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September 26, 2008

Make Shabbat easier

DAVE GORDON

A Toronto rabbi has turned halachic loopholes into a way to make life more convenient for Sabbath-observant Jews. With items ranging from lamps to oral hygiene aids to magnetic message centres, Rabbi Shmuel Veffler, Rebbetzin Chana Veffler and Moshe Orzech have designed a line of products that help make the observant Jewish lifestyle easier to keep.

The Vefflers have a knack for finding everyday problems with which people put up and creating rabbinically approved solutions. They founded Kosher Innovations, in 2004, out of a desire to help the observant community adapt to the modern world. As well, they work to educate people in Jewish law, giving sources and explanations on their website www.kosherimage.com for how their products meet rabbinical standards.

Currently, Kosher Innovations offers 10 products, with three more on the way. "These are items that were created out of problems me and my family found annoying," Veffler said. "I kept thinking that there had to be a better way."

The kosher lamp, now in four models, was the first invention, with one that comes in a size that's perfect for children: a 31-centimetre-tall, teddy bear-shaped nightlight. The lamps feature a shade that turns to let out or block the light, so that a person can turn the light "off" on Shabbat without turning off the bulb.

Veffler's not only a rabbi but, fittingly, he also has a degree from the University of Waterloo in mathematics and computer science, thus making for the perfect marriage of Torah knowledge and physics. Before becoming a member of the clergy, Veffler devised computerized solutions for companies with technical predicaments. "I'm always trying to think of a way to do things differently," he said. "I like to come up with a sideways-thinking solution to problems."

The kosher lamp idea came from Veffler's wife, who wanted to read in bed on Shabbat. One of his children, who has an affinity for building projects, decided one Sunday afternoon, during father-son time, that they would solve the problem together. After a trip to the local hardware store and a day's experimenting, they had a prototype.

They discussed the idea with Orzech, a fellow member of their synagogue, the Village Shul. Orzech happened to be in the lighting business. He had the contacts and networks necessary to release the product to the public. The Vefflers sought learned rabbis to examine and approve their products.

One particular invention, their bug checker – a light to inspect fresh vegetables for potential insects – had to be made brighter after a request came from the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, which used the prototype. The possibility of eating *treif* (non-kosher food) – consuming an insect via produce, for example – has become more of a hot button issue in recent years.

Some of the products that the Vefflers sell include special toothbrushes and dental wash approved for use on Shabbat. According to various opinions held by

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communities and rabbis, regular toothbrushes use nylon bristles that are so densely packed and thin that wringing out water is inevitable, and this is a Sabbath prohibition. To solve this problem, Kosher Innovations created a brush with wide-spaced, thick, rubber bristles.

One of the newer products available from Kosher Innovations is the Shabbat alarm clock, which automatically shuts off by itself after a minute, without the need to press any buttons. The clock is equipped with five alarms, so it can be set for multiple naps and wake-up times over the course of a day.

The Magnetic Shabbos Message Board is a halachically approved way to leave fridge notes to the family on Shabbat or *yom tov* (holy day) when writing is not allowed. The message board comes with more than 150 colorful magnets, with words, pictures and phrases common to the typical Jewish household.

"These are items that help people feel better about the commitments they made in terms of Jewish practice," Chana Veffer said.

Dave Gordon is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His website is davegordonwrites.com.

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