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TECHNOLOGY

Inside

Talking Tech

Is online OK on the Sabbath?

The web is overflowing with religious sites. An online rabbi in Israel answers questions on internet issues for orthodox Jews. **Page B3**

Talking Tech / By Lee Gomes

Rabbinical Advice: How to Keep The Shabbath in a 24/7 Online World

For all its putative godlessness, the internet abounds with religion: most major faiths have thousands of sites devoted to them. One run by the Eretz Hemdah Institute in Israel, www.erezhemdah.org, features an "Ask the Rabbi" service. We asked some Questions about the internet of Rabbi Yosef Carmel, Dean of the Institute and a rabbinic judge, educator and author.

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What are some issues involving the internet that an orthodox Jew might be concerned with?

An orthodox Jew who runs a business is supposed to close it on Saturday. But what about a business on the internet – a Website business? The answer is that he doesn't need to close his Web business on Saturday, and for two reasons. First, he isn't doing anything, and thus he isn't violating the Shabbat according to Jewish law. And second, on the internet, it is not Shabbat for everyone in every place.

Why can you keep your website business running, as long as you don't work at the computer, but still have to close a physical business?

One of the most important things in Jewish law regarding Saturday is the atmosphere of Shabbat. If you are opening on the street your market or your store, that disturbs the spiritual atmosphere. If your website is working, it doesn't disturb anything. If you are an orthodox Jew, you aren't supposed to open your computer on the Shabbat. But you can leave it running because you are not doing anything on it and thus not violating the atmosphere of the special day.

What if you know there is a big game on Saturday, and you leave the monitor on to check the scores as you pass by?

You have no permission to look at it. Because it's not the atmosphere you want for a Shabbat. You can ask the same question with a VCR since you can set it to show a movie anytime you want.

Are there other special concerns with the internet on the Shabbat?

Can a Jew in New York look at an Israeli website which was updated on Saturday, even if he is in New York and it is still Friday? No, because Jews must also not enjoy the work of another Jew on the Shabbat. So it is not permissible according to Jewish law to use an Israeli website that was updated on Saturday. If the website were somewhere else, and you knew for sure the workers were Jews, you would also have no permission to use it if it was updated on Saturday.

Do these answers represent the consensus of many Rabbis?

Not many Rabbis have dealt with these questions.

Are there things about their own holy days that other religions can learn from Judaism?

I don't think Judaism wants others in the world to observe their own holy days according to Jewish law. But Jews would like non-Jews to take the values of the Shabbat and adapt them. To try to be more spiritual. To try to make a break in your every day running of things. To try to think how you can be a good person, and do good things for others.
