



## The Mitzvah of Lighting Shabbat Candles

### Part II

[Last week's issue](#) discussed the dual nature of the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles. There is an aspect of *kavod Shabbat*, preparing for the Shabbat, and an aspect of *oneg Shabbat*, enjoying the Shabbat. One element of *oneg Shabbat* is *shalom bayit*, tranquility in the home (Gemara, *Shabbat* 25b). Rashi, *Shabbat* 25b, s.v. *Hadlakat*, explains that when there is darkness and people are stumbling, there is no tranquility. The other element of *oneg Shabbat* is use of the light for the various activities one performs to enjoy Shabbat. Either way, the candles serve a practical purpose in illuminating the home. It would stand to reason that one may fulfill the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles with anything that can provide sufficient light in the home. Therefore, use of electric lights would be acceptable for the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles.

There are a few objections raised by contemporary poskim to the use of electric lights for the purpose of the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles. Before exploring these objections, some background information is required. There are two categories of electric lights. The first category includes bulbs that illuminate due to the heating of metal to the point that it glows. The most common forms of light bulbs in this category are incandescent bulbs (the standard light bulb) and halogen bulbs. The second category includes bulbs that illuminate without any heat. This category includes fluorescent bulbs, neon bulbs, and light emitting diodes (LEDs).

### **What Type of Light is Valid for Lighting Shabbat Candles?**

Many poskim (see *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata* ch. 43 note 22) write that an incandescent light bulb is comparable to a *gachelet shel matechet*, a glowing hot piece of metal, which most Rishonim (see *Teshuvot Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim* no. 229) consider to be a fire for halachic purposes. Therefore, they permit use of an incandescent bulb for the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles. However, R. Yitzchak Shternhel, *Kochvei Yitzchak* 1:2, disagrees and rules that one may not use a fire that has no fuel. An electric light which doesn't run directly on fuel but rather through resistance of electrons is not considered a *ner* for these purposes.

A further question arises regarding fluorescent bulbs that do not provide light in the form of fire. R. Shmuel A. Yudelevitz, *HaChashmal Le'Or HaHalacha* 3:6, rules that since the light is not derived from glowing metal, it is not considered fire, and is therefore not suitable for lighting the Shabbat candles. However, *Encyclopedia Talmudit, Chashmal*, note 308, comments that one can question the requirement for fire based on the comments of *Moshav Zekeinim MiBa'alei HaTosafot, Vayikra* 24:2. *Moshav*

*Zekeinim* discuss the dispute regarding whether one recites a *beracha* on lighting the Shabbat candles (as discussed on last week's issue). They quote Rabbeinu Meshulam who claims that if one has a shiny stone that provides light there is no need for a candle. Therefore, one does not recite a *beracha* even when one does light a candle because the candle is not inherently obligatory. *Moshav Zekeinim* then quote Rabbeinu Tam who states that even if one has a shiny stone that provides sufficient light, there is still an obligation to light the Shabbat candles. *Encyclopedia Talmudit* claims that this dispute is limited to whether there is an active requirement to light Shabbat candles. If there was some way to actively "light" the shiny stone, even Rabbeinu Tam would agree that its use for Shabbat candles would be sanctioned. The implication is that there is no requirement for fire, and any light would suffice. Therefore, fluorescent lights, which can be actively lit, may be used for Shabbat candles.

### **Reciting a Beracha on Electric Lights**

R. Tzvi P. Frank, *Har Tzvi* 2:114, quotes R. Yosef Rosen (The Rogatchover) that one may not recite a *beracha* on lighting an electric light because turning on a light is not considered a sufficient enough action to warrant saying "*l'hadlik*" (to light). Ostensibly, R. Rosen considers lighting an electric light to be *gerama* (an indirect action). [R. Frank notes that completing a circuit is not considered *gerama* for the purpose of permitting *melacha* on Shabbat. R. Rosen's concern is that one should consider it *gerama* as a matter of stringency to prohibit reciting a *beracha* on electric lights.] R. Frank addresses the issue of *gerama* regarding lighting Shabbat candles, and states that since Maharam (cited in last week's issue) allows recitation of a *beracha* on a candle that was not lit for the purpose of Shabbat, (i.e., one may recite a *beracha* on *oneg Shabbat* without fulfilling the *kavod Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles) one may also recite a *beracha* on a light that was lit through *gerama*. R. Shmuel A. Yudelevitz, op. cit., adds that even if one requires that the *beracha* is recited on a light lit for the purpose of *kavod Shabbat*, an electric light would fulfill that requirement even if it is considered *gerama*.

R. Chaim Y.A. Halberstam, in *Teshuvot Yerushat Peleitah* no. 7, contends that even if one can fulfill the requirement of lighting Shabbat candles using electric lights, one may not recite a *beracha* on that lighting. His opinion is based on a ruling of Rashba, *Teshuvot HaRashba* 1:18, who rules that one does not recite a *beracha* on a mitzvah that requires the assistance of other people in order to perform that mitzvah. With regards to reciting a *beracha* on electric lights, R. Halberstam suggests that since one must rely on the electric company in order to provide power, one does not recite a *beracha* on such a mitzvah. Rav Shlomo Z. Auerbach (cited in *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata* ch. 43, note 22) notes that if the concern to refrain from reciting a *beracha* is the reliance on the power company, one may recite a *beracha* on a battery-powered light (such as a flashlight with an incandescent bulb). It should be noted that R. Moshe Feinstein (cited in *The Radiance of Shabbos*, page 12) was of the opinion that one should not recite a *beracha* on electric lights.

### **Combining the Use of Candles and Electric Lights**

Under normal circumstances, most women opt to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles with actual candles or oil rather than electric lights. Nevertheless, the presence of the electric lights in the room does impact the mitzvah in a number of ways.

First, the purpose of the Shabbat candles is to provide light for activities that are going to be performed on Shabbat. Maharil, *Teshuvot Maharil* no. 53, questions whether one may recite a *beracha* on lighting candles in a room in which other women have lit their Shabbat candles. He writes that although there are opinions that maintain that one does not recite a *beracha* in such an instance, there are grounds to recite a *beracha* as the additional candles provide added light to corners of the room that the original candles do not illuminate sufficiently. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 263:8, rules that one may not recite a *beracha* upon lighting candles in a room where there are other lit candles. Rama, *ad loc.*, rules that one may rely on the opinion of Maharil. R. Shlomo Z. Auerbach (cited in *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata* 43:171) questions whether Maharil's leniency is applicable to lighting candles in a room in which there are electric lights, as the candles are not going to provide any additional light. Although R. Auerbach does provide justification for this practice, he notes that it is preferable to either turn off the electric lights prior to lighting the candles (and then have someone else turn on the electric lights), or to incorporate lighting of the electric lights into the candle lighting service.

Second, *Mishna Berurah* 263:38, notes that if one is in a situation where a few people in the same house must light Shabbat candles, it is preferable for the guest to light in her private quarters rather than the dining room in order to avoid relying on Maharil's leniency. By incorporating electric lights into the candle lighting service, one can follow *Mishna Berurah's* ruling by lighting an electric light in one's private quarters and then lighting actual candles in the dining room (after the hostess has lit her candles).

Third, there is a certain element of danger in lighting actual candles, especially when left unattended. Incorporating electric lights into the candle lighting service provides a means of minimizing the danger. By incorporating electric lights, one can use a candle or oil that will only burn for a short amount of time, and the electric lights will fulfill the task of providing *oneg Shabbat* after the candles are extinguished.

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