

BS”D

Sound The Alarm, And Turn It Off!

On Electricity

R. Mois Navon

Beit HaKenneset HaSefaradi BeRimon – Shabbat Shuva 5782

Shabbat Shuva. I would like to discuss the importance of Shabbat by delving into a violation of it.

On RH, for those of you who were not with us, when the doors of the Aron Kodesh were opened for the special prayer of Parnasa, the alarm went off (azaka paala) – apparently someone mistakenly forgot to turn it off. The sound was, of course deafening (machrish), and the Hazan did not wait for it to stop but simply continued the tefilla l’parnasa. Now, everyone knows this is an important prayer that everyone concentrates on and the person who opened the ark paid a pretty penny to perform. So I realized that people didn’t know what to do and I went up and turned off the alarm.

The question is: How could I do such a thing when everyone knows that we refrain from using electricity on Shabbat and Hag?

As I mentioned in short that night, I based myself on the psak din of R. Nachum Rabinovitch, who bases himself on the psak din of R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. I will now elaborate my reasoning.

There are a number of ways that poskim have tried to halachically categorize electricity: Molad, Boneh, Makeh BePatish.

R. SZAuebach rejects them all, explaining that for electricity to constitute an issur d’oraita it would have to be like fire (maavir esh) which is composed of HEAT and LIGHT – so if you don’t have BOTH of these components, you don’t have fire. Accordingly, he categorizes the prohibition of using electricity that does not generate heat and light as “Uvdin D’Chol” – something that is forbidden because it goes against the spirit of the day, but in the case of great need is permitted. Here are his words:

שו"ת מנחת שלמה חלק א סימן ט – ר' שלמה זלמן אוירבך (1910-1995, י-ם)

נתבאר לפי זה דלעני"ד נראה דבכה"ג דלא עשה כלל שום הדלקה או כיבוי כי אם מחבר רק את הטלפון עם הזרם אין לאסור בשבת ויו"ט לא משום מכה בפטיש ולא משום מוליד. (אך חושבני שהמון העם אינו יודע כלל להבחין בכך ויכול לטעות ע"י זה לומר שמותר גם להדליק ולכבות את החשמל בשבת, ולכן אף לדין אין להתיר דבר זה כי אם במקום צורך גדול, ...)

The question now becomes: what is “great need”? Clear it is not an issue of “life and death” for that kind of need (i.e., pikuach nefesh) allows the violation of all of Shabbat. I bring you two examples of “great need” applies by other modern poskim. Then first is that of R. Dov Lior who allowed people to call volunteers to stop “kochot hageirsh”

when they might come on Shabbat to destroy an Israeli outpost (ma'ahaz). Here is the description in an Israeli news site:

הרב ליאור מאשר: חילול שבת במקרה של חשש ל"גירוש"

השמועות על הריסת מאחזים בכלל מתגברות בימים האחרונים ובעיקר בסוף השבוע, ובעקבות כך הוציא הרב דב ליאור, מחשובי הציונות הדתית ומנהיגם הרוחני של נוער הגבעות, פסיקה יוצאת דופן: אם במהלך השבת מזוהה תזוזת כוחות צבא ומשטרה, ויש חשש שמדובר ב"כוחות גירוש" - אפשר להשתמש, בשבת, בטלפון, כדי לדווח לרכזי הפעילים האזוריים.

Here you could say that the permit was given due to the "great need" of the mitzvah of "Yishuv Haaretz".

But then there is the psak of R. Nachum Rabinovitch, ztz"l, applies the heter to the use of a hotel card key, saying that to get in and out of your hotel room is a great need. (See Shu"t Siach Nachum, OH 25).

Accordingly, while am open to criticism here that perhaps I misjudged the need of tefilat haparnasa, from my years davening in this shul, I believe that the community (tzibur) places great weight on this once a year prayer, as seen by the fact that it is the most highly prized and highest paid "kibud" that is auctioned off during the whole holiday season. Furthermore, the amount that it went for is not an insignificant sum, as can be seen by how many people participated in the auction versus how many more people participated in other less expensive kibudim. And so I felt this was indeed a "great need" of the community to be able to pray with kavana and not simply mouth the words while an unbearable siren was sounding.

At the end of the day, if I violated anything, it was "uvdin dchol". And here I want to be very clear, uvdin dchol is not d'oraita, but it is no less critical to the sanctity of Shabbat. That is, you all now can go home and start judging what you think is a "great need" and the kids in the audience may be very tempted to just get on their laptops and smart phones and be there all day. The adults may just decide they get in their Teslas and drive around all day. And in this you will have destroyed the Shabbat! The "great need" allowance of uvin dchol must be weighed very very seriously – for the violation of it leads to the end of Shabbat.

To conclude, let me leave you with the inimitable words of R. Abraham Joshua Heschel:

"In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil there are islands of stillness where man may enter a harbor and reclaim his dignity. The island is the seventh day, the Sabbath, a day of detachment from things, **instruments**, and practical affairs, as well as of attachment to the spirit."

באוקיינוס הסוער של הזמן והעמל ישנם איים של שקט אשר בהם האדם יכול להיכנס לנמל ולחזיר את כבודו. האי הוא היום השביעי, השבת, יום של ניתוק מדברים, ניתוק ממכשירים וניתוק מעניינים מעשיים, כמו גם [מהצד החיובי] התחברות לרוח.

Shabbat Shalom.

OTHER ISSUES

SOUND

There is one other element that we should note in tuning of an alarm and that is the sound. This too is not a problem because making sound is an *issur d'rabanan*, and doing a destructive act – like stopping sound – is also a *derabannan*. And we know that there is no *issurim* of *derabannan derabbanan*.

HAG

I could also add that the prohibition of electricity is even weaker on Hag. Indeed, there are communities that have permitted it in *toto*.

DELAY

R. Peninei Halacha writes that one can turn an alarm off with a *shinui*, but if the alarm will go off by itself in a short period of time, the one should wait, unless it will cause anguish and ruin one's shabbat. <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/01-17-16/>

If an alarm goes off on Shabbat because one touched one's car or entered one's house carelessly, what should be done? If the alarm goes off during the day and will stop relatively soon, one may not take any action to turn it off. However, what if it will continue to make noise for an extended period during the day or for even a short period at night? If the alarm disturbs people and causes them anguish because it prevents them from sleeping, sets them on edge, and ruins their enjoyment of Shabbat, one may turn it off, as long as one does so via a *shvut di-shvut* (above 9:11). This is because turning off the alarm is only prohibited rabbinically (see section 1 above), so if one turns it off with a *shinui* such as by pressing the appropriate button on the remote control with a spoon or the back of his finger, then the action taken is considered a *shvut di-shvut*. Even if turning off the alarm will make a light go on temporarily, since he does not need this light, it is considered a *psik reisha de-lo niha lei* (above 9:5). It is true that some forbid this, only allowing one to be lenient if a non-Jew is available to turn off the alarm. For one who follows this position, if his non-observant Jewish neighbors threaten to call the police (which will lead to additional Shabbat desecration), he should tell the neighbors where the remote control is. Then the neighbors can choose to turn the alarm off themselves rather than call the police (*Melakhim Ommayikb* 10:6). However, in practice, since this is a case of great necessity for the sake of a mitzva, one may turn off the alarm via a *shvut di-shvut* (see *Be-ohalah shel Torah*, OH §23; R. Dov Lior in R. Moshe Harari's *Kedushat Ha-Shabbat* vol. 1, p. 303).

I would argue that if the Hazan would have waited, and the tzibur would have also waited quietly until the alarm stopped, that would have been ideal. However, the Hazan did not wait, and even if he did, I have my doubts the tzibur would have waited – depending on how long it would have taken.