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Sous-Vide Cookers on Shabbos

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Some pronounce it 'sue vee', while others pronounce it 'sue veed'. Either way, it is a French phrase which translates to "vacuum". It is a method of cooking that was first described by the inventor Sir Benjamin Thompson, aka Count Rumford, who is also credited with the invention of thermal underwear. The techniques of modern sous-vide cooking were perfected in the 1970s and have become increasingly popular over the past twenty years. Sous-vide is a method of cooking in which food is vacuum-sealed in a plastic pouch and cooked in a bath of water at an accurately controlled temperature. The water is typically held at 125° – 175°F, which is considerably cooler than standard cooking temperatures in an oven. While the vacuum packing is achieved by removing any excess air, the food will not float but rather sink and be completely submerged underwater.

There are a number of benefits to sous-vide cooking. When preparing meat using conventional cooking, the food is subject to a level of heat far greater than the internal cooking temperature of meat. If the meat is removed too late, it will be overcooked; if it is removed too early, it will be underdone. Furthermore, the meat will not be cooked evenly. The outside will be more well done, and the inside will be rarer. Contrast that with sous-vide, in which the water is held constant at the desired internal cooking temperature. The meat cannot be overcooked, as it cannot get hotter than the temperature of the water in which it is submerged. Furthermore, the meat will be cooked evenly with the outside and inside being heated uniformly.

Another benefit of sous-vide is that the lower cooking temperature allows the meat to retain its natural juices, thereby enhancing its taste. The ability of sous-vide to cook vegetables at a temperature below the boiling point of water allows them to maintain a firm and crisp texture. One other benefit of sous-vide is that vacuum packing allows the food to be stored for a longer period of time after cooking.

The fact that sous-vide food cannot be overcooked would seem to make it an ideal candidate for keeping food hot on Shabbos. However, there are two halachic issues with doing so – the prohibitions of shehiya and hatmana.

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KEEP THE FIRE BURNING creatively

RABBI TZVI ROSEN
EDITOR, KASHRUS KURRENTS

What is a wise life course of action? Rabbi Shimon says it is seeing the consequences of one's actions. Our Chachomim, with their keen insight into human nature and the consequences of one's actions, realized that safeguards have to be instituted in order to keep the קדושה and טהרה of ישראל intact.

there is nothing more effective to draw hearts closer (i.e., relationships) than a "geshmak" meal. לגימה is probably the most potent tool that kiruv professionals have in their kiruv arsenal. The "לגימה" factor is part and parcel of human nature and socialization. Unfortunately, we have seen how potentially dangerous "innocent" socialization can create serious pitfalls. As a precaution against unnecessary socialization, our חכמים have instructed that certain חשוב foods served at important functions must be monitored by a יהודי in a small but significant way during the cooking preparation.

This significant participation of the יהודי in food preparation is known as מלכים is required on foods that are considered to be מלכים, בישול ישראל, נאכל כמו שהוא חי עולה על שולחן, fit for a state dinner or wedding, and are not eaten raw. בישול ישראל is required for foods that are cooked, boiled, roasted, broiled, fried or grilled (i.e., fire is used as the cooking medium). Microwaving or induction cooking are not subject to בישול ישראל. Moreover, food that has been cooked by an יהודי and has not reached בן דרוסי (the 33% cooking threshold) can be finished by a יהודי and would qualify as בישול ישראל.

בישול ישראל Implementing

Practically speaking, when food is prepared by a kosher caterer, or in a facility such as a kosher certified nursing home or hospital, one of the main duties of the

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1. Avos 2:13
2. Sanhedrin 103B
3. Chochmas Adam 66:1, Y.D. 113:8
4. Chochmas Adam 66:5
5. Chocomas Adam 66:9

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GETTING INTO HOT WATER:

Urns & Pump Pots in *Halacha: Shabbos & Yom Tov*¹

RABBI ZVI GOLDBERG
KASHRUS ADMINISTRATOR

Electric urns greatly enhance our *oneg Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* by allowing us to effortlessly enjoy hot drinks. However, the technological advances that permit us to use urns on demand come along with a host of *halachic* considerations that must be carefully reviewed.

A summary of the various *halachic* considerations in the usage of electric urns, pump pots and commercial urns are addressed in this article. An urn is a heater that lets the water out through gravity using a lever at the bottom of the urn. A pump pot uses a pump at the top to force the water out. In this article, the term urn is used generically to refer to a pump pot, as well (except as noted in the section about the water level tube).

Keep in mind that there are many different types of devices, and not every situation is applicable to all of them.

Heating, Adding and Dispensing

Heating: It is best to bring the water in the urn to a complete boil before *Shabbos*.²

Adding: Adding water on *Shabbos* is always prohibited. On *Yom Tov*, it is permitted to add cold water provided no light goes on or off immediately upon adding the water, and the heating mechanism does not immediately turn on.³ Before *Yom Tov*, one can test to see how much water can be added before activating the urn. To test, follow the steps in the footnote.⁴

Dispensing: It goes without saying that dispensing water is permitted through *mechanical* means only (i.e., the use of spigots or levers). One should not press any electronic buttons.

Shabbos Mode/Yom Tov Mode

Some urns feature a “*Shabbos Mode*”. On some models, this mode only disables the electronic buttons. For example, some models have a button which allows dispensing from a pump pot without having to manually ‘pump’. The “*Shabbos Mode*” disables that button. However, even without disabling that button, one could simply opt to use the manual pump.

“*Yom Tov Mode*” is a feature available on some urns and is obviously for *Yom Tov* use only. When this feature is engaged, the urn

supposedly allows the user to refill the urn with cold water without activating any mechanisms. When STAR-K tested some models, we found that the mode only disabled the lights and buttons but not the reboil, which was activated as soon as cold water was added.

You should make sure that the *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* mode feature is reliably certified and works as intended by testing it before *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov*.⁵

“STAR-K consulted with engineers and undertook the testing of urns...”

Covering the Urn

Sometimes, users want to cover the urn with a blanket or cloth to maintain the temperature of the water during *Shabbos*. Placing a covering that fully covers the urn is prohibited, even on *erev Shabbos* and certainly on *Shabbos*.⁶ If part of the urn is left uncovered, then it would be permitted— even on *Shabbos* itself.⁷ There are no restrictions on *Yom Tov* with respect to covering the unit.

Tilting an Urn

On both *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, one should not dispense water from an urn if it is beneath the level of the spout (by tilting it). Doing so creates a *halachic* concern that one may be tempted to unplug the urn or add water to avoid damaging the urn.⁸ (Aside from *halachic* issues, removing the water is not advised since the element may overheat and should not be done, even on a weekday, unless the urn is first unplugged.)

Water Level Tube

Many urns include a tube of water on the outside of the tank that displays the level of the water inside the urn. When the urn fills up, the tube fills to the same level. When water is removed, some water from the

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1. See “Getting Into Hot Water (Part One, *Tevilah* and Workplace)”, and “Getting A Handle On Your Faucet” by this author at www.star-k.org. See also “Instant Foods In The Kosher Home,” by Rabbi Avrohom Mushell.

2. *Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasa* 1:63. However, if the urn has no means of changing the temperature one can fill it with cold water before *Shabbos* even though it will boil on *Shabbos*, since it is considered “*grufa u’ketuma*” (*Rav Moshe Heinemann, sblit”a*). In such a case, water may not be removed before the boiling is complete as this will speed up the boiling process and is considered *bishul*. (See *Meor HaShabbos* 1:pg 516 quoting *Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach*.)

3. *Gramma*, an indirect action (a delay of 5 seconds or more), on *hav’arah* is permitted on *Yom Tov* (*Shaar Hatziyun* 514:31).

4. To test, follow these steps: A. Boil some water in the urn. B. Slowly add cold water and listen for the ‘click’ that indicates the urn is beginning to boil the added water. C. The amount of water that can be added on *Yom Tov* is less than the amount that activated the urn. For example, if three cups of water activated the urn, only less than three cups could be added on *Yom Tov*. (The amount you can add without activating the urn will also depend upon the amount of water remaining in the urn. If there is little water left, the urn will likely turn on faster.)
A work-around on *Yom Tov* is to add hot water that was heated in a stovetop kettle. (The purpose of doing this would be to have hot water conveniently available for later in the day.) This should not cause any change.

5. As stated above, on *Shabbos* it is always forbidden to add water.

6. The heating element and cover cause this to be *hatmona b’davar hamosif hevel*, covering with something that adds heat, which is prohibited on *Shabbos*. (*Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 257:1, *Mishnah Brurah* 253:69).

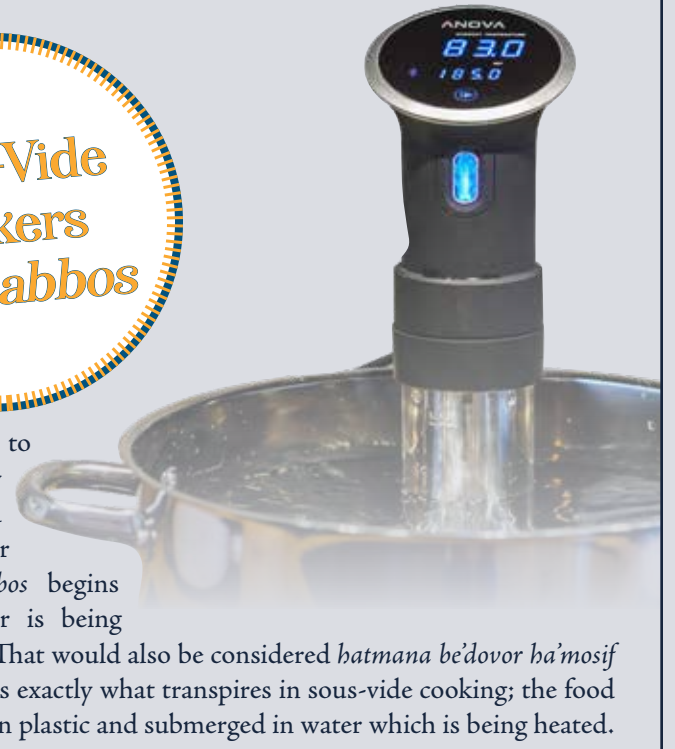
7. The amount left uncovered should not be minuscule; it should be enough to make a difference in the heat retention.

8. See *Mishnah Brurah* 318:118, *Orchos Shabbos* 1:pg75, and *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa* 1:40. Modern urns usually have a cutoff which will sense overheating, but the urn may still be damaged in the process. Additionally, one is not permitted to trip the cutoff.



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Sous-Vide Cookers on Shabbos



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Shehiya: Chazal forbade leaving partially cooked food on an uncovered flame at the onset of *Shabbos*. This is due to the concern that a person may mistakenly stoke and increase the fire on *Shabbos* in order to speed up the cooking process. However, Chazal allowed this if the flame is covered because the covering will remind a person not to stoke the fire on *Shabbos*. The covering cannot serve as a reminder if it always covers the flame, only if it is placed on the flame specifically for *Shabbos*. Therefore, a heating element would be considered equivalent to an uncovered flame. Even though the element is manufactured surrounded by metal or plastic, these materials cannot be considered as a covering as they are always present.

The heating element of a sous-vide cooker heats the water which, in turn, heats the food being cooked for *Shabbos*. There is a debate among the *poskim* as to how to cover a heating element in order to mitigate the *halachic* issue of *shehiya*. Rav Ahron Kotler, *zt"l*, held that it is sufficient to cover the electronic controls of the heating element with foil. The foil will serve as a reminder not to tamper with the controls on *Shabbos*. This can be done easily with a sous-vide cooker. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zt"l*, held that it is necessary to cover the actual area which gets hot. This can be accomplished on a regular stovetop by placing a *blech* over the fire; however, it may be difficult to do so on a sous-vide cooker.

One simple solution for *Ashkenazim* is to ensure that the food is fully cooked, or at least half cooked, before the onset of *Shabbos*. Once the food is half cooked, it is considered to be edible and there is no longer a concern that a person will feel the need to speed up the cooking process. At times of need, it is sufficient if the food is only one-third cooked. These times are measured as a fraction of the full cooking process. If it takes a piece of meat three hours to be fully cooked, it will be considered one-third cooked after one hour and half cooked after one and a half hours. Thus, when it comes to sous-vide cooking, *Ashkenazim* can avert the *halachic* issue of *shehiya* by ensuring that the food is half cooked before the onset of *Shabbos*. In such circumstances, care must be taken not to tamper with the food on *Shabbos* in a manner which would speed up the cooking process.

Hatmana: Chazal also forbade wrapping a pot of food on *Shabbos* to keep it warm. For example, one cannot wrap a hot pot in a towel on *Shabbos* in order to keep the food inside it warm. The *Mishna Berura* (258:2) forbids completely submerging a pot in hot water on *Shabbos*, as he considers this to be *hatmana*.

It is permitted to wrap the pot in a towel before the onset of *Shabbos*. However, if the food in the pot is being heated up on a heat source then it is forbidden to completely wrap it, even before the onset of *Shabbos*. For example, a plugged-in crockpot should not be completely wrapped in a towel before *Shabbos*. This is known as *hatmana be'dovor ha'mosif hevel* – wrapping in a manner that adds heat, which is forbidden even before *Shabbos* begins. According to the *Mishna Berura*, it would be

forbidden to completely submerge a pot in water when *Shabbos* begins if the water is being heated up. That would also be considered *hatmana be'dovor ha'mosif hevel*. This is exactly what transpires in sous-vide cooking; the food is wrapped in plastic and submerged in water which is being heated.

It should follow that it is likewise forbidden to wrap *kishka* in foil and place it in *cholent* which is cooking in a crockpot before *Shabbos*. Here too, the *kishka* is wrapped and submerged in such a way that it is being heated up at the start of *Shabbos*. Some *poskim* do, in fact, forbid this. However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zt"l*, and others permit this (*Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchassa, mahadura chadasha* chapter 1 footnote 254). They argue that the *kishka* is not wrapped to keep it warm, but rather to keep it separate from the *cholent*. As the intent is merely to keep the *kishka* from crumbling, it is not classified as *hatmana*. One could argue that the same is true regarding sous-vide cooking. The plastic pouch is intended merely to keep the food dry, not to retain heat.

However, the counterargument would be that the vacuum-packing and water bath are essential components of the sous-vide cooking process. It is necessary for the food to be dry for this method of heating to be effective; therefore, it would be considered *hatmana*. Rav Heinemann, *shlit"l*, *paskens* that leaving vacuum-packed food in a sous-vide hot water bath over *Shabbos* is considered *hatmana be'dovor ha'mosif hevel*.

One solution for *Ashkenazim* would be to make sure that the food is not completely submerged in water. *Hatmana be'dovor ha'mosif hevel* is forbidden for *Ashkenazim* when *Shabbos* begins only if the food is completely submerged. If some of the food sticks out of the water, it would be permitted. It needs to be recognizable that the food is not completely submerged, and it is not sufficient for a miniscule amount of food to stick out. While this may work *halachically*, it will defeat the goal of sous-vide cooking, which is to have all the food heated up equally. Therefore, practically speaking, sous-vide cookers on *Shabbos* will present a *halachic* problem of *hatmana be'dovor ha'mosif hevel*.

(I would like to mention the following articles that I found to be very helpful with the composition of this article: The article of Rav Yaakov Yosef Winkler published in *Koveitz Eitz Chaim* no. 31, and the article by Rabbi Shmuel Lesches published in *Young Yeshiva Magazine* issue 14.)★



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KEEP THE FIRE BURNING creatively

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משגיח/משגיחה is to make sure he/she is the only one who turns on the fires. In the event that the facility or caterer/restaurant accommodates the Sephardi community who follow the *psak* of מרן בית יוסף, the משגיח must put the raw food in the oven (i.e., raw rice in the rice cooker or raw meat in the oven) while the fire is burning. Adjusting the flame is not enough.

In factory settings where בישול ישראל is required, and there is no משגיח תמידי, בישול ישראל can be a daunting challenge. Today, the obstacles are even greater. Thirty years ago, the pilot light which was used for gas burners and gas ovens was lit by the משגיח and the בישול ישראל requirements continued to be met as long as the pilot light was not extinguished. As long as the pilot light beneath each burner remained lit, בישול ישראל was kept in perpetuity.

However, the technology culture has constantly moved to create energy-efficient appliances to save costs. Pilot lights gave way to electronic ignitions and electric sparking when the oven or burners were turned off; there was no light that continued to burn. How was the בישול ישראל issue to be resolved without pilot lights? One answer is by hotwiring an oven with a separate glow bar placed in the oven cavity. The electricity was turned on by the משגיח and the glow bar remained lit, even when the oven was turned off. A glow bar is a short electric element similar to the coil of an electric oven. The requisite בישול ישראל was fulfilled when the יהודי turned on the electricity to light the glow bar. As long as the glow bar remained lit, the oven was בישול ישראל-compliant. Not only is the “glow bar” a viable long-term בישול ישראל solution for ovens, it is also a good option for deep fryers that can be heated by a glow bar that would keep the oil warm and the fryer בישול ישראל-compliant.

How does a long-term בישול ישראל solution address steam jacketed kettles or rice cookers that cook with steam and water? The glow bar is not practical. The answer is the industrial boiler. It is the boiler that provides hot steam for the kettles. If it is lit by the משגיח, this qualifies for בישול ישראל.

For example, if the משגיח lit the boiler and the boiler constantly remains on throughout a two month sweet potato production, the entire production would be בישול ישראל-compliant. Of course, it is imperative that the company coordinate with the משגיח to make sure that the boiler remains lit. If at all possible, the boiler controls should be sealed. Lighting boilers has been an effective בישול ישראל system for decades.

However, in many companies even long-term workhorse boilers present בישול ישראל challenges. What was is no more. Energy savers have found their way to preserve the life of the workhorse boiler. In a quest for energy-saving techniques, boilers are typically turned on and off to conserve energy, thereby nullifying בישול ישראל.

The following three examples are actual cases where STAR-K implemented בישול ישראל solutions to satisfy *halacha* as well as the company’s energy-saving plans.

Solution 1: Mode לילה טוב – A Pennsylvania company producing dehydrated potato flakes wanted to conserve energy by shutting down their boiler for the night and subsequent weekend, restarting for the next day’s production. In doing so, בישול ישראל would be nullified. The resolution to this issue was letting the boiler remain on a low temperature mode, keeping the water hot and בישול ישראל intact. This proved to be more energy-efficient because starting a boiler from a cold position requires more energy than simply turning up the boiler from low to high.

Solution 2: The Condensate Holding Tank – Recycling condensation is another economical water-saving technique that companies use to save on their water bill. Once the steam is used in a production, the condensation created is recaptured and sent back to the boiler to be recycled. This California Ready-to-Eat rice bowl company not only recycled their steam but turned off their boiler nightly, thus nullifying בישול ישראל. How were we going to solve this predicament?

The recaptured condensate was first collected in a holding tank that re-fed the boiler. By hotwiring an electrical coil “banding”, not the holding tank, the condensate remained hot. The משגיח locked the controls and the condensate remained heated constantly. The water in the holding tank fed the boiler, keeping the boiler and cooked rice bowls בישול ישראל compliant.

Solution 3: Another Warming Belt to the Rescue – A different California-based Japanese company that produced rice vinegar, requiring the rice to be cooked (pre-fermentation), was also powered by a boiler that was turned off after production and turned back on again the next day. In this case, there was no holding tank to feed the boiler. The resolution was even more ingenious. This boiler system had a steam pipe which came off the boiler. The hot steam fed the cooking kettles through the pipe. By installing the warming belt that wrapped around the feed pipe and was turned on by the משגיח, the pipe was perpetually heated, and the rice was בישול ישראל-compliant to the satisfaction of STAR-K and the delight of the company.

As technology marches on and presents new challenges, frontline כשרות is right there to provide creative solutions to keep the consumer’s קדושה intact, and the companies happy.☆

GETTING INTO HOT WATER:

Urns & Pump Pots in *Halacha: Shabbos & Yom Tov*

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tube flows out and is cooked by mixing with the water coming from the urn. There is concern that the water in the tube has not been cooked and, if so, removing water from the urn would be forbidden on *Shabbos* (but permitted on *Yom Tov*).⁹

Determining if the water in the tube has been heated is definitely a challenge. Some tubes feel very hot while others do not, especially at its top. The tubes generally do not allow easy access to thermometers or other temperature devices.

Some experts with whom we consulted thought that since there is some connection to the water in the pot, and it is being heated, the water will quickly move from the tube to the urn and then back again. In this way, all the water in the tube has been cooked in a short amount of time. Others argued that the water will not mix so quickly.

STAR-K consulted with engineers and undertook the testing of urns to see if the water moves from the tank into the tube, and the amount of time it would take to do so. Different models of urns were heated, then a food dye was poured into the urns.¹⁰ In all cases, the dye began flowing into the tube almost immediately. After a very short time, the tube was the same color as the water in the urn. This indicates that there is an exchange of hot water into the tube.¹¹

Even if the water in the tube does not remain boiling hot (especially at the top of the tube), the *Ramo*¹² holds that water which has once been heated and has not totally cooled down is no longer subject to restrictions upon further heating.

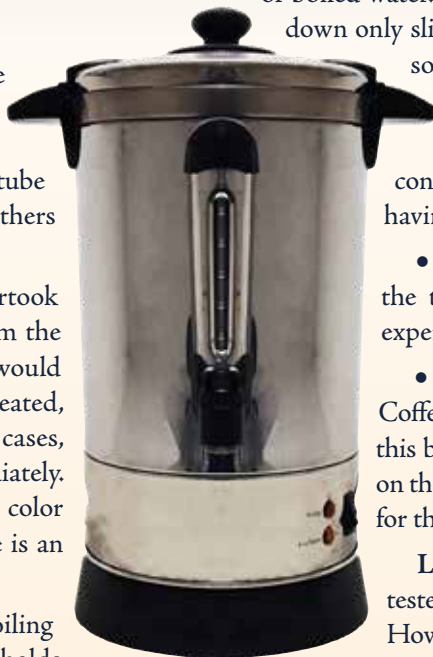
Based on this finding, *Rav Moshe Heinemann, shlita*, has *psakened* that one can use the urns without concern for the water in the tube.¹³

If one still wants to be strict about this issue, there are several options:

- There is usually a visible hole on the top of the tube that allows air to enter. If that is covered with tape before *Shabbos*, no air can get in and the water level will not change in the tube. (On some tubes, this hole is not accessible.)
- Alternatively, you can put tape over that hole before filling the

urn on *erev Shabbos*, then permit the water to boil and remove the tape to allow the boiled water to flow into the tube.

- Some urns work in the following manner: When the lever is pressed to remove some water, the level of the tube is significantly reduced. When the lever is released, the tube refills with boiled water from the urn. Therefore, after the water has boiled on *erev Shabbos*, and the lever is pressed a few times, one can be certain the tube is full of boiled water. (Other urns work differently. The tube level goes down only slightly when water is removed. This would not be a solution for those urns.)



- Boil the water on the stovetop and pour it into the urn before *Shabbos*. (Some would not consider this a practical solution because the point of having an urn is to avoid this!)

- Unscrew the tube and block the water flow into the tube at the bottom. This method requires some expertise or special tools.

- Opt for an old-style type of urn (e.g., West Bend Coffee Urn) that doesn't have a tube. (An advantage of this brand is that it is UL-listed as safe, while many urns on the market are not UL-listed. Always check appliances for the UL marking or equivalent [e.g., ETL]).

Large commercial urns with automatic refill were not tested and one should employ one of the above solutions. However, they often run at a high temperature. One can feel the tube at the bottom, and if one's hand cannot be held there for 15 seconds then the water in the tube is being heated.¹⁴

A **pump pot** works differently than an urn. Dispensing water from a pump pot involves pushing down on a pump mechanism located at the top of the urn. Pressing this mechanism pushes the water up through the tube and out the top of the pot.

In the previously mentioned dye test, the dye was not transferred into the pump pot tube due to the different setup. Therefore, this poses a potential issue of *bishul* by mixing hot water in the pot with the water in the tube which may not have been sufficiently heated. However, with pump pots the solution is easy. After boiling the water before *Shabbos*, pump a few ounces of water out of the pot.

9. *Poskim* debate how hot the water needs to get to be considered cooked. Is it enough to be *yad soledes bo* or must it be fully boiled? *Rav Elyashiv, zt"l*, has been quoted as ruling strictly (*Otzros HaShabbos* pg 528). He was concerned that even though the water in the tube was heated, it would mix with the water in the pot and be raised from *yad soledes bo* to boiling. (However, *Shalmei Yehuda* 2:14 quotes *Rav Elyashiv* as not being concerned about the water in the tube.) On the other hand, many *poskim* are lenient on this question and hold that as long as water was heated to *yad soledes bo* it is considered cooked. For example, see sources quoted in *Minchas Yitzchak* 10:28, and *Nishmas Shabbos* 4:1. *Rav Moshe Heinemann, shlita*, rules that once water has reached 120°F [*yad soledes* according to *Rav Aaron Kotler, zt"l*,] it is permitted to heat it to a higher temperature. *Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Otzros HaShabbos* pg 529) is quoted as permitting the use of an urn with a tube. He was told that the water in the tube had been cooked. See also *Nishmas Shabbos* 1:9.

10. If doing this at home, be careful with the dye as it stains clothes and countertops.

11. We repeated the test with cold water and found there was little transfer of the dye through the cold water. This further indicates that heating causes the transfer of the dye and water.

12. O.C. 318:15

13. *Sefardim* follow the *Mechaber* (O.C. 318:4), who states that water that has cooled below *yad soledes bo* and is reheated is considered *bishul*; this seemingly would be a concern here. However, *Rav Ovadiah Yosef (Yechave Daas* 6:21) is lenient on the reheating of the water in the urn tube for various reasons, including that it is a *psik reisha d'lo nicha leh*, since he doesn't care whether or not the few drops in the tube that come out are heated. *Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul (Ohr L'tzion* 2:30:note 10) is also lenient.

14. See also the section in this article regarding the automatic refill of commercial urns.

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This will push out the water from the tube, and the tube will then be filled with boiled water from the pump pot.¹⁵

Does Removing Water Cause the Urn to Activate?

This is another question we are asked regarding the use of urns on *Shabbos*. The argument made by some *poskim* is that the removal of hot water causes cold air to enter the urn, causing the urn to activate, which is prohibited.¹⁶

STAR-K tested various urns with a meter that measures total usage of power, as well as a Fluke brand tester¹⁷ that measures power usage per second and records the information.

None of our tests showed that the heating element was using more power or was activated sooner, although for technical reasons these tests could not be considered 100% conclusive.¹⁸ Since it is very difficult to ascertain, and one does not *intend* to cause an increase in power when removing water, *halachically* one is not obligated to be concerned about this on *Shabbos*. Therefore, one may dispense water from an urn on *Shabbos* without worrying that he is activating the urn by allowing cold air to enter.¹⁹

Automatic Refilling of Commercial Urns

Commercial urns in *shuls*, *yeshivos* and hotels are often connected to piping and automatically refill when water is taken out. The urns generally have a water level sensor near the top of the inside of the urn.²⁰ To allow use on *Shabbos*, shut off the water input and do one of the following:

1. Remove enough water from the urn before *Shabbos* to bring the water level below the sensor. Removing a few cups of water should be sufficient, but this should be tested on each urn.

2. Install a switch to bypass that sensor and activate it before *Shabbos*. On *Yom Tov*, the urn may be used even if it refills. However, if there is a sensor then one of the above solutions is still required.

Instant Hot

An “instant hot” device attaches to a sink and is connected to a small tank of water under the sink. The tank keeps the water at a high temperature and is refilled automatically through its connection to the water supply.

The tank refills as the chamber empties and then boils the water as needed. Use of an instant hot device is always forbidden on *Shabbos*.

If the heating element is not activated immediately, one can remove water on *Yom Tov*. To determine permissibility on *Yom Tov*, we tested a popular model which holds 2/3 of a gallon. Our testing showed that one can assume the device is not immediately activated after removing one cup of water.²¹ After allowing sufficient time for the water to boil, one could take another cup.²² If the tank would be significantly smaller, it is possible that taking even one cup would be forbidden, and such a device should be tested before use.²³

Due to advances in technology, there are more and more options that provide us with hot water on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. Knowing the *halachos* allows us to enjoy our hot drinks in a permissible way.

The author would like to thank Mr. Jonah Ottensoser, STAR-K engineering consultant, for his assistance with this research.★



TESTING URNS WITH FLUKE™ TESTER IN BACKGROUND

15. This solution is also discussed by Rav Yisroel Belsky in *Shulchan Halevi*, pg 55. Alternatively, before *Shabbos* one can pump out a few drops of water (which will come from the tube) to see if they are *yad soledes bo* (120° F).

16. On *Shabbos*, this would be forbidden due to the *gramma* of *hav'arah*, kindling the heating coils. On *Yom Tov*, this would not be a concern.

17. A high-end testing device (listed at \$5000).

18. We were able to conclude definitively that the West Bend Coffee 30 cup urn, due to its simplicity, did not cause any changes when water was taken out.

19. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is quoted as having ruled leniently. It can be assumed that it is not a *psik reisha* or, at most, it is a *sofek psik reisha* and a *gramma* (*Me'or Ha'Shabbos* 1:pg 509). See, however, *Orchos Shabbos* 1: pgs 73-74 who rules strictly on this issue.

20. The concern is that whenever the water level drops below the sensor, a valve is activated and opens to allow water into the urn. Turning off the water intake is not enough to allow use of the urn, since at some point someone who takes out water on *Shabbos* will still trip the electromechanical valve to open; this is forbidden. Please note that older urns may use a mechanical float and would not cause any valves to open.

21. Depending upon the device's position in its cycle, even one cup may activate the element. However, at most this is a *sofek psik reisha* on a *d'rabonon* and is, therefore, permitted. (See *Be'ur Halacha* O.C. 316 *v'lachen*).

22. There are many variables that determine how soon another cup could be taken. One could test his own device to assess. After 15 minutes, one can definitely assume another cup is permitted.

23. To test, follow these steps: A. Use a power usage meter that measures how many amps are being drawn. These are inexpensive, less than \$20. B. There will be a power outlet under the sink that powers the instant hot. Plug the power cord of the instant hot into the meter and then plug the meter into the outlet. C. Set the meter to read amps. When no power is being drawn, it will read '0'. Have someone push the lever of the instant hot, and count how many cups are taken out, before the meter shows that amps are being drawn. D. Wait till the water boils and repeat the test a few times. If you can remove a few cups before the power is drawn, then you can assume that one cup will not activate the device.



RABBI CHANANYA JACOBSON
KASHRUS ADMINISTRATOR

Kashrus in the Age of Corona

Kashrus is a very hands-on affair: factories must be visited, cows must be *shechted*, and lettuce must be checked. How is it possible to maintain kosher supervision when travel is restricted and mere proximity bears risk?

Early Hurdles

STAR-K felt the effects of coronavirus well before it struck the United States. The *mashgichim* who staff the Far East were called back to their home bases in Israel and the U.S. as hundreds of manufacturers in China closed in January for the Chinese New Year, with no plans to reopen. Fear of COVID-19 overtook the world, and in many places foreigners were no longer welcome. One *mashgiach*, who had been living peacefully in India for several months with his family, decided it was time to leave his home there when his wife was accosted in the marketplace by people pointing at her accusingly and shouting, "Coronavirus! Coronavirus!" Another senior *mashgiach* managed to leave Spain only 12 hours ahead of a countrywide travel lockdown and cessation of all air travel. All were faced with weeks of quarantine upon returning home.

The Response

STAR-K is working with other major *kashrus* organizations to keep the kosher food supply chain uninterrupted and provide food manufacturers and consumers with the information they need during this pandemic. Every facility under our supervision has been notified that kosher standards cannot be lowered in the face of COVID-19. Since non-essential travel is prohibited in many locales, STAR-K has worked with Agudath Israel and local governments to ensure that kosher service is recognized as essential and has provided the documentation needed for *mashgichim* to travel.

Restaurants and Caterers

In food service facilities, *kashrus* requires that our *mashgichim* work hands-on in the kitchen. Rabbi Sholom Tendler, STAR-K *Kashrus* Administrator, delivered a webinar instructing *mashgichim* regarding the extra caution necessary during these times. Despite shortages, he provided personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves and N95 masks. When Rabbi Tendler was told by a *mashgiach* that he was uncomfortable being the only person in the kitchen with access to PPE, Rabbi Tendler replied, "I'll get masks for everyone there!"

Factory Visits

Many factories are located in regions that are closed. As of this writing, international borders are still closed to travelers, and interstate commerce is severely restricted. Even in accessible regions, factories are reluctant to allow outside visitors due to the devastating effects of the virus. For productions requiring *hashgocha temidis* (such as kosher runs in otherwise non-kosher plants) we have often been able to gain access to a plant by explaining that, unlike other inspections, kosher supervision is part of the production process. However, in plants that we cannot access, special kosher productions have been canceled for the time being. Likewise, we may need to suspend certification in factories that require frequent visits to ensure that kosher standards are upheld.

"We have been gratified," remarks Dr. Avrom Pollak, president of STAR-K, "when companies that are following strict guidelines limiting entry into their facilities recognize the essential nature of kosher requirements and continue to accommodate routine inspections, albeit with appropriate measures." STAR-K is requiring all *mashgichim* to follow a safety program developed by NSF, a certification partner, for plant inspectors during this pandemic. Detailed protocols are designed to minimize risk exposure both for plant personnel and the *mashgiach*.

Consumer Information

This year, people found themselves unexpectedly making *Pesach* at home, many of them for the first time, and in need of *halachic* guidance. Consumers have always turned to the STAR-K Kosher Hotline in the weeks leading up to *Pesach*, typically placing thousands of calls to the STAR-K office during that time; but this year our office was closed. As the stay-at-home order took effect, our dedicated technical support team created a virtual office so that every question would still be answered. From their individual homes, our front office, database staff and *rabbonim* were able to answer an unprecedented number of queries including thousands of emails and nearly 12,500 phone calls between *Purim* and *Pesach*!

In partnership with *Baltimore Jewish Life*, STAR-K broadcast special COVID-19-focused *shiurim* and webinars to educate people about *Hilchos Pesach*, both timeless and timely.

With social distancing protocols in effect, people could not visit their *rabbonim* to sell their *chometz*. STAR-K developed a website that enabled the public to sell *chometz* online. The transaction was made legally binding using DocuSign technology. *Rabbonim* across America then followed suit, implementing similar initiatives in their own communities.

Going Forward

Even now, kosher food production does continue. Inspectors are in the field visiting factories, *shochtim* are traveling to do *shechita*, and *mashgichim* are in the kitchens checking lettuce. However, it is not entirely business as usual. We will not have the entire array of kosher products available in the manner to which we are accustomed.

Our *Rav HaMachshir*, Rav Moshe Heinemann, *shlit" a*, comments:

"With the many precautions and restrictions being put in place in all areas of food production, including kosher supervision, it is easy to understand that there will be a reduction in supply. Maybe among all the other messages being sent to us by הקב"ה through this virus is that we can and should be מסתפק במועט and be happy and grateful with a little less. The רבונו של עולם, in his mercy, will see that we are all trying and will put an end to this מגפה and see with נחת that, even then, we will try to continue to be מסתפק in so many areas of our lives. Needless to say, we are grateful and appreciative for the understanding and patience from the companies and the consumers with whom STAR-K shares a strong relationship, ותבא עליכם ברכה." ☆

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