

HALOCHOSCOPE TOI

A clean replacement used thermocouple from a non-kosher oven was placed into a kosher oven. Does the kosher oven now need to be *Kashered*?

The issues:

(A) *Ta'am Ke'ikar* and *Balua*, how utensils absorb non-kosher flavor

(B) Kashering an oven

(C) The status of the thermocouple

(A) *Ta'am Ke'ikar* and *Balua*

When food is cooked in a utensil, particularly metal and earthenware, its *Ta'am*, flavor is absorbed or *Balua*, swallowed. This flavor will then be imparted by the utensil to the food next cooked in the same pot. If the food first cooked in the pot was forbidden, its flavor is also forbidden. This is known as *Ta'am-*, the flavor, *-Ke'ikar*, is like the actual food. That is, in terms of restrictions, just as the Torah forbids the actual food, its taste is also forbidden. In practical terms, kosher food with the flavor of the forbidden food is also forbidden. Thus, unless the second food is able to counteract the taste of the first food, the second food is also forbidden.

It is assumed that one part of forbidden food can not impart a trace of its flavor to sixty parts of other food. However, if the proportion of forbidden food cooked with kosher food was greater than this, the kosher food is rendered unkosher. It is also assumed that a pot can absorb all the flavor of a food cooked inside it, provided that the pot's volume is equal or more. Then, any time more food is cooked in this pot, all of this absorbed flavor could be imparted to the food cooked later. Thus, each time fresh food is cooked therein, the fresh food must be able to neutralize the forbidden flavor. If the pot is full to capacity, it will not absorb the equivalent of the entire capacity, but its walls will be saturated. If its walls are the equivalent in volume of ten cubic inches, this is the amount that will need to be neutralized by the next food cooked in there. Most pots do not have the capacity to hold sixty times the volume of their walls.

Therefore, the pot may not be used until it has been cleansed of the unkosher flavor. Even if the maximum unkosher taste is so little that when the pot is full

or half-full it will be neutralized, one may not use it. The only exception to this rule is *Kli Shefa*, a large pot never used for small amounts, that happened to absorb a very small amount of unkosher food. Some Poskim maintain that the dispensation of *Kli Shefa* only works if the nonkosher *Ta'am* is already *Pagum*. This dispensation may be used occasionally. Since this ruling is contested, and using the *Kli* also involves intentionally neutralizing forbidden food which is normally forbidden, it must eventually be *Kashered*.

Before *Kashering* a utensil, one must be sure to remove all physical particles of the original non kosher food. Physical food retains its original prohibition, and when reheated together with the utensil, simply imparts its flavor to it again, forbidding it anew. The utensil should not be used twenty-four hours before it is *Kashered*. There is always a concern that the water used becomes unkosher and is reabsorbed. After twenty-four hours, though the pot may not be used for food, the flavor is *Pagum*, not beneficial to the food or water cooked in it. (Bad unkosher flavor is considered neutral even if it is detected.) It is then *Kashered*.

A utensil is *Kashered* consistent with its normal use — *Kebol'o Kach Polto*, one extracts the flavor in the same way it was absorbed. In some cases extracting it is not possible, and the only way it can be removed is by destroying it. Most *Kashering* involves a *Kli Rishon*, a pot used in the cooking stage of the process. Foods cooked in a pot are absorbed through the medium of boiling liquid, and are thus extracted through this method of *Kashering*. The pot is suspended in boiling water for the time it takes to loosen and remove the absorbed flavor. [If the pot is too big to fit in another pot, various alternatives, such as overflowing it with something very hot, are suggested.] If it absorbed food through use with hot food, though not cooking, the same procedure is usually done. This is called *Hag'ala*.

If food was roasted dry, the flavor will not be removed through boiling. The utensil must be heated to the point that the absorbed flavor would be burned in its place. Although these procedures resemble sterilization, sterilizing alone is not necessarily sufficient. [It is possible to sterilize flavor of germs but the *Belia* will still retain its taste.] There are two methods of heating: *Libun Chamur*, strong heating with direct fire such that the top layer of metal becomes red hot. *Libun Kal*, moderate heating, means heating it to the point that straw (or tissue paper) would begin to char if it touches the metal. Where the utensil had direct contact with a fire when unkosher food was cooked on it, *Libun Chamur* is required. In some other instances, such as when the heat was indirect or when the food was not forbidden (for example *Kashering* a dairy utensil for use with meat) *Libun Kal* suffices.

If food was poured out of a *Kli Rishon* into a second *Kli*, known as *Kli Sheini*, may be *Kashered* in the same way — boiling water is poured into or onto it. This is known as *Iruy*, pouring. If a utensil was used without ever having *Iruy* from a *Kli Rishon*, but with “second-hand” hot food, it might not require *Kashering*. The heat of the food is too low to cause the flavor to be imparted. Since some foods, due to their bulk etc., are considered hot enough to impart flavor to a *Kli Sheini*, and there are opinions that though a *Kli Sheini* could not cook, it could absorb *Belia*, in such cases a competent authority should be consulted.

Some utensils can not be *Kashered* with *Hag'ala* due to their construction. Parts of the *Kli* might have food lodged in them, or the material is too absorbent to be cleansed with water etc. In these cases *Libun* is used. Earthenware, porcelain and enamel utensils absorb *Belia* too well, and *Hag'ala* is not able to remove it. It will however, continuously impart some of its flavor into food cooked subsequently. They may not be *Kashered* with *Libun* either. Due to their fragility when exposed to too much heat, it is likely that they will not be heated hot enough. They may be *Kashered* by firing them in the type of kiln used to bake them. Heat resistant plastics are considered earthenware by many Poskim for these purposes. However, they are not always baked, and when they are, it is not necessarily at a high enough temperature to be considered even *Libun Kal*. It is, therefore, usually not possible to *Kasher* plastics. [See Chulin 97-99 Pesachim 30a-b 44 Avoda Zara 75b-76b Zevachim 97a commentaries, Poskim, Tur, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 451-2 Yoreh Deah 98 99:(esp. 7) 121 122, commentaries. Halochoscope I:31 37. II:39.]

(B) *Belia in ovens*

Foods are cooked in ovens with or without a liquid. It is therefore assumed that its usual use is the more serious of these, i.e. cooking without water, and the oven is *Kashered* accordingly. Some Poskim require *Libun Chamur*. Other Poskim maintain that our types of oven are not used in direct contact with the food, as were bakers ovens in earlier times. Only the broiler pan is used in direct contact with the fire. All other food is cooked in there on pans. The main way it is *Boleia* is through fumes in its atmosphere. A spill on the oven floor is not its most frequent use. Some foods are placed on the floor of the oven, but the rest of it is not used with the food. In this respect it is like a *Kli Shefa*.

Fumes are considered either *Raicha*, a smell rather than *Taam*, flavor, or *Zei'a*, steam. *Raicha* is less stringent than *Ta'am*, and were it not for certain stringencies and concern about the surfaces of the oven and racks, might not even forbid kosher

food. Vented ovens, especially larger than a certain size, do not even pose a Raicha issue when two foods are cooked together. Initially, one may not disregard Raicha, but if foods were cooked in proximity Raicha alone will often not forbid them. Zei'a is a more serious, being airborne particles containing Taam. The top and side walls of the oven can absorb steam. Accordingly, an oven may not be used for both meat and dairy items at the same time. Since meat and dairy are kosher when separate, some Poskim permit it to be used for one immediately after the other, after wiping up spills. Others require steaming it out first, and some require waiting twenty-four hours before using it, maybe in addition to steaming it. If either food is well covered, and there is no moisture on the outside of the utensil or on the racks, most Poskim maintain that this is unnecessary.

Since its manner of Belia is not as stringent, some Poskim permit Kashering an unkosher oven with Libun Kal. In this case, this means heating it on its highest setting for at least one hour. [See Pesachim 76b Avoda Zara 66b Yoreh Deah 97 108 commentaries Poskim. Hilchos Pesach (R. Eider) XVI:E, references.]

(C) The thermocouple

One factor to mitigate the requirement to Kasher the oven due to the thermocouple is Kli Shefa. The rest of the oven is known to be kosher. It is used for quantities too large to be tainted by the Balua of the thermocouple. If the oven is used occasionally for a small quantity of food, such that the steam possible to fall onto the food from the thermocouple would not be neutralized, this factor does not apply. Using it for any amount is then forbidden due to concern that one might forget and use it for small quantities. It must be determined whether the amount of steam that could come of the thermocouple is sufficient to forbid the small amounts normally cooked in this oven, such as cookies.

Sometimes, a thermocouple does not extend across the roof of the oven, but along the side or back of the oven. If it will not touch a utensil, the single issue is its steam, which usually falls straight down. The likelihood of this being able to forbid the food in the oven is reduced, once again to make it similar to a Kli Shefa. Under such circumstances, one might again be allowed to use it without Kashering after it has been unused for twenty-four hours. Though Kli Shefa may only be used short term, periodically, people Kasher their ovens anyhow. For the meantime, one may rely on Kli Shefa, to use the oven as is.