



Electronics on Shabbat

1. Some poskim permit opening a refrigerator door only when the motor already is running, while many poskim hold that one may open the door even if the motor is off.¹
2. Some poskim permit walking in an area where a motion sensor will turn on a light provided that one does not intend to turn on the light if there's no other way to walk. Similarly, many poskim permit walking in an area where there surveillance cameras will capture a person's image as long as he does not intend to be recorded.²
3. Many poskim permit using an electrical automatic toilet if no other toilet is available.³

1. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minchat Shlomo 1:10) permits opening the refrigerator at any time because completing the circuit to run a motor may not involve any melacha at all, and even if it is, it is permitted because it is *grama*. He says that he's not sure that it should be considered a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* as one doesn't want the hot air to cause the motor to run sooner, because one also does want the motor to run so that the food doesn't spoil. Tzitz Eliezer 8:12:4, 12:92, Rav Moshe Feinstein (quoted by The Shabbos Home vol 2, p. 482; see, however, Igrot Moshe 2:68), and Rabbi Mordechai Willig ("Halacha Engages Modernity Part 8," min 18-22) agree.

In defining *grama*, Rav Hershel Schachter ("Electricity on Shabbos," min 73-6) explains that according to many achronim who understand *grama* as a delay in time, it isn't even a *psik reisha* to open a refrigerator if the motor will turn on at a later time, while according to Rav Soloveitchik, who defined *grama* as a total disconnect in action, if it was certain that opening the door would cause the motor to go on any earlier, perhaps it would be forbidden to open the door when the motor wasn't running based on *koach achar m'urev bo*. (See B'Ikvei HaTzon siman 7).

On the other hand, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer 1:21) assumes like Rav Shlomo Zalman that it is *grama*, but thinks that completing a circuit may involve an *issur deoritta* of *hav'ara*. He also is uncertain if this should be considered a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* and concludes that it is permitted, but it nevertheless is proper not to open the door unless the motor is running. Har Tzvi 1:151 and Rav Henkin (Edut LeYisrael p. 122) agree that although it is permitted, it's proper to be strict.

Lastly, Chelkat Yaakov O"Z 76 argues that while it may be a *psik reisha*, perhaps it is not considered *grama* since this is the intended normal way it is used. Therefore, he rules that one may only open the door when the motor already is running. Minchat Yitzchak 2:16 and Az Nidberu 2:36 agree. Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 10:12, Orchot Shabbat (vol 3 p. 62), and The Shabbos Home (p. 482) quote the two approaches but do not give a final ruling.

2. Sheivet HaLevi 9:69 permits walking in an area where there is a motion sensor that will activate a light, such as those attached to the outside of buildings. He explains that *davar she'eino mitkaven* refers only to when one does an action that may cause an unintended melacha. If, however, one is walking normally and makes no motion in order for a melacha to occur, it is not even a *psik reisha* as long as one's intent isn't to turn on the light. Orchot Shabbat (p. 79) quotes Rav Elyashiv and Rav Nissim Karlitz who

say that since one doesn't have a direct connection to the melacha and doesn't care about the light, it's not called *melechet machshevet*. The Shabbos Home (p. 489) agrees.

Rabbi Mordechai Willig (ibid. min 50-60) challenges this line of reasoning because it should be considered a *psik reisha d'nicha lei* and turning on a light might be *deoritta*. Furthermore, The 39 Melachos (p. 1215) says that if one can't avoid walking in a place that will turn on a light because of a motion sensor and the streets are dark so that one will benefit from the light turning on, one shouldn't leave his house! He does permit one to walk past such a motion sensor if he closes his eyes while the light will turn on because in such a case then it is not considered *nicha lei*.

On the other hand, Rabbi Hershel Schachter (ibid. min 62-8) explains that if one is doing an action that is physically disconnected from where the melacha is occurring, it isn't considered a *psik reisha*. Thus, Rav Schachter says that there's what to rely on to permit walking in an area where there is a surveillance camera or a motion sensor which will turn on a light as long as one doesn't have intent to be videoed or turn on the light.

Rabbi Mordechai Willig (ibid. min 48-49) agrees that it is permitted to walk in an area where there is a surveillance camera because unlike the light motion sensors, a person doesn't benefit from the being videoed by the surveillance camera and thus qualifies as a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* which is permitted for a *d'rabanan* prohibition. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, (cited by Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg in Ateret Shlomo vol 6, p. 57), Yabia Omer 9:35, and The Shabbos Home (p. 489) agree.

3. Rabbi Josh Flug (Sukkot To Go 5770, p. 27) writes that it is certainly permissible to use a toilet with an automatic flusher if no other restroom is available because most assume that using electricity is prohibited only *d'rabanan* and therefore is permitted for *kavod habriyot*. He says that perhaps it is even permitted if going to the non-automated toilets is inconvenient, since it may be a *psik reisha d'o nicha lei* on a *issur d'rabanan*. Practical Laws of Shabbat (Rabbi Rafael Soae, p. 335) agrees on the first point.

Rabbi Yisrael Belsky in Shulchan HaLevi 7:7 permits using this type of bathroom if there is no other bathroom available, but if there's another option, he forbids using the electrical toilet. Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz ("Using Automatic Bathrooms on Shabbos") quotes Rav Belsky as saying that *kavod habriyot* would not be a leniency in order to wash one's hands with an automatic sink.