

36. Kindling a Fire

הַמְבַּעֵיר

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to kindle a fire that produces, prolongs or increases heat or light for the purpose of igniting, heating, lighting, cooking, baking, operating an engine or a motor,¹ etc. Activities

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1. **Stuck in Traffic Erev Shabbat, and Driving in an Unsafe Neighborhood** Being stuck in traffic on *Erev Shabbat* is a *halachic* problem which tests, perhaps like none other, a Jew's *yirat shamayim* and serves as a litmus test which measures our relationship with *Hashem*. Moreover, the complexity and nuance of each individual circumstance makes relating to this question in a meaningful manner beyond the scope of this work. Needless to say, the best way to deal with this issue is to arrive at your destination well before Shabbat begins. Having said that, situations beyond our control do occur from time to time, and therefore, a traveler should have a basic knowledge of the issues involved. There are five separate and distinct *halachic* issues which may arise in this situation: a) continuing to drive involves the *Melachah* of *Mav'ir*. b) Turning off the car involves the *Melachah* of *Mechabeh*. (See *Melachah* 37, note 4.) c) Carrying valuables that you might want to remove from your car involves the *Melachah* of *Hotza'ah*. (See *Melachah* 39, note 3.) d) Asking a non-Jew to help involves the rabbinic prohibition of *Amira L'Nochri*. (See Part IV, Chapter 6.) e) Traveling a distance which exceeds the two thousand *amot* of the *Techum Shabbat*. (See Part IV, Chapter 11.) Each issue will be addressed in its place. Driving, as stated in the text, violates the *Melachah* of *Mav'ir*. Therefore, it is forbidden to drive on Shabbat. If you are in a situation which is considered dangerous, such as a high crime neighborhood, near a village where anti-Semitism is prevalent, or in an extremely secluded area, you may

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prohibited within this *melachah* include kindling a fire by striking a match, or by lighting one fire from another, as well as increasing or prolonging a fire by raking the coals, and igniting a fire or producing heat or light² with a chemical substance.

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) are adding oil to a lamp to keep the light burning; tilting or adjusting the lamp to facilitate the flow of oil to the flame; adding gasoline, wood, coal or other fuel to a tank or furnace to prolong the fire; and heating metal to a glow.

3. *Chazal* also prohibited reading alone or examining an article closely by lamplight, for fear that you may tilt the lamp for the oil to flow more freely in order to increase the light;³ and moving a lighted candle or lamp.

4. Among the activities prohibited⁴ under this *melachah* are smoking a cigarette, cigar or pipe; turning on or regulating the flame of a gas burner; starting the furnace;⁵ and opening a coal furnace, or a

continue to drive until you reach a safe environment, such as a populated area, a hotel or a police station. Once you are undoubtedly out of harm's way, you must park. Also, as Shabbat approaches, it would be wise to turn the lighting control to off, and disable the alarm if possible, so that in cases of need, you can open the car door once Shabbat has started.

2. **Handling Synthetic Fabrics That Emit Sparks** On Shabbat, you are allowed to wear clothing made of synthetic fabrics that create static electricity and emit sparks when handled.
3. **Reading by Electric Light** You may read by electric light and perform other activities that require close concentration. The restriction does not apply to electric lights, even if the intensity of light in the bulb can be increased. The restriction also does not apply to gas light, or to lamps and candles which give off a good, steady light. Some *poskim* permit reading by the light of an oil lamp as well if you put up a sign or some other reminder that it is Shabbat.
4. **Dropping Garbage into the Incinerator** In an apartment house, where the garbage is incinerated daily, you are not permitted on Shabbat to drop garbage into the chute that leads to the cellar, where it is collected and burned that day.
5. **Having a Non-Jew Light the Furnace** You may have a non-Jew light the fire in the furnace on Shabbat in order to heat the house in cold weather, because everyone is susceptible to sickness in the cold. While you are allowed to explicitly request him to light the furnace on Shabbat, it is best to arrange for it in advance, preferably on a contractual basis for the winter season.

thermostatically controlled⁶ gas oven,⁷ and thereby igniting or intensifying the fire.⁸

5. The use of electricity⁹ is prohibited on Shabbat. Activities involving the use of electricity, such as turning on an electric light and

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6. **Activating the Thermostat That Controls Operation of the Furnace** In a heating system where a thermostat automatically controls the operation of the furnace, you may not raise the temperature setting on Shabbat when the furnace is not in operation, as it is bound to start the fire in the furnace. You should refrain from raising the temperature setting even when the furnace is in full operation. However, you may open a door or a window in the room where the thermostat is located, even though it will lower the temperature in the room and activate the thermostat, thereby causing the furnace to operate and the heat to come up in the house.
7. **Use of an Oven with Thermostat Control** Many authorities prohibit keeping food warm on Shabbat in a thermostatically-controlled gas or electric oven, because when you open the door of the oven to remove the food, you thereby lower the temperature, and may cause the thermostat to ignite the flame, or to intensify and prolong the fire if it is burning. Some, however, permit removing the food if necessary when the fire is on; see also *Melachah* 11, note 36.
8. **Opening a Door Near a Fireplace** You should not open a door or window directly opposite and near a fireplace if the wind will fan the fire causing it to burn more intensely. If there is no wind it is allowed, provided you do not cause a draft. Closing the door or window is allowed, even if it will restrict the supply of air in the room, causing the fire eventually to go out.
9. **Halachic Basis for the Prohibited Use of Electricity** The *halachic* status of electricity is subject to a wide-ranging debate among the *poskim*. In the view of many early authorities, the use of electricity comes under the *Melachah* of Kindling a Fire (הבערה), as it is presumed to involve kindling a fire and generating a spark when the electrical circuit is made. It is also classified by some authorities under the *Melachah* of Cooking (בישול) on the presumption that the electrical current causes the wires to be heated. A novel view was advanced by the *Chazon Ish* that making the electrical contact and completing the circuit, or breaking the contact and the electrical circuit are activities of the nature of Building (בונה) and Demolishing (סותר). These approaches would render use of electricity on Shabbat a *melachah min haTorah*. However, the generally accepted view is that use of electricity is a prohibition of rabbinic nature. Some authorities ascribe it as well to the prohibition of forming or repairing a utensil (תיקון מנא), and of creating (מוליד), insofar as the flow of electricity makes the object useable. Some characterize it as דברים המותרים ואחרים נהגו בהם איסור. While opinions thus vary as to the *halachic* basis of the prohibition, there is unanimous agreement that it is forbidden to use electricity on Shabbat. Furthermore, the use of incandescent lights is a Torah violation since the filament is burned to create both light and heat. For analysis

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operating electrical equipment and appliances are forbidden. Although you are forbidden to switch the electric lights and appliances on during Shabbat, you are permitted to have lights burning that were turned on before Shabbat or automatically switched on during Shabbat, and to have certain appliances in operation on Shabbat that were switched on or set for operation *Erev Shabbat*.¹⁰

of the technical and *halachic* principles involved in the analogies that are drawn, see the sources and references cited.

10. **Operating Electrical Appliances by Means of a Timer** The use of a timer, or *Shabbos* Clock, that is set before Shabbat to operate electrical equipment and appliances on Shabbat is the subject of a difference of views among *poskim*. Rav Moshe Feinstein permits use of the device when it is set before Shabbat to put on the electric lights and to turn them off, but does not permit its general use for appliances. The prevailing view among authorities, however, permits use of the device, when set before Shabbat, to turn the current on and off on Shabbat on certain, select appliances as well. Opinions differ also as to the permissibility of adjusting the device on Shabbat either to advance or delay the operation. While some authorities consider it a violation of a Biblical prohibition if the electrical current is on, and a rabbinic prohibition if the current is off, others take a lenient view and permit adjusting the device on Shabbat as long as the adjustment maintains the status quo (meaning if the appliance is on, it can be adjusted to stay on longer; if it is off, it can be adjusted to stay off longer). Adjusting a *Shabbos* Clock is only permitted if the clock is operated manually and not electronically. See the following section, *Electrical Equipment and Appliances*, for particulars on use of the timing device with electric lights (#1), air conditioner (#4), radio and TV (#5), dishwasher (#16), and an electric stove (see *Melachah* 11, note 23).

36.1 Electrical Equipment and Appliances

The following are additional notations on operating electrical equipment and appliances on Shabbat. In view of technological advances in this field, you are advised to obtain technical and halachic guidance.

1. TURNING LIGHTS ON AND OFF

Lighting an electric light involves the flow of an electric current through the wire or filament in the electric bulb, thereby heating it to incandescence and causing it to give off light, and would constitute a Torah violation. Lighting a fluorescent lamp entails the conduction of electricity through mercury vapor resulting in the emission of visible light, and is therefore subject to the debate regarding electricity cited above in note 9. Turning on either type of light is a prohibited activity on Shabbat. You may, however, have lights go on and off at designated times on Shabbat by means of a time clock set before Shabbat. You should not reset the time on the clock on Shabbat to advance the operation of the turning off of the light. However, you may carefully, and manually adjust the pegs in a timer to maintain the status-quo.

2. OPENING AN ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR AND FREEZER

(a) A standard electric refrigerator or freezer that is thermostatically controlled operates automatically to cool the air when the temperature in the unit reaches a preset degree. By opening the door of the refrigerator, and allowing warm air to enter, the thermostat is activated,

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causing the compressor and the cooling mechanism to operate. Some *poskim* take a strict view regarding triggering the mechanism and recommend opening the door of the refrigerator in an indirect manner (אִתְּרָא) when it is not in operation. (When it is in operation, opening the door does not affect the thermostat.) If you wish to comply with an even more restrictive view, you can install a timing device that will turn the motor off at designated times, allowing the unit to be opened at such times. In view of the new models of refrigerators and freezers that appear on the market periodically, you should ascertain the nature of the operation of a particular model in order to take the proper measures to remove any restrictions.

However, normative practice follows those authorities who permit opening the refrigerator and the freezer on Shabbat to remove food or to put it in at all times. In no case should you raise or lower the temperature setting at any time, whether it is in operation or not.

(b) Before Shabbat, you should remove the light bulb that lights up when the door is opened and goes out when the door is closed or tape the switch. If you failed to deactivate the light, you should have a non-Jew open the refrigerator to remove the food. In case of emergency, and where a non-Jew is not available, a child may unplug the cord of the refrigerator when it is not in operation. After the bulb is removed, the child may plug it back in. If a child is not available, you may remove the plug in an indirect manner, as with the foot, etc. when the refrigerator is not in operation. However, an adult may not plug it in.

3. ADJUSTING AN ELECTRIC FAN

You are not permitted to adjust the speed on an electric fan on Shabbat. However, you may move it and turn it to direct the flow of air in a desired direction.

4. REGULATING OPERATION OF AN AIR CONDITIONER

You are not permitted to adjust the controls of an air conditioner on Shabbat in order to raise or lower the temperature. However you may open the door or window, although it will result in altering the

temperature in the room. You are permitted to adjust the grille or the partitions while the air conditioner is in operation, in order to direct the air flow. Most *poskim* permit use of a timer set before Shabbat to turn on the air conditioner on Shabbat. On a hot day, you may ask a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioner to obtain relief from the heat, just as you are permitted to have a non-Jew turn on the furnace to obtain relief from the cold. You are likewise permitted to have the non-Jew turn off the air conditioner if the weather should turn cold. See footnote 10 above regarding adjusting a *Shabbos* clock.

5. LISTENING TO THE RADIO OR STEREO AND WATCHING TELEVISION

You are not permitted to listen to the radio or to watch television on Shabbat, even when it is turned on by means of a timing device set before the Shabbat, or is turned on before Shabbat. The prohibition applies to a transistor or battery operated radio, as well as one that is operated electrically. The same prohibition applies to listening to music on a stereo or on a similar musical apparatus. Apart from the likelihood of turning the dials to adjust the volume or the picture, or to change stations—and even if you take measures to prevent turning the dials—it is disruptive of the spirit of Shabbat and not in keeping with the holiness of Shabbat. In case of emergency, when it is essential to be informed of weather conditions and the like, you may set the radio before Shabbat to go on at a designated time and listen discreetly, taking precautions to prevent adjusting it in any way.

6. MONITORING THE DOORWAY WITH A TV

On Shabbat, you may have in operation a television that monitors the area surrounding the doorway to screen those who come to the door, if it is deemed necessary to protect your home and family.

7. USING THE TELEPHONE

You are not permitted to use a telephone on Shabbat, as lifting the receiver completes an electrical circuit; by talking into the phone the sound of your voice is converted into electrical impulses for transmission over the telephone wires; and by hanging up, you break the circuit.

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In an emergency, as when someone is critically ill, you are allowed to make a telephone call. Therefore, you may phone for an ambulance, to summon a car for a woman in labor, for police in case of a break-in by a robber, for firemen in case of a fire and a possible danger to life, however remote. If possible, you should lift the receiver and replace it in a manner different from the usual. The same regulations govern use of a cell phone.

8. USE OF A TELEPHONE ANSWERING MACHINE

You may leave your answering machine on over Shabbat.

9. USE OF A MICROPHONE AND LOUDSPEAKER

You are not permitted to use a microphone or loudspeaker on Shabbat, irrespective of whether it is operated by electrical current or by means of a transistor. This applies even if the apparatus was turned on before Shabbat or by a non-Jew on Shabbat.

10. RINGING AN ELECTRIC DOORBELL

You may not ring an electric doorbell on Shabbat because pressing the button completes an electrical circuit that operates the bell. If you are in danger of being locked out at night, or in a similar emergency, some permit ringing the doorbell in order to enter the house or to summon help. In such a case you should do it in a manner different from the usual, such as with your elbow, foot, left hand, etc. For the ruling regarding a doorbell that operates mechanically, see *Melachah* 38, note 21.

11. OPENING A DOOR THAT OPERATES AUTOMATICALLY

You may not enter or exit a doorway, if in opening the door you cause a light to go on, or if in stepping on or across the threshold you activate a photo-electric or an electromagnetic mechanism, causing the door to open automatically. In a case of need, such as visiting a patient in a hospital, you can wait until someone else has opened the door then enter afterwards. In case of doubt as to whether or not the door opens automatically, you are permitted to enter.

12. INSTALLING A BURGLAR ALARM SYSTEM

- (a) If you find yourself as a guest in a home or in a public building where the alarm system is off, but monitors or closed circuit TV track your movements, you may move around freely without concern based on the principle that *pesik reishet delo nichah lei*, inevitable consequences of your actions that you prefer not to have happen, are allowed in cases of rabbinic prohibitions; see *Introduction to the Nature of Melachah*, note 11.
- (b) When installing your own system, be mindful that there are various types of alarm systems designed to protect the home from intruders, and not all of them are universally accepted or fully operable, as solutions to the *halachic* problem. You should learn the technical details of your system, and seek *halachic* guidance **in advance** regarding the following issues: how it can be made functional on Shabbat; what to do if the bypass or other Shabbat accommodations were inadvertently not set before Shabbat; what to do if the alarm activates, etc.

13. RIDING IN AN ELEVATOR

- (a) You are forbidden to use an elevator on Shabbat if it entails pressing a button.
- (b) *Halachic* literature reflects differing opinions on the question of riding in an elevator that operates automatically, either continually or at designated intervals, with doors that open and close automatically, known as a *Shabbos* elevator. Automatic elevators, such as the standard traction elevator or the hydraulic elevator, may pose *halachic* problems by virtue of the technical nature of their operation, including speed of descent, switching signal lights, and braking, which are affected by the presence or absence of passengers. According to some authorities, you may ride in an automatic elevator, taking care not to touch the doors in any way when they are closing, so as not to cause them to open. Others permit riding in an automatically operated elevator only in case of extreme need, such as if you are ill or elderly, or to enable you to pray with a *minyán*.
- (c) You may not ride in an elevator operated by a Jew. If it is operated by a non-Jew, some permit riding in the elevator, provided you enter

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and leave along with other non-Jews, and do not request that it stop on a particular floor. Others do not permit it, except in case of illness or in an emergency. If you are accompanying someone who is critically ill, you may ride the elevator with the patient.

In general, when you must use the elevator, it is recommended that you do so only for ascent, and use the stairs for descending.

14. RIDING ON AN ESCALATOR

You may not use an escalator that is set in motion when you approach or step on it. However, if it operates automatically, either continually or at designated times, you may ride the escalator up or down.

15. USE OF AN INTERCOM OR AN APNEA MONITOR

You may not use an intercom on Shabbat. Therefore, you may not, under normal circumstances, use an intercom to monitor children in another part of the house. This restriction, however, does not apply in a dangerous situation or in the case of a child with a critical condition, such as one prone to apnea, a serious respiratory condition that requires the use of an apnea monitor when the child is asleep. In such a case it is permitted; you should consult a *halachic* authority for more specific guidance.

16. USE OF A DISHWASHER

You may not use a dishwasher to wash dishes on Shabbat, even if it is set for operation on a timer before Shabbat. This is because a dishwasher is not like other appliances which may be operated on a timer. First, you must close the door in order to run the cycle. Therefore, you are involved with the process of turning it on. Secondly, the loud noise heard during operation detracts from the atmosphere of Shabbat (אָוּשָׁא מִיְלִתָּא). (However, you may stack the dirty dishes in the machine on Shabbat. You may likewise remove dishes from the dishwasher.) See Part IV, Chapter 5, note 7.

17. USE OF A HEATING PAD

You may use an electric heating pad on Shabbat if it is turned on before Shabbat. The temperature controls and the outlet should be taped to prevent inadvertently resetting the temperature or turning

it off. You may have a non-Jew turn it on and regulate the temperature on Shabbat.

18. USE OF AN ELECTRIC BLANKET

You may use an electric blanket on Shabbat, provided it is plugged into the socket and turned on before Shabbat. You should cover or tape the temperature controls and the outlet to prevent inadvertently adjusting the heat or turning it off. (This deals only with the *halachic* considerations in the matter. It does not address the safety factors that should be considered in the use of an electric blanket generally and in particular under such circumstances.)

19. USING SMARTPHONES, IPODS, AND OTHER ELECTRONIC AND BATTERY-OPERATED DEVICES

A smartphone, iPod, or other electrical powered devices may not be used on Shabbat. Even a device which is configured to operate through use of the principle of *grama* is prohibited since *grama* does not stand on its own as a permitting factor (see Part II, Introduction—The Nature of *Melachah*, note 14.) An appliance, such as a flashlight or a portable radio that operates on electric current produced by batteries, is likewise forbidden on Shabbat. In the case of toys that operate with batteries, you should remove the batteries before Shabbat. Devices which are used for writing and sending text messages pose the additional problem of the *Melachah* of Writing, even though the writing only exists temporarily (see Part II, *Melachah* 32, note 10.) Also, see Part IV, Chapter 5, paragraph 1, and note 1 on preserving the character of Shabbat.

20. DOORS EQUIPPED WITH ELECTRONIC LOCKS

Almost all hotels use electronic locks as a substitute for key locks in order to prevent theft. You are not permitted to insert the card into the electro-magnetic lock on Shabbat to open the door, in view of the *halachic* problems and prohibitions currently involved in activating electrical sensors and the switching on of lights in the mechanism. When encountering such an unavoidable situation, you should pre-arrange with the hotel staff for a non-Jewish attendant to open the door.

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21. WEARING A DIGITAL OR BATTERY-POWERED WATCH

You are permitted to wear a watch that is powered by a battery, where it is permitted to carry on Shabbat, but you may not insert the battery to make it work. Also, you may not press any of the buttons.

22. WEARING A HEARING AID

Someone who is hard of hearing may wear a hearing aid on Shabbat. A hearing aid that operates automatically without batteries for an extended period of time is preferable. If it is battery operated, it should be turned on before Shabbat. You may adjust the volume, if necessary, but not turn it on or off, or replace the battery. You should take precautions to prevent turning it off inadvertently. As new devices come into use frequently, you should seek technical and *halachic* guidance. A hearing aid, like glasses, may be worn outdoors even where there is no *eruv*. See Part III, Chapter 4, note 18.