

MAKING COFFEE ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

QUESTION How does one make a cup of instant coffee [or instant tea] on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: There is a well-known halachic principle that is cited when discussing if and how food can be "cooked" or warmed up on Shabbos: Ein bishul achar bishul, which means that once a food has been cooked before Shabbos, it cannot - in halachic terms - be "cooked" again. In other words, a food which has already been cooked cannot be subject to the prohibition of cooking on Shabbos.

Regarding making a cup of coffee on Shabbos, one could reason that since coffee beans are first roasted and then cooked while being processed into instant coffee,¹ it would be permissible to pour boiling water from an urn directly onto the [already cooked] instant coffee powder. But there are two good reasons why this is not so simple a matter:

1. While it may be true that generally, coffee beans are cooked before they are made into instant coffee, it is possible that a method other than cooking was used in the manufacturing process.² If, indeed, a process other than cooking was used, then it would be strictly prohibited to pour water directly from the urn over the coffee, since then the coffee would become cooked for the first time.
2. Some authorities maintain that instant coffee is not considered a solid food since it disintegrates completely and melts upon contact with hot water.³ Thus it would be classified halachically as a liquid. The halachah regarding liquids is that even if they were fully cooked, if they are no longer warm⁴ it is prohibited to recook them.⁵ If so, then water may not be poured directly from the urn over the instant coffee, since cooled-off liquids are subject to bishul.

Practically speaking, are these two issues a concern? While there are dissenting opinions⁶, the general consensus among contemporary poskim is that it is proper to be stringent. The poskim advise, therefore, that one first fill the coffee cup with water from the urn, and then put the instant coffee into the cup; this way the instant coffee is being put into a keli sheini (a "second vessel"), which does not have the power to recook liquids which have cooled off.⁷ Some poskim⁸ go even further and advise that one pour the water from the first cup into another cup and then put the

instant coffee in. This way, the instant coffee is being put into a keli shelishi (a "third vessel"), which has even less cooking power than a keli sheinig.

These halachos regarding instant coffee [or tea] apply also to processed sugar and artificial sweeteners.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Rabbi S. Eider writes that the procedure is as follows: After roasting the coffee beans in heat of up to 350° F, the beans are ground and cooked. Then the cooked beans are "freeze-dried" at a temperature of up to 800° F to remove all of the moisture from the beans. Based on this information, Igros Moshe O.C. 4:74-16 ruled that instant coffee is completely cooked and the rule of Ein bishul achar bishul applies.

But after first publishing this information I received the following letter: "With all due respect to your sources, I researched all the manufacturers... There are (maybe not surprisingly) very few. The largest manufacturer in the world is a company called Atlas-Stord. In extensive correspondence with their engineers and division managers I can state with 100 percent confidence that a temperature even near 800° F is impossible. The absolute maximum temperature that the coffee can possibly hit in the freeze-drying process is 60° C or 140° F. This occurs in a vacuum, and no manufacturer of this equipment could possibly make it hotter. As it is this is a very high temperature for the process and the majority of places use lower temperatures. It should be noted that the temperature dramatically effects the size of the vat used in the vacuum process, and the vats that do this are already the size of small buildings. Therefore, I am convinced that 800 °F is totally not possible. In addition I know coffee heated to even 250° F would taste horribly burned..." [See note 55.]

2 See Meor ha-Shabbos 5:25, that possibly this is current technology in some plants. See also previous note.

3 See Mishnah Berurah 318:71 concerning sugar. The halachah regarding instant coffee may be even stricter, since it is used exclusively in a liquid state.

4 "Warm" means that it is warm enough to be enjoyed as a "warm drink."

5 Rama O.C. 318:15. But it is only prohibited to recook cooled-off liquids in a keli rishon; Mishnah Berurah 318:23.

6 See Yechaveh Da'as 2:44.

7 Minchas Yitzchak 1:55; 9:27; Chelkas Yaakov 2:116; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 1, note 135). [In addition, see Igros Moshe (O.C. 4:74, Bishul 17) who debates whether or not instant coffee and tea - even if previously uncooked - have the halachical status of tavlin, spices, which do not cook altogether in a keli sheini.]

8 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Meor ha-Shabbos, vol. 1, 5:25); Shevet ha-Levi 8:63.

9 Harav M. Feinstein (Igros Moshe O.C. 4:74, Bishul 16) writes that though the halachah permits pouring hot water directly over instant coffee, he himself - for his personal use - is particular to put the coffee in a keli shelishi. [In light of the new information quoted in footnote 47, this stringency takes on added importance and relevance.]

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Rabbi Neustadt is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos.

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