SHABBAT UNPACKED

Session 9

OLAMI MENTORSHIP

SAVED BY SHABBAT

In the days leading up to that tragic Shabbat of October 7th, Eli and Ilana*, a young Israeli couple, found themselves at a spiritual crossroads. Newly married, they had made a commitment to one another: their home would be a Shabbat observant home, a sanctuary of peace and holiness each week, no matter what.

But that week, the pull was strong.

Many of their friends were planning to attend the Nova Music Festival. It promised excitement, music, freedom. They hesitated. “Just this once,” they reasoned. “We’ve been so careful... maybe it’s okay to make an exception.”

They went back and forth, their hearts torn between two worlds—between the light of Shabbat and the allure of something else.

In the end, they gave in. They packed their bags and joined the crowds heading south.

But in the stillness of Shabbat morning, as music still floated through the air, the unthinkable happened. The festival grounds were stormed by Hamas terrorists. Chaos erupted. Screams pierced the silence. Eli and Ilana ran for their lives, as did so many others.

BURST OF INSPIRATION

Eventually, they were captured by a group of four terrorists. Fear closed in around them like a vise. The couple stood frozen, unsure what would come next.

As the gunmen argued among themselves in Arabic, Eli leaned toward Ilana and whispered through clenched teeth, “If we had made a different decision this Shabbat, maybe we would be home safe right now.”

Ilana looked down, her voice a quiet ache. “I know… I’ve been wondering the same. Why did we drift from it?”

Suddenly, the leader of the group turned toward them.

“What are you whispering about?” he barked.

“N-nothing,” Ilana stammered, her body shaking.

“Tell me!” he snapped. “If you know what’s good for you!”

Ilana’s voice was barely a whisper. “We usually keep Shabbat. We weren’t supposed to be here. We only came this once… and now we regret it. We should’ve stayed home.”

BURST OF INSPIRATION

The man narrowed his eyes, staring at them in silence. Then, in a voice that sounded almost otherworldly, he said:

"Back in Gaza, we were told that people who keep Shabbat have a special aura... a holiness that surrounds them. We were warned not to touch those people. You're not like the others."

He paused for a moment. Then, in a low voice, he added:

"Run. Now. Save yourselves."

They didn't wait for another word. They ran. Through the desert, through the fear, through the smoke of that dark day. And by some miracle, they survived.

MORE THAN THE JEWISH PEOPLE
HAVE KEPT THE SHABBAT...
SHABBAT HAS KEPT
THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

CATEGORY 6 OF 39:

CREATION THROUGH *MAAVIR*/KINDLING A FIRE

Maavir is the act of creating or enlarging a fire. During the construction of the Mishkan they lit fires to cook dyes for the various fabrics used.

Included in *maavir* are a number of actions :

- Striking a match
- Creating sparks
- Using the sun to create a fire ie. via a magnifying glass
- Heating metal until it is red hot
- Lighting from a pre-existing fire
- Turning on a light with an incandescent bulb (the glowing filament is considered to be fire)

Practical applications of *maavir*:

- Turning on a gas stove, oven or grill.
- Driving a gas-fueled car. When one accelerates, gas is released into the engine's combustion chamber and subsequently ignited
- Sterilizing a needle with a pre-existing fire.
- Moving the dimmer switch on an electric light
- Adding oil to an existing lamp

CREATION THROUGH *MAAVIR*/KINDLING A FIRE

Electricity:

Since we have mentioned the prohibition to ignite an electric light this would be a good time to discuss using electricity on Shabbat as per Jewish law.

- Halacha/Jewish law is eternal and unchanging. The concepts in Jewish law have withstood the test of time and, as technology evolves, we need only to plug in the eternal Jewish concepts and principles of halacha and we continue to maintain clarity and direction into how to lead our lives as Jews.

- With the advent of electricity and subsequent invention of electrical appliances, there was unanimity amongst the rabbinical experts in halacha that one may not turn on or off electric appliances; experts varied however as to which of the categories of creative activities to “plug into.”

CREATION THROUGH MAAVIR/KINDLING A FIRE

Electricity:

- What follows is a very brief summary of the potential biblical and rabbinical categories that may be the reason for the prohibition of using electricity on Shabbat.

    1. Maavir/Kindling a fire (as mentioned in the case of a switching on a light with an incandescent bulb. In addition, when turning on an electrical appliance, you may cause additional fuel to be burned at the power station that is producing the electricity.

    2. Makeh B'Patish/Final Hammer Blow (Category 7 of 39) - One of the 39 biblically prohibited categories is to perform a final act that transforms a product into a functional tool/item. An electric appliance that is not plugged in is useless. Connecting it to a power source renders it functional and potentially violates makeh b'patish.

    3. Boneh/Building - turning on an electrical appliance completes an electrical circuit. This is tantamount to building.

    4. Bishul/Cooking - Often the current passing through a wire raises the temperature of the wire above 110 degree and potentially violates the laws of cooking.

    5. Molid/Creating a new entity - There is a substantial Rabbinic prohibition against creating a new entity on Shabbat. Adding electricity to a dormant electric appliance essentially creates a new entity i.e. a functional appliance and is thus considered molid.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF ELECTRICITY

Jewish law allows us to derive benefit from any electrical appliance that was turned on before Shabbat. One of the busiest exercises of Shabbat preparation on Friday is going around the house to ensure everything is set appropriately.

Therefore, in a Shabbat home, you may see:

- Lights, electric hotplates, crockpots, air conditioning units, and other electrical appliances set up on timers or plugged in and kept on throughout Shabbat.

- A Kosher Lamp: this product is a light that remains on throughout Shabbat but can be “turned off” by turning the shaft, thus blocking the light. These are great to keep next to your bedside so you can read before going to sleep.

- Light switch covers: they serve as a reminder to keep the lights as they are.

DISCUSSION

In an ever evolving technological society, the scope of halacha and technology continues to expand. Consider the following relevant applications where Torah and technology intersect. Discuss together.

- Automatic doors
- Use of surveillance cameras
- Using an elevator on Shabbat
- Using health related electronic devices i.e. hearing aids
- AI driven appliances and gadgets i.e. smart refrigerator or self driving car

Often, it is the unique circumstances that will dictate the halachic ruling in the above cases. As always, for practical application of any of these concepts, please reach out to your LOR (Local Olami Rabbi).

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