

CAN UTENSILS LINED WITH TEFLON OR SILVERSTONE BE KASHERED?

Rabbi Kassel Abelson

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The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

שאלה

Can utensils lined with Teflon or Silverstone be Kasherred?

תשובה

Teflon is manufactured by the Dupont Company. Teflon is the name of an entire family of non-stick coatings. Teflon is a synthetic fluorine-carbon compound. Silverstone is a member of the Teflon family, more exactly Polytetrafluoroethylene PTFE. It is used for the coating of pots. Teflon is chemically inert, non-absorbing and remains unchanged at full cooking temperatures (up to 600°F/316°C). When Teflon/Silverstone is used to coat non-stick metal cookware, it is applied in a very thin film, the average thickness of the coating being less than 2 mils (1 mil = $\frac{1}{1000}$ inch). Some manufacturers recommend using only plastic utensils for mixing or stirring and not metal ones, since Teflon/Silverstone may scratch. If Teflon/Silverstone is scratched, the coating is so thin that the scratch will go down to the underlying metal.

Though Teflon was first manufactured in 1938, there were forerunners, coatings applied to metal pots to make them better cooking vessels than plain metal. Questions about kashering such pots were directed to previous generations of rabbis. The problem that disturbed the authorities of past generations was the nature of the coating. The composition of the coating was a carefully guarded trade secret held closely by the craftsmen who made the cookware. There are authorities who held that in the absence of definitive information, the coating should be considered as earthenware. Consequently, they did not permit such cookware to be kasherred by boiling water if it inadvertently

became טריף. The Hatam Sofer evidently believed that it was חרס, and he required that the metal of the pot be kashered only with burning coals regardless of the damage done to the coating of the cooking vessel:

והעקר נ"ל דלא ליעבד להו הגעדה כמש"ל אבל למלאות גזלים ש"ד
דמסתמא לא ניהוש דפקעו ואי פקעו הרי קמן שהוא כ"ח שהרי פקע ע"י
האש ואמנם אי לא פקעי לא נימא דלא אסיק להן שפיר משום דחייס עליי
דכיון דאינו אלא שוע בעלמא וגם ספק אם הוא חרס.¹

The Maharam Shick has doubts, even though a "modern rabbi" investigated the chemical composition of the coating and determined that it is not חרס, and consequently permitted kashering it if it became טריף by הגעלה, though not for use on Passover. The Maharam is reluctant to trust the testimony of non-Jewish craftsmen, that the coating is not made of חרס. Nonetheless the Maharam concludes that if it is shown definitely that it is not made of חרס, then there are grounds to permit it to be kashered, not only for year around use, but for Passover use as well:

ולכך אין להתיר הקדירות האלו המצופין מבפנים בהיתוך שהוא ספק חרס
בהגעלה אלא א"כ יתברר לן שאינו חרס ומ"מ מי שרוצה להתיר אין גוערין
בו כיון שיש צדדים הנ"ל מיהו דווקא מאיסור להתיר אבל מחמת לפסח כל
זמן שלא יתברר בעדות ברור שאין הציפוי של חרס בוודאי לא שייך כל
התירים הנ"ל דבפסח הוא במשהו.²

The Arukh Hashulkhan deals with the same issues and provides us with a useful approach to the question. He also describes metal cooking ware lined with white coating whose composition is doubtful – since the manufacturers keep the formula secret. If such cookware inadvertently becomes טריף, kashering it by ליבון (heating it until it glows) requires considerable expertise to avoid irreparable damage. In these cases where it is uncertain whether the coating is of metal or חרס, and the pot itself is metal, then to avoid considerable material loss, kashering by הגעלה (boiling water) is permitted. And if it can be demonstrated that it is not חרס, it is certainly kasherable by boiling water. And since there is some indication that the coating is not חרס, it is reasonable to consider it like metal and permit it to be kashered by הגעלה:

מ"מ בספק ציפוי חרס או מתכות, ועצם הקידרה הוא ודאי של מתכות
פשיטא שיש להקל בדין ברור כזה ולחוס על ממונם של ישראל וקצת ראה
יש שהציפוי הוא של מתכת ולא של חרס.³

Rabbi Isaac Klein concludes his investigation of the nature of Teflon as follows: "Today we know that the lining is not made of a porous substance, nor of a substance that would be damaged by boiling. Hence kashering should be permitted."⁴

Conclusion

The composition of Teflon (Silverstone) is well known and easily verifiable. It is a fluoro-carbon compound and not חרס (earthenware). When it is used to line metal cookware, it does not absorb food nor the taste of food that is cooked in it. It is chemically inert and is

¹ Responsa of the Hatam Sofer, Part 2, 113.

² Responsa of Maharam Schick, Orah Hayyim 238.

³ Arukh Hashulhan, Yoreh De'ah 121:27.

⁴ Rabbi Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 113.

not affected by cooking, even at high temperatures. If the coating is scratched, then the food will touch the metal of the pot. Hence, if such cookware becomes טריף, it may be kashered by הגעלה, by careful cleansing and by boiling water. The same would apply to kashering for Pesah. In the case of Pesah the cooking pot should be kashered only after 24 hours of non-use, and the kashering should be complete by 10:00 A.M. ערב פסח. Baking pans may not be kashered. In general, it is recommended that, where feasible, separate cookware be purchased for Passover use.