

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 they are needed for that very Shabbos. Moreover, 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.

It is permitted to wash dishes after the Friday night meal if they will be used for the Shabbos morning or afternoon meal (seudah shelishis). 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 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, fruit plates, etc., unless one is sure that they will not be needed again.

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.

Several poskim debate whether it is permitted to wash dirty dishes for Shabbos use even if there are other clean dishes readily available. While it is customary to be lenient, some poskim recommend that it is appropriate to be stringent when possible.

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.

Dishes that may not be washed on Shabbos may still be stacked in the dishwasher. 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.

A dishwasher may not be operated on Shabbos, even if it was preset by a time clock. It is also strictly

forbidden to instruct a non-Jew—on or before Shabbos—to operate a dishwasher on Shabbos.

Soaking Dishes

Just as it is forbidden to wash dishes that are not needed for Shabbos, so is it forbidden to rinse them 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.

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. Other poskim do not agree with this leniency. 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.

When washing dishes on Shabbos it is prohibited . . .

- to turn on the hot water tap. On Friday night, when the tank and the water it contains are 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.
- to use a sponge, a wet cloth, a paper towel or any implement made of any other absorbent material.
- to use steel wool or synthetic scouring pads which trap water between their fibers.
- to use bar soap.

When washing dishes on Shabbos it is permitted . . .

- to use hot or warm water that was heated and prepared in a basin before Shabbos. Hot water should not be poured directly over globs of fat in order to dissolve them.
- to use liquid detergent. It is preferable to add water to the liquid soap in order to dilute it before Shabbos.
- to use synthetic scouring pads whose fibers are widely spaced and cannot trap water (such as the round plastic "Shabbos sponges").
- to use a nylon bottle brush.
- to wear rubber or plastic gloves.
- to plug the sink drain with a stopper.

- to empty the refuse which accumulates in the drain into a garbage can.
- under extenuating circumstances, to plunge a blocked drain with a rubber plunger.

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