

In the journal "תחומין" published by the Tzomet institute of Gush Etzion, was published a shortened version of the Halachik decision by HaRav Nachum Eliezer Rabinowitz, past Rosh Yeshiva of Maaleh Adumim. HaRav Rabinowitz is an important halachik expert of the religious Zionist movement. His opinion focused on authorizing the use of electronic sensors and smart cards in opening hotel doors on Shabbat.

There is no question that the closing of an electronic circuit such as by switching on a bulb is forbidden, according to the Torah, on Shabbat because it transgresses one of the 39 forbidden melachot. The question arises as to what is the law about an activity of closing an electronic circuit that does not result in a forbidden activity such as a fan, or air-conditioner. Halachik scholars forbid it on the basis of either "מכה בפטיש" building, "בונה". HaRav Shlomo Zalman claims that there is no basis for the claims of "מכה בפטיש" or "מוליד" but argues that the electronic equipment should simply not be operated on Shabbat. HaRav Nachum Rabinowitz argues that it is forbidden on the basis of "עובדן דחול", to prevent the Shabbat resembling weekdays. However, according to HaRav Rabinowitz, today, many electronic devices do not result in the closure of a circuit or creation of a new flow of electricity and the circuits are based on miniature, automatic semi-conductors, in which the current is virtually undetectable and therefore עובדן דחול is not applicable.

The most popular are in electric doors operated by mobility sensors and door locks that open by means of a smart card, a system comprising 2 central components:-

1. A card incorporating a chip or film held by the person wanting to enter and,
2. A card reader that identifies the card without the need of any contact between them.

In the card reader, flows a constant current, and it has an antenna that transmits an electromagnetic radio signal. In the smart card there is an RFID chip that contains an antenna that receives the radio signal and converts it to energy and then sends a signal, specific to the smart card, to the card reader. Once this signal is received by the card reader it is transmitted to a computerized data base and if the signal matches the door lock it will allow the door to open. Opening and closing of the door lock is dependent on a magnetic field which is either interrupted allowing the lock to open or not in which case the lock remains closed. What is important to state is that the smart card doesn't generate any current. No electrical circuits are opened or closed and the electrical force (without current) resulting from the use of the smart card is so small that it cannot be humanly detected.

In some of the sensors there is an LED indicator but the technology of LED is such that there is no ignition/kindling. There is no prohibition of "נולד" in this technology according to Rabbi Dror Fixler.

HaRav Rabinowitz claims that smart card technology does not open or close any electrical circuits nor is there any current generation, only force generation and therefore does not break any of the 39 forbidden Shabbat activities. In addition he discounts the claim of "מכה בפטיש" because there is no permanent transformation of metal to a permanent magnet only a transient change to an existing magnetic force. The claim of "נולד" is also not relevant claims HaRav Rabinowitz because any changes are only transient which does not qualify for the prohibition of "נולד".

In support of his opinion, he brings the opinions of other halachik poskim that allow walking in areas being surveyed by security cameras which induce transient and minimal change in force in existing circuits.

In summary, according to HaRav Rabinowitz, opening the hotel doors with a smart card does not cause an infringement of the 39 shabbat melachot, in the same way that he claims, walking through a door that opens as a result of motion sensors, is permissible.

There is an eruv around Rio de Janeiro including the Beach area, so there is no restriction on carrying over Shabbat to and from our hotel. On board our ship, there will be an eruv Chatzerot in place so it is entirely permissible to carry everywhere on the ship. Rav Rabinowitz permits also the carrying of the smart cards because of the issue of 'Oneg Shabbat' עונג שבת

Wishing you all a restful and enjoyable Shabbat! Alan שבת שלום