

The prohibition of insulating: Is it permitted to cover the pots on the hotplate with a blanket?

Prior to **Shabbat**, it is permitted to cover the pot. According to **Sephardi authorities** one should make certain that there is a space between the cover and the sides of the pot (e.g., by placing the blanket on a pot cover that is wider than the cover of the pot), or that the blanket covers only the upper part of the pot. Nevertheless, Sephardim who are lenient and completely and tightly cover the pot have a basis for their practice, especially when the pot is placed on an electric hotplate. It is permitted for **Ashkenazim**, even *lekhathila*, to tightly cover a portion of a pot provided that a significant part of the pot remains uncovered.

Everyone agrees that **on Shabbat itself** it is prohibited to completely and tightly cover the pot. Rather, one must make certain to leave space between the cover and the sides of the pot or to cover only the upper part of the pot and not the sides, or (for Ashkenazim) to leave a significant part of the pot uncovered.

When the pot is not in direct contact with the blanket, it is not considered insulation. Therefore, keeping food in an oven is not a problem of insulation. There are other problems with use of an oven, as explained above (pp. 521–539).

Is it permitted to use a slow cooker on Shabbat?

Some authorities permit placing food in a slow cooker **before**

Shabbat, and that is the opinion of Rav **Wosner** (*Responsa Shevet HaLevi* 9:52–53). By contrast, according to Rav **Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** (*Minhat Shlomo*, vol. 2, 12:9) and Rav **Elyashiv** (*Orehot Shabbat*, vol. 1, p. 540), it is prohibited to use a slow cooker due to the concern that this will violate the prohibition of insulating (the earthenware vessel is surrounded by a metal heating receptacle). One who wishes to follow the ruling of the stringent authorities should place items such as pebbles or empty tuna cans at the bottom of the heating receptacle and place the insert on them. Those who want to be meticulous should also immobilize the dials. For Sephardim, the straightforward understanding is that one must be stringent and completely avoid using a slow cooker. Yet, Rav **Ovadia Yosef** (*Hazon Ovadia* 1, pp. 64–65) permits using it to prepare food for the morning meal, and one who acts accordingly has a basis for their actions (pp. 542–546).

Is it permitted to heat a baby bottle in hot water?

In general, there is no problem of cooking when heating a baby bottle by placing it in hot water, since it is done in a secondary vessel. Yet, ostensibly there is a problem of insulating, when **the bottle is submerged in the water**.

This matter is subject to a dispute between *Aḥaronim*: According to the *Hazon Ish* (37:32), the prohibition of insulating applies only to insulating in coals or garments or the like. **Insulating in food is permitted** and it is therefore permitted to heat a baby bottle in hot water. Yet, from the statement of the *Mishna Berura* citing the *Aḥaronim*, it appears that **insulating in food is also prohibited**, and Rav **Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 42, note 242), *Shevet HaLevi* (3:47), and others concur.

Therefore, one who wishes to heat a baby bottle in hot water in a secondary vessel should make certain that the water does not completely cover the bottle. Rather, some of the bottle should remain exposed, so that it will not be considered insulating (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 1:50). Nevertheless, one who is lenient and

submerges the entire bottle in water has a basis for their actions (pp. 546–549).

Is it permitted to place a bag with rice in cholent?

Ostensibly, the same dispute applies to insulating bags with food in cholent or in other cooked foods: According to the *Hazon Ish* there is no prohibition of insulating, while according to the *Mishna Berura* and others, it should be prohibited due to insulating.

Yet, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-Hilkhata* 42, note 242 and in *Tikunim UMiluim* there) asserts that even if there is a prohibition of insulating in food, it is nevertheless permitted to place a bag of food into cooked food before Shabbat. In his opinion, the prohibition of insulating applies only when the person intends **that the food will be heated by the material surrounding it**. In this case, both the food in the bag and the food outside the bag are heated simultaneously by the fire. The bag is not designed to intensify the heat of the food in it; rather, it is designed merely to enable it to absorb flavor from the food in the pot without disintegrating and dispersing into it. Therefore, the prohibition of insulating is not relevant in this case. Similarly, it would be permitted to place food wrapped in aluminum foil in the cooked food, and there is no problem of insulating (p. 550).

Is it permitted to put hot water into a vacuum flask (“thermos flask”) on Shabbat?

The reference, of course, is to a non-electric vacuum flask, and the question is whether putting the hot water into the thermos flask constitutes insulating. The straightforward understanding is that it does constitute insulating, as the water is insulated inside a completely closed vessel, and it is insulated in an item that does not add heat, which may not be done on Shabbat itself. That is the ruling of the *Responsa Shevet HaLevi* (1:93) as well.

Nevertheless, the consensus among the authorities is that it is **permitted**, for a variety of reasons:

1. According to the **Rambam** (4:5) and his understanding of the Gemara, **there is no prohibition of insulating in a secondary vessel.**
2. **The Hazon Ish** (37:32) writes that perhaps the prohibition is only to insulate **a vessel in a cloth.** Placing food into a vessel is never insulating, as every vessel preserves the heat of the food within it, and nevertheless, it is permitted to place hot food into a vessel on Shabbat and close it.
3. **Rav Moshe Feinstein** (*Iggerot Moshe, Oraḥ Hayim* 1:95) writes that insulating is accomplished by closing the cover, and closing the cover of a vessel does not constitute insulating, as it is also necessary in order to prevent dirt from getting into the food.
4. **Responsa Helkat Yaakov** (*Oraḥ Hayim* 84), **Responsa Tzitz Eliezer** (11:29), and **Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata** (1:70–71) also rule that it is permitted to put hot water into a thermos flask on Shabbat, and that is the *halakha* (pp. 552–555).

What should one be concerned about when using an electric urn?

One must ensure that the water was heated before Shabbat to at least the level of *maakhal ben Derosai* (approximately 122° F (50° C)), and preferably to a complete boil. In any case, it is prohibited to remove water from the urn on Shabbat if the water in the urn has **not yet boiled**, as otherwise, closing the spigot will accelerate the cooking of the water remaining in the urn.

When the water in the urn is boiling, there is no problem with removing water. Yet, in some types of urns, two ancillary problems are apt to arise:

If there is a **thermostat** that activates the heating element when the water in the urn is not sufficiently hot, it is conceivable that removing water from the urn will cause the water remaining in the urn to cool, leading the thermostat to activate the heating element sooner.

If there is a water-level **gauge** – a tube attached to the outer side

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of the urn indicating the amount of water remaining in it – the water in the gauge is relatively far from the heating element and might not be cooked. Removing water from the urn is apt to cause the water in the gauge to be cooked.

Practically, it is possible to purchase urns approved by the **Zomet Institute** or the **Scientific Institute for Technology and Halakha**, which certify that it is permitted to use the urn on Shabbat. It is recommended to do so. According to basic *halakha* it is permitted to use a standard urn without certification. One reason, among others, is that when removing water, the effect on the thermostat or on the water in the gauge is in the category of an indirect cause of an inevitable consequence (*pesik reisha beGerama*).

The matter is more complex with regard to **large institutional urns** into which water flows during Shabbat, and it is necessary to receive halakhic guidance to use them on Shabbat (pp. 559–568).