



Beracha on a Havdala Candle You Cannot See

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: I will be in a hospital for Shabbat. They do *Havdala* in the ward. It is unclear if I will be able to make it close to where it is held, but I was told that the *mavdil* is very loud and I will hear it in my room. If this happens, what will I do about *Borei Me'orei Ha'eish* on a candle I do not see? (Safety concerns prevent any flames in hospital rooms.)

Answer: First, remember that your health is paramount and that there is no problem whatsoever doing *Havdala* without a candle (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 298:1). If one is able to make the *beracha* on the candle later that night, that is great (Mishna Berura 298:3).

The *mishna* (Berachot 51b) states that one can make a *beracha* on the *Havdala* candle

only when “they benefit from its light.” The *gemara* (ibid. 53b) cites a *machloket* on what this means: Rav says it just requires the light to be significant enough that if one were close, he could benefit. Rava requires actual benefit, with the example being that he is able to use it to distinguish between coins. Most *Rishonim* and the Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 4) rule that one needs to be close enough to benefit from the light.

On the other hand, according to most authorities, there is no *mitzva* to actually benefit from the light (see Halacha Berura 298:13). Actually, almost all agree that the *beracha* is a *birkat hashevach* (praising Hashem), in this case for creating fire/light, which Adam became aware of on *Motzaei Shabbat* (see Pesachim 54a). If so, the requirement of how to see the light is to ensure a sufficient trigger for the *beracha*, as one must see a rainbow or lightening before making a *beracha* on it.

Therefore, there is logic to say (as Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 61:(62) points out) that if the person who is reciting the *beracha* is properly triggered, those who hear his *beracha* are appropriately praising Hashem (e.g., by you answering *amen* from your room). Nevertheless, the Mishna Berura (297:13; 298:13) says that whoever wants to fulfill the *halacha* of the *Havdala* candle must be close enough to the light, and I did not find those

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who disagree. This goes well with the *halacha* (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 13) that a blind person does not make *Borei Me'orei Ha'eish*; we do find that he should hear the *beracha* from someone with sight.

One can **suggest** various explanations for everyone's need to be close enough. 1) The *mitzva* is not limited to the *beracha* but includes experiencing the light and being reminded of Hashem's creation, which is capped off with the *beracha*. This may explain why we make the effort to hold out our hands and look at our fingernails (ibid. 3) and that some do this after the *beracha* (against the simple halachic logic). 2) One should connect to the *beracha* as one who is obligated in it, which happens only when he is personally triggered (see Chief Rabbi Yosef's Birur Halacha 298:(19)).

That being said, even if you cannot make it close to the light, you can salvage the situation significantly. First, if you can light an **incandescent** lightbulb, some *poskim* allow using this for *Havdala* in a case of need (see Piskei Teshuvot 298:10). If so, it would be ideal if you answer *amen* to the *beracha* of the *mavdil* and "attach" the *beracha* to your incandescent light.

Finally, realize that despite the standard *p'sak* that one cannot fulfill the *mitzva* at a distance, hearing the *beracha* does have some value. First, some *poskim* say it might be possible you do fulfill the *mitzva* at a distance, and therefore if you did hear the *beracha* in this way, you cannot make a *beracha* later if you gain access (Kaf Hachayim

298:22). The Mishna Berura (297:13) likely agrees, because he says that when one is listening at a distance, he should have in mind not to be *yotzei*, and make the *beracha* later when he gains access. Additionally, according to the reasons we gave before, by listening intently to the *beracha* (you should not answer, as it is likely a *hefsek* in *Havdala*), one takes part in the praise of Hashem, just that it is missing either the seeing of the light or taking part in the *beracha* with an obligation to do so. ■

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