

PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHABBOS KITCHEN LEARNING PROJECT

# **The Shabbos Kitchen**

## **Lesson One**

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## **The Shabbos Kitchen**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Through the proper observance of Shabbos we come to the awareness that the world came into being and continues to exist through one Creator. The concept of Shabbos is the source of the thought in the faith of God who created all. The Torah writes, “Remember the Shabbos day to keep it holy. Six days shall you work, etc. For in six days did God make the heavens and earth, etc.”<sup>1</sup> The Torah exhorts the Jewish People twelve times in the observance of Shabbos. Our great Sages say, “Whoever properly observes Shabbos is equivalent to one who observes all of the commandments of the Torah. Whoever desecrates the Shabbos is likewise equivalent to one who denies the entire Torah.” For the above reasons, Shabbos is the source of the faith in God.<sup>2</sup>

The merit of proper Shabbos observance according to Torah Law will have the effect of granting forgiveness for all of one's sins. How, may one reach that level whereby Shabbos will be observed in all of its details? The best advice for this is that one should undertake learning the laws of Shabbos and to constantly review them so that one may know what is permitted and what is not.

We have undertaken with the help of God to explain the Laws of Shabbos as they pertain to the Kitchen. This work is written to help one to understand the basic functionings within the confines of the Kitchen, however one must always consult and ask their Rabbi on all questions that may arise. May this work act as a light to so many who have not had the opportunity to learn in a traditional manner and as well act as a clarification and review for others who have had such a chance. May this work be a merit to those who have sacrificed their lives for the observance of Shabbos.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemos 20:8-11

<sup>2</sup> Mishna Berura - Introduction

Mrs. Sara Ravenscroft and her neighbors Mrs. Finchley and Mrs. Hendon decided to form a neighborhood learning group. They asked the Rabbi of the community to start a lecture series on the Laws of Shabbos pertaining to the Kitchen. Within a short amount of time an incredible amount of interest grew until the lecture outgrew the confines of the Ravenscroft kitchen and had to be moved into the spacious parlor room.

## *The First Lesson*

### ***Sh'hiya***      *Leaving Food on an Open Flame on the Eve of Shabbos*

Mrs. Thornhill who recently moved to the neighborhood asked the Rabbi, “Why should there be any laws on how to warm food before Shabbos, when everything is being done before Shabbos?” “Mrs. Thornhill,” the Rabbi replied, “before we answer your question, let’s give a bit of background to the subject.”

## **Preface**

There are 39 labors (*melachos*)<sup>3</sup> that are biblically prohibited to be done on Shabbos, which are called literally fathers or (*Avos*),<sup>4</sup> and they in turn have many derivatives of these Laws called (*Tolados*),<sup>5</sup> which are also biblically prohibited on Shabbos. An example of a Topic or (*av*) is “planting” and one of its derivatives (*tolados*) is watering seeds and plants. This operatively means that there are many actions that a Jew is prohibited from performing on Shabbos and one who performs such a work (*melacha*) on Shabbos has violated a biblical command, which carries very severe consequences.

### **Our Sages**

Just as one erects a barrier around a delicate object, in order to prevent accidental destruction of the object, so too **our Sages** which are also known as *Chazal*<sup>6</sup> erected

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<sup>3</sup> *Melacha* literally means work or labor, but in this context it refers to an action that is prohibited to be done on Shabbos.

<sup>4</sup> An *av* literally means father, and in the laws of Shabbos it refers to one of the 39 actions that were used to construct the tabernacle (*Mishkan*). The 39 labors (*melachos*) of Shabbos are learned from the actions used to construct the tabernacle (*Mishkan*).

<sup>5</sup> A *toladah* refers to actions that are similar in concept to the *av* but this action was not one of the main actions used to construct the tabernacle (*Mishkan*). It nevertheless is a biblical prohibition.

<sup>6</sup> *Chazal* is an acronym of *Chachameinu Zichronam Livraha*, our rabbis of blessed memory, and refer mainly to the rabbis and wise men until (and including) the Talmudic period.

barriers around the biblical prohibitions (*issurei d'oraisso*), <sup>7</sup> in order to prevent any accidental violation of those prohibitions.

These barriers, or Rabbinical Prohibitions (*issurei d'rabanan*) <sup>8</sup> as they are called, are very binding and must be adhered to at all costs, because it is *Hashem* who commanded our Sages to erect these barriers, as it says in the scripture – “you shall erect barriers around my barriers.” This is true of the entire code of Jewish Law, including Shabbos.

“I understand that this would apply on Shabbos itself, but how does this effect the eve of Shabbos?” asked Mrs. Thornhill again. The Rabbi replied, “It does very much, wait and see.”

“Imagine yourself placing the chicken intended for the Shabbos night meal into the oven 15 minutes before you light the Shabbos candles, and a short while after sunset you realize that the oven heat is not high enough, what would instinct cause you to do?” asked the rabbi. “I know what you are aiming at, but I would never raise the temperature,” gasped Mrs. Thornhill; after all “it is Shabbos.” “And what if you are having extremely distinguished guests over for the meal, I would be afraid that your hand might instinctively turn the oven higher.” “You are right, it is a delicate situation, and so what is the solution?”

## Making a Fire and Cooking

The *Mishna* and *Gemora* in the Tractate *Shabbos* page 36b deals with the issue of placing pots of food onto the fire before Shabbos, where the underlying problem is that one may either raise the fire or cook the food before it is fully cooked. In both cases one will have violated biblical prohibitions, namely cooking – *bishul* <sup>9</sup> and making a fire – *hav'arah*. <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *D'oraisso* means the Torah, and *mid'oraisso* means from the Torah. *Issur* means a prohibition, and therefore *issurei d'oraisso* or an *issur d'oraisso* are biblical prohibitions.

<sup>8</sup> *Rabanan* are the Jewish wise men and are mostly from the Mishnaic or Talmudic periods and their decrees or “barriers” are known as *issurei d'rabanan*.

<sup>9</sup> *Rashi Shabbos* 34b ‘g’zeira’, 4 lines down.

<sup>10</sup> *Rambam* chapter 4:3.

Our Sages therefore prohibited the placing of foods and liquids on the fire / coals / gas range / hobs in the normal manner before Shabbos unless certain prerequisites were met. These preconditions refer either to the state the food is in when Shabbos begins or/and the modifications one has made to the stove or oven.

## COOKING – The Source of Our Concentration

“Rabbi, I still don’t see the relationship between cooking before Shabbos and cooking on Shabbos,” Mrs. Thornhill asked.” “The prohibited Labor of Cooking, Mrs. Thornhill, covers all methods of using heat to prepare food including baking, frying, broiling and roasting. The Torah forbids in the case of solid foods not only complete cooking but even minimally cooked food. If the food is minimally cooked then as I told you before you might get under pressure and turn the fire up so the food will be ready for your approaching guests.”

We will commence with explaining the modifications one must make to the stove or gas range to enable the placing of foods or liquids onto them before Shabbos.

### Raking and Covering - Garuf V'katum

In the time of our *Sages*, cooking and baking was done in coal ovens and stoves, and the constructive measures implemented by our **Sages** were configured to suit those types of stoves. We will later see how to apply them to modern stoves and ovens.

**To Rake** One method is to rake the oven or stove from its coals before Shabbos, which eliminates the possibility of being able to stoke the coals to raise the heat. This action is known as (*g'rifah*) – **raking**, and (*garuf*) means that the stove or oven has been **raked** from its coals.

**To Cover** The other method was to sprinkle ashes over the coals and thus demonstrate that one is removing one’s mind from the cooking process. This action is known as (*k'timah*) – covering the coals, and (*katum*) means that the oven’s ashes are covered. A normal cooking process calls for continual tending of the coals to ensure that they are hot, and sprinkling ashes over the coals one demonstrates that one will no longer tend to them and they will be left alone.

“Would it not be enough to place a note with the words “The Holy Shabbos” (*Shabbos kodesh*) next to the stove and thus remind oneself that it is Shabbos?” asked Mrs. Hendon. “That is a very good question,” replied the Rabbi, “but our Sages were not satisfied with such a prompt, rather they wanted a reminder that was implanted into the

**THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHABBOS KITCHEN PROJECT  
LESSON ONE**

actual process. The Ramban <sup>11</sup> explains that the idea of covering the ashes is to ruin the fire to some extent, and thus the demonstration is a real part of the cooking process and not merely an external reminder.”

**To summarize:** one is permitted to place foods and liquids on a stove or in an oven whose coals were either covered or removed.

“Does this problem exist with contemporary stoves and gas ranges, and if yes, how can it be remedied?” asked Mrs. Ravenscroft. “It applies just as much too contemporary heat sources, and we will now see how to deal with it.” The Rabbi felt an aura of confusion coming over the group. “Ladies, don’t worry yourselves needlessly. It’s a lot simpler today than it once was. This is due to our modern conveniences; what was once quite complicated, today is much simpler.”

The identical prohibition applies to contemporary heat sources such as gas ranges and ovens. Until one has modified them for Shabbos use, one may not place foods or liquids on them to heat for Shabbos (there is another solution, we will see later). However, once that modification has been put into place then it is permitted.

**A Blech – Covering the flame with a Sheet of Metal**

Obviously we cannot implement **raking** (“*garuf*”) to our ovens and stoves, because that would mean one would have to totally remove the heat source. Coal ovens would remain hot for a long time after having removed the coals, whereas contemporary ovens cool down very quickly, and thus “turning off” the heat elements or the gas would indeed be a halachic solution but at the same time a very impractical one.

The next option would be to implement the “coal covering – (*k’timah*),” and this is accomplished by one of two ways. The first is by covering the range (electric or gas) with a metal sheet made either of copper, stainless steel or tin. In Yiddish it is called a *blech*. This has the same effect as covering the coals with ashes, because this action is

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<sup>11</sup> **R’ MOSHE BEN NACHMAN - RAMBAN - Born:** Gerona, Spain, c. 1194. **Died:** Israel, c. 1270. **Notes:** Also known as Nachmanides. Great Biblical and Talmudic commentator, Kabbalist, and Jewish leader, and a physician and linguist by trade. Scion of a renowned rabbinical family, he was a relative of R’ Yonah of Gerona, and was a student of R’ Yehuda ben Yakar. R’ Natan ben Meir and a disciple in Kabbalah of R’ Meir Abulafia, R’ Ezra of Gerona, and R’ Ezriel of Gerona. He opposed the rationalism of the Rambam while not opposing his halachic rulings. Participated in the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263 in the presence of King James I of Aragon and wrote **Sefer HaVikuach**, with a detailed account of this disputation. Banned from Spain in the aftermath of the disputation, he settled in the Land of Israel in 1267. Having been the first major authority to pronounce the resettlement of the land of Israel as a Biblical commandment, he spent the last years of his life trying to rebuild Jewish life, which had been devastated by the Crusades. He is the author of a major commentary on Chumash, printed in the Mikraot Gedolot, which integrates midrashic and kabbalistic elements, a commentary on the Talmud, **Milchamot Hashem**, a halachic work in defense of the views of the Rif, and **Toras HaAdam**, on the laws of the sick and dead. His students include the Raah and the Rashba.

demonstrating that by removing one's mind from the heat source it will no longer be tampered with during the Shabbos.

“Rabbi,” perked up Mrs. Finchley, “I do not understand, after all I am still able to turn the dials and raise the heat, so what effect does this Metal plate (*blech*) have?” “Mrs. Finchley, you could have asked the identical question when covering the coals with ashes, after all one is able to stoke the coals and raise the heat even after covering them with ashes. The coals do not need to be buried in ashes; it will suffice to sprinkle ashes superficially over the coals.<sup>12</sup> The answer is that our Sages wanted to demonstrate that one would not deal with the heat source, and that would act as a reminder. It is not a fool proof measure to prevent fiddling with the dials, as it is not intended to be one.”

### **A Dispute amongst the Rabbis - Machlokes**

Before we continue, we must be aware that there is a concept in determining Jewish Law (*halacha*) called a (*machlokes*), or dispute, amongst the rabbis. This is true for our entire Oral Traditions (which include *Mishnayos*, *Talmud* and *Jewish Law*). This is brought about by the different interpretations given by different rabbis and learned men (*talmidei chachamim*) on a certain matter. This manner of learning through dispute is the method of learning which provides our basis of understanding Jewish Law today. The Rabbanim who engaged in these disputes were very Holy Men whose brilliance and knowledge of the Torah were beyond question. These attributes combined with their fear of Heaven and upholding of Torah Law has set the framework for our generation today being able to understand the works and depth of Torah Law as much as any human being can.

The ramifications of these disputes are that we often do not know which opinion to follow and thus one must ask their Rabbi for the final determination – i.e. which opinion to follow. The Rabbi of your community is able to decipher and apply the proper Law as it pertains to the Local Community. This will vary to some degree depending on the communities traditional background and where in the world the community originated from. For example those whose forefathers came from the communities of Spain or Syria could vary somewhat from those whose family spent time in Eastern Europe. The basic Torah Law is the same, nonetheless the Rabbinical interpretations and customs could vary due to the fact these communities were distanced from each other from 2-3000 years. However, amazingly enough the core and basis of Torah Law has not varied even one letter all these thousands of years of separation. It is not in the capacity of this lesson to explain how a Rabbi reaches a conclusion and decides which opinion to follow.

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<sup>12</sup> Mishna Berura 253:14

We will encounter many disputes in our course of learning, and one must ask for guidance as to which opinion to follow.

### **Covering the Fire and Dials**

“Rabbi,” asked Mrs. Hendon, “Didn’t you mention that one must cover the heat source with the Metal Plate (*blech*), but is one supposed to cover the dials as well?” “Mrs. Hendon,” the Rabbi replied, “we find a dispute in this matter.”

When covering the fire with a Metal plate (*blech*), Rav Moshe Feinstein says <sup>13</sup> that gas dials should also be covered. However Hagaon Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, זצ”ל, and to differ between the living, Rav Eliashiv *sblita* hold that the dials need not be covered, it is sufficient to show that one does not want the fire by covering the actual flame. <sup>14</sup>

Common custom is to cover the fire and the dials, and the regular blechs that our sold in Israel are made to cover the dials as well.”

“Now I really do not understand,” remarked Mrs. Finchley, “should it not be enough just to cover the dials and thus prevent the possibility of fiddling with the dials?”

“Rav Moshe Feinstein rules <sup>15</sup> that it is not sufficient to merely cover the dials, because our Sages want us to demonstrate a modification to the actual fire,” replied the Rabbi. “We mentioned the *Ramban* before who says that the fire itself must be lowered to some extent, and this is only accomplished by covering the actual fire.” “I see I am beginning to get the entire picture more clearly,” said a relieved Mrs. Finchley.

### **A Hotplate**

The other way of accomplishing *ke’timah* is to use a hotplate. <sup>16</sup> The hotplate is not usually used for cooking and it does not have a dial with which one would be able to

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<sup>13</sup> *Iggros Moshe* vol. I *simon* 93. R’ Moshe Feinstein – Uzda, Russia, 1895: Died: New York 1986, of the Leading Scholars of Jewish Law in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Author of many major works.

<sup>14</sup> *SS”K* 1 footnote 186. HaRav Ezriel Auerbach *sblita*. See also the *Otsros Shabbos* chapter 2:27. R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach – Born Jerusalem 1910, Died Jerusalem 1995, of the Leading decision authorities on Jewish Law in the world. Author of many major works who was especially beloved by all sectors of society. R’ Auerbach along with R’ Feinstein were considered the greats and leaders of the generation.

<sup>15</sup> It is known in some circles that Rav Aharon Kotler זצ”ל permitted the covering of the dials without having to cover the flames, but common custom is not in accordance with that *p’sak*.

<sup>16</sup> See the *SS”K* chapter 1:25 and footnote 71.

raise the temperature. A regular electric range is considered an uncovered fire and may not be used in place of a blech.

“What do I do if the hotplate we have has a dial?” asked Mrs. Hendon, “May it be used like a regular hotplate?” “You will have to ask your Rabbi on that one, Mrs. Hendon; it is not a simple question.”

“Ladies, many have the custom of using the Shabbos hotplate to overcome the problem of an uncovered fire. We now know that the two methods of accomplishing covering is by using a blech or a hotplate.” “Rabbi does this mean that one may put all foods and liquids on them before Shabbos?” asked Mrs. Thornhill. “Indeed that is so, but it is not the best solution, as we will see,” replied the rabbi.

### Ovens

“How does one place a metal plate (*blech*) in our types of ovens? Is it at all possible?” asked Mrs. Finchley.

“Placing a Metal Plate (*blech*) in contemporary ovens is indeed a problem because one would have to cover the heating elements, which is not an easy feat. One would have to use a metal or tin sheet and place it across the wall that hides the heat element. If there are two heating elements, one would need to cover both. Another method would be to place a tin box inside the oven and place the food inside the box.<sup>17</sup>

Due its impracticality, one is far safer using a Metal Plate (*blech*) or hotplate, but if it needs to be done, this is the practical method. In the next lesson, we will learn about the “food state” and we will see that sometimes one can do away with a metal plate (*blech*) altogether, which will permit *sh'hjya* in an oven as well.”

### Food State

Mrs. Ravenscroft asked, Rabbi, once a metal plate (*blech*) is used to cover the fire or a hotplate is used, may one place any type of food or beverages onto them before Shabbos, regardless of whether they are fully cooked or not?” “You may, Mrs. Ravenscroft however, for several reasons though, one should avoid doing that, and the food and water should be fully cooked and hot when placed on a blech or hotplate before Shabbos as we touched on a bit before.<sup>18</sup> In the ensuing lessons we will elaborate more on the reasoning for this.”

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<sup>17</sup> אוצרות השבת פרק ב' סעיף ל"ג

<sup>18</sup> SS"K chapter 1:63.

In the next Lesson we will learn how one may place food on the fire before Shabbos when one does not have a Metal Plate (*blech*) or hotplate.

## Review Questions

- 1 Why are there laws governing one's action **before** Shabbos, when the Labors (*melachos*) only apply to Shabbos itself?
- 2 What is an father of a labor (*av*) and what is a offspring (*tolada*)? Are *tolados* forbidden according to Torah Law (*ossur mid'oraissa*)?
- 3 Why did the Sages see it necessary to add (decrees), are there not enough prohibited actions?
- 4 May one say that after all the decrees were instituted to prevent mistakes, and I, knowing myself, will not make a mistake, and thus forego the decree?
- 5 What (violations) were our Sages concerned about when dealing with the laws of *sh'hija* (placing food on the fire before Shabbos)?
- 6 What were the two methods with which our Sages would be certain that would prevent people from stoking the fire on Shabbos?
- 7 How would covering (*k'timah*) help?
- 8 How does one do covering (*k'timah*) to modern day stoves and gas ranges?
- 9 Must the metal sheet (*blech*) cover the dials or the flame or both?
- 10 Is it possible to make an oven "kosher" for *sh'hija* (leaving food inside) before Shabbos?
- 11 In what cooking state must the food be when placing it on the blech?

## Review Answers

- 1 Our Sages were concerned that one would violate Shabbos itself, and to avert this possibility they instructed us how to arrange our food.
- 2 An *av* is an action that was used in the construction of the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), and is one of the 39 biblically prohibited works (*melachos*). A *toladah* is an “offspring” of and in the way that it shares the same principal intent but is a different action.
- 3 *Our Sages* understood human nature and had to erect barriers to prevent us from violating any tenets of the Torah.
- 4 No, one may not. The decrees and rules of the Sages are not up for bargaining and they may only be violated when the Sages themselves say they can.
- 5 They were concerned with stoking the fire, which involves cooking and making a fire.
- 6 The first method was to rake the coals from the stoves and ovens, thus eliminating the possibility of stoking, and the second was to sprinkle ashes over the coals.
- 7 Since one is demonstrating that one is not interested in the coals’ heat, one will remember not to stoke them on Shabbos.
- 8 This is accomplished either by placing a metal sheet over the gas range or by using a Shabbos hotplate.
- 9 The main purpose is to cover the flames themselves. Some Rabbanim who are experts in Jewish Law say that the dials must be covered as well, while others say that it is unnecessary. It is customary to cover the dials as well.
- 10 It is possible, by placing a metal sheet over against the oven wall which conceals the elements.
- 1 According to the strict Law it can be in any state, i.e. half cooked or less, but it is not the optimal thing to do, rather it should be fully cooked, as will be explained in the ensuing Lessons.