

Grinding in an unusual manner

The *halakha* of grinding in an unusual manner

The Gemara (141a) cites a dispute between *amora'im* concerning grinding performed in an unusual manner:

Rav Yehuda said: In the case of peppers, crushing them one by one with the handle of a knife is permitted. But crushing two at a time is prohibited. Rava said: Since he crushes in an unusual manner, even crushing many at a time is permitted.

Accordingly, **Rav Yehuda** permits crushing if one deviates from the usual manner in two ways: Each item must be crushed separately, and it must be performed with a knife handle, rather than a normal utensil. By contrast, **Rava** maintains that one change is sufficient, and therefore one may crush even a large quantity with a knife handle.

A straightforward reading of the *Tosefta* (15:13) seems to support the opinion of Rava: “One may not crush pressed or dried figs or carobs for the elderly on Shabbat, but one may crush them with the handle of a knife or with a wooden ladle.” This implies that it is permitted to crush even a large quantity of food, if one does so in an unusual manner.

In practice, **the majority of the *Rishonim***¹⁹ rule in accordance with the opinion of Rava that one may crush even **a great quantity**, and both the **Rambam** (21:20) and the *Shulḥan Arukh* (321:7) rule accordingly.

Why is there no prohibition by rabbinic law?

How is it possible that performing this action in an unusual manner renders it entirely permitted in this case? After all, an act performed in an unusual manner is generally prohibited by rabbinic law. The **Rid** explains (*Piskei HaRid* 74a, cited by *Beit Yosef* 321) that crushing with a knife handle is **a substantively different act**, and therefore is not classified as Grinding at all:

AND IF YOU ASK: Since [for doing this] in the normal manner one is liable due to Grinding, it should be that [one who performs

19. Except for the *Kol Bo* (31), who rules in accordance with the opinion of Rav Yehuda.

the same act] in an unusual manner should be exempt [by Torah law], but it should be prohibited [by rabbinic law].

ANSWER: Using a knife handle is an absolute change from the norm. Even choosing a wooden pestle over a stone pestle is unusual, as taught in the mishna in the first chapter of *Beitza* (14a) ... and [thus] a knife handle is completely unusual, and therefore it is permitted. This is similar to what we stated with regard to Selecting, that [for selecting] with a sieve or sifter, one is liable to bring a sin-offering, whereas [for selecting] with a tray or a plate, which is unusual, one is not liable, but it is prohibited; but [selecting] by hand, which is totally unusual, is permitted.

The Rid explains that grinding is generally performed with a stone pestle. When one uses a wooden pestle, this is considered unusual, and therefore the act is prohibited only by rabbinic law. When one does not use a pestle at all, but a knife handle, this is considered totally unusual, which renders the act permitted.²⁰

The **Rambam** rules in accordance with the opinion of Rava (21:20), but he adds a stipulation:

One who desires to pound peppers and similar [items] in order to place [them] in foods on Shabbat should crush with the handle of a knife **and in a bowl**, but if [he uses] a mortar he is liable, as this is grinding.

The **Rambam** maintains that one must pound **with a knife handle** and do so **in a bowl** (not a mortar). This implies that **two deviations** are necessary. This is also the ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh* (321:7).

The *Magen Avraham* (321:9) questions this ruling of the Rambam:

20. The *Mishna Berura* (321:25) notes that while grinding with a knife handle is considered an absolute change, which removes the label of Grinding from the act, grinding with a normal utensil but with a **change in the place where the grinding is performed**, for example, grinding on a tabletop instead of inside the vessel generally used for grinding, is prohibited. Although this would be considered grinding in an unusual manner, it is still prohibited by rabbinic law.

The Rambam: The leniency applies to a bowl, not a mortar

Why does he require two deviations? The Gemara does not mention such an idea in its discussion of Rava's opinion. The *Magen Avraham* therefore claims that one should understand the Rambam's statement differently: The Rambam concedes that one deviation is sufficient, and he means that one should pound "with a knife **or** in a bowl," as either option is sufficient.

By contrast, the *Taz* (321:7) writes that both conditions are indeed necessary. Why? The *Mateh Yehuda* (321:2) explains that two deviations are required, but since pounding with a knife is generally performed directly on the table or in a bowl (and only pounding with a pestle is carried out in a mortar), it was not necessary for the Gemara to mention this second deviation.

The requirement of a bowl is due to "weekday activities"

The majority of the Aḥaronim apparently maintain that a bowl is required for a different reason. The *Taz* (ad loc.) writes that one may not grind with a mortar because this is "similar to a weekday activity." The *Mishna Berura* (321:25) also states that pounding in a mortar "looks like a weekday activity."²¹ According to this explanation, there are two relevant factors here:

One must pound in an unusual manner to avoid violating the prohibition of Grinding. For this purpose, one deviation is enough, e.g., grinding with a knife handle.

One may not grind in a mortar, due to the similarity to weekday activities.

Accordingly the requirement to grind in a bowl is not due to the *halakha* that one must perform certain activities in an unusual manner. Rather, it is derived from the principle that one must avoid the appearance of weekday activities, and therefore one may not use a utensil into which one grinds on weekdays. If so, it turns out that

21. It is true that the *Mishna Berura* writes that it is permitted to pound with a knife handle on a tabletop because "these are two deviations." Yet, in light of what was stated about his opinion earlier, that the reason is due to weekday activities, it seems that although he requires two deviations, only one of them is related to the prohibition of Grinding (using the knife handle), whereas the other one (using a bowl) serves to avoid weekday activities.

there is no need for two deviations, but only **one deviation** (a knife handle or spoon). In addition, one must take care that the grinding **is not performed in a specially-designed vessel**, but rather onto a regular plate or tabletop, to avoid similarity to weekday activities.

In light of the above, **one may grind anything on Shabbat** if one does so with a **knife handle**, but not into a vessel designated for grinding (e.g., the bowl of a food processor), but only onto a normal bowl or plate, or on a table.

The *Iggerot Moshe* (*Orah Hayim* 4:74, *Tohen* 2) writes that strictly speaking, one may also mash with a **spoon**,²² and this is also the opinion of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 6, note 20). If possible, it is best to perform this grinding just before the meal.²³

Practical *halakha*:
Grinding in an
unusual manner



It is permitted to grind in an unusual manner, e.g., with a spoon or the handle of a knife, or on a plate or table.

22. “Note that the *Hazon Ish* also permits this with a deviation, and the deviation he mentions is using the handle of a knife, spoon, or fork. But it seems that the spoon and its handle are equivalent in terms of the difficulty of pulverizing, and I think that it is harder to pulverize with the spoon itself, with its rounded surface, than with the handle. If so, what is the reason that he considers using the handle a deviation? Perhaps because this is a deviation in the very nature of its use, which is to use the bowl of the spoon rather than the handle, it is preferable in his opinion” (*Iggerot Moshe*, ad loc.).

23. The *Eglei Tal* (*Tohen* 12:30) writes that it is permitted to grind in an unusual manner only **for immediate use**, and he thereby explains why the deviation in this case renders the activity permitted. Other *Aharonim* disagree, and permit grinding in an unusual manner even not for immediate use.

It is advisable to grind in an unusual manner specifically for immediate use for a different reason. The *Hazon Ish* (57. s.v. *nimtzeinu*) writes that it is permitted to mash bananas for babies in an unusual manner, with the handle of a fork. The *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* (6:8) maintains that this leniency of the *Hazon Ish* applies **only when mashing for babies**, but not for adults. This is puzzling, as the permission to grind for babies appears in the Gemara and the *Shulhan Arukh* as a leniency that is not limited to grinding for babies. Perhaps the *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* maintains that generally

Summary IN CONCLUSION, although it is prohibited to grind on Shabbat, one may grind or mash **in an unusual manner**, with a spoon or the handle of a fork. One should do this onto a table, plate, or bowl, not into a vessel which is specially designated for grinding (such as the receptacle of a food processor), and it is preferable to do so just before the meal.

two deviations are required, and one may be lenient and use only a single deviation only when grinding for babies, e.g., mashing with the handle of a fork. Yet, his wording implies that the act is prohibited if done on behalf of adults even if one employs two deviations. In light of the statements of the *Taz* and the *Mishna Berura* that in principle one deviation is sufficient, and that the need for a bowl is only due to weekday activities, it can be claimed that if one grinds with a fork handle not into a utensil designated for grinding but into a bowl or onto a plate or table, this is permitted even when grinding for adults. The *Orehot Shabbat* concurs with this ruling (5:18) and leaves the difficulty with regard to the opinion of the *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* unanswered (ad loc., note 31). In any case, although it seems that a single deviation is fundamentally sufficient, it is best to perform the act just before the meal, in order to take into account the opinion of the *Rashba* and the *Rema* that grinding for immediate use is always permitted.

VARIOUS LENIENCIES CONCERNING GRINDING

