SHABBAT and automatic appliances

12th day of Kislev, 5771

Last week we discussed the use on Shabbat of automatic devices or appliances that were activated before Shabbat.

Many Halakhic principles on this area are learned from the Shulchan Arukh (circa 1560) who authorized the use of a water mill -a turbine like device used to grind wheat, etc.- which was operated before Shabbat and continued grinding wheat 'automatically' during Shabbat.

The challenge for today's expert Rabbis (poskim) is to apply this principle to our modern world.

A few examples:

It is permitted to operate a washing machine or a dryer before Shabbat begins because these machines are turned off automatically (the clothes, obviously, can not be removed until Shabbat is over). Ashkenazi Rabbis will oppose this rule if the appliance makes a noise (hashma'at kol, see Penine Halakha, 17).

The Sephardic approach is more lenient in these cases. In a business, for example, Rab Obadia Yosef authorizes to leave a fax or an answering machine active on Shabbat provided one can assume that the majority of those who might call during Shabbat are non Jews.

The same principle, reasons Rabbi Yosef, is applied if one owns a vending machine. If I own a vending machine I can leave it to operate during Shabbat. Except if the machine is in a jewish area, for example: a community Jewish Center or in Israel, to avoid the deliberate or involuntary activation of

it by a Jew on Shabbat.

What about a Web site? Can I have a commercial Web site working for me online during Shabbat? B’H next week.

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