



Salt, Kosher, and Shabbat – Part One

One of the foundations of modern kosher supervision is a thorough understanding of manufacturing procedures and production methods. Rabbis at the Orthodox Union (OU) Kosher not only possess deep knowledge of how to apply halacha (Jewish law) to the products they supervise, but they also take responsibility for understanding precisely how those products are manufactured.

This expertise often affects areas of halacha beyond the narrow realm of kashrut. Many areas of halacha are intertwined, and because kashrut encompasses so many aspects of modern food production, other halachic subjects frequently intersect with it. As a result, broader halachic issues are often clarified and elaborated through the lens of kosher supervision.

KOSHER SALT PRODUCTION

Table salt is one of the most common household ingredients. From a kashrut perspective, salt is generally considered innocuous. Even modern additives such as calcium silicate or potassium iodide are simple compounds that typically do not pose kashrut concerns.

However, the method by which salt is produced can have significant implications in the realm of Hilchot Shabbat, particularly with

regard to the laws of cooking (*bishul*).

There are three primary methods used to produce salt:

1. Rock Salt Mining

Salt is extracted from underground mines, then crushed, filtered, and packaged. In this method, the salt itself is not subjected to a cooking process.

2. Solar Evaporation

Seawater is collected in large ponds, where the sun gradually evaporates the water, leaving salt deposits behind. The salt is then further dried in ovens heated to approximately 200–300°F for about ten minutes.

This method is viable only in regions with warm, dry climates and extended rain-free periods, such as Australia, California, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean.

3. Solution Mining

In this process, water is pumped into underground salt deposits, creating brine (a salt-water solution). The brine is then extracted and brought to a boil, causing the water to evaporate as steam and leaving salt crystals behind.

Boiling is typically performed in a multiple-effect evaporator system. Pressure decreases from the first chamber to the last (approaching a vacuum), allowing the brine to boil efficiently at progressively lower temperatures.

THE SHABBAT QUESTION

Given these production methods, a halachic question arises: May one add salt to hot food on Shabbat?



In general, Hilchot Shabbat prohibits cooking uncooked food on Shabbat. Adding an uncooked substance to hot food under certain conditions may constitute a serious biblical violation.

If salt were produced through rock salt mining and had not undergone any cooking process, it could potentially be considered uncooked. In such a case, adding it to sufficiently hot food on Shabbat might be prohibited.

By contrast, salt produced through solar evaporation (which includes oven drying) or solution mining (which involves boiling) would appear to qualify as halachically “cooked.” If so, it may be permissible to add such salt to hot food on Shabbat, subject to additional halachic considerations.

Another related issue concerns the additives mixed into salt. Even if the salt itself is considered cooked, if the additives were not subjected to heat, their addition to hot food on Shabbat could present a separate halachic concern.

SALT PRODUCTION IN ISRAEL

Israel has developed a highly successful salt production system. All salt used domestically and sold at retail in Israel is produced locally.

Israel is particularly known for its advanced solar evaporation system. Seawater is collected in a series of large evaporation pools, where the water gradually evaporates, leaving substantial salt deposits. The remaining salt is then heated with hot air to remove residual moisture and further refine the product.

Based on this process, there is little question that Israeli-produced salt is halachically

considered cooked and may therefore be added to hot dishes on Shabbat. The remaining question, however, concerns the additives.

After extensive research, it appears that most additives used in Israeli salt are exposed to high levels of heat during production. Even in cases where they may not be fully cooked, there may still be grounds for leniency based on the ruling of Rav Belsky, *zt”l*, a leading halachic authority and *Posek* for the OU.

Rav Belsky explained that additives are typically present in extremely small quantities, often less than 0.005% (approximately 50 parts per million). If the additives were cooked, the concern would be resolved entirely. However, even where that is not definitively the case, Rav Belsky ruled that the salt may still be considered halachically cooked.

Although the concept of *bitul* (nullification) does not always apply straightforwardly to the laws of *bishul* on Shabbat, Rav Belsky maintained that such minuscule additives are halachically insignificant. Because they are present in such negligible amounts and play no substantive role in the cooking process, they are considered *batul* and do not alter the salt’s halachic status.

There are additional halachic considerations regarding the addition of salt to hot foods on Shabbat. In Part Two, we will examine the final practical conclusions on this subject. ■

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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