YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**LAWS OF SHABBAT: COOKING**

**By Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon**

**Shiur21 – *Hatmana* (Insulation)**

**Chapter XXI) Insulation**

May one cover pots on the *plata* or *blech* with blankets? Is it permissible to do so on Shabbat itself?

May one use a “*plata* cover”?

**The Double Prohibition of *Hatmana***

This prohibition has many details, and we will suffice here with the principles and practical matters. There are two types of *hatmana*, depending on whether the insulation material adds heat (*mosif hevel*) or not (*eino mosif hevel*). Materials that add heat include peat, compost and salt. (Mishna, 47b).

The Gemara (Shabbat 34a) indicates that in the context of the prohibition of *hatmana* the Sages forbid two things:

1. On Shabbat itself, even something that doesn’t add heat may not be used to insulate food on Shabbat itself.
2. Even on Friday, something that adds heatmay not be used to insulate food for Shabbat.

The Gemara explains that the two prohibitions have different reasons. The Rishonim argue, following different texts, which reason applies to which prohibition. We will explain the view of Rashi. This is what the Gemara says according to his version:

Rava said: “Why was it said that one must not do *hatmana* after nightfall, [even] by means of something that doesn’t add heat? For fear lest he make [the pot] boil.” […]

Rava also said: “Why was it said that one must not do *hatmana* by means of something that adds heat, even by day? For fear lest he insulate in hot ashes containing a burning coal.”

Abbayei said to him, “Then let him insulate! We fear lest he rake the coals.”

If so, insulating by means of something that **doesn’t add heat** is forbidden **because one may make the pot boil**. When one covers the pot withsomething that doesn’t add heat, he first ascertains that the pot is sufficiently hot, so it will remain warm until the meal. Therefore, **when one is setting up the *hatmana* for a pot**, there is a great concern that **one may boil** it, so that it will actually be hot at the time of *hatmana*. This concern exists specifically at this time, and therefore the problem exists only on Shabbat. Before Shabbat, there is no problem of insulating by means of something that doesn’t add heat, because there is no problem if one actually wants to boil the food beforehand.[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, **when it comes to insulation by means of something that adds heat,** the concern is that **one may use ashes**; if we allow that, he might even use hot ashes that still contain smoldering coals. Then one might rake these coals in order to “turn up” the heat, violating the biblical prohibition of kindling. This concern exists even when one does this **before Shabbat**, because **during Shabbat** one might rake the coals to increase the heat of the pot. Therefore, the Sages forbidinsulation by means of something that adds heat, **even if one insulates before Shabbat begins.**

**Covering with Cloth**

Even in modern times, we often insulate by means of something that doesn’t add heat, such as towels or blankets. On the other hand, we do not insulate by means of something that adds heat. So is the law still relevant?

**Argument of the Rishonim**

This is dependent on an argument among the Rishonim, who discuss “mixed *hatmana*” **before the commencement of Shabbat**: may one leave a pot on the fire and cover it withsomething that doesn’t add heat, such as blankets? The Ran (47b) cites an argument about this:

There is a dispute about this, for some say… that since the pot does not touch peat, this is *shehiya* (retention), not *hatmana*… Even though one has put something that doesn’t add heat on top, it is still allowed, because *hatmana* is allowed when using something that doesn’t add heat; thus the *shihuy* (retention) below is independent, and the *hatmana* above is independent, and each is allowed…

Our current custom follows this view: one may do *hatmana* with cloth or anything else that doesn’t add heat, and the stewpot may sit on the sprinkled stove, which does add heat, but this is permitted, because the *shehiya* is independent, as is the *hatmana*… This is the view of the Ramban, *z”l*.

On the other hand, Rabbeinu Yona, *z”l*, writes… that when we allow *shehiya* on top of the sprinkled stove, even though it adds heat, this is only if there is no *hatmana* above… However, if there is *hatmana*, one demonstrates that he is preoccupied with its heat, and he needs it for the next day, and because of this, one may not leave it atop a sprinkled stove or anything thatadds heat, lest one come to stoke…

This is the view of the Rashba, *z”l,* as well.

Thus, the Ramban sees this as the juxtaposition of permitted *shehiya* and permitted *hatmana*, while the Rashba and Rabbeinu Yona argue that there is no such thing: while the Sages do allow *shehiya* under certain conditions and do allow *hatmana* under certain conditions, they would not permit doing both simultaneously, as in this case, the latter undermines the former: one demonstrates that the heat of the food is of paramount importance by doing *hatmana* above, so that the concern about stoking the coals is still problematic.

**Shulchan Arukh**

The Shulchan Arukh (257:8) adopts the view of Rabbeinu Yona and the Rashba:

Even though one may leave a pot on a coal-fueled stove according to the conditions we mentioned in Chapter 253, if it is covered with cloth — despite the fact that the cloth does not in itself add heat — the fire beneath it adds heat (and the pot may not be left there).

The Shulchan Arukh explains the reasoning in a slightly different way than Rabbeinu Yona and the Rashba do. In his view, it is true that initially the cloth does not add heat, but since it is on something hot, it becomes hot andadds heat.

**On a *Plata***

In light of this, one may not put a towel over a pot on the *plata*, even before Shabbat, because this is considered *hatmana* by means of something that adds heat. In fact, it is forbidden to cover the pot even if it is atop another, because ultimately the cover heats up (via the *plata* or the lower pot), and it is considered to add heat.

**PARTIAL INSULATION**

**Touching the Coals**

Is there any permissible way to cover the pots on the *plata*? In order to clarify this, we should examine what is defined as *hatmana*. What about partial covering? This seems to be a matter of dispute. Rabbeinu Chananel (37a) indicates that not only is partial *hatmana* considered *hatmana*, but even if only the bottom of the vessel touches the heat source, it is still considered *hatmana*:

This *shehiya* is not *hatmana* unless it is like a metal seat for the pot while it sits on stones and the like, but *hatmana* over coals is forbidden according to everyone, for we have established that *hatmana* that adds heat is forbidden even while it is still day.

In his view, even if the pot **sits on coals**, this is *hatmana*, and only if it is suspended in the air can we look at it as *shehiya*.

Rabbeinu Tam (*Sefer Ha-yashar*, ch. 235) believes otherwise:

The way that we do *hatmana* for our hot food — even though there are some cinders that are as tall as a finger — is not prohibited, because *hatmana* means **that most or all of it is covered.**

In his view, it is not *hatmana* unless most or all of the pot is covered.

**Ruling**

The Shulchan Arukh (253:1) rules in accordance with Rabbeinu Chananel, quoting him virtually verbatim, but the Rema is lenient:

There are those who say that even if the pot is actually standing on the fire, as long as it is uncovered above, this is not called insulation, and it is allowed. This is the custom.

From this we may conclude that Sefardim are not allowed to cover the pot on the *plata* even partially, and apparently according to them it is forbidden to put a pot on top of a *plata* before Shabbat even if it is not covered at all, because it is “covered” on its bottom by the hot *plata*.

On the other hand, according to the Ashkenazim, one is allowed to put a pot on the *plata* and even cover it with a blanket, if it does not cover all of it.

We will try to clarify part of this law, for Sefardim and for Ashkenazim.

***Hatmana* for Ashkenazim**

As we have seen, Ashkenazim allow partial *hatmana*. What exactly is the definition of this?

The Chayei Adam (2:5) writes that only when one insulates above and below and from all sides is it considered *hatmana*. However, elsewhere (20:22), he contradicts himself and writes that partial *hatmana* is only when less than half of the surface of the pot is covered.

Similarly, the Mishna Berura (253:69) writes that if one insulates with pillows and leaves an opening above, this is not *hatmana*, while elsewhere (257:43) he writes that only if it is half-uncovered is this true.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Halakha**

For Ashkenazim, Rav Feinstein (4) rules that only if the pot is covered above and on the sides is it considered *hatmana*, and this is the ruling of Rav Neuwirth (*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilkhata* 1:66).[[3]](#footnote-3) According to this, *hatmana* requires that everything be covered. Indeed, one should leave a significant portion, rather than a symbolic portion, uncovered.

For Sefardim, based on what we see in the Shulchan Arukh, every time one puts a dish on a heat source, he violates partial *hatmana*, even if the dish is not covered at all. Rav Mordekhai Eliyahu concurs with this ruling, and therefore he designed a special *plata* in which the standard metal encasing the element is covered by another metal plate (with air in between).

Rav Ovadya Yosef (*Yabbia Omer*, Vol. VI, *OC*, 32:5) is lenient for a number of reasons. The central reason is that the pot does not stand directly on the heating element; there is air dividing the heating element from the metal of the *plata*, and even the metal itself divides between the heating element and the pot, so this is not considered partial *hatmana*.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Another Consideration**

There is another reason to be lenient about this, in light of the words of Tosafot (48a, s.v. *De-zeitim*):

This is puzzling: how can we insulate upon our stoves… even though we may sweep it, it adds heat just like olive peat! The Ri says that we may give a reason to justify this custom, for regarding peat there is a concern that he will totally bury the dish in it, but in stoves, this is not applicable.

According to Tosafot, partial *hatmana* is a concern only if it is physically possible to totally surround the pot with the heat source, such as peat or coals, but there is no such concern with a hot stove, since one cannot bury a pot in it. According to this, even those who are stringent about partial *hatmana* are allowed to set up a pot on Friday on a *plata* or *blech*, since one cannot use them for *hatmana*.[[5]](#footnote-5) So writes the Tefilla Le-Moshe (Vol. I, 1:15-17).

Nevertheless, once the pot is set on the *plata*, Sefardim have no allowance to cover it with blankets, because it is physically possible to entirely insulate the pot with blankets, creating something that adds heat, as we saw above.

**Not Touching the Walls**

Is there any way for Sefardim to cover the pots on the *plata*?

Tosafot (ad loc*.*) offer a suggestion:

Some dig a large hole, making a building of bricks around from every side and below; they heat it well and sweep it, and then they insulate the pot in it.

Why is this not *hatmana*, considering that the pot is totally surrounded by the fire pit’s walls?

This is not comparable to *hatmana* with something that adds heat, because that is forbidden only when one packs around [the pot] something akin to hot ashes, but concerning an oven or hole in which there’s air between walls and the pot, one need not forbid more than *shehiya*, even though the entire pot is in the oven.

Thus, according to Tosafot, **the air space** between the pot and the walls removes it from the category of *hatmana*. Based on this, one may conclude that leaving the pot in the oven is not considered *hatmana* (although there are other problems in this act of *shehiya*, as we have seen previously). This is true even if the pot touches one of the oven walls, because there’s space between the pot and the other walls (Bei’ur Halakha 257:8, s.v. *Sharei*).

**A Wide Cover**

According to the same principle, a pot sitting on the fire or on the *plata* may be covered with cloth, if we make sure there’s air between the cloth and the sides of the pot. This is how the Shulchan Arukh (257:8) rules:

However, as long as the cloth does not touch the pot [walls], even though there is a fire below it, since one does not do it in the way of *hatmana*, it is permissible…

If one puts on the pot a wide utensil that does not touch the sides of the pot, and one puts cloth on the wide utensil, this is permissible; since the cloth is put only on the wide vessel and does not touch the pot walls, there is no [violation of] *hatmana*.

Creating air space is thus effective according to Sefardim as well. It may be that according to this, one may use a blanket to directly cover a number of pots, so that the cover is not tightly packed around each individual pot (and there is always some space between the pots, at least in relation to most of the pot), but it is worthwhile in any case to leave one side open, since one could consider all the pots as one with respect to *hatmana*.

**Rav Ovadya**

According to Rav Ovadya Yosef (*Yabbia Omer*, Vol. VI, OC, ch. 33), when we are talking about pots sitting **on a *plata***, one may be lenient and cover them **before Shabbat** fully, even without air space. In his view, since the prohibition of *hatmana* before Shabbat is based on the concern of stoking, when we are talking about a *plata* — in which case it is impossible to stoke or turn up the heat — the prohibition is inapplicable.[[6]](#footnote-6) This ruling is based not on Sefardic custom, but upon the principles of the Rishonim and the halakhic authorities, and therefore even Ashkenazim who want to be lenient in this way may do so.

**On Shabbat**

However, **on Shabbat itself**, there is no allowance to cover the pot tightly and completely, even if it is on a *plata*, since the prohibition of *hatmana* on Shabbat is based on the concern that one may cause a pot to boil before *hatmana*, and that concern exists when the *hatmana* is on the *plata* as well, even if the *hatmana* is by means of something that doesn’t add heat — for example, one covers a pot sitting on the countertop with a blanket. Therefore, one may cover a pot on Shabbat itself only partially (Ashkenazim) or if leaving space between the pot and the covering.

**Summary**

Practically, when it comes to **putting a pot on the *plata* before Shabbat,** some Sefardim are stringent not to put food directly on the *plata* but only on top of an empty vessel; however, many are lenient about putting food on the *plata* without any suspicion of *hatmana*. According to Ashkenazim, placing on the *plata* is not considered *hatmana*, and therefore it is certainly allowed before Shabbat.

**As for covering the pot with blankets and the like, before Shabbat** one may cover the pot, but according to Sefardim it is worth being stringent to ensure that there is air between the pot and the cover, and according to Ashkenazim, one may cover the pot tightly, as long as one leaves part of it uncovered.

However, when the pot is put on the *plata*, one who is lenient and covers it tightly and fully has upon whom to rely. **On Shabbat itself**, one may not cover the pot tightly and fully; rather, one must maintain the air space between the cover and the pot or (according to Ashkenazim) leave a small but significant part of it uncovered.

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

Insulation

By Means of Something That Doesn’t Add Heat(only maintaining heat, e.g., blankets)

By Means of Something That Adds *Heat*

**On Shabbat itself,** according to all views, one should not cover the *plata* tightly and fully, lest one make the pot boil before *hatmana*. Rather, one should cover the pot partially way (Ashkenazim) or maintain some air space between the cover and the pot (see the following diagram).

**Rav Ovadya:** One may cover the pot on the *plata* before Shabbat, for it is impossible to adjust its heat, and there is no concern of stoking.

The **Shulchan Arukh** rules this way.

This is forbidden even before Shabbat, lest one insulate with coals and over Shabbat come to stoke and ignite them.

**Rav Neuwirth:** Therefore, it is forbidden to cover the pot with blankets tightly and fully even before Shabbat.

**Rabbeinu Yona, Rashba:** It is forbidden before Shabbat, since one reveals his intent: he is interested in heating the pot, because the blankets grow hot from the fire and are considered to be adding heat.

**Ramban:** The blankets do not add heat, and therefore it is permitted to cover the pot, even fully, before Shabbat.

It is forbidden only on Shabbat, lest one boil the pot before the *hatmana*.

**Rabbeinu Chananel:** Even if the pot touches the heating element below, or the pot is partially covered, this is considered *hatmana.*

**Rabbeinu Tam:** Only covering the entire pot or most of it is considered *hatmana*.

Partial Insulation

According to all views, one may cover the pot with blankets even on Shabbat itself((on the *plata/blech* or off? if on, “all views” *don’t* allow this -- R. Chananel and R. Eliyahu would forbid)), if there is air space between the pot walls and the cover.

**Rav Mordechai Eliyahu:** Therefore, it is forbidden for Sefardim to put dishes on a regular *plata*, since the bottom is touching the heating element.

This is the ruling of the **Shulchan Arukh**.

According to Ashkenazim, one is permitted to cover a pot with blankets before Shabbat. One may do so even on Shabbat if he does not cover the pot on all sides, leaving a significant part uncovered.

Many allow even Sefardim to put dishes on a *plata*, because one cannot insulate using it and there is a division between the heating element and the pot.

**Covering the pot with blankets:**

If a pot is sitting on the fire, it is forbidden according to all views for Sefardim to cover it, even partially and before Shabbat, since this is partial *hatmana*.

If the pot is on the *plata*, Sefardim may cover it on Shabbat, but there are those who are lenient about covering it before Shabbat, for the decree of *hatmana* before Shabbat might not apply to the *plata* (see the previous diagram).

This is the ruling of the **Rema**.

1. The Yerushalmi (4:1) notes additional explanations for the prohibition of *hatmana* on Shabbat even if insulating by means of something that doesn’t add heat: a) instead of coming to the study hall on Friday night, one will be busy with *hatmana*; b) others may suspect that one has not sufficiently prepared for Shabbat (Penei Moshe) or that one it is cooking on Shabbat (Korban Ha-eda). These reasons are not mentioned by halakhic authorities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It may be that when it comes to something that doesn’t add heat, only fully covering the pot with it is forbidden, whereas if something that adds heat, even covering most of the pot with it is forbidden. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is not clear how we have reached this decision, because Rabbeinu Tam is stringent about this, and there are also a number of contradictions in the Mishna Berura and Chayei Adam. In any case, since the great authorities have decided leniently, and since this has echoes among the Rishonim and is a question of rabbinical law, it appears that one may rule accordingly. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to this view, one may be lenient, not only with a *plata* but even with a *blech*. Below we will see that according to the view of Rav Ovadya, one may be even more lenient: *hatmana* does not apply at all (even if one uses blankets), since a *plata*’s heat cannot be increased. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to this approach, Sefardim would be allowed to leave pots even **on an open flame,** because it’s impossible to insulate them, while according to the view of Rav Ovadya Yosef, this is forbidden because of *hatmana*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ***Hatmana* in an oven sealed with clay** depends on a dispute among Acharonim. The Mishna Berura (257:47) cites a dispute about whether one may cover a pot with coals when it is found in an **oven sealed with clay.** The Eliya Rabba and others allow it, because there is no concern that the person will stoke the coals, while the Maharshal and others forbid this. According to the Maharshal, the prohibition of *hatmana* is not based on the concern that **one may rake the coals on *this* Shabbat.** The prohibition relates even to something that doesn’t add heat, which cannot be stoked, such as peat and fertilizer, and it emanates from the concern that the person will come **on another Shabbat** to insulate with hot ashes, and then he will stoke the coals. Therefore one may forbid *hatmana* even in an oven daubed with clay, even though right now one cannot stoke the coals. It makes sense that according to the Eliya Rabba and his colleagues, specifically with peat and the like, there is a concern of *hatmana* lest a person insulate with hot ashes and not pay attention to the distinction, while an oven daubed with clay has a clear barrier that prevents stoking the coals, and no one will think *hatmana* is permissible without this barrier.

   In fact, the Mishna Berura concludes that it is good to be stringent ab initio, but in *Shaar Ha-tziyun* (46), he writes that in the words of the Or Zarua (Vol. II, ch. 8), it appears that he is lenient. If the Maharshal had seen this, he presumably would not have been as stringent. Rav Ovadya (loc. cit.) follows the Or Zarua, that even on a *plata* there is no issue of *hatmana*, since a person has no access to the heating element, so it is similar to an oven daubed with clay. (However, the Chazon Ish, 37:20, explains the Or Zarua’s view differently, and he concludes that one should be stringent about an oven daubed with clay; this is the view of most Acharonim concerning the *plata*.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)