

# Hot Tap Water on Shabbat?

*Just in Time for Winter, Halachic Home Heating Breakthrough*

BY AMY GOLDSTEIN

The choices: Painfully cold, chapped hands washing dishes without benefit of hot water, or food eaten off paper plates with plastic utensils instead of a elegantly set, festive table befitting the Shabbat Queen.

Directly, or indirectly, all these can and do result from the halachic prohibition against the use on Shabbat of water heated above approximately 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Known in halachic literature as *Yad Soledet Bo*, it represents the temperature at which a hand would recoil when touching the water.

A new device called the Shabbhot more precisely controls the temperature of household tap water. Remarkably, it will allow the use of hot water on Shabbat. Resembling an iPod, the Shabbhot was developed by two men from Far Rockaway and Bayswater. It has been endorsed by a number of local rabbis, including Rabbi Avrohom Blumenkrantz, as halachically permissible.

"It's the beginning of the way to improving people's *oneg Shabbat*," said Yair Matan, a co-founder of Sterling Water Heaters, which is selling the Shabbhot device.

Plumbers from across the NY metro area gathered in a

shul in Brooklyn last month to see the Shabbhot for themselves. Matan was joined by Nissim Isaacson, a plumber and the other founder of Sterling Water Heaters. They presented their invention to people they hope will sell it to their own customers and discussed how they researched halachic issues related to the use of hot water on Shabbat.

The inspiration for the Shabbhot device came from Isaacson's wife, Matan said, back in 1999. With hands extremely sensitive to cold water, she challenged her husband, the plumber, to come up with a halachically-permissible way to use hot water on Shabbat. He accepted the challenge and after meeting with engineers in Canada and Europe, developed technology that he incorporated into the Shabbhot device. It will retail for \$399.

The hot-water controller can be used both on Shabbat and during the week, with the temperature controlled either manually or automatically.

On Shabbat, in "S-mode," the heating of tap water can be held to a default temperature no higher than 105 degrees, so that it does not exceed 107 degrees. This is the temperature that many rabbis agree is *Yad Soledet Bo*. The temperature limit in that mode is 120

degrees, considered by other halachic authorities to be the actual threshold of *Yad Soledet Bo*.

In weekday mode, the developers of the Shabbhot device believe it will help save energy. "We're trying to prove that it follows [U.S. Department of Energy] guidelines where if you turn off the unit you can save 12 to 15 percent toward heating water," according to marketer David Muskal of M2 Worldwide.

In tests the Shabbhot has helped shave 15-percent off a typical water bill over the course of six weeks, Matan said. "We've heard about the energy savings from customers - that's the great thing about it, and if we're going to prove it's good, we'll market it to everybody [not just Orthodox Jews]."

Overnight, a regular water heater would reach a temperature between 130 and 140 degrees between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. A lower, controlled water temperature, as low as 90 degrees, would be sufficient to warm the house at night and would save energy.

Rabbi Abraham Blumenkrantz is perhaps the best known of the small group of rabbanim who have endorsed the new product. The others include Rabbi Yechezkel Roth of the Karlsburger Beis Din, Rabbi Polatsek of Vaad Hakashrus Megeg Yehudah, and Rabbi Gabriel Tzinner.

Matan understands why some rabbis have been reluctant to offer their approval. "It's a new product; using hot water on Shabbat is a milestone in Judaism," he said. "We've told our kids not to use hot water for so many years, so many generations, and then all of a sudden there's an OK to do it." For a time, people were not comfortable using air conditioning or refrigerators on Shabbat, either, he said.

When asked why they would not endorse the product,

Muskal said, rabbis typically admitted that while they didn't find any problems with the unit or the technology, they felt uncomfortable being among the first to give the OK.

Rabbi Avrohom Blumenkrantz said while he tends to take a more-strict approach to halacha — he dislikes the term 'chumrah' — being first wasn't a problem for him. "People are very concerned about the fact that you open up the door on

this issue, but ... logically, there should be no reason why something like this shouldn't be permitted, if it functions properly," he said. Rabbi Blumenkrantz added, however, that the essence of the product is not to give a "carte blanche" to using hot water on Shabbat.

The inventors of the Shabbhot water temperature controller are confident their product will eventually see widespread acceptance, and they

hope to see it installed in one particular new construction.

"Someone was telling me that when they're going to build the temple in Yerushalayim, they're going to use the best technology that's available," Matan said. They're not going to use the same [devices] they used 1,000 years ago — hopefully, they'll have one of these in there."

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Nissim Isaacson and Yair Matan, co-founders of Sterling Water Heaters and inventors of the Shabbhot device, presented the unit to shomer Shabbat plumbers at a meeting in Brooklyn on Nov. 2.

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