



'Sabbath mode' ovens

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

Rabbi Yisroel Moshe Guttentag

Whitefield Community Kollel and Federation ShailaText



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Opening the oven door Halachic challenges of improved oven technology

Despite its name and its *hechsher*, the Sabbath mode oven does not necessarily offer the most convenient means of heating food for Shabbos. The hotplate/*blech* can, under the right conditions, be used to heat foods ON Shabbos; the oven can ONLY be used for food inserted beforehand.

Why have ovens been manufactured under rabbinic supervision? In this week's article we will discover the many pitfalls inherent in use of the most up-to-date ovens, and how rabbinic guidance has enabled manufacturers to produce a 'kosher' product.

Who is responsible for authorising these ovens?

The Kashrus agency Star-K, of Baltimore Maryland, under the leadership of Rabbi Moshe Heinemann *shlita*, has developed a working relationship with many leading brands. Based on detailed guidance provided by the Star-K's rabbinic team, a range of ovens which proudly boast a 'Sabbath mode' are now available in the USA and beyond. In preparation of this article, I spoke to Mr Jonah Ottensoser of Baltimore. Mr Ottensoser, a qualified electrician and highly skilled technician works closely with both the Star-K's Rabbonim and electrical manufacturers to ensure that products marketed under the supervision of the Star-K comply with halachic requirements.

At the outset, he made it clear that not all models which claim to be Shabbos compliant carry his agency's or any hechsher. His advice for use of unauthorised models is to discuss their use with one's Rov.

In a lengthy conversation, Mr Ottensoser set out for me the issues which his agency has sought to address in their products.

Modern touch - Automatic lights, Digital display

Whereas traditionally, the oven cavity was lit only when in operation, in modern ovens a hidden switch controls the light. When the door is opened, a set of magnets are separated from each other. The oven 'knows' that the door has been opened and illuminates the oven. This automation is a feature favoured by many consumers, but serves as a warning light for the kosher consumer. This presented a minimal challenge, and was solved by the Star-K team's Sabbath mode by disabling the door switch.

Electronic displays were dealt with in a similar manner – in Sabbath mode, no change registers on the LED display when the door is opened. In ovens which do not offer Sabbath mode, opening the door causes words or letters to be displayed on the LED screen – this constitutes a potential issue of *koseiv* and *mochek* (writing and erasing).

Safety first

Not all of the concerns are *halachic*. Mr Ottensoser told us that some of the features of the Sabbath mode are in place simply for the convenience of the kosher consumer. Some ovens are programmed with a cut-out feature employed for safety. To combat the fire hazards potentially arising from running an oven for many consecutive hours, firms have

installed this automatic safety feature. This helpful feature, is a nuisance when planning for a three-day Yom Tov. In the Sabbath mode, one can choose to override this setting.

Doors open, heating element off

Perhaps the greatest challenge in providing a kosher model was a feature which the average consumer would never have noticed. Some ovens switch off the power to the element as soon as the door is opened; they then allow it to power up again once the door is closed.

US manufacturers claim that this design is intended to protect the **consumer** from a vicious blast of hot air as the door opens. Mr Ottensoser tells us that he has understood that the true intent is to prevent the heat from warping the sensitive electronic devices located just above the entrance to the oven door. Whatever the motive, in some models, opening and closing the oven door involves a serious infringement of the laws of Shabbos - classed under the *melochos* of *havoro* (lighting a fire) and *kibuy* (extinguishing a fire). In the coming paragraph, we will explain the halachic basis for the solution which the Star-K have developed.

Delayed reaction

The *halachic* principle of *grommo* – causative action – is understood to be a mitigating aspect in Torah prohibitions. If the person committing an act can be considered to have *caused* rather than *directly* have brought about a particular result, then he is somewhat less responsible for anything resultant.

Are *gromoh*-actions permitted on Shabbos? The Gemoro in Shabbos discusses cases of *gram kibui*. Where a fire is burning, measures to indirectly extinguish the fire may be employed. One example would be placing large vessels of cold water in the fire's path – in the face of the fire's heat, these would crack and the water would spill onto the fire.

Would this pave the way for Shabbos prohibitions to be circumvented? Mordechai, one of the Rishonim, highlighted the potential financial loss inherent in cases of '*gram kibuy*', and he is of the opinion that it is only in such circumstances that *grommoh* can be employed to permit an action. Quoted by Beis Yosef, this comment forms the basis of the *psak* of Rema who writes that indirect *meloch* action can only be permitted in order to avoid financial loss and damage.

Accepted use of time delay in modern appliances

Although Halocho does not permit actions based on their being '*gram*', Poskim do consider them in a more lenient light. A classic example of this is a ruling on use of electric fridges on Shabbos from Rav Shlomom Zalman Auerbach *zatzal*. In his work *Minchas Shlomo* he deals with the claim that opening a fridge door, has an effect on the motor. Rav Shlomo Zalman's ruling incorporates the *gerommo* factor with a **number of other halachic factors**. Each on their own merit would have been insufficient to grant permission to open and close the door, but in collaboration, they serve to allow the fridge door to be opened and closed.

Time delay in the oven door

As a solution to the problem of opening oven doors, Star-K have adopted the same approach and have sought to incorporate a number of halachic principles. In their Sabbath mode, opening the door **will** turn off the heating element; however they have built a time delay into the process. Under Rabbi Heineman's guidance, manufacturers have delayed by at least 15 seconds the reaction as the oven door opens.

Yet to state that setting a time delay fully 'kashers' the oven is a fallacy. Rabbi Heineman instructs one to limit use of the oven. Similar to the Rav Shlomo Zalman's permission for frige use, to achieve halachic permission to open the doors, he directs members of the public to open/close the doors only when resultant melochos can be deemed to be insignificant. Only in collaboration with halachic insignificance – '*lo niche leih*' status will the *grommoh* activity be permitted.

Rabbi Heineman ruled that although the oven door may be opened, it should not be shut if there is food still in the oven, and should ONLY be shut once the food has all been removed from the oven.

This distinction can be explained by reminding the reader that when the oven door closes, the element is in fact reheated. If the food is still heating in the oven, the resultant heating of the element serves the useful function of heating one's Shabbos food. Only if the oven has been emptied can the meloch activity be deemed '*lo niche leih*' – inconsequential.

Opening the door, however was deemed to be a permitted activity. Although the element will switch itself off, this is of no consequence to the oven's owner. Even the sensitive circuitry can survive the short blast of hot air it faces on rare occasions, and the switch-off feature designed to prevent damage is unnecessary in these circumstances.

Read the instructions OR check with a Rov!

The Star-K issue carefully worded instructions for use of their ovens, which are based on a collection of halachic arguments. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full analysis of the matters involved, but it is our hope that the reader will understand that the use of these ovens does not involve blanket permission – as though the appliance had been disconnected from the electric mains. Instead, householders should follow guidance from a Rov.

The Star-K caveat use of their ovens on Shabbos with the following limitations – the oven may be opened once - at which point ALL food must be removed. Subsequently, the oven door may be closed and then should not be opened again.

In conclusion, members of the public should be aware that many ovens are now being marketed by brands which have mimicked the Sabbath mode setting. These models, especially prevalent in the UK need to be investigated on an individual basis, and we suggest that members of the public discuss use of these ovens with their community's Rov.

The final section in this series will appear in next week's edition and will focus on Yom Tov use of these ovens.

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