

Adath Shalom Policy

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES ON SHABBAT

Passed unanimously by the Board 07 August 2016

Preamble

Ordinarily Adath Shalom's Ritual Committee operates only at the behest of the Board. However, in this case an issue was brought to the Committee about inappropriate use of electronic devices on Shabbat by a few members of the congregation. Therefore, it seemed wise to develop a formal policy so that everyone knows what practice is expected by Adath Shalom. Only one portion of the draft policy was controversial, as indicated below.

Halakhah

The Halakhah on the issue of use of electrical and electronic devices on Shabbat is clear. They are prohibited. A long and closely written position paper by R. Daniel S. Nevins on this subject was adopted on 31 May 2012 by the Rabbinic Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards by an overwhelming majority of 17-2-2. Key portions of the summary on page 54 read as follows:

The operation of any appliance which records data—whether text, audio or images—is banned under the category of *toledat koteiv*, a derivative form of writing. Most consumer electronics fall within this category and are therefore incompatible with Shabbat observance. While a comprehensive ban on all uses of electricity may be justified as a fence around the Torah, some uses are not only permissible but even positively indicated. Certainly any action needed to save a life—even if it involves biblically banned forms of *melakhah*—may be permitted under the rubric of *pikuah nefesh*. Actions which are forbidden under the authority of rabbinic law must be avoided unless they are required for the preservation of human dignity. In some cases such actions may also be indicated in order to avoid waste and excessive exertion. The balancing of these norms is complex and requires consultation with halakhic experts based on the particulars of any given situation and appliance.

Having said that, it is evident from exchanges on the USCJ Ritual List that many congregations find it difficult to monitor and enforce their policies. As a result practice varies widely, at least for a minority of people in some congregations.

Policy

1. Use of any electronic device is prohibited on any Shabbat or Yom Tov at Adath Shalom. This prohibition applies to all devices including those devices used for communications, for photography, for games, etc.

2. This rule applies to the sanctuary, to the corridors adjacent to the sanctuary, the rest rooms, and the kiddush room.ⁱ It does not apply outside the building, but congregants are urged to have consideration for others when using devices outside. Should some portion of the building happen to be used by another group on Shabbat, no effort will be made enforce the prohibition in areas used by such a group.

3. An exception to the general prohibition applies to medical people and people with urgent family issues, but they are requested to set their devices to vibration mode so that a call will not disturb other congregants.

As a result of the proliferation of small electronic devices, it is recommended to the Board that a sizeable sign, prepared in English and French, indicating that use of electronic devices is prohibited on Shabbat, be placed in the sanctuary and nearby areas.

ⁱ The one significant dissent from the general policy concerned whether use of an electronic device inside the Kiddush room for showing pictures of, for example, family events or recent holidays was not just consistent with normal Shabbat activities but also to be encouraged as the one time in a normal week when the congregation gets together informally. The dissent was rejected by the majority of people who commented on this text as too big an exception and one that was open to inappropriate extension.