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By Yossi Golds

Harav Shmuel Yosef Shtitzberg is a noted Rav in Beit Shemesh and prolific mechaber of a number of popular halachah sefarim. His first sefer, Shaarei HaBrachah, on hilchos brachos, received the glowing haskamos of leading Gedolim, including Hagaon Harav Shmuel Halevi Wosner, zt"l, whom Rav Shtitzberg considers his Rebbi muvhak in halachah. His next sefer is on hilchos mezuzah — Sha'arei HaMezuzah— and he has also written a Haggadah shel Pesach: Sha'arei HaHaggadah. All of his sefarim are bestsellers.

Even though it is before Pesach, for a change, we aren't speaking with Rav Shtitzberg about his Haggadah, but rather, his next sefer, which he has been working on for several years — Sha'arei HaShabbos — a sefer on the halachos and aspects of electricity on Shabbos. Rav Shtitzberg has been in contact with leading Poskim and with many leading experts and has studied the issue extensively. He gives shiurim on the practical applications of various electronic devices vis a vis issurei Shabbos.

"Make sure you stress that this is not a halachic article," he notes, as we begin the interview. "The point of this is to raise public awareness and not to pasken which things are mutar and which are assur. Of course, one cannot rule from a newspaper article — even if it appears in Hamodia — and that's totally not what I want to get out of this interview. If we save even one family from issurei Shabbos — dayeinu."



Harav Shmuel Yosef Shtitzberg

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What is the basis of the issur of using an electronic device on Shabbos? Why has it become such a topic of discussion these days?

I'll word it differently. Many people ask what has happened, what has changed, that these days there are so many new issues with opening fridges on Shabbos, and that every new appliance brings with it a host of *she'eilos*. And the answer is that every new device, each new model of an older device, gets "smarter." Everything these days is called "smart" — that's without going into what it has done to the users of the devices, if it has made them smarter or otherwise — but as far as the technological advances, yes, they become much more complicated halachically.

I'll explain. Back in the day, and we're not talking about all that long ago, the machinery wasn't so "smart." Going back 50 or 60 years, the Tchebiner Rav, *zt"l*, and Harav Tzvi Pesach Frank, *zt"l*, wrote many halachic *teshuvos* on the topic of the use of electronic devices on Shabbos.

But the devices then were a far cry from today's complicated devices. Devices then were things like a simple fan — when you press the button, it spins around, when you press another button, it turns off. Today, with the green-energy motto, the idea has become to use as little electricity as possible. That is why many devices, like air conditioners, work with infrared sensors, for example. These sense when people are in the room and adjust the power accordingly; when people are present, the device uses more power, and when no one is there, it uses less, and lowers the thermostat and the temperature. These things make Shabbos much more complicated.

And refrigerators?

In the older refrigerators, the only issues that would be a problem for Shabbos were the lights, which turned on every time the refrigerator was opened, and the thermostat, which would work more powerfully when the door was opened and hot air would enter the system.

Rav Shtitzberg shows us a thermostat of an old fridge, and demonstrates how it was much "dumber" and thus had far fewer halachic issues. He shows us how it worked on gas, and when it would expand the metal, it would cool down, and when it contracted, it wouldn't be so cold. It's all about physics.

He then shows us a thermostat of a more current fridge — which looks more like a computer brain — and shows how quickly the temperature rises by just touching it, with body heat.

Even those *poskim* who ruled that a refrigerator may be opened on Shabbos to take something out if it is closed right away — under certain conditions, obviously — would certainly *pasken* otherwise on today's refrigerators, without the correct Shabbos mode settings on the fridge.

Some people say that the problem with fridges is *koseiv*, as the screen writes the new temperature when the heat rises. The problem is actually far more serious. The numbers that one sees on the screen come from the computer brain — yes, every fridge, every appliance, has a brain, usually a chip — assessing whether it needs to work harder or slower, *mechabeh* and *ma'avir*.

It is the function of the sensors, the chips, to make the appliance work, and that is the basis of the *issur*. It's all about the electric circuits that a person sets off, be it by actually pressing a button — as things used to be — or by just opening or closing an appliance. This is besides for the many new functions that fridges have, for example, the non-frost function or the sensor that beeps after the fridge door is left open for a long time.

The mishnah in Chagigah says that issurei Shabbos are like 'mountains hanging by a hair.' The Rav has just demonstrated one aspect of the possible issurim one might, chalilah, transgress, by just doing regular daily chores. What can be done

to ensure proper shemiras Shabbos in this day and age?

You are right; it is not at all simple. And as we move ahead in this technologically advanced world, it will only get more complicated.

When a person spends Shabbos in a non-Jewish hotel, or in a hospital, does he realize how many *issurei Shabbos* he might transgress? By opening doors, closing doors, opening windows, closing windows, walking through automatic doors — the list is endless. Even opening the faucet to wash one's hands or flushing the toilet can be an *issur*.

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