

In Hilchos Shabbos

You have heard the shaylos . . .
Now learn the issues & the opinions

Wearing Watches

Part 2

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by Rabbi Shmuel Stein at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

In part one, we discussed the different opinions among the *poskim* regarding wearing a watch on Shabbos in a *Reshus ha'Rabim*. In this chapter we will discuss a number of other issues that are involved with wearing watches on Shabbos. We will discuss the following:

- 1) Are Watches *Muktze*?
- 2) Watches that may be prohibited to wear on Shabbos
- 3) Setting a watch to the correct time

1) Are Watches *Muktze*?

Chazal enacted numerous prohibitions in order to safeguard the sanctity of Shabbos. One of the most extensive Shabbos prohibitions they enacted is the prohibition of *muktze*. Objects that are *muktze* (set apart) from being used on Shabbos, may not be moved on Shabbos. Only objects that are *muchan* (prepared) to be used on Shabbos may be moved on Shabbos. For example,

A battery is considered *muktze* on Shabbos.¹ Since it is prohibited to use a battery on Shabbos (due to the prohibition of using electricity on Shabbos), it is "set apart" from being used on Shabbos, and is therefore considered *muktze* and may not be moved on Shabbos.

Are battery operated watches *muktze*?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach² rules that watches are not considered *muktze*, even though they run on a battery. Because the watch runs on its own, and the one wearing the watch does not need to perform any *melacha* in order for the watch to function, it is not considered "set apart" from being used on Shabbos, and is not *muktze*. Accordingly, it is permissible to wear a battery operated watch on Shabbos.

Watches that have prohibited functions. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach³ rules that even if the watch has other functions which are prohibited on Shabbos, such as a stopwatch or a light that illuminates the screen, it is not considered *muktze*. Although it is prohibited to use these functions on Shabbos, it does not deem the watch *muktze*, since the *main function* of the watch is to tell time, which is a permissible function, we do not consider it to be "set apart" from being used on Shabbos, and it is not *muktze*. Other *poskim*⁴ rule that if someone regularly uses the other prohibited functions of the watch there is a concern that he may inadvertently push the buttons on Shabbos as well, and should not wear such a watch on Shabbos.⁵

Wearing a watch that can be used only by pushing a button.

A digital watch whose screen display can be viewed only by pushing a button or tapping the screen, may obviously not be used on Shabbos, because pushing these buttons activates the display screen.⁶ Similarly, a watch whose screen display activated only when one tilts his wrist to look at the time (e.g. an Apple watch), may not be moved on Shabbos, since doing so activates the watch.

Furthermore, these watches are *muktze* on Shabbos, because they have no permissible use on Shabbos and are considered "set apart" from being used on Shabbos.⁷

A watch that has stopped working. A watch that has stopped working is viewed as "broken," and considered *muktze*. Since the watch is broken it is "set apart" from being used on Shabbos, and is therefore *muktza*.⁸ (However, an ornamental watch, that is worn as jewelry (e.g. a gold watch), is not considered *muktze* even when it is broken, because it is still functional even in its broken state.⁹)

2) Watches that may be prohibited to wear on Shabbos

1. Self-Winding Wristwatches

The *poskim* discuss whether it is permissible to wear a self-winding wristwatch on Shabbos. These watches are not battery operated, but are wound by the movement of one's arms, which provides energy to run the watch. Since wearing these watches causes the watch to be wound perhaps they may not be worn on Shabbos.

There is a similar question discussed by the Mishna Berura:¹⁰ In the times of the Mishna Berura, in order for clocks to run, one would need to wind it on a regular basis. The Mishna Berura rules that once the clock has already stopped working it is forbidden (*mid'Oraisa*) to wind it, because doing so is equivalent to fixing it, and violates the *melacha* of *Makeh b'Patish*. The Mishnah Berura adds, that even winding the clock while it is still running in order to ensure that it does not stop running is also prohibited on Shabbos, because winding the clock still makes it more functional, and is therefore prohibited on Shabbos.

Based on this ruling of the Mishna Berura it would seem to be prohibited to wear a self-winding wristwatch on Shabbos, even when it is still running, because causing the watch to be wound is prohibited (under *Makeh b'Patish*). However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach¹¹ rules that one may wear a self-winding wristwatch on Shabbos based on the principle of *derech tashmishto* - a normal act of usage. Since as one wears the watch it is continuously being wound, we consider winding the watch to be a normal act of usage, and not an act of fixing. Accordingly, wearing the self-winding watch does not violate the *melacha* of *Makeh b'Patish*.

Still, Rav Shlomo Zalman¹² adds, that if the self-winding watch has already stopped, one may not wind it in order to get it to start work again. Since the watch has stopped it is considered "broken" and winding it on Shabbos violates the *melacha* of *Makeh b'Patish*.¹³

2. Solar-Powered Wristwatches

Solar-powered wristwatches work by absorbing the energy from the sunlight and storing it in the self-recharging battery of the watch. When one wears a solar-powered watch outdoors he causes the battery to be charged by the sunlight. Causing the battery to charge on Shabbos is problematic, and therefore some *poskim*¹⁴ rule that one should not wear a solar-powered watch outdoors on Shabbos. However, there may be reasons to permit wearing a solar-powered watch on Shabbos,¹⁵ one should consult his Rav on this issue.

1 Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (Muktzeh, p. 128) 2 Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 28:20 note 46 [See also Nishmas Shabbos 6:387] 3 ibid 28:25 note 53, Binyan Shlomo 308:4 4 Ohr l'Tzion 2:26:10 5 Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igras Moshe O.C. 5:22:25) writes that although there is no decree against wearing such a watch, as we never find that Chazal made such decrees except by covering a fire, if one is concerned that he may inadvertently push the buttons on Shabbos it is appropriate to cover the buttons for Shabbos to serve as a reminder. 6 Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 28:22 7 Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso ibid. Since these watches can be used only by violating a Shabbos prohibition, the watch is considered to be *muktze machmas gufo* (ibid, note 51). 8 Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 28:20 9 ibid 10 338:15 11 Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 28 note 57 12 ibid 13 The Meor Ha'Shabbos (Vol.4:14:148) notes that some self-winding wristwatches do contain a battery and work differently than a typical self-winding watch. Whereas typical self-winding wristwatches are wound by the movement of one's arm, these wristwatches are charged by the movement of one's arms. Accordingly, these watches may be compared to a solar-powered wrist watch which are questionable on Shabbos, as we will soon discuss. 14 Meor Ha'Shabbos Vol4:14:147

3. Activity tracking bands

Activity trackers (or fitness monitors) are worn on one's wrist like a watch (or clipped onto one's clothing). These trackers count one's steps and then estimate distance and calories burned. Is it permissible to wear these on Shabbos in order to track the activity that one performed over Shabbos? (This question is obviously relevant only if one can view his activity without pushing buttons on Shabbos, or if he waits to check his activity after Shabbos.) There may be a number of issues involved with wearing an activity tracker on Shabbos.¹⁶ One of the issues is that as one walks he causes information to be stored in the memory of the band.¹⁷ This can be compared to the controversy over using "Shabbos mode" ovens on Yom Tov:

The Star-K organization rules that it is permissible to use the electronic keypad to raise and lower the oven on *Yom Tov* while the screen of the display is disabled. They argue that since the electronic key pad is disabled, no noticeable change occurs when one uses the keypad to raise and lower the temperature of the oven. However, many *poskim*¹⁸ strongly disagree with this leniency and prohibit using the buttons on the electronic display screen to raise or lower an oven on *Yom Tov*. One of their arguments is that although the display screen is disabled and no recognizable change occurs, it is nevertheless forbidden since pressing a key immediately closes an electrical circuit and instructs the microcontroller to carry out an action.¹⁹

Indeed, the Star-K permits wearing an activity tracker on Shabbos so long as the display screen is disabled.²⁰ However, according to the majority of *poskim* that prohibit using a "Shabbos mode" oven on Yom Tov, it would be prohibited to use an activity tracker on Shabbos as well. If, due to health reasons, one must wear a tracker on Shabbos he should consult his Rav.

3) Setting a watch to the correct time

Some prohibit adjusting a watch on Shabbos to the correct time, as doing so violates the melacha of *Makeh b'Patish*, because adjusting the watch to the correct time, in some way, "fixes" the watch. However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach²¹ and other *poskim*²² rule that it is permissible to adjust the watch to the proper time on Shabbos, because we cannot consider the watch "broken" so long as it is *running* properly, even if it is not set to the proper time. However, if when changing the time the watch stops, even for just a few seconds (as is common by battery operated watches), it may not be adjusted on Shabbos.²³

¹⁵ Since one does not *intend* to charge the watch when he goes outside it may be permissible on Shabbos (based on Shmiras Shabbos k'hilchaso 28: note 57, where he cites many *poskim* who permit wearing self-winding watches based on this reasoning). This is especially true if the watch has enough battery to last the entire Shabbos without charging having to charge it in the sunlight.

¹⁶ There may be a number of other issues involved with wearing these bands on Shabbos: Firstly, since the only way to view the information stored on the band is by tapping a button, we must be concerned that someone may forget himself on Shabbos and inadvertently press the button on Shabbos. This can be compared to what the *poskim* rule regarding wearing a watch that can also perform other functions. We mentioned earlier that some *poskim* rule (see Ohr l'Tzion Vol.2:26:10) that if the watch has buttons that one commonly uses during the week one must be concerned that he may inadvertently push the buttons on Shabbos as well. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe O.C. Vol.5:22:25) writes that it is appropriate to use such a watch only if the buttons are covered. Accordingly, because one must push a button or tap the screen in order to view the information on the activity tracker, wearing it on Shabbos may lead to someone inadvertently push the buttons on Shabbos. Additionally, wearing the band may violate the rabbinical prohibition of measuring on Shabbos, because when one wears the band it measures the amount of steps he took and the distance he walked (See Mishna Berura 397:5 that one may not count 2,000 steps on Shabbos (in order to figure out the *techum Shabbos*) unless one is measuring for a mitzvah need.)

¹⁷ In a conversation with Rav Yitzchak Reichman.

¹⁸ A list of Rabbanim in America who signed against using the Shabbos mode feature to raise and lower "smart ovens" on Yom Tov: HaRav Yaakov Horowitz, Rav Telz Minyan HaRav Elya Ber Wachtfogel, HaRav Shlomo Miller, Rosh Kollel, Kollel Avreichim Toronto HoRav Yechiel Tauber, Rosh Kollel Mechon L'Hoyroa, Monsey, NY HaRav Gershon Bess, Rav Kehilas Yaakov, Los Angeles (and numerous other Gedolim in Eretz Yisroel)

¹⁹ Perhaps this can be compared to a ruling given by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Quoted in Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 66 note 21 I) regarding storing information on a disc on Shabbos. He ruled that it is forbidden to store information on a disc on Shabbos because it violates the *melacha of Makeh b'Patish*, because adding information to the disc makes it more functional or usable.

²⁰ In a conversation with Rabbi Avrohom Mushell from the Star-K

²¹ Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 28:26 note 54

²² Cited in Nishmas Shabbos 6:383. Some *poskim* permit adjusting the time only for a *dvar mitzva*

²³ Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso 28:26