

WASHING DISHES ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

As part of an overall strategy to minimize unnecessary work on Shabbos and to enhance the Shabbos day as a day of rest from all weekday chores and activities, the rabbis forbade washing dirty dishes on Shabbos unless those dishes are needed for that very Shabbos.⁽¹⁾ It is obvious, therefore, that all dishes that are to be used on Shabbos should be washed before Shabbos begins. One should not wait for Shabbos to begin to wash dirty dishes from Friday afternoon.⁽²⁾

QUESTION: Which dishes may be washed on Shabbos and which may not?

DISCUSSION:

- * It is permitted to wash dishes after the Friday night meal if they will be used for the Shabbos morning or afternoon meal. But it is forbidden to wash the Friday night dishes if they will not be used for any of the Shabbos day meals.
- * It is permitted to wash dirty dishes that accumulated from the morning or midday meals if they will be needed for the third meal (seudah shelishis) or for snacks that will be served later on in the day. It is also permitted to wash all types of dishes which are commonly used throughout the day, such as glasses, teaspoons and fruit plates, etc, unless one is sure that they will not be needed again.⁽³⁾
- * It is permitted to wash all the dirty dishes that have accumulated even though only some of them will be needed later. Even if one plate or cup will be needed, it is permitted to wash all the plates or cups that are dirty.⁽⁴⁾
- * Several poskim debate whether it is permitted to wash dirty dishes for Shabbos use even if there are other clean dishes readily available. Some forbid it,⁽⁵⁾ others discourage it,⁽⁶⁾ while yet others permit it.⁽⁷⁾ While it is customary to be lenient,⁽⁸⁾ many poskim recommend that it is appropriate to be stringent when possible.⁽⁹⁾
- * In the case of a family simchah, for example, when used dishes may pile up and create a dirty, unsightly mess, it is permitted to wash the dishes [even if they not going to be used on Shabbos], since they are being washed for the sake of oneg Shabbos and not for a weekday need.⁽¹⁰⁾
- * Dishes that may not be washed on Shabbos may still be stacked in the dishwasher.⁽¹¹⁾ One may not sort different types of dishes or cutlery before placing them in the dishwasher, even if his intention is to make room for all of the dishes. It is permitted, however, to pick up a few similar dishes, e.g., a stack of fish plates or cups, and place each dish in its designated slot. If the dishes were improperly

placed, they may not be rearranged according to size and type so that they will be ready for washing in the evening.(12)

* A dishwasher may not be operated on Shabbos, even if it was preset by a time clock.(13) It is also strictly forbidden to instruct a non-Jew - on or before Shabbos - to operate a dishwasher on Shabbos.(14)

QUESTION: Is it permitted to rinse or soak dishes that may not be washed on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: Just as it is forbidden to wash dishes that are not needed for Shabbos, so is it forbidden to rinse them(15) in preparation for washing them after Shabbos. Soaking dishes in preparation for washing them after Shabbos is also prohibited. [Note: "soaking" is only prohibited when it entails a specific, additional act, such as filling a dirty pot with water to soak it, or filling a dishpan with water on Shabbos and then placing the dirty dishes in it. If, however, a dishpan was filled before Shabbos and the dishes are merely removed from the table and deposited therein, that is permitted.]

There are, however, a number of specific cases when rinsing or soaking is allowed. It is permitted, for instance, to rinse or soak dirty dishes which will otherwise become permanently stained, will attract insects or flies, or will emit a foul odor.(16)

In addition, some poskim permit soaking dishes or pots to prevent leftover grease or soft food particles from hardening and becoming difficult to wash after Shabbos.(17) Other poskim do not agree with this leniency.(18) All poskim agree that once the residue has hardened and formed a crust, it is forbidden to rinse or soak dishes or pots to prepare them for washing after Shabbos.(19)

WHEN WASHING DISHES ON SHABBOS IT IS PROHIBITED . . .

* to turn on the hot water tap.(20) On Friday night, when the tank and the water it contains is still hot, it is strictly prohibited to turn on the hot water tap even if the boiler was turned off before Shabbos, since the tank and/or the hot water in the tank will cook the cold water which flows into it automatically.(21)

* to use a sponge, a wet cloth, a paper towel or any implement made of any other absorbent material.(22)

* to use steel wool or synthetic scouring pads which trap water between their fibers.

* to use bar soap.(23)

WHEN WASHING DISHES ON SHABBOS IT IS PERMITTED . . .

* to use hot or warm water that was heated before Shabbos. Hot water should not be poured directly over globs of fat in order to dissolve them. (24)

* to use liquid detergent.(25) It is preferable to add water to the liquid soap in order to dilute it before

Shabbos.(26)

- * to use synthetic scouring pads whose fibers are widely spaced and cannot trap water.(27)
- * to use a nylon bottle brush.(28)
- * to wear rubber or plastic gloves.
- * to plug the sink drain with a stopper.(29)
- * to empty the refuse which accumulates in the drain into a garbage can. (30)
- * under extenuating circumstances, to plunge a blocked drain with a rubber plunger.(31)

FOOTNOTES:

1 O.C. 323:6 based on the Talmud, Shabbos 118a. Rashi and Ra'avad (Hilchos Shabbos 23:7) explain that the basic concept behind this rabbinic decree is to avoid "unnecessary toil for weekday purposes." This may be the Rambam's opinion as well; see Magid Mishneh, ibid. [Based on this explanation, some poskim hold that if the dishes are washed in order to be used next Shabbos and they will not be used during the week, it is permitted to wash them (Salmas Chayim 1:75). But other poskim do not agree (Tehillah l'David 302:6), and it is customary to be stringent; see Tzitz Eliezer 14:34-2.]

2 See Machatzis ha-Shekel 302:6.

3 Mishnah Berurah 326:28, 29; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 146:16.

4 Mishnah Berurah 323:26; Aruch ha-Shulchan 326:7; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 146:16.

5 See Be'er Moshe 6:82 quoting Ohel Moed who permits washing dishes only when there are no other dishes available.

6 Tosfos Shabbos 323:8; Minchas Shabbos 80:254; Aruch ha-Shulchan 323:7.

7 Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling, quoted in Kol Hatorah, vol. 54, pg. 18); Harav Y. Kamenetsky (oral ruling, quoted in Emes L'Yaakov O.C. 323:6); Bris Olam (Ofeh 90).

8 Shevet ha-Levi 5:39.

9 B'tzeil ha-Chachmah 4:130; Shevet ha-Levi 6:42; Machazeh Eliyahu 62-3.

10 Tzitz Eliezer 14:37-1, quoting Teshuvos M'harshag O.C. 1:61, based on Mishnah Berurah 302:19. See also Da'as Torah O.C. 444:1 (s.v. v'im).

11 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:74 (rechitzah 4). But this is permitted only for those who generally clear their dirty dishes straight from the table into the dishwasher; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:35.

12 But it would be permitted to rearrange the dishes according to size or type if the intention is to

make more room for all the dishes in the dishwasher.

13 Minchas Shelomo 2:20; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:35. See also Igros Moshe O.C. 4:60 who prohibits operating any appliance on a time clock on Shabbos.

14 O.C. 307:2. A dishwasher may not be operated in one's home even if the non-Jew offers to operate the dishwasher without being told to do so; see The Monthly Halachah Discussion, pgs. 264-268 for more details.

15 When dishes are stacked in an empty sink, the routine use of the sink for washing hands or food etc. is permitted, even though the dishes in the sink will inadvertently be rinsed off; see Mishnah Berurah 321:21.

16 She'arim Metzuyanim B'halachah 80:27; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:2; Machazeh Eliyahu 55:5. [In the unlikely event that soaking or rinsing will not remedy these conditions, then washing is permitted as well.]

17 Minchas Shelomo 2:35-12; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:3; Machazeh Eliyahu 55-5.

18 See Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 1, pg. 115 quoting Harav Y.Y. Fisher; Nishmas Shabbos (O.C. 323:361).

19 Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:3.

20 If the hot water tap was turned on inadvertently, it should be turned off as quickly as possible; see Nishmas Shabbos 318:73-2. See also Shulchan Shelomo 318:1-1 and Orchos Shabbos 1:90.

21 Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:33; O.C. 5:20-4; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 1:39 and Tikunim U'miluim 31, note 4.

22 O.C. 320:17.

23 Based on Mishnah Berurah 326:30. See dissenting opinion in Yabia Omer 4:27.

24 Mishnah Berurah 253:100; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:8).

25 Aruch ha-Shulchan 326:11; Kaf ha-Chayim 326:43; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah 9:3).

26 To satisfy the view of Igros Moshe O.C. 1:113 who discourages the use of liquid soap on Shabbos; see Az Nidberu 10:16.

27 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:15). See also Yabia Omer 4:30-19.

28 Be'er Moshe 1:43.

29 Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12:16.

30 O.C. 308:34.

31 While many poskim allow unclogging a blocked sink or stuffed toilet with a plunger, there are those who do not, maintaining that this may constitute "fixing" the drain, which may be a violation of Makeh B'patish; see the various opinions in Igros Moshe O.C. 4:40-9; Minchas Yitzchak 5:75; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 12, note 50; Yabia Omer 5:33.

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