

Preparing and Serving Food on Shabbat

RABBI KASSEL ABELSON

This paper was adopted as the Majority Opinion on November 4, 1981 by a vote of 6-3-7. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Edward M. Gershfield, David Graubart, David H. Lincoln, David Novak and Henry A. Sosland. Members voting in opposition: Rabbis David M. Feldman, Mayer E. Rabinowitz and Joel Roth. Members abstaining: Rabbis Jacob Agus, Ben Zion Bokser, Robert Gordis, Salamon Faber, Wolfe Kelman, Morris M. Shapiro and Harry Z. Sky.

Note: "Preparation and Serving of Food on Shabbat in the Synagogue," a paper by Rabbi Mayer E. Rabinowitz, was adopted as a Minority Opinion on November 4, 1981 by a vote of 3-6-7. It appears following this paper.

The synagogue is the focal point for the Jewish life of its congregants. Life cycle ceremonies commonly take place in the synagogue. The *seudat mitzvah* which follows should also be held in the synagogue, and not in a non-kosher hotel or restaurant where non-observance of dietary laws and open *hillul Shabbat* are common. Hence, every effort must be made to encourage families to hold their *seudot mitzvah* in the synagogue. When such events are scheduled for Shabbat or Saturday night, questions arise about the possible violation of Sabbath laws and standards in the course of the preparation and serving of the meal. These questions should be resolved in ways that do not put onerous burdens on families who bring such events to the synagogue. We should not hesitate to utilize the methods developed by past generations to mitigate the too rigorous application of the Sabbath laws, and to develop new and creative responses, in the spirit of Masorti Judaism, which will preserve and enhance the spirit of Shabbat. In this spirit, it is recommended that the following standards be observed by synagogue catering committees and by professional caterers.

MEALS ON SHABBAT

- (1) All deliveries to the synagogue must be completed by 3:00 P.M. on Friday. Nothing can be removed until Shabbat is over.

- (2) All cooking for a meal to be served on Shabbat must be completed before Shabbat begins.
- (3) Cooked solid foods may be warmed up on Shabbat -- *ein bishul ahar bishul* (cooked foods cannot be 'cooked' again) -- and *mitztamek vera lo* (the quality of reheated food suffers).
- (4) Refrigerated liquid foods which have been cooked before Shabbat may be reheated, but not boiled. To avoid boiling, one may place the pot on a burner covered by a tin plate (*blech*). Alternatively, a non-Jew may set the burner control to simmer and place the pot on the burner.
- (5) Coffee or water for tea should be prepared in thermostatically controlled urns prior to Shabbat. The urns should be left hot (overnight) until the coffee or water is used. There should be enough capacity in the urns to meet all needs on Shabbat. However, if it is anticipated that demand will outrun supply, then additional water may be boiled before Shabbat and left standing at room temperature. The water should be added gradually, before the urns empty, so that the boiling process does not begin again. The water storage containers should be labeled to avoid error. A non-Jew may refill the urns when necessary, on the assumption that (s)he will drink a cup of tea or coffee. Where possible, automatic devices are preferable.
- (6) Frozen foods which are cooked before freezing may be thawed and warmed. Frozen foods which require cooking before being eaten may not be cooked on Shabbat.
- (7) If the stoves do not have automatic controls, non-Jewish kitchen help should be informed before Shabbat that among their duties is the responsibility to see that the stoves are lit and the controls set to the proper temperature. (It is dangerous and wasteful of energy to leave stoves and ovens on for 24 hours.)
- (8) Cans may be opened on Shabbat, but only for use on Shabbat (*Orah Hayyim* 314:6).
- (9) Tables may be set, and dishes cleared and washed.

SATURDAY NIGHT MEALS

- (1) All deliveries must be made by 3:00 P.M. on Friday, or after Shabbat officially ends. According to Rabbi Isaac Klein, the minimum period one should wait after the astronomical sunset before terminating the Shabbat, on the longest Shabbat of the year, is 25 minutes (i.e., 43 minutes after the time the candles were lit on Friday). The time will vary slightly depending on time of year and longitude. [See Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), p. 57.]

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- (2) Caterers should not begin to cook, nor guests arrive, before the end of Shabbat.
- (3) It is preferable to have food cooked or partially cooked before Shabbat begins, and then reheated or finished after sunset. Where the menu calls for newly prepared food, cooking cannot begin until Shabbat ends.
- (4) Since non-Jewish employees can be assigned specific duties to be performed on Shabbat, as part of their total job responsibilities (See Klein, 91; *Orah Hayyim* 244:5; 252:2), they should be told before Shabbat to clean up, sweep, set tables, etc. However, these duties should not be performed 'publicly,' but after morning services when the congregation has left, or behind closed doors.

