



Items or Money Found In A Vending Machine

- May You Keep It? [#36]

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Today's topic is in regard to vending machines. A vending machine is a machine that you come over, you put in a credit card or cash, you press a selected code for an item that you want, it falls down to the bottom, and you take the item out of a receptacle slot.

The question is, sometimes you're walking by a machine and you see there's something sitting there, inside the receptacle slot, and there's no one around. Who is the owner of that item? Are you allowed to take the item for yourself? Does it belong to the previous guy that actually paid for the item and, for whatever reason, didn't take it? Or does it possibly belong to the owner of the vending machine?

We're talking about when you found the item in the receptacle slot, whether it's a product, or it's food or drink, or whatever it is. Or, we're even talking about, sometimes you find money (but not as common anymore because we use credit cards many times with these machines nowadays). But let's say, it still applies with coins, sometimes you see in the return change slot there are coins sitting in there. Or, even in cases where, if you push the return coin button, sometimes coins that the previous person put in and he just never selected an item, those coins fall down into the coin return receptacle slot as well. So, in regards to all of those cases, when there are products in the receptacle slot that you get at the bottom of the vending machine, or you find coins, or you push the release button on a vending machine, the question is, are you allowed to keep that money or those products?

We spoke this question over with the *poskim* and the halacha comes out like this: Those items which you found in the receptacle slot, or the coins, are deemed *hefker* and ownerless by the previous person, because he/she abandoned the item and has given up hope in getting/having it.

Therefore, if you find items in a receptacle of a vending machine, you're allowed to actually take the item for yourself and keep it. This applies as well, even if you're in an enclosed place and there's a video camera videoing the machine. You'd still be allowed to take the items out of the receptacle slot or even take the coins.

When it comes to pushing the return coin button and releasing the coins that were sitting inside the machine, in such a case, if it's in a *Yidische* store and the owner is watching the machine, in that case the coins would actually go to the owner who is actually watching over the machine. But that's hardly ever the case, that somebody has a vending machine in their store, so that wouldn't really happen so often.

In an open place, where it's just a machine by itself and it's not inside a store being watched, you'd always be able to keep the coins that comes out after pressing the release button or coins already sitting inside the coin return receptacle, or a product that's sitting inside the product receptacle of the vending machine.***

***Please note that these halachos are intended to inform and educate the reader/listener in general. For any specific questions which arise, it is recommended to speak over the exact case with a competent halachic authority in order to assess the halacha accordingly. You can send your questions in to us as well by replying via WhatsApp to our halacha Q & A number on the group, sending an email to Ask@MoneyHalacha.com, or via our contact page at MoneyHalacha.com/contact-us

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