



**B'NAI  
DAVID-JUDEA**  
*Shabbat Shorts*

Let's look at the question as to whether you can set a coffee maker on a timer before Shabbat, i.e. position the water and the coffee in their proper places on Friday afternoon, and set the timer to brew at 8 AM on Shabbat morning. In principle this should be similar to the very commonplace act of setting a light on a timer before Shabbat. As in the case of the light, the coffeemaker will do its thing (which includes boiling water, unquestionably a *melacha*) without you're engaging the process in any way on Shabbat itself.

There doesn't appear to be a lot of literature on this question, but some years ago there was a robust discussion about it on a rabbinic listserv that I subscribe to. In that discussion, reliable testimony as to the rulings - and even the personal practices - of top-tier contemporary poskim were recounted. There is one school of thought which forbids setting the coffeemaker, and does so based on two arguments. One harkens back to Rav Moshe Feinstein's very early ruling that Shabbat timers were simply prohibited as a blanket rule. At the time, Rav Moshe's reasoning was that the use of Shabbat timers would turn Shabbat into a weekday, as every manner of work (even the running of whole factories) could be carried out on Shabbat in this way. Rav Moshe thought of using timers as essentially no different from simply asking non-Jews to do *melachot* for us. And while Rav Moshe's ruling clearly didn't win the day, there are some contemporary *poskim* who feel that the line or permissibility should be drawn at cooking via a Shabbat timer, a (generally) much more complex activity than merely turning on a light.

Other *poskim* in the same camp point to the prohibition of leaving a pot directly on the fire on Friday afternoon, for it to cook through the night. They argue that just as in this classic instance we fear that someone may unthinkingly "stir the coals" (i.e. do something to accelerate the cooking process) after Shabbat had begun, the same fear would similarly be in place if the cooking process began *on its own* on Shabbat day.

On the other hand, there are numerous *poskim* who *permit* brewing coffee in this way. The most prominent name among them is Rabbi Moshe Heinemann, the Rabbinic Administrator of the Star-K kashrut supervision organization. Rabbi Heinemann takes the position (both for a private household and in catering situations under his supervision) that in light of our broad acceptance of Shabbat timers (and, I suppose, the fact that Rav Moshe's original fears did not end up materializing), there is no basis upon which to distinguish between setting a light on a timer and setting a coffeemaker on a timer. And I would just add that in the specific case of the coffeemaker, there is also nothing one can

do to accelerate the cooking process in any case (though Rabbi Heinemann does not limit his permission to only such cases.)

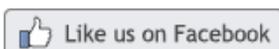
So while there are certainly differing practices out there, a person who wishes to set the coffeemaker before Shabbat definitely has solid, authoritative halachic support for doing so.

(I was going to say "has more than sufficient grounds on which to do so", but then I thought better of it 😊)

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