

COLD FOOD PREPARATION ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Eggs and Onions

Preparation of this dish, or similar ones, can involve many Shabbos Labors, among them: washing and peeling the eggs and the onions (Selecting); mashing the eggs (Grinding); dicing the onions (Grinding); mixing the eggs and onions together (Kneading); salting the onions (Tanning); adding oil as a binding ingredient (Kneading); removing egg shells from the mixture (Selecting).

In view of all these potential Shabbos violations, some poskim recommend that the eggs and onions be prepared before Shabbos. But the custom in many homes is to prepare this dish right at the Shabbos table on Shabbos morning. Also, it is noteworthy that some have the custom that the men, not the women, prepared this dish. Possibly this is due to the complexity of the issues involved. The following information, therefore, is important to review for anyone who would like to prepare eggs and onions on Shabbos:

Preparing the Ingredients

Both the eggs and onions should be peeled immediately before the meal. This means that if the meal is to start at 12:00 o'clock, for example, and it takes about thirty minutes to prepare for the meal, then the eggs and onions may be peeled at about 11:30, but not earlier. Even if the housewife would like to prepare her meal before going to shul or taking a walk, it is forbidden to do so.

The eggs and onions may be peeled by hand or with the aid of a knife only.

The eggs may be mashed with a fork or sliced with an egg slicer. A grinder [or a masher] may not be used. [If the eggs were peeled before Shabbos, they may be mashed earlier, and not necessarily immediately before the meal.]

It is strictly forbidden to cut up the onions into very small pieces (diced). However, in the event that it is difficult to eat bigger pieces of onion [or if the food is being prepared for a child], most poskim permit dicing the onions into small pieces, provided that they are diced immediately before the meal. [Another option is to cut the onions into little pieces in an unusual manner—with a spoon or with the handle of a knife or fork, but this is not practical.]

Mixing the Ingredients

The eggs and onions may be mixed together.

The eggs and onions together may be salted, especially if the mixture is going to contain oil or mayonnaise. But the onions alone should not be left salted [or immersed in vinegar] for any length of time.

The proper method for the next step in making eggs and onions—adding oil to the mixture—was hotly debated among the poskim of the past generations, since adding oil may be a violation of the forbidden Shabbos Labor of Kneading. Apparently, it was a widely-held custom to add oil to the mixture in the normal manner, and many leading poskim approved of it. Indeed, several contemporary authorities agree that the custom is firmly grounded in Halachah and may be followed. The oil should be added immediately before the meal, and in small quantities only.

Nonetheless, the poskim are of the opinion that it is halachically preferable to add and mix the oil in a way that is altogether different from the way it is done ordinarily: a) the oil must be poured into the bowl first, and then the eggs and onions added; b) the mixture may not be stirred vigorously—it may only be mixed in one of the following ways, in order of halachic preference: with one's finger; by shaking the bowl; with a knife, fork, or spoon but only in a criss-cross pattern (up and down and left to right), not around and around in the normal mixing motion; with a utensil not normally used for mixing; with the handle of a knife or a spoon.

When mayonnaise is being used instead of oil, the same procedure is followed, except that there is no need to reverse the order and place the mayonnaise in the bowl before the eggs and the onions (as is required when using oil).

Serving the Mixture

Pieces of cooked potato may be added and mixed into the egg-onion mixture.

If, after the mixture is prepared, an eggshell is found in it, the shell may not be removed from the mixture. Rather, the proper procedure is to leave the eggshell and the food that is around it in the bowl, and lift all of the rest of the mixture out of the mixing bowl and into another dish. Some poskim are more lenient and permit removing the shell provided that some of the mixture is removed with it. Other poskim strictly prohibit removing the shell in this manner, and it is proper to be stringent.

When the mixture is ready, it is proper to leave it as is and not smooth it down, shape it, etc. It is permitted, however, to use a scoop for serving individual portions.

Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2011 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com