



שבת

יגזג

Parshat Va'eira

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STARTING POINT

The Hand of G-d - by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Moshe and Aharon were directly involved in most of the plagues that were brought on Egypt. In the first three (blood, frogs, and lice), Aharon stretched out his staff to start the plagues (Shemot 7:19, 8:1, 8:12). In the third set of three plagues (hail, locusts, and darkness), Moshe stretched out his hand (9:22, 10:12, 10:21). Both Moshe and Aharon played an active role in the plague of boils: "And G-d said to Moshe and Aharon, take fistfuls of soot and let Moshe throw it towards the sky in front of Pharaoh. And it will become dust throughout the land of Egypt, and it will develop into blisters on man and beast." [9:8-9]. However, three plagues were an exception to this trend, and for them the Almighty acted without any help from Moshe and Aharon. With respect to wild animals, it is written, "And G-d did this, and a serious attack of animals came on the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his slaves, and on all of the land of Egypt" [8:20]. In the plague of the death of the cattle, it is written, "And G-d did this thing on the next day, and all of the cattle of Egypt died" [9:6]. And in the plague of the firstborn, it is written, "And it happened at midnight, that G-d struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt" [12:29]. Why were these three plagues different from the others?

The answer is that in these three plagues, there is a special emphasis on the fact that Bnei Yisrael were treated very differently than the Egyptians. Before the plague of wild animals we are told, "And that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no animals will appear there, so that you shall know that I am G-d within the land" [8:18]. The understanding that G-d appears in the world and judges between the evil and righteous people is achieved through seeing that Bnei Yisrael are singled out for good treatment. The same is true of the plague of Dever: "Behold, G-d's hand will appear among your cattle... And G-d will differentiate between the cattle of Bnei Yisrael and the cattle of Egypt, and not one of Bnei Yisrael's cattle will die... And G-d did this thing the next day, and all of the cattle of Egypt died, but among the cattle of Bnei Yisrael not one died." [9:3-6]. The same is true of the beginning of the plague of the firstborn, where it is written: "And every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sits on his throne... and all the firstborn of the cattle. And there was a great cry in all the land of Egypt... But for all of Bnei Yisrael not even a dog will move its tongue, against a man or an animal, so that you shall know that G-d differentiates between Egypt and between Yisrael." [11:5-7]. While it is noted in passing that other plagues (hail, darkness) did not cause harm to Bnei Yisrael, it is only with these three plagues that the differentiation is emphasized

before the plague happens. Note too that the term "wonder" (hafla'ah) appears only with respect to these plagues.

The plagues in Egypt teach us various lessons, and one of them is the personal supervision that G-d provides for His nation. It is therefore reasonable that when the message to be emphasized is the special treatment given to Bnei Yisrael it is especially important that the plague be initiated by G-d Himself. If Moshe or Aharon had struck, it might have been assumed that they purposefully acted to bring about a plague against Egypt. The fact that G-d alone struck Egypt, with an emphasis of the fact that Bnei Yisrael were not harmed, shows with even greater clarity the important message, "I am G-d within the land" [8:18].

POINT OF VIEW

"He Looks at the Earth and it Trembles" [Tehillim 104:32] - by Rabbi Yisrael Rozen

What is the Message for Us?

For the last few days, ever since the terrible tragedy took place in southeast Asia, I have repeatedly asked myself a question, and I have not been able to find peace: What is the meaning of these events for all of mankind? "What is this that G-d had done to us?" [Bereishit 42:28]. The heart is filled with emotion, and the head is weary – what Divine lesson is there for us to learn? Are we seeing a deluge, because "all of the flesh has corrupted its way on the earth" [Bereishit 6:12]? If this is indeed the message, we might have been able to suggest other geographic areas that are even worthier for "trembling" and the wrath of G-d than this one. Could it be that this is a Divine reminder, for all of mankind, about who is really in charge here? His influence can be seen at the farthest reaches of the world.

I cannot accept at face value the "natural" tendency linking every important event on the Earth to Bnei Yisrael, based on our basic belief that we are the "center of the world" – implying that the other nations "were created only in order to serve me" (see Kidushin 82a). I have already seen a foolish reaction by a rabbi claiming that the tragedy of the tsunami is a heavenly response to the disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip, with the objective of distracting the press and the public in general. This is not worthy of comment! We do not know the accounting maintained by the Almighty, and we are certainly not in charge of His records. As far as I am concerned, any such statements are foolish, false pride of one who claims "to know the will of heaven" [Bamidbar 24:16].

His Power Fills the Universe

It is also hard to be satisfied with a general rabbinical statement such as the one quoted on the "YNET" website in the name of the Chief Sephardi Rabbi, Shlomo Amar: "The Almighty is angry. We must increase the level of prayer and our demands for mercy, in order to decrease the punishment. The other nations are also obligated by the seven mitzvot, such as prohibitions against murder and illicit sexual relations." I agree with every word of this quote, but it is not enough to quiet the groaning in the heart, and it does not provide any response to the heavenly rebuke of Yonah: "You had pity on the bush for which you did not labor and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and was destroyed overnight. Should I not have pity on Ninveh, the great city, which has many more than 120,000 people, who do not know their left from their right, and also many cattle as well?" [4:10-11].

As people of faith, there are two things we must do. First, as noted in the Mishna, "a man must recite a blessing after evil, just as he recites one for good" [Berachot 54a]. What can trigger such a blessing? "Upon experiencing meteors, catastrophes, lightning, thunder, and winds, one says 'Blessed is He whose might and power fill the world.'" [ibid]. As the Talmud explains, "What are catastrophes? Rabbi Katina says, a roar." [Berachot 59a]. Rashi comments that this refers to an earthquake. We do not know why the Almighty "creates worlds and destroys them" and we do not know why some people are effected differently than others. What great sin was performed by the inhabitants of Indonesia and Thailand, as compared to the rest of mankind?

Solidarity of the Village

The second action that we must take is in accordance with the verse, "Let the living take it to heart" [Kohellet 7:2]. The concept of a "global village" demands a greater showing of solidarity than to just gather contributions all around the world, an operation which is certainly good by itself. The western consumer-based economy takes full economic advantage of the relatively low cost manual labor in southeast Asia. The high standard of living in America and Europe has been built up on the basis of the hard work and the sweat of the cheap labor in the east. All the inhabitants of the global village who receive the benefits must feel within themselves that a terrible tragedy has occurred in the village, in their own backyard, and to provide support and an atmosphere of brotherhood.

Such a great loss of life, direct victims of the forces of nature without any human acts of evil, has not been encountered in all the times of known history. Would it not be appropriate to call for a worldwide period of mourning (who should do this – perhaps the G7, the economic superpowers)? If there is an international Mother's Day, an AIDS Day, a Children's Rights Day, and a Day Without Smoking, there is also a need for a week of worldwide mourning. It would have been proper to cancel the New Year's celebrations all over the world as a sign of solidarity. The tragedy of "the Titanic" has returned to haunt us. Is there any possibility that the representatives of Israel ("a light for the nations") will call for this, making the demand

from every available platform? Perhaps we should first declare an Israeli period of mourning, as a Jewish expression of the verse (which was falsely adopted by the Christians as their own) "He carried our illness and suffered our pains" [Yeshayahu 53:4]. What should we do? It would be appropriate to broadcast sad songs and serious programs, just as we do for a national tragedy of our own.

SERMON BY A GUEST

"He Who Appoints Kings and Royalty is His" - by Rafi Ostroff, Head of Annual Programming, Worldwide Bnei Akiva

"And G-d said to Moshe... Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and stand opposite him on the bank of the Nile" [Shemot 7:14-15].

Everybody is familiar with the Midrash quoted by Rashi (which I like very much), explaining the seemingly extra words, "when he goes out to the water." The phrase is repeated a second time (8:16), leading the Midrash to understand that it is important. "Out to the water – to relieve himself, since he had declared himself a god who does not have bodily functions. Therefore, he rose early and went to the Nile, in order to relieve himself."

Many times, I have found myself imagining how embarrassing the situation must have been from Pharaoh's point of view. Here, in this early stage of the spiritual and physical battle between the king and the G-d of Yisrael, Moshe appeared suddenly before Pharaoh and caught the king at an embarrassing disadvantage. In a practical sense, even before the ten plagues, Pharaoh might have begun to understand that his struggle with G-d was doomed to defeat.

Pharaoh was not the only historical leader in the world who thought that he was a god. In this week's Torah portion, the Midrash lists four others who had the same idea. "Pharaoh was one of four men who made themselves into a deity and caused themselves harm. They are: Chiram, Nevuchadnetzer, Pharaoh, and Yoash, King of Yehuda." We are familiar with other people who declared that they were gods, such as Nimrod (according to Midrash Hagadol), Haman, various Roman and Japanese Emperors, and others.

Human beings who consider themselves to have godly attributes, present the greatest danger to the fate of humanity. Sometimes, one who reaches such a stage and considers himself a god permits himself to take the lives of others for no reason at all.

But now, through the millennia of history, a small nation persists in communicating a different message to all these megalomaniacs: You are nothing more than real people, who have to relieve themselves just like everybody else! You are not gods, we can bear witness that there is only one Deity in the entire world. Perhaps this is the reason that such people, with their superiority complexes, do not like us very much, since they see us as a barrier that stands in the way of their complete domination of the world. The nation of Yisrael reminds them that there is another One who truly is in possession of the

world. This is the only way to understand the hate for Jews and their constant pursuit, by Haman and by such nations as Greece and Rome, by Hitler, and many others. If there is a G-d above, then there are morals and a conscience, there are commands and eternal mitzvot. If there is indeed a G-d – then He and only He "appoints kings, and royalty belongs to Him."

TORAH, SOCIETY, AND GOVERNMENT

Taking Blood - by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

Included in the laws of circumcision is a rule that even one who was born circumcised must have a drop of blood removed, in order to fulfill the requirement of circumcision. No big deal, it is just a drop of blood! Every one of us during his or her lifetime has given many blood samples for laboratory analyses. However, the halacha treats the act of bloodletting in a very serious manner, seeing it as an act of aggression. For this reason, it is forbidden to perform an operation of bloodletting on Shabbat, and a physician might find it difficult to treat his father at any time, since if he will be required to take a blood sample it would be considered as causing his father bodily harm!

One of the national medical funds deliberated over whether it should buy a very expensive piece of equipment so that it could perform blood tests using a very small sample of blood. The reasoning behind the question was that use of this equipment would reduce the Shabbat desecration involved in testing the blood, since as noted above, taking blood is considered as causing harm. It would seem reasonable that the less blood taken, the smaller the violation. Some of the rabbis felt that the added expense for this equipment was unwarranted, comparing it to the case when it was necessary to slaughter a chicken for a sick person on Shabbat – the chicken's size has no effect on whether the act is permitted or not. The prohibition does not depend on the size of the chicken.

However, Rabbi Menasheh Klein, the author of Responsa Mishna Halacha, disagreed with this comparison. He felt that the question of using such equipment was not relevant only with respect to Shabbat. Even on a weekday, it is forbidden to remove more blood from a patient than is needed for the test, and the less blood taken the better. Every drop of blood is related to life, and therefore if a single cc of blood is sufficient for a test it is forbidden to take a larger sample. A medical team that does not take this into account is "spilling blood" – this is literally true, for "blood is the soul" [Devarim 12:23].

This also clarifies the words of the Talmud, in explaining that the verse "For we were killed for your sake all day" [Tehillim 44:23] refers to the mitzva of circumcision [Gittin 57b]. The Chatam Sofer asked why killing is relevant to the mitzva of circumcision, when we see with our own eyes that not even one out of ten thousand children die from the act of circumcision. However, if every drop of blood is considered as related directly to the soul, we can understand that the blood of circumcision is related to killing. In this case the matter is permitted, since we have been given a Divine commandment to perform the act.

This ruling places a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of medical teams. Even if they obtain permission from a patient to take more blood than is absolutely necessary, it is possible that they are not permitted to do so. This is because the patient himself is not allowed to cause himself bodily harm. While it is true that "one who harms himself is not punished," this does not mean that it is permitted to cause harm.

Reference: Rabbi Moshe Klein, et al, "Techumin," volume 24, pages 126-138

A LESSON FOR THE CHILDREN

The Platoon of the Thirty Five (Part 3) - by Rabbi Yikhat Rozen, Merkaz Neria, Kiryat Malachi

Summary of the previous chapters: In the War of Independence, the area of Gush Etzion was in a severe blockade. When food, medicine, and ammunition were almost gone, a platoon of 35 soldiers of the Palmach started out on foot. They were discovered by the Arabs and surrounded by thousands of rioters. In the end, the men were killed in a fierce and courageous battle.

The thirty-five heroes were buried in Gush Etzion. After the war, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces, by a great effort managed to retrieve the bodies for burial in Jewish graves.

It was very difficult to positively identify each body. Was it possible to bury the men without knowing their names? After using various methods to identify the bodies, 23 of them were identified. All that was known about the rest was that they were the bodies of the remaining 12 heroes, but there was no definite way to tell who was who.

What could be done? In consultation with prominent rabbis, it was decided to hold a lottery. But this was a very special type of lottery, familiar to the sages of Jerusalem, which is called "The lottery of the GRA." It is based on a holy approach. It is for use only under very special circumstances, and its success depends on the spiritual level of those who use it.

It was late on a Thursday night. In a dark hall, twelve candles were lit. The ceremony was attended by Rabbi Arieh Levine, Of Blessed Memory, other prominent rabbis, and the bereaved families. They started by reciting portions of Tehillim, in an atmosphere of sanctity and spiritual elevation.

The hall was completely quiet, with an aura of holiness. An old volume of the Tanach was opened, without any special attempt to look for a specific passage. Seven times in succession, the pages were riffled seven times. Whichever page was picked in this way was accepted as a sign of where to bury the remains of the next soldier in line. The rule was that the last verse on the page must include the name of a soldier or a hint of one of the names.

There was great tension and excitement in the air. Would the lottery succeed? Would they be able to identify the dead heroes in this mystic way?

To the pleasant surprise of the people gathered in the hall, the first verse that they reached was: "From the tribe of Binyamin, by lottery" [Yehoshua 21:4]. This gave a positive identification of one of the dead men, Yehoshua Buglevsky, and the people understood that his was the first body. Once again, the people opened the Tanach at random and riffled seven times through the pages, seven times in succession. The verse that was found was: "Am I not the son of Yemini?" [I Shmuel 9:21]. This was a clear sign of the name of another dead man, Oded Ben Yemini. All the other verses that were found were miraculously linked to names of the fallen soldiers.

The lottery was finished late at night, hours after midnight, but the people in the hall could not sleep at all. They keenly felt how special this day had been. They were convinced that the choices were correct, and that they had received Divine help to identify the remaining bodies of the thirty-five heroes. The names were written on the monuments according to the results of the lottery. The graves can be seen to this day at the cemetery on Mount Herzl, in Jerusalem.

The memory of the Platoon of the Thirty Five will remain forever within the nation of Yisrael as a story of courage with a harsh ending, but it was a story that has helped improve the fighting spirit, the sense of dedication, and the ability to withstand difficulty within the IDF, from that day to this. And this contribution has been very important indeed.

(Source: Parts 1 and 2: "Gush Etzion – Fifty Years of Struggle and Creativity"; Part 3: "There Was a Righteous Man")

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS (Pirkei Avot)

Chapter 5 Mishna 14 - by Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv

"There are four types of dispositions: One who becomes angry easily but becomes pacified easily - whose gain is offset by his loss; one who becomes angry with difficulty and finds it hard to be pacified - whose loss is offset by his gain; one who becomes angry easily and is easily pacified - is pious; and one who becomes angry easily and finds it hard to be pacified - is evil."

The Mishna continues with lists of four items (while still involved with the number seven – there are seven lists of four items...). This Mishna follows the previous one in form, and in the ending: "There are four types ... a pious man and an evil one." Once again, the last two types are extremes, one completely positive and the other completely negative. In this case, the first two types are also opposites, but it is not clear which one is good and which is bad (depending on the texts of different versions of the Mishna).

The version quoted above appears in the Kaufman manuscript and in most others: "One who becomes angry easily but becomes pacified easily - whose gain is offset by his loss." That is, what is most important is the loss involved in becoming angry easily, and this takes precedence over the credit that the person receives for being quick to forgive. On the other hand, the text of the Rambam (according to Rabbi Kapach) is the opposite: his "loss is offset by the gain" – that is, in the end the gain takes precedence over the loss. Perhaps this is indicated by

the parallelism between the first and second halves of the Mishna, both of them first positive and then negative. Another possibility is that the Mishna has a chiasmic format: positive, negative, negative, positive – corresponding to the original phrase, the "gain is offset by the loss."

The use of definitions with ethical value – piety, evil – with respect to character traits, which would seem to be ingrained in the human conscience, shows that a person should "work" on his traits in an effort to improve them. Even one who tends by his nature to become angry easily can be transformed into a person who is pleasant and is easily pacified. This is also implied by the Sforno: "The one with a bad trait is called evil... because even though he has a natural tendency towards evil, his final disposition depends completely on his own choice."

It should be noted that the ethical definitions are only given for the last two traits, while for the first two examples the Mishna only discusses the issues of gain and loss. Perhaps the difference is that the first two descriptions are indeed related to reasonable character traits. On one hand, a person might be stable and very difficult to upset, so that he rarely becomes angry, but at the same time it is difficult to pacify him. On the other hand, a person might be such that his mood changes easily, that is, whether to become angry or to be calm. This is the opposite of the last two types, whose traits imply an internal contradiction, in that a specific individual is at one and the same time both difficult and peaceful. This shows that the traits of such people are not ingrained but acquired. It is therefore reasonable to define one who has an inherently difficult nature but has acquired good traits – angers easily but is also easily pacified – as a pious person, while one who is the opposite is indeed evil.

LAND OF MY BIRTH

The Struggle Surrounding the First Religious Moshav - by Zev Wallack

In the early twenties of the last century, religious pioneers from the Torah V'Avodah movement, the Hapoel Hamizrahi, organized in order to establish the first religious "moshav" in the land. They found that they had to traverse a very bumpy road, full of obstacles, to achieve their ambitious and innovative objective. Until their efforts succeeded, only secular movements that renounced the Jewish traditions were allowed to build the moshavim and the kibbutzim with the support of the Jewish Agency.

The book, "They were Remarkable People," by Arie Levin, from Moshav Sedei Yaacov, contains a detailed description of the struggle that took place in order to establish his moshav, which was the first that was populated by religious people. The story was mainly told by the author's grandfather, Shlomo Levin. He was the arch-type of a true religious pioneer, with a thick beard (an unusual phenomenon in those days among the religious settlers), a man full of Torah knowledge and the fear of G-d. Shlomo was among the very first of those who took part in the uncompromising struggle for the privilege of establishing a religious settlement. He left behind three handwritten notebooks with the stories of all the hardships that

the founders were forced to endure. The editor of the book, Shlomo Lahav, wrote a short introduction that helps to understand the background of the struggle.

In the year 5685 (1925), it was finally decided to set aside a site for a single religious community, but a year or more passed and the decision had not been implemented. In their desperation, the representatives of the religious movement turned to the Jewish Agency, demanding to be given a plot of land. The reply by the Agency was short and insulting:

"We have already divided all the parcels of land to various organizations, and we have no free land left for the Hapoel Hamizrachi... For some reason, we have once again forgotten to leave land for your settlers."

The members of the organization felt betrayed, and they decided to do something on their own. Without authorization, they moved to the area of Varkani, a free site belonging to the Keren Kayemet, in the center of the Yizrael Valley. But this experiment did not succeed, both for economic reasons and because the land had already been assigned to a group of pioneers from Kefar Baruch.

Only near the end of the year 5687 (1927) did the religious pioneers move to the area of Sheich-Abrah, in the western side of the Yizrael Valley, near the foot of the Carmel Mountains. Here they had hopes of establishing a permanent settlement. And in fact during several years of labor that was almost impossible to bear they were able to establish a new settlement where there had been nothing before. But then they were struck a new blow: The settlement department decided to abandon the site. The representative of the religious settlers, Yaacov Zak, in an emotional appeal to the Jewish Agency, begged to cancel the decree. Among other things, he said the following:

"This is a group of eighty families that are linked together, with one objective, the will to build up their lives in the spirit of Torah and labor on the land of the Keren Kayemet in the Yizrael Valley. This is the only site where the religious workers have settled. And now, you have destroyed this entire concept, and the energies that we expended and our suffering for the last four years will have been for nothing... How is it possible to destroy a settlement site at the edge of the Valley, which guards against expansion by the Arabs from the direction of the Carmel Mountains?"

This time things had gone too far. The religious Zionist community of the time was outraged. Protests arrived from broad sections of the people, both in the land and abroad. Among those who objected were prominent rabbis, such as Rabbi Ben-Tzion Meir Chai Uziel and Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan. Rabbi A.Y. Kook sent the following letter:

"I take it upon myself to write to you honored gentlemen about the site at Sheich-Abrah, which I have heard that you are considering abandoning. I feel obligated to tell you honored gentlemen that such a step would be terrible and should not be done under any circumstances. A site occupied by young people who are true to the traditions of Yisrael should be twice

as precious as any other. In the end, pure Jewish life must be the basis of our future settlement... Therefore, I renew my demand that this site should not be touched, rather it should be strengthened and allowed to maintain its religious character, as it was formed from the very beginning."

The struggle to establish a religious moshav in Eretz Yisrael took a long time. It was only in 5693 (1933), about ten years after the first settlement group was established and seven years after they first moved to a specific site, that the Jewish Agency gave its approval to establish a permanent settlement, the town of Sedei Yaacov.

THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Kefar Haroeh Takes Note of the Victims of the Holocaust - by the Department of Education, World Mizrahi

Anlilevitch, Korchak, Cherniakov: these are some of the names that come to mind as people who were active during the Holocaust. How well do we know the names of religious leaders and what do we know about the life of tradition during the Holocaust? Why is this so much more difficult than to remember the more common names? Didn't religious leaders operate in those terrible times? Are the main stories indeed related only to individual cases of glorifying G-d's name?

The "Shem Olam" Institute for the Shoah and Faith, established in 5756 by Rabbi Avraham Kriger on the campus of Yeshivat Kefar Haroeh, has taken on the task of revealing the spiritual and religious atmosphere that existed in the ghettos and the camps. This is being accomplished through a network of educators, teachers, historians, and researchers, all from the religious Zionist sector, who work together to reveal this unknown chapter in history, using scientific and historical tools.

A revolution has begun in three areas: Documentation – hundreds of thousands of hidden documents have been recovered which reveal many details about this world; Research – This includes the writing of historical research; Education – Thousands of youth and mature people from all sectors of the country have been exposed to this relatively unknown world.

On the fast of the Tenth of Tevet, students of the yeshiva at Kefar Haroeh and Ulpanat Tzvia in Herzelia who were trained for this purpose spread out around the area, in order to teach about the traditional world and how it met the spiritual challenges of the Holocaust.

The activity also included other actions, such as publishing research and teaching aids on such subjects as the rabbinical leadership. The most recent publications are about the Gur Chassidic dynasty during the Holocaust. A rich pedagogical center has been made available to the public that is centered on the religious and spiritual world during the Holocaust. This activity helps increase the understanding of the ethical struggles that took place during the dark period of the Holocaust.

And what about our list of prominent people? Certainly, after one spends some time in Shem Olam, he will be able to give a list of people, including such rabbis as Fleishheimer and

Nissenbaum, and laymen such as Freidman and Kaminer, among others.

THE CHAIN OF HALACHA

Using Electric Lights as Shabbat Candles - by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Rabbi of Southern Alon Shevut and a teacher in Yeshivat Har Etzion

Can electric lights be used as Shabbat candles? Many rabbis of recent generations have discussed this question. Five main points have been raised:

(1) Is it necessary to use oil and a wick? According to Levushei Mordechai, by Rabbi Mordechai Winkler, Shabbat candles must have oil and a wick, and therefore electric lights cannot be used (Orach Chaim 59). In Beit Yitzchak, by Rabbi Yitzchak Shelkis, it is written that the glowing filament can be considered a wick (Yoreh Dei'ah 120). Rabbi Ovadia Yosef proved that there is no obligation to light using oil (Yechaveh Da'at volume 5, 24): We have been taught that Rabbi Chanina Ben Dossa's daughter lit candles with vinegar instead of oil by mistake, but a miracle occurred and the candle burned anyway (Taanit 25a). This proves that what is important is for the wick to burn, and that it makes no difference what fuel is used (as the rabbi points out, this proof can be disputed, since once the miracle occurred the candle had a proper fuel).

(2) It may be that a real flame is necessary. Can an electric light be considered a flame? In the responsa of Maharshag, the author writes that he is not sure but it seems to him that electric light is not the equivalent of a flame (volume 2, 107). On the other hand, some prominent rabbis have concluded that a glowing filament can be considered a flame (Rabbi Chaim of Brisk; Responsa Achiezer, volume 3, 60; "Melamed L'Ho'il" 49; "Me'orei Ha'esh," by Rabbi S.Z. Auerbach).

(3) Even if the glowing filament is a fire and the filament is considered a wick, perhaps turning on an electric lamp is not considered lighting the flame (see "Pekudat Elazar" 22). Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and others do indeed feel that turning on an electric switch is an act of lighting. This is true, since a person who turns on a switch on Shabbat by mistake and lights an electric lamp is obligated in principle to bring a Chatat sacrifice to atone for the Torah sin of desecrating Shabbat. Similarly, turning on an electric light may be considered lighting a flame with respect to Shabbat candles.

(4) Rabbi Uziel, the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi, wrote that since if there would be an electric outage the light would go off, electric lights cannot be used for Shabbat candles ("Mishpatei Uziel" Orach Chaim 7). Many rabbis disagree with this opinion, since nowadays electric outages are quite rare. In fact, it is more common for the flame in a candle to be extinguished than for the electricity to stop.

(5) Electric lights are on all week, so that lighting them does not give any special indication that they have been lit specifically for Shabbat. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef gives this reason, but he writes

that it can only be used as a preliminary thought. Clearly, it is not a completely valid consideration, since in the time of the Talmud oil lamps were used all week long, and the same lamps were also used on Shabbat.


In summary, the first choice is to light regular candles for Shabbat, but if this is not possible the blessing can also be recited over an electric bulb (after turning it off before reciting the blessing). Fluorescent lamps are not considered a flame or a wick, and therefore they cannot be used for Shabbat candles. One who has only a fluorescent light available may light it for Shabbat but without reciting a blessing. A flashlight can be considered a flame, and it can be lit for Shabbat if no candles are available. Rabbi S.Z. Auerbach wrote that a flashlight is preferable to an electric light connected to a power network, since it is similar to a candle in that it "contains the electricity within itself."



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March 16	Daniel Goldhagen
May 25	TBA

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