YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**LAWS OF SHABBAT: COOKING**

**By Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon**

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Dedicated in memory of   
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**Shiur #20 — Ovens**

How is one allowed to leave food in an oven on Friday in order to eat it on Shabbat?

Is it permissible to return the food to the hot oven after the meal?

***Shehiya* in an Oven**

Until this point, we have dealt with heating on the fire. We have seen that one may leave foods on a covered fire before Shabbat. If these foods are cooked to the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*, in the view of the Ashkenazim and some Sefardim, one may leave foods even on an open fire. Similarly, by the letter of the law, one may leave, on an open fire, a totally uncooked food as well.

What about *shehiya* in an oven? May one put foods in an oven before Shabbat and take them out afterwards for the Shabbat meal?

**Oven vs. Stove**

The mishna (38b) explains that the law of the oven is more severe than that of a stove:

If an oven is heated with straw or stubble, one may not put a dish therein or thereon.

In other words, even though there is no problem with a stove fueled with straw or stubble (as there are no coals to stoke, as explained in a previous *shiur*), one is not allowed to leave food in an **oven** fueled in that way. The Rambam (3:5) explains:

The above applies to a stove, which produces minimal heat. With regards to an oven, in contrast, even if one removes the coals, covers them with ash or uses straw or stubble as fuel, we are not allowed to leave food in it or on it…

This applies to food that has not been cooked to completion or to food that has been completely cooked but will benefit from continued cooking. Since an oven is very hot, a person will not divert his attention from it. Hence, we are concerned that one will stir the small fire that remains, even if it is fueled by straw or stubble, even if it is covered.

This indicates that the Sages treat the oven more stringently in another aspect: *shehiya* is allowed upon a stove that has been swept or sprinkled, **but not in an** **oven** (see Rashi 37b, s.v. *Ha*).

Rashi (s.v. *Tannur*) explains that the Sages’ ovens were hotter than their stoves, since the ovens were narrow at the apex and wide at the base, allowing the oven to maintain its heat. A number of Rishonim (Rabbeinu Chananel, 38b; Me’iri**,** ad loc.; Ran, 17b, Rif, s.v. *Matnitin*) write that their ovens have the status of a stove, since they are not that warm, and this is how the Rema (253:1) rules. On the other hand, the Maharshal (cited by Tiferet Shemuel on the Rosh 3:5) argues that their ovens are also like the Sages’ ovens. The Mishna Berura (28; *Shaar Ha-tziyun*, 30) writes that in a baker’s oven, which gets very hot, one must be stringent.

**Modern Ovens**

What about our electric ovens?

In *Iggerot Moshe* (6), Rav Feinstein writes that modern ovens have the status of a stove, because they do not become very hot (since they have a thermostat). According to this, (according to the Ashkenazim and some Sefardim) one may leave food that has reached the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai* in an oven, and if the oven is defined as swept or sprinkled, one may leave in it even food that has *not* reached the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*.

How may we render our ovens swept or sprinkled? Rav Feinstein (op. cit. 27) writes that one may put an aluminum pan in an oven and put food in it. The Az Nidberu (Vol. VIII, ch. 16) writes that one may be lenient about an empty pan put on the bottom of the oven.[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, there is a simpler solution. In a previous *shiur* we saw that if the oven **is daubed with clay** in such a way that there is no possibility of stoking, it is considered swept and sprinkled, at least according to Ashkenazim. Therefore, in an oven as well, **if we seal the knobs** in a way that there is a need to remove the glue in order to turn them, this makes it an oven daubed with clay, and it would be permissible to leave in an oven such as this even food that has not reached *ma’akhal ben Derusai*. All the more so, removing the knobs should be sufficient, because in such a case, one cannot alter the temperature.

As we have said, if the food reaches the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*, then for Ashkenazim and some Sefardim, it is permissible to leave this food in an oven, even if the knobs are not sealed. In any case, it is always preferable to seal the knobs.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Opening the Oven**

However, there is an additional problem. In ovens, there is usually a **thermostat**; opening the oven accelerates its activation.[[3]](#footnote-3) Some ovens have a Shabbat setting, which uses a timer instead of a thermostat, and this setting circumvents this problem (one should ascertain that the Shabbat button actually disconnects the thermostat). In ovens with a Shabbat setting, one may set the oven so that the timer will turn the oven off before the time of taking out the food, and the food may then be removed when the oven is off.

If one finds himself in a situation in which the oven does not have a Shabbat setting and has not been set to shut off at mealtime, one may be lenient and remove the food at the time that the oven is hot and the thermostat light is on; in this situation the person only prolongs an existing situation, but one does not cause the oven to go on.

If this is also not feasible, one may open the door with an alteration (e.g., with one’s elbow) even at the time that the oven is not heating (in other words, the thermostat light is off), because it is not necessarily the case that opening the door will cause the oven to go on, and even if it would bring this about (and this is considered a *pesik reisha*), we are talking about causation (and there are those who allow a *pesik reisha* by causation).[[4]](#footnote-4) If one does this with an alteration , then there a number of rabbinical doubts coinciding, and one may be lenient, particularly for a need such as that of the Shabbat meal.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Conclusion**

To **summarize**, it is permissible to leave a food in an oven on Friday if it has been cooked to the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai* (at least for Ashkenazim and some Sefardim), and it is permissible to leave it even it has not reached the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*, if the knobs have been sealed or detached. One should strive to use an oven with a Shabbat setting that disconnects the thermostat, or alternatively to ensure that the oven will be off at the time that the food is removed. (In a case of need, when one has not done so, one may remove the food at the time that the oven is not heating up. In a case of pressing need, one may take the food out even when the oven is heating up, but in this case it is better to open the oven with an alteration.)

**Retention in and Removal from an Oven**

Thermostat

In an Oven

Making an Oven Swept or Sprinkled

In the time of the Talmud, it was forbidden to leave food in the oven, since its heat is excessive.

If the dish has been cooked to the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*, one may (according to Ashkenazim and some Sefardim) leave it in the oven, even if it is not swept or sprinkled.

One may seal or uproot the knobs.

There are those who believe that putting an empty pan in the bottom of the oven is effective.

Our ovens are not so hot, and one may leave food in them (**Rema**, **Rav Feinstein**).

One should set the oven to the Shabbat setting, or one should open the door after the Shabbat timer has turned off the oven. In a case of need, one may open the oven at the time when it is active and the light of the thermostat is on.

**REPLACING IN AN OVEN**

After one has taken food out of an oven, may one replace the food? Apparently, if the oven is swept or sprinkled and one is stringent about the conditions of *hachazara* (intention to replace and holding the pot — or at least not putting it on the ground, but only on the countertop), one may put it back in the oven.

**Empty Pan**

However, one must examine whether one can turn the oven into a swept and sprinkled stove. As regards the prohibition of *shehiya,* we have seen that it is enough that one seal or detach the knobs. However, as we explained in previous *shiurim*, it may be that these solutions are effective only when dealing with the issue of *shehiya*, not *hachazara*. *Shehiya* is based on the suspicion of stoking the coals, and therefore when one performs operations that prevent a person from turning up the fire, there is no reason to forbid the act. On the other hand, according to many Rishonim, *hachazara* is based on *mechzi ke-mevashel* (the appearance of *bishul*), and for this purpose, it may not help that a person cannot turn up the fire; one must take actions to turn down the heat and express his diversion from cooking. Therefore, one must put an empty pan on the bottom of the oven (in the view of Rav Feinstein, there is a need for a metal box with four walls, as we have mentioned above).

**Stringent View**

Moreover, it may be that even if the oven is defined as swept and sprinkled, it is still forbidden to put food back in it. This is based on a statement in the Gemara (37a):

Rabbi Chelbo says, quoting Rav Chamma bar Gurya, in the name of Rav: “This is true only thereon, but therein is forbidden.”

In other words, one may replace food **on top of a stove** on Shabbat, **but not inside a stove** (as their stoves were deep). This limitation does not spring from the prohibition of *hatmana*, which does not apply when the cover is not touching the pot (we will discuss this more next week in our *shiur* on *hatmana*); rather, it is forbidden because it looks like *bishul*. This is also the Shulchan Arukh’s ruling (253:2): one may not put food back into a stove on Shabbat. According to this, it is apparently forbidden to put the food **back into the oven,** and this is the ruling of the Minchat Yitzchak (Vol. III, ch. 28) as well as the one found in *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilkhatah* (1:17) and other authoritative works.

**Lenient View**

However, one who is lenient has upon whom to rely. The Arukh Ha-shulchan (253:17) writes that the prohibition of putting food inside the stove relates only to the situation in Talmudic times, in which there were two possibilities to heat with a range: inside it or on top of it. Therefore, had one chosen to put a dish inside the stove instead of on top of it, it would have appeared more like *bishul*. However, in our times, there are not two different ways to place the dish in the oven, so it is permissible to put foods inside it, because this does not testify to one’s desire to cook them:

Our ovens are like a stove, as will be explained, and concerning them there is no “thereon,” and one must always put it “therein.” Therefore, there is no distinction about this, and “therein” is like “thereon.”

This is what the Shevet Ha-Levi (Vol. III, ch. 48) writes as well.

**Summary**

In conclusion, if one wants to put food back on the fire on Shabbat itself, ab initio it is best to put it **on a Shabbat hot plate;** however, if this is not possible, one may be lenient and put food back into an oven with the following conditions: the dish is fully cooked, one holds it continuously after removing it, one removed it with intent to replace it, an empty pan is put on the bottom of the oven (or a separation between the heating element and the food), and the oven is on the Shabbat setting. (If one has forgotten to put the oven on the Shabbat setting, see above about the laws of *shehiya* in an oven.)

**Initial Placement**

In any case, **one may not take food out of the refrigerator and put it in the oven on Shabbat,** even if the oven is on the Shabbat setting and the food is fully cooked, and even if one puts it in the oven on top of a full pot. This solution works only in a stove, which is heated from below, so that putting food on top of a full pot distances it from the heat, and the act does not look like *bishul*. **In an oven**, on the other hand, **the heat spreads throughout the entire space**, so it doesn’t matter whether the pot is on the bottom of the oven or on another pot inside it — in any case, this looks like *bishul*, so one may not do so on Shabbat. This is also what the Chazon Ish (37:9) writes:

Inside the oven, it is certainly forbidden to do so, because this is all about placing food on top; however, within the airspace of the oven, all the air is warm, so the separation between the floor and the pot does not allow anything.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Therefore, **it is better that one have a *plata* at home,** because on it one may both replace the food and place food ab initio on Shabbat itself, according to the conditions mentioned in previous chapters.

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

Therefore, it is good for one to have a *plata* on which to heat food on Shabbat (according to the conditions mentioned in previous chapters).

Even according to those who permit, some put an inverted pan on the bottom of the oven in order to make it swept and sprinkled. Similarly, one should be stringent about conditions of *hachazara*, and one may not transfer dishes directly from the refrigerator into the oven, even if one puts them on a pot in the oven.

**Returning Food to an Oven on Shabbat**

There are those who forbid it, because the Talmud forbids putting food inside a stove (**Minchat Yitzchak**, *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilkhatah*).

Some allow this, because in these ovens every act of heating is done inside it, and returning food does not appear in particular like *bishul* (**Arukh Ha-shulchan**, **Shevet Ha-Levi**), so one who is lenient has upon whom to rely.

1. However, see Minchat Yitzchak, Vol. III, ch. 28; this is not the place to elaborate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This serves two potential aims: to prevent mistakes and to respond to the view that there is a prohibition of *shehiya* even for foods cooked beyond the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A similar problem exists with a refrigerator, but there the aim is accomplished by sealing a circuit, which is forbidden according to the view of most authorities rabbinically, while the oven involves heating filaments, which are forbidden biblically according to everyone. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See below, note 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In *Yalkut Yosef* (253, n. 5), we find a lenient view: one may open an oven that has a thermostat because this constitutes a *pesik reisha* of causation (among other reasons). Rav Feinstein (28) is lenient about this, but his justification is that opening the door will not definitely cause the oven to be activated. This would mean that in a reality in which we know that opening the door will cause the oven to be activated, one may not be lenient according to his view. In any case, even though ab initio it is good to be stringent about this, as we have written, it appears that the authorities do provide a basis on which to rely to be lenient if one has not arranged for the oven to be off when one removes the food, particularly if one opens the door of the oven with an alteration. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is also written by the Minchat Yitzchak (Vol. III, ch. 28). However, see the Mishna Berura (253:81). This view requires some explanation, but this is not the place to elaborate.

   In a case of pressing need, one may be lenient and put food in an oven on Shabbat itself under three conditions:

   One should put an empty pan on the bottom of the oven (making it swept and sprinkled).

   One should put the (cooked) food **before Shabbat** in an oven for several minutes, such that at the beginning of Shabbat the food will be inside the oven (one may then put them in the refrigerator). Thus, one may enlist the view of theRan based on the Yerushalmi (see above, note 117): once the food has been in the oven on Shabbat itself, the laws of *hachazara* are nullified, and one may put the food directly on a swept and sprinkled fire. Indeed, the Rema (253:2) cites the view of the Ran, and he writes that it is fitting to be stringent. Therefore one may not be lenient following this view alone, but only in conjunction with the following condition.

   One must put the food in the oven on Shabbat **before it is ignited**.In this way, some believe that it is permitted ab initio to put cooked food in the oven, for in their view, this does not look like *bishul* (see Rav L. I. Halpern’s *Kashrut Ve-Shabbat Ba-mitbach Ha-moderni*, p. 231). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)