, is no longer subject to the prohibitions of *bishul*. *Halocho* distinguishes between the status of solid foods and that of liquids. Whereas pre-cooked solid foods may, in the right circumstances, be reheated on Shabbos, cold liquids **may never** be reheated. (According to Ashkenazi *halocho*, one would be permitted to reheat a liquid which had retained some warmth).

To highlight this distinction, we could draw on the case of a cold chicken soup which, although fully cooked before Shabbos, could under **NO** circumstances be heated on Shabbos. On the other hand, warming a fully baked *challah* would not involve the *issur* of *bishul* - as it is solid and precooked.

Even the solid precooked foods are subject to limitations - as Chazal prohibited activities which **look** like *bishul*. Placing a food on a fire initially was deemed by the Sages to be an act too dangerously similar to cooking itself (*mechazi kimevasheil*) and is prohibited.

Instead, an acceptable means of reheating cooked solid food is by putting them on top of a *kedeira* - pot which is heating on a stove. This permission assumes that the lid of a pot is not a place in which one would usually cook, placing foods there shows an intent not to cook, but rather to warm the food.

Although many say that the pot should be full, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *z"l* ruled that this is acceptable even if the pot is empty. An upturned baking tray qualifies and it is common practice to thaw a dry-frozen *challah*, or heat a *kugel* for the day time Shabbos meal in this manner. As mentioned, though, liquid foods may not be placed on the tray (unless they are still hot/warm). In a similar vein, placing foods on a central heating radiator would be permitted.

How about an oven? Any oven whose general function is to bake and cook foods would not meet the criteria necessary to allow one to initially place foods in it on Shabbos. This act would always be deemed by *poskim* as *mechazi kimvashel* - 'looking like cooking'.

- One may reheat cold dry foods by placing them on top of a pot warming on the stove.
- Using an oven - even -with an active Sabbath mode - would be no different from using a regular oven and under no circumstances may one place foods in it on Shabbos.

➤ In addition, when operating in Sabbath mode ovens, closing the door with food in place in the oven poses other serious halachic issues. (Read next week's article for discussion of this point).

If I take food out of the oven can it be returned?

In the previous section we discussed the prohibitions involved in initially placing foods on the stove or in an oven. In this section we move to a discussion of a topic called *chazoro* - returning food to a fire.

Although the rules of *shehiya* dictate that food which has been mostly cooked prior to the onset of Shabbos does not require a *blech* or hotplate, one is advised to always have one in place. This is because of the further limitations imposed by the laws of *chazoro*.

The rules of *chazoro* teach that once food is removed from the fire during Shabbos, placing it back on the fire is permitted **only** if the following preconditions are met. 1) the food must be fully cooked 2) the pot was removed with the intention of being replaced 3) the pot is still being held in one's hand. 4) a *blech* is in place.

To return food to a hot oven on Shabbos would only be permitted if the oven could be deemed to be *gerufo uketumoh* - the state which on a regular stove is created by putting a *blech* in place. This would only be possible if a dedicated metal casing was fitted inside the oven. Yet, even if such measures were taken, and all of the *chazoro* criteria were fulfilled, returning food to a hot oven, may be subject to further limitations.

In the *gemoro's* words, the *chazoro* permission only applies when returning 'onto it and not into it'. This instruction differentiates between the top of and the inside of a *kirrah* stove. Does this restriction apply to any heating appliance - and dictate that inserting into is prohibited - or was it referring to the specific stove prevalent in the times of Chazal?

Some contemporary *poskim* have ruled that one may return food to modern ovens. In his Responsa Shevet HaLevi (C:49) Rabbi Shmuel Wosner *z"l* suggests that it is only returning foods to the intense heat inside a *kirrah* stove which the Sages prohibited. Others - notably Dayan Weiss *z"l* in *Minchas Yitzchok* (C:28) and *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchoso*, maintain that all contemporary ovens are subject to the limitation.

➤ The Sabbath mode on an oven is not designed to permit returning foods into it on Shabbos. In all instances, the rules of *chazoro* remain the same as when operating without Sabbath mode. According to many *poskim*, *chazoro* may NEVER be performed in an oven, even if fitted with internal metal casing.

In conclusion, when buying an oven with a Sabbath mode, remember that no food can be placed inside to heat on Shabbos itself. All foods must be partially cooked and left warming in the oven from before Shabbos.

In next week's article, we will discuss the issues surrounding opening an oven door on Shabbos.

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