Dear Jeffrey B. Sidney,

The angle at which the motion-sensors are set determines whether or not a given action will activate them. The halacha varies accordingly. Sometimes the sensors are set at such an angle that you can pass by without activating them — they only activate if you actually approach the house. In such a situation, it’s permitted to walk by. This is based on the following rule: If a permitted action will activate them, they only activate if you actually approach the house. In such a situation, it’s permitted to walk by. This is based on the following rule: If a permitted action might or might not cause a prohibited result, the action is nonetheless permitted. This is provided that you’re not purposely trying to cause the prohibited result.

However, many motion-sensitive lights are set at such an angle that you can’t walk past the house without activating them (unless you crawl past on your belly — something not recommended on Shabbat or any non-combat situation). In such a situation, the halacha generally forbids walking past. This is true even though you don’t intend to turn the light on, and you derive no real benefit from the light — for example, there’s adequate street lighting.

However, some authorities rule that if you don’t intend the prohibited result to occur, and you don’t benefit from it, the act it permitted even though the result is sure to occur. Based on this and other factors, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashev, shilta, ruled that if you’re on the way to do a mitzvah — for example, going to and from Synagogue or the Shabbat meal — it’s permitted to walk past these lights if there’s no other way to go.

Sources:
- Rabbi Natan Ba’al Ha’urch, 13th Century Rome
- Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim 320
- Rav Elyashev’s ruling is based in part on the fact that the lights are activated ke’lachar yad — in an unusual way.

Jeffrey B. Sidney <SIDNEY@admin.uottawa.ca> replied:

Dear Rabbi,

Thank you very much for dealing with my question. I’m amazed at the speed with which the reply arrived.

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Bonnie Horwitz <mlcf@bellatlantic.net> wrote:

I am a vegetarian and it is abhorrent to me to have an animal leg on my table at Pesach. I have been told that somewhere in the Talmud it says that a roasted beet can take the place of a roasted shank bone. Can you help me find the source?

Dear Bonnie Horwitz,

The source is the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesachim 114b. There Rabbi Huna is quoted as saying “beets and rice” can be used for the two cooked foods on the Seder plate.

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Yiddle Riddle

There is a person mentioned in Tanach, who the last part of his name is the English translation of the first part of his name. Who is this person?

Answer next week.

(Riddle thanks to Danny Frohlich.)