

# A Warm Environment and Warm Food on Shabbat

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*An HIWP community standard for Shabbat food warming*

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As a community, we do not judge others for how they implement Jewish practice in their homes. We know that everyone is on an individual journey with regards to greater observance and personal religious advancement.

When you invite people to your home, you are carrying out the great mitzvah of hachnasat orchim. At the same time, in a community such as ours, you take upon yourself a responsibility to feed those guests in accordance with the Jewish kosher and Shabbat laws. This guide should assist you each in creating a warm Shabbat meal while complying with the rules concerning *bishul* (cooking). We hope that in following these guidelines you will create a meal in which all members of our community would be comfortable participating

## FOOD PREPARATION AND SHABBAT

There are numerous rules with regard to food preparation on Shabbat. We hope to continue to provide learning opportunities so that you might more fully educate yourself with regard to many elements of food preparation (from dicing to separating to squeezing too) that are often an issue when preparing food on Shabbat.

### **The basic rule about cooking on Shabbat:**

In Jewish history, there were Jewish sects that misinterpreted the Torah rule against creating a flame on Shabbat. They understood it as prohibiting deriving any benefit from fire. Their Shabbat was cold and dark. Our Tradition rejected that view. We maintain that we may benefit from fire on Shabbat, indeed there is an important mitzvah of Oneg Shabbat, the enjoyment of Shabbat. The Rabbis went so far as to require that we eat hot food on Shabbat to affirm this. At the same time, the halachah is clear: food that is cooked on Shabbat, or even heated incorrectly on Shabbat, is prohibited to be eaten. **All food to be served on Shabbat must be cooked prior to Shabbat.**

How do we have warm food while not violating the prohibition of cooking? The answer relates to the nature of the heating sources, and the way in which engage them.

## THE HEATING SOURCE

When discussing food warming, we need to reference the various types of heating sources.

There are, of course, the oven and the stove top, along with crock pots that are actual cooking sources. In addition, we will speak about warming locations, including covered stovetops ("blech") and warmers ("plates" and warming drawers) and the oven itself.

### **A few notes about ovens:**

- It is possible that opening the door of a thermostat controlled oven might cause the ignition of the flame inside. There are various suggestions and directives as to how best avoid this, including waiting to hear/see that the fire has already been ignited before opening, or perhaps to remove all the food at once, in a single opening.
- In recent years, new ovens have a 12-hour shutoff. It is highly recommended to purchase a "Sabbath mode" oven, which includes an override to that shutoff. In addition, such ovens have methods built in that enable you

to raise and lower the temperature and settings on Yom Tov. Please understand that such temperature and settings adjustment is not permitted on Shabbat.

## The "Blech", "plateh" and warming drawers

As mentioned above, the Torah prohibits cooking on Shabbat. Warming was permitted, but with some concerns that needed to be overcome. The Sages were concerned about warming foods that were already cooked, for two primary reasons:

1. A person will not inadvertently stoke/adjust the flame on Shabbat
2. And so that it does not appear that you are engaged in cooking on Shabbat (a special concern with regard to returning food to the warming source).

These concerns direct some of our actions (how, for example, to return food to the warming source) , and how to prepare a warming source that overcomes them.

In our modern kitchens, we have a few general options to enable us to overcome the rabbinic concerns:

- **Blech**- A metal sheet over the flame (covering the flame from view as well) or the electric element (with the controls covered).
- An electric warming tray ("**plateh**"): The halachik preference is for a non-adjustable plateh, but, there are opinions that also allow the use an adjustable warming tray if the knobs covered/removed.
- A **warming drawer/cabinet**. Make sure as well that the controls are covered. (There are some complicating elements to the use of such drawers. Among them: ensure that as you open the drawer you are not temporarily disconnecting the heating service).
- **The oven itself**.

Below we will discuss the manner in which food might be returned to those heating sources on Shabbat.

## SAFETY AND SHABBAT

**One should never endanger oneself or others, even in the effort to observe Shabbat meticulously.** A number of safety concerns have been raised in recent years, and we must take great care in that regard.

**Gas stovetop blechs**- I have become quite uncomfortable with this method, which consists of a metal sheet placed over a low flame (described above). The worry is that the flame might blow out and lead to serious Carbon monoxide danger. (One additional concern related to Passover- if you are considering covering your stovetop with foil over Passover, please make sure not block the venting in the back of the oven.) For that reason, for years I have preferred the electric hotplate....

**Electric hotplates**- Most of those "platehs" available from Israel and elsewhere (i.e. China!) seem to have no safety approval (eg. UL or CE rating). **Please look for one that has safety approval!** I have recently begun using the Classic Kitchen glass top warming tray which is CE approved, and has a fuse system as well. It does have a knob adjustment- so you'll need to find the right setting, and then cover or remove the knob...

**I also recommend putting the hot plate on a heavy-duty timer** so that it is not on when you head to sleep, and will turn on again late in the morning (make sure to set the time settings correctly on erev Shabbat- I've neglected that on a few occasions, and we ended up with cold food!).

Lastly- Please make sure that your **carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are functioning**, and that all batteries are changed twice a year.

## **SHEHIYEH- KEEPING FOOD ON A HEAT SOURCE FROM THE BEGINNING OF SHABBOS**

### **Uncooked food**

**Do Not:** Put any uncooked food or cold liquid, on/in a heating source on Shabbat itself.

**Do:** Make sure that any food on the heating surface is at least one-half cooked before Shabbat starts. In general, even a cholent should be half-way cooked prior to Shabbat (there are some further considerations that might permit a slow-cook food, not intended for eating until the next day (eg. a cholent) to be put up raw just before Shabbat).

We'll work with the scenario that your food is indeed **fully cooked** when Shabbat comes in:

### **Food that is fully cooked as Shabbat enters, in/on the heat source:**

You may keep such food in the oven, or you may also keep it directly on the flame. This latter suggestion is less than optimal as a matter of safety, as you will be leaving an exposed flame after removing the pot. **Most people keep the food in the oven, on a warming surface, or merely covered and unheated until eating it Friday evening.**

One may indeed keep the food warming from the onset of Shabbat until the next day as well in the oven or on the blech.

**Do:** Keep food- at a health-safe minimum temperature (*at or above 165°*)

**Do Not: Stir food** in the crock pot or on a pot **on the stove** once Shabbat comes in. It is preferable to remove the ceramic crock pot insert before transferring the contents to a serving dish. There are ways for you to transfer hot water into a cholent that has begun to dry. Please ask the rabbi for more details.

In addition, there are many rules with regard to moving food around the blech on Shabbat. We are not able to discuss these in this general overview.

### **Liquids**

**Do Not Heat any liquids on Shabbat:** Water or even fully cooked soup or stew - anything that can be poured out - needs to be put on the heat (in an urn, crock-pot, or on the stove) and left there, BEFORE Shabbat.

**Hot drinks- Do:** Feel free to offer your guests tea or coffee; however, since brewing tea or coffee may be considered cooking, please follow the following special Shabbat procedures:

1. You may use instant coffee or tea or essence that is made before Shabbat by putting several tea bags in a cup of hot water
2. or you may make tea (or coffee) by the most common technique:
  - "K'li sh'lishi" (tertiary vessel) tea: Cooking is defined as happening on the heat source. If you are doing something a few steps away from the source, you are not "cooking".
  - So: make sure that the tea bag only is immersed into a cup of water that has been twice transferred from the urn or kettle. For example, hot water is poured from the urn (primary vessel) into a carafe or cup (secondary vessel) and from there to each person's cup (tertiary vessel). Once it is in the "3rd/tertiary vessel", you can then put in the tea bag without any concern of halachik "cooking".

# HACHZARAH: REHEATING FOOD ON SHABBAT

There are detailed rules concerning *hachzarah*, returning food to the heating surface on Shabbat. We'll present a primary approach we take in our shul community.

**Note:** Do not reheat liquids on Shabbat, only solid, pre-cooked food. For the purposes of this discussion, "solid food" includes a pan of meat or chicken that might have a little amount juice or sauce present, but certainly not added.

## A. The common halachic approach taken to returning solid food is as follows:

This view does not allow the reheating of cooled solid food by putting it directly on a cooking surface. According to this view, one could only place cooled food onto a warming surface with some indirection (eg.- on another pot already on the warming surface). Some also allowed it if the warming surface is not one intended for cooking, only warming (a "plateh").

## B. The approach followed at the Hebrew Institute with regard to reheating solid food

**1)** Rabbi Soloveitchik instructed institutions under his guidance that they might follow the following method (that of R" N-Rabbeinu Nissim), with regard to reheating solid foods on Shabbat: As long as the solid food was on a heating surface when Shabbat entered, it may be later returned directly to a blech/covered heating surface, even if it has cooled down. This is the practice we follow in the Hebrew Institute kitchen and can be followed in your homes as well.

**2)** Rav Ovadia Yosef and some other poskim took the position that did not require having solid food on the warming surface as Shabbat came in if one would be placing the food onto a surface that is not used for cooking- eg. warming trays and drawers. We try to follow the practice of Rav Soloveitchik, but, in cases when it was not possible to do so, one can rely on Rav Ovadia Yosef's instruction.

**Therefore:**

**One can reheat cold, solid pre-cooked food by following the following procedures:**

- 1. Optimally: have the food on the heating surface when Shabbat enters. It then may be refrigerated.**
- 2. Then put it either:**
  - a. on a (preferably non-adjustable, or at least control-covered) "plateh" (SEE SAFETY NOTE)**
  - b. or in a warming drawer/cupboard, which is designed just to warm, not to cook.**
  - c. Or- one is permitted to put the food into a low heated oven (approx 200 degrees), adding a clear sign that this is not an act of cooking (eg.- use a wad of foil to prop the door open, which is not our method of baking).**

# ENJOYING THE BLESSINGS OF SHABBAT

This guide is intended to help you in the observance of Shabbat, and to provide guidance for a uniform set of practices within our community. Don't be intimidated, or frustrated. Absolutely ask me or another knowledgeable friend for guidance!

With Blessings for a peaceful, friendly, relaxed Shabbat together.

*Rabbi Chaim Marder*