

# **Shabbos Candles – Part III**

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## **The use of electric lights for Shabbos and Chanukah candles**

In order to understand whether one can fulfill his obligation of lighting Shabbos and Chanukah candles by using electric lights, we must first classify what status halachah gives to these lights in general. Then we must further understand whether this status is relevant to the mitzvos that Chazal commanded us to perform.

### **Is a light-bulb considered a fire?**

The invention of electricity led to a great deal of confusion in the halachic world. Many of the gedolim worked hard to figure out exactly what role this new invention would play in Jewish life. Many Tshuvos and Seforim are dedicated solely to this topic. One of the most famous Tshuvos written on the matter of electric lights was by the Great Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky (shu"t Achiezer chelek 3, siman 60). He Paskens unequivocally that an incandescent light bulb constitutes a halachic fire. The fact that the filaments inside the bulb reach a heat that causes them to glow seems to indicate an actual fire inside of the glass casing. Therefore, one who actively lights an incandescent bulb on Shabbos has violated the melachah of havarah. This opinion is contrary to the Maharsham (shut chelek 2 siman 244), who held that turning on the lights on Shabbos is only an issur d'rabanan. (It is important to note that even if one assumes that electric lights do not constitute fire, there may be other reasons that it is assur mid'oraysah to turn on the lights on Shabbos. See Chazon Ish hil. Shabbos siman 3, sif. 9.) The majority of poskim seem to agree with the opinion of Rav Chaim Ozer. Among them are Rav Yosef Rosen (The Rogatchover Gaon quoted in hsofrim vhasfarim p.316), Rav Issur Zalman Meltzer (in his Haskamah to sefer Chelkas Yaakov) and many others. According to Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (see Nefesh Harav p.156), Rav Chaim Ozer was so convinced that his opinion was correct, that he was makpid to say havdalah over an electric bulb. Thus we see that incandescent lights are generally treated as fire in halachah. One might then assume that this is enough to fulfill the requirement for Shabbos and Chanukah candles. However, we shall see that fire is not the only criteria necessary to perform these mitzvos.

### **Chanukah Candles**

We know that the driving force behind the mitzvah of neiros chanukah is pirsumei nissah, to show the world that Hashem performed a miracle for his people. Thus, the candles that we light should serve to demonstrate the nature of this miracle. The Mechaber writes (siman 673, sif 1) based on the Gemarah (Shabbos 21a) that all oils and wicks are acceptable for Chanukah candles, even those that can't be used on Shabbos. The Rema adds that using olive oil constitutes a mitzvah min hamuvchar, and the Mishnah Berurah (s.k. 4) explains that this because the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash was only lit with pure shemen zayis. However, the Rema concludes that one

can even be yotzeh with wax candles. In the Sha'ar Hatziyon, he quotes the Maharal Mi'Prague who says that one is not even yotzeh with wax candles because it's not similar to the menorah of the Mikdash, but rejects his opinion.) Based on this, many poskim conclude that one may not light Chanukah candles using electric lights, because they are in no way similar to the menorah of the Mikdash. This is the opinion of the Sefer Beis Yitzchak (Rav Yitzchak Shmelkis, yoreh de'ah siman 120) Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (shu"t Har Tzvi chelek 2 siman 114) and Mikra'ei Kodesh siman 20) elaborates that a light bulb contains neither a wick nor oil, both of which are requirements for ner chanukah. It is almost as if there is a free-standing flame inside a glass casing, which is unacceptable. This sentiment is mirrored by the majority of modern poskim (for an exhaustive list, see shut Yabiah Omer chelek 3 siman 33). Another possible problem with electric menorahs is based on the Mechaber (ibid sif 2) who says that at the time of lighting the candles must be amply fueled so that they can burn for a half hour. This is the principle of kavsah eino zakuk lah (that if the flame goes out due to abnormal circumstances, one need not relight it because he was already yotzeh the mitzvah when he lit it the first time.) In the case of electric lights, the fuel for the lights continued illumination is dependant on others (i.e. the power plant that supplies the electricity) and might not be considered 'ready in advance' as the Mitzvah of Chanukah candles requires. However, one could argue based on another statement by Rav Frank (Har tzvi ibid sif 1, Mira'ei Kodesh siman 17): that even if there is seemingly insufficient fuel for the candles, if they do last the entire time, despite their seeming inefficiency, one has indeed fulfilled the Mitzvah. So too in our case, if the lights never go out, the lack of electricity would be inconsequential. Thus one should avoid using electric lights in place of candles for his ner chanukah. If one has no other option, he should light the electric menorah without saying a bracha (see Piskei Tshuvos p. 480).

### **Shabbos Candles**

Despite what we have just learned, one can still make a case that he can be yotzeh ner shabbos by using electric lights. We know that there are two reasons that chazal instituted Shabbos candles: Kavod Shabbos and Oneg Shabbos. The Oneg Shabbos manifests itself through shalom bayis. When people can see what they are doing, it lessens the tension and creates a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere on the home. Greater illumination also leads to greater enjoyment of the Shabbos meals and increases the Oneg Shabbos. Kavod is accomplished when the Shabbos meals are properly illuminated and are enjoyed in the proper atmosphere. Both of these goals can seemingly be accomplished through the use of electric lights. A proof to this can be found in the Gemarah (Ta'anis 25a) that tells a story of the daughter of Rabbi Chaninah ben Dosah, who accidentally lit Shabbos candles using vinegar instead of oil. Rabbi Chaninah assured her that the same God who commanded oil to serve as fuel for a fire can command vinegar as well. And so it was, that these candles lasted the entire Shabbos. Thus we see that any fuel that will serve to illuminate the Shabbos home is sufficient. Therefore, many Poskim are far more permissive of using electricity in place of Shabbos candles. The Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah (perek 43, sif 4, 32) writes that one can use electric lights for Shabbos candles should say a bracha. This is also the opinion of Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Tshuvos V'hanhagos chelek 2, siman 157). However, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (ibid) writes in the name of the Rogatchover, that even though one can say havdalah on electric lights, he cannot say the bracha for Shabbos candles,

because the text of the bracha indicates a lighting of candles and this does not constitute a halachic lighting. Rav Simchah Bunim Cohen writes (Kavod V'Oneg Shabbos) that this was also the opinion of Rav Moshe Feinstein (against the majority of poskim). Thus one should be makpid to light Shabbos candles and not rely on the electric lights.

Even those who prefer actual candles to electricity still admit that the Shabbos candles don't actually serve as additional light for the home. They are overshadowed by our chandeliers and fixtures. Thus, many quote in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein (see Tshuvos V'hanhagos ibid), and Rav Soloveitchik (Nefesh Harav p. 156) that when one wishes to light Shabbos candles, she should first extinguish the lights, and relight them in honor of shabbos along with her actual Shabbos candles. Others explain that this is not necessary because the added ambience of the candles sufficiently enhances the Shabbos atmosphere and therefore necessitates its own bracha.