



Culinary Torch for *Milchig* and *Fleishig*

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: Is it permissible to use the same culinary torch (a small handheld butane fire-tool for browning food) for *milchig*, *fleishig*, and *pareve*?

Answer: While there is not much halachic discussion about this relatively new tool, applying the time-tested rules should provide a direction.

One concern is that since the torch is held mere inches from the food, it can unintentionally touch *milchig* and *fleishig* food in succession and transfer taste due to the heat. Because the part of the torch from which the flame emerges becomes extremely hot, food that touches does not always have a chance to properly absorb (see Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 92:6) and possibly the area is

considered *kashered* by continued use (see Hagalat Keilim (Cohen) 13:(85)). However, the parts of the sides of the nozzle are the right temperature to absorb and be affected.

It is critical though that the torch is not meant to touch the food. Admittedly, there are times that *Chazal* or classical *poskim* were stringent due to concerns that unintentionally, things would touch or food would fall into food (see Shulchan Aruch and Rama, YD 88:2). On the other hand, Halacha often allows us to allow dangerous proximity. For example, the Shulchan Aruch (YD 108:1) permits roasting slabs of meat and dairy near each other in a somewhat big oven (the Rama **prefers** avoiding it). Later *poskim* generally do not turn such concerns into formal prohibitions. So, this concern does not preclude using the torch for both. Of course, if the torch touches a food, one must calculate the consequences. The worst-case scenario is if the sides of the torch touch opposite foods within 24 hours of each other (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 103:5). We will omit further detail.

The other concern is that splatter or vapor will rise from the food up to the torch. As above, the primary concern would be on that which lands on the **sides** of the nozzle, where splatter would not burn instantly. Regarding vapor, Halacha distinguishes

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between two types: 1. A relatively dry or non-concentrated vapor, which is called *reicha* (smell) because the particles that are transferred are noticeable primarily by odor, as our nasal receptors are sensitive to trace quantities of airborne particles. Halachic taste is imparted by such vapor only in certain closed-area circumstances (see Rama, YD 108:1). Higher density liquid (*zeiah* – “sweat”) can transfer halachic taste between foods and to and from utensils (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 92:8). In short, hot liquids transfer taste; hot air generally does not. My limited research informs me that culinary torches are used to singe/brown only the surface of relatively dry foods, and one must move the flame relatively quickly from place to place. Therefore, it is rare for the torch to produce *zeiah*, and taste transfer should not occur.

Let us be pessimistic, for the sake of exercise or caution, and assume that occasionally significant milk/meat will reach the sides of the torch nozzle. Even if so, there is no way (other than the torch touching the food) to get it to another piece of food. According to some, if one pours liquid from one utensil to another, the recipient utensil can return some taste to the source utensil. But that is likely a *chumra* (see Living the Halachic Process V, E-3), and it is unlikely to apply to minimal steam

between them. It is plausible that a droplet of condensation will drop from the nozzle to the food, but this small amount would be *batel* in the food. Although we must not set up situations in which we will have to rely on *bitul* (Shulchan Aruch, YD 99:5), this is not the case here. We do not expect anything of halachic significance to fall in, and we are just covered by *bitul* if by chance it does.

Therefore, it appears to be permitted to use the same culinary torch for *milchig* and *fleishig*, even though occasionally a problem could arise. Here is our advice for those who prefer *chumra*/caution. Assuming it is uncommon to use the torch for *fleishig*, increase the distance from any meaty food you are browning. ■

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