

Concurrence to Rabbi Daniel Nevins, “Halakhic Responses to Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Machines”

Rabbi Daniel Nevins brings up the important issue of AI machines being used on Shabbat and argues that their use may erode the distinction between Shabbat and weekdays. He suggests that the distinction between requests made through direct (e.g. “Please make me a cup of coffee”) and indirect address (e.g. “It would be good to have a cup of coffee”) is a distinction that, if employed, would technically evade violating the Sabbath while substantially infringing on it. Rabbi Nevins does observe that there is leeway for permitting the use of AI machines to preserve human dignity, such as in the caring for the ill.

I would like to suggest that we approach this issue from a different vantage point. The version of the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue in the book of Deuteronomy offers an explanation for Sabbath rest: לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ כַּמּוֹךָ “so that your male servant and female servant may rest as you do”.(Deuteronomy 5:14) The Israelites were to rest so that those who work for them, whether Israelite or non-Israelite, may also rest.

Nonetheless, as Jews found themselves in different cultural and socio-economic circumstances through the long span of Jewish history, they came upon situations in which they could not avoid relying on the labor of non-Jews on the Sabbath. These types of circumstances posed quandaries for Jews, and still do. The development of the halakhic basis for גוי של שבת is fraught with nuances and complexity,¹ and the reality of it today is no less difficult.

¹See Jacob Katz, גוי של שבת: הרקע הכלכלי-חברתי והיסוד ההלכתי להעסקת נוכרי בשבתות ובחגי ישראל (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1988); translation: *The Shabbes Goy: A Study in Halakhic Flexibility* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

When, and if, AI machines reach the appropriate level of sophistication, it behooves us to think through recourse to the assistance of non-Jews on the Sabbath and to articulate guidelines for the use of AI machines that will allow human beings to observe, and benefit from, Sabbath rest.