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#16 – Leaving Food on the Fire and Covering Knobs**

May one leave uncooked dishes on the fire on Friday afternoon?

Is it permissible to put dishes on a gas burner if it is covered by a *blech* (sheet metal)?

Which dishes may one put on an electric hot plate before Shabbat? May one put cold soup on it if it will not heat up before Shabbat commences?

***SHEHIYA* ON A COVERED FIRE OR HOT PLATE**

As we discussed in the previous *shiur*, before Shabbat one may not leave on an open fire a dish that has begun cooking but has not yet reached the level of *ma’akhal ben Derusai*. As we have explained, the prohibition stems from the concern that one may come to stoke the coals on Shabbat. In our modern reality, this translates to a concern that one may turn up the heat. In light of this, the Sages allow one to leave a pot on the stove when the coals are swept away or sprinkled with ashes, making the stove respectively *gerufa* or *ketuma*.

One practical solution has been the *blech* (“tin” in Yiddish), a flat piece of metal (nowadays, usually aluminum) that covers the burners on a range; more recently, an electric hot plate (known in modern Hebrew as a “*plata*”) has become popular, designed with room for several pots and **no knobs**.

**What Is *Ketuma*?**

In order to explain this, we must first understand the reason one is allowed to leave dishes on a stove that is ***ketuma*** (if ashes are poured on the coals, rendering the fire less effective). The concept of a stove that is ***gerufa*** is easily understood; once the coals have been swept away, it is impossible to stoke them! But why is one allowed to leave a pot on a stove if its coals have been sprinkled with ashes? One can still stoke the coals to raise the temperature!

**Rashi**

Rashi (36b s.v. *O*) explains:

“Or sprinkles ashes upon it” — on top of the coals in order to cover and **cool** them.

This indicates that sprinkling reduces the stove’s heat.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is also what the Tur (ch. 253) writes: “One covers the coals with ashes **to reduce its heat.”** This is also what the Shulchan Arukh (253:1) writes. Why is the reduction of heat efficacious to allow *shehiya*? It appears that one who reduces the heat of the stove demonstrates by this that he is not eager for *bishul*, so that there is no concern that one will come to stoke the coals. This is what the Rambam (3:4) writes:

Accordingly, retention is permissible if one has removed the coals or covered the coals with ash… **because one puts it out of his mind**. Hence, no decree is made lest one rake the coals.

**Ramban**, **Rashba**

According to this view, some Rishonim (Ramban, Rashba, Ran, et al., 36b) say that there is no need for actual sprinkling, but rather spreading some ashes over the coals suffices; by this, one demonstrates that he is not eager for *bishul,* and he does not care about the coals’ heat. As the Rashba puts it, “Since one sprinkles a bit, it is clear that one gives up hope, and one does not want to stoke it.” This is also the implication of the Gemara (37a): even putting thin chips from the combing of flax on top of coals is considered sprinkling.

**Remakh**

The Remakh (3:4, cited by Kesef Mishneh ad loc.) explains the aim differently:

The correct reason is that one makes a noticeable sign, such as sweeping or sprinkling, and then one will not come to stoke.

In his view, the sprinkling does not demonstrate that one puts it out of his mind; rather, it’s **a sign and a reminder;** should a person come to stoke the coals on Shabbat, he will see the ashes and recall that there is a prohibition.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Covered Fire**

In light of the different reasons for permitting retention on a stove that is *ketuma*, we may go back to the question with which we opened: is one allowed to leave a dish on a flame covered with a *blech*? Apparently, we should answer this question according to the first two reasons. According to the Remakh, the sprinkling serves as a sign and reminder not to stoke the coals; it makes sense that covering the fire is a good reminder so that one will not stoke the coals and turn up the fire (even though one may dispute this and say that the reminder must be attached to the knobs by which one turns up the fire and not the fire itself). Also, even according to the view of **most** Rishonim that sprinkling ashes on the coals indicates that one is diverting his attention from the cooking, we have seen that according to many Rishonim it is enough to have **a symbolic act** such as this that expresses the diversion of one’s attention, and according to this, it makes sense that covering the flame is enough.

However, one may say that **reducing the heat** alone expresses the diversion of one’s attention from *bishul*, as is implied by the words of Rashi and Tur, and according to this, it makes sense that covering the fire does not express the diversion of one’s attention. Indeed, one does not reduce the heat meaningfully, so covering the fire does not help to make the stove *gerufa* or *ketuma*.

The Chazon Ish (37:9, 11) writes to be stringent about this, and he offers a proof from Rashi’s words. The Gemara (37a) states:

They queried: “What of leaning against it? On the inside and on top of it is forbidden, but leaning against it may be permitted; or perhaps, there is no difference?”

From this passage, it emerges that the doubt relates only to retention near a stove, **but inside** (their stoves were quite deep) **or on top of it**, there is no doubt that *shehiya* is forbidden. What is the meaning of “**on top of it**”? Rashi explains:

“On top of it” — the thickness of its rim or a cover **over its hollowness**.

In other words, this refers to placing the pot on a cover over the stove as well. According to this, the Gemara says explicitly that there is no allowance to leave the dishes on a covered stove, and the cover does not help to define the stove as *gerufa* or *ketuma*. The Tur (ch. 253) explains the words of the Gemara with language similar to that of Rashi.[[3]](#footnote-3)

However, the Mordekhai (80a) indicates that if a stove is covered with **an empty, inverted pot,** it is considered *gerufa*, “because the pot seals the stove,” and his words form the halakhic ruling of the Shulchan Arukh (253:3). The Chazon Ish (37:9) relates to this in the following way, and he claims that a tin cover is worse than an inverted pot:

Behold, that separation of an empty pot is efficacious because it appears that it is an alteration, for this is not the way of cooking (*derekh bishul*). Moreover, it also reduces the heat considerably. However, using the cover, which is customary and does not reduce the heat too much, is included in the category of “on top of it.”

**Chazon Ish**

According to this, covering a stove with a *blech* is not enough in order to express the diversion of one’s attention from *bishul*, since this act is not so exceptional and it does not reduce the heat too much, as opposed to covering the stove with an inverted pot, which is considered an unusual act that reduces the heat radically. In addition, the Chazon Ish (37:11) writes:

In our holy land, the custom is to put the pot on a burner, and the flame is underneath, below the bottom of the pot, but this is like an unswept stove, and even if there is a metal plate and the pot is on the plate, in any case, it is not considered like putting an empty, intervening pot on a stove. This is only placing a cover on the stove and putting a pot on the cover, which is considered “on top of it,” as I have written above.

**Most Authorities**

On the other hand, Rav Moshe Feinstein writes (OC, Vol. I, ch. 93) that covering the fire with a *blech* makes it *ketuma*. According to him, what Rashi and the Tur write, that the cover does not help to make the stove *ketuma*, is relevant only when applied to the Talmudic ovens, as one would cook on their covers; our *blech*, on the other hand, is unusual, so it makes the stove *ketuma*.

This is also what Shevet Ha-Levi writes (Vol. I, ch. 91), and he adds that the authorities indicate **there is no need specifically to reduce the heat,** but any act that differs from the regular way of cooking becomes a **sign and reminder** in order to make the stove *ketuma*:

Certainly, the simple meaning of the glosses of the Mordekhai shows that the very fact that the fire is covered makes it allowed, even though the heat remains as it was at first, because for the issues of sweeping and sprinkling, the heat is immaterial, since the principle exists because of the concern of stoking…

Thus, there is certainly no question to be asked about the cover of the stove based on what Rashi and the Tur write, that it is not efficacious, for there it is the regular cover that is put on the stove every day…

In any case, when one puts an empty pot on the stove, it is not the usual way for it to be there and it is permissible. This item that does not belong there and covers the flame makes it like it was swept and sprinkled; if so, it is the law for the large plates that they put on the burner; they are not at all like the regular cover of the stove.

In addition, in Tashbetz Katan (ch. 27) we find that the Maharam allows putting a dish on a board upon the stove even on Shabbat itself, as written by the Magen Avraham (253:31) and Mishna Berura (253:81), and this should be similar to a *blech*-covered stove. This is how Rav Neuwirth rules (1:18), that a *blech*-covered stove is considered *ketuma*.

In *Yabbia Omer* (Vol. VI, *OC*, 32:5), Rav Ovadya Yosef adds a reason to be lenient, and he writes that it may be that the Sages make no decree except concerning a coal-fueled stove, which usually **fades** over time, for we are concerned that a person will stoke the coals in order **to maintain the temperature**, but in our stoves, in which the temperature is constant, the Sages’ concern that a person will **raise the temperature** is not applicable**.**

Thus, for example, the custom is to relate to a *blech*-covered flame as a *ketuma*, whether for issues of *shehiya* or *hachazara*, which we will deal with below.

**Hot Plate**

When it comes to an electric hot plate, there is even more reason to be lenient, because it is not designed at all for *bishul*, and one cannot turn its heat up or down. Thus, it makes sense that the Chazon Ish would concede that it is *ketuma* (Brit Olam, *Dinei Shehiya Ve-chazara*, no. 26; Az Nidaberu, Vol. VIII, ch. 16. However, see the opposing view of Orechot Rabbeinu, Vol. I, p. 10).[[4]](#footnote-4)

One should stress that this relates to retaining a dish on a *plata* **before Shabbat**. When it comes to putting the dish on the *plata* on **Shabbat itself**, there is another dispute among halakhic authorities related to *hachazara*, which we will deal with in a future *shiur*.

**Chazon Ish:** Covering the fire is not enough, because it doesn’t significantly reduce the temperature (but it makes sense that he would still be lenient about a *plata*).

**Most authorities, common practice:** Covering the fire is considered a sufficient symbol or reminder, since this is not the way of cooking, and therefore the fire is considered *ketuma* (and all the more so using a *plata* is effective).

What Is *Ketuma,* and Why Does It Change Everything?

What about using a *blech* or *plata*?

There is no issue of stoking, so one may put food on the fire.

It is forbidden to leave food on the stove, lest one stoke in order to increase the fire.

**Most Rishonim:** This is a symbolic act that expresses diversion from *bishul* (**Ramban** et al.) or as a reminder not to stoke (**Remakh**).

If the coals are swept away or ashes are sprinkled upon them, one may leave a dish on the stove.

?

**Rashi, Tur:** Reducing the temperature expresses one’s diversion from *bishul*.

Fueled with wood

Fueled with straw

**Leaving Food on the Fire**

**COVERING KNOBS**

Instead of covering the fire itself, is it enough to cover the knobs that we use to regulate the flames?

Apparently, this is related to a dispute that we have seen about the reason to allow leaving food on a sprinkled stove: if the sprinkling is supposed to be a mark and a reminder not to stoke the coals, covering the knobs is an **excellent sign**, because every concern about modern stoves is that a person may turn up the flames using knobs, and if they are covered, this is an excellent reminder not to touch them. On the other hand, if the sprinkling reduces the temperature and expresses **the diversion of one’s mind from cooking,** then the covering of the knobs, which does not change anything in the process of cooking, does not make the stove *ketuma*.

**Covering Knobs Is Not Sprinkling**

Rav Feinstein understands (*Iggerot Moshe*, *OC*, Vol. I, ch. 93) that the fact that a person must demonstrate that he is not preoccupied with *bishul*, so there is no need for a great fire, is secondary. Therefore, Rav Feinstein rules that covering the knobs does not help:

If one only covers the knobs and not the fire, this will not help, because the essence is that one must show that his intent is solely to lower the temperature, which is more readily apparent when one covers the fire.

In his view, one must do an action specifically to the **fire itself,** an act that expresses one’s desire to reduce the fire.[[5]](#footnote-5)

However, even if covering the knobs is not considered sprinkling, it may be that one should be lenient for a different reason. The Gemara (18b) determines that one may leave food in an unswept oven, if the door of the oven is daubed with clay. What does daubing with clay accomplish?

**Daubing — Dispute of Rishonim**

Rashi (ad loc., s.v. *Sharik*) explains that in order to open the oven door and to stoke the coals, there is a need to break the clay, and before one can manage to break it, he will remember that it is forbidden to stoke the coals. On the other hand, the Rambam (3:13) writes that the allowance is applicable only to certain types of meat that may be damaged by the wind: we are not concerned that the person will exert effort to remove the clay, to open the oven and to stoke the coals, since this act damages the meat. According to Rashi, this allowance applies to every food that is found in an oven that is sealed with clay; according to the Rambam, the allowance is limited to certain types of meat alone.

From this argument, there may be halakhic ramifications for our issue: may one leave food on a gas range, covering the knobs and **taping the cover**, so that in order to turn the knobs, one must take the cover off? According to Rashi, it makes sense that the matter will be allowed, since the case is similar to that of **an oven daubed with clay,** while according to the Rambam, it makes sense that this would be forbidden: the lenient view about a clay-daubed oven is limited to meat that will be damaged by wind.

**Halakha**

The Shulchan Arukh (254:1) rules in accordance with the view of the Rambam, while the Rema rules to be lenient, following the view of Rashi:

There are those who… believe that in an oven daubed with clay, everything is permitted.

**Ramifications**

According to the Rema, the Chazon Ish writes (36:3, 38:2) that if we install a lock on the door of the oven and lock the door, there is no prohibition of *shehiya* (even if it has not yet reached *ma’akhal ben Derusai*). Apparently, one may say that if one does not merely cover the knobs, but one also seals the cover in a way that makes it impossible to change the height of the flame without removing the cover,[[6]](#footnote-6) Ashkenazim may be lenient and consider the stove *ketuma*, even if the stove is not covered.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is best to write “Shabbat” on the note that one tapes to the knobs.

However, it is generally accepted that one should be stringent about both things: covering the flame (so that there will be a mark upon the body of the fire, as it were) and even covering the knobs (this is the significant element by which one may violate the prohibition). However, by the letter of the law, one may be lenient after covering the flame alone, and in a case of need, one may be lenient after covering the knobs alone, if one seals the covering. For this matter, there is a significant ramification concerning *shehiya* in an oven, as we shall see in a coming *shiur*.

**Summary**

To conclude, one may make a gas range *ketuma* (allowing one to retain upon it a dish that has started to cook but has not yet reached *ma’akhal ben Derusai*) by **covering the flames**. One should cover particularly the fire, not the knobs, since we need a reminder upon the body of the fire; however, it makes sense that if **one seals** the knobs, one may suffice with this (at least for Ashkenazim), because then we need to do an **action** in order to turn the knobs, and this matter will remind the person that today is Shabbat. Generally, people are stringent and cover both the flames and the knobs, but in terms of the law, there is reason to be lenient after either covering the flame or sealing the knobs.

**Knobs**

Sealed

Covered

According to Ashkenazim, it makes sense that sealing knobs is effective, like a clay-daubed oven.

According to Sefardim, sealing knobs is not effective

**Rav Feinstein:** it is not effective, because one needs a **sign in the body of the fire**.

**Rambam, Shulchan Arukh:** forbidden (except for certain types of meat)

**Rashi**, **Rema**: permitted

May one leave food in an oven daubed with clay?

1. It may be that we should offer a proof from Rashi himself, because according to the simple meaning, the mishna is dealing not with *shehiya,* but rather with *hatmana* (Ramban, Rashba, et al. also explain in this way); if so, one should cool the coals, so it is not considered something that adds heat. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Remakh challenges the explanation of Rambam and most Rishonim: how can we say that sprinkling shows that one has diverted his attention from the dish? One wants to eat it for supper, so diverting his attention is untenable! It makes sense that the Rambam and other Rishonim would respond that a person doesn’t divert his attention **from the dish;** however, one diverts his attention **from heating the dish** and shows that he is not that concerned with the question of when the *bishul* will conclude, so he won’t try to accelerate the process. The views of the Rishonim do require further analysis, but this is not the place for it. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Bei’ur Halakha (253:1, s.v. *Litten*) cites their words and writes that the words of the Rambam indicate that he argues with them, and in his view, only on top of the fire itself is there a problem, but a covered stove is considered *gerufa* or *ketuma*, since one diverts his attention from *bishul*. Indeed, the Bei’ur Halakha is troubled by the view of the Rambam about this issue, concluding that it requires further analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In leaving dishes on a *plata*, there may be an issue of *hatmana*, according to the view that partial insulation is considered *hatmana*. We will deal with this issue in a future *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to his view, when one covers the fire, there is no need to cover the knobs, though he writes that there is a preference for this ab initio. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. According to Rashi (ad loc., s.v. *Ve-tocheh*) it arises indeed that there must be some effort necessary to remove the clay, and this arises from the words of the Bei’ur Halakha (254:1, s.v. *Af al pi*). However, from the above-mentioned words of the Chazon Ish, it appears that there is no need for this level of effort; the necessity of opening a lock and the like is enough to remind one of the situation and to ensure that one will not come to stoke the coals. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. However, Rav Feinstein writes that it is not enough to cover knobs, as we have seen above; however, we are dealing here with a better solution: not only covering the knobs, but sealing them. This is not a **reminder** but instead it is a **roadblock** preventing one from stoking the coals: one who will come to stoke the coals (to turn up the fire) should need to do something and remove the seal; in the meantime, he will recall the prohibition. There is an oral tradition to be lenient, as has been told to me in the name of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. (Rav Avishai David told me this, but it is not clear to me whether Rav Soloveitchik allowed this with any covering or only with a sealed covering.)

   As for **removing the knobs**, Rav S.Z. Auerbach (*Minchat Shelomo*, Vol. II [5759], 34:21) poses a question: if one removes the knobs, so that it is impossible to change the height of the flames without putting them back on, is this considered a clay-daubed oven? Logically, if we are lenient about knobs that are sealed, all the more so we should be lenient about knobs that have been totally removed, and this is how Rav Wosner rules (cited by Orechot Shabbat, p. 516). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)