

PSAK DIN – HALAKHIC DECISION – SENSORY ROOM

In planning for the creation of a [Sensory Room](#) at Beth Tzedec for use on Shabbat and Yom Tov we considered several principles of *Halakhah*:

- The use of electricity in and of itself is permitted according to longstanding decisions of the Committee of Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly.
 - Electricity is not *aish* – fire. The use of fire on Shabbat is prohibited. It is a capital offense according to the Torah. Since electricity is not fire, but rather more akin to opening a door or circuit, its use on Shabbat does not violate the *aish* principle.
 - Rabbi Daniel Nevins in his *Teshuvah* (Responsa) [Electrical and Electronic Devices on Shabbat](#), CJLS, The Rabbinical Assembly, distinguishes between different types of electronic devices and concludes that devices that are disconnected from the internet and add to the celebration and observance of Shabbat in the spirit of Shabbat may be used.
- Could the use of a Sensory Room for people with neurodevelopmental challenges be considered a form of treatment and a medical necessity? In consulting with Leanne Matlow, a member of our congregation and a leading child and adolescent therapist, I determined that the answer to this question is yes. Since a Sensory Room is a form of treatment, the category of *Pikuah Nefesh* would apply. Even if the use of electronics on Shabbat was prohibited this exemption would be sufficient to allow the use of the Sensory Room.
- Rambam in his discussion of [Mishnah Shabbat 2:5](#) provides a direct and relevant opinion.
 - The Mishnah lists four (4) exemptions to the death penalty for violating Shabbat by extinguishing a flame (*aish*) on Shabbat. They are because a person is afraid of Roman Soldiers, Highwaymen, *Ruah Ra'ah* (evil spirits), and because someone is on their death bed and the light is agitating them.
 - [Ramabam's](#) commentary focuses on *Ruah Ra'ah* (evil spirits) which he interprets to mean all different types of melancholy. Meaning that for the Rambam, if you were to extinguish a flame to provide comfort for a person with depression who finds the light agitating you would be exempted, after-the-fact, from the death penalty.
 - He goes even further in his commentary to explain why he believes the Mishnah is wrong in providing an “exemption.” Rambam concludes that extinguishing a flame for these four circumstances should be *mutar* or permitted from the beginning.
 - Sensory Rooms are designed specifically for this purpose, there are people for whom too many stimuli create *Ruah Ra'ah* and need a space to quiet themselves.

In conclusion, the use of electronic devices for a Sensory Room on Shabbat and Yom Tov is permitted only for people with neurodevelopmental challenges. It is permitted because the use of these devices is not *aish* (fire), because there is a medical necessity (*pikuah nefesh*), and because according to the Rambam too many stimuli create *ruah ra'ah* and the extinguishing of a flame on Shabbat is permitted to provide quiet and comfort.