

Power Trip

Rav Aryeh Finkel

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**Q** I'll be staying in a hotel one night of Chanukah on a business trip. The hotel prohibits fire on the premises without special permission, but the process of obtaining permission is time consuming. I am on a tight schedule, and taking that time would cause me a significant financial loss. Must I do that, or may I use an electric menorah instead?

**A** Let us first address the loss question and then the matter of the electric menorah.



Although *ner* Chanukah is a mitzvah *deRabanan*, it is more stringent with respect to the loss that must be incurred in its performance than many mitzvos *de'Oreisa*, because of the imperative of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle): The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 671:1) rules that a pauper must sell his garment to fund the mitzvah of *ner* Chanukah.

Based on this, R' Akiva Eiger (*ibid.*) and the Aruch Hashulchan (*ibid.* 2) write that this mitzvah is excluded from the general principle that one need not spend more than a fifth of his possessions to fulfill a mitzvah.

Accordingly, one must assume a great financial loss if that's necessary to fulfill this mitzvah.

The Pri Megadim, however, doesn't require a person to spend more than a fifth for *ner* Chanukah, but he nonetheless maintains that some financial loss would be required (*ibid.*).

Whether electric light is fire has been the subject of great halachic debate. R' Chaim Ozer Grodzensky said yes and allowed *borei me'orei ha'eish* to be recited over it. Still, most *poskim* hesitate to allow an electric menorah for various reasons, including that it doesn't resemble a traditional menorah because it lacks a wick and fuel and that its ignition is not considered a direct action. But R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach writes that in the absence of an alternative, one may use an electric light on Chanukah and make a *bracha*. You may follow this ruling.

Note, however, that all this only applies to incandescent bulbs, because

their red-hot tungsten coil is considered fire; fluorescents and LEDs are not fire. Also, the device should be powered by a battery rather than plugged into the wall, because the former is somewhat similar to the traditional oil or candle lamp whose fuel is in a container and is depleted as time passes.