



[Exodus 35:3](#)

(3) Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.
King James Version

There is an interesting example in the way Orthodox Jews keep the [Sabbath](#) and the 39 forbidden Sabbath activities (*melachot*) that they have come up with. Rather than learn the principles involved in Sabbath-keeping, the attitude seems to be, "Let's just have a rule to cover every conceivable development." The command in [Exodus 35:3](#) directly follows a command not to *work* on the Sabbath, so in saying not to kindle a fire, [God](#) was speaking of a fire employed in work, such as one used by a smith to shape metal, not a home heating fire.

However, the Orthodox Jews take it to an extreme, teaching that it includes the modern analogy of moving electricity through a circuit. If a person opens his refrigerator door on the Sabbath and the light inside comes on, in their judgment, he has "kindled a fire." So, the Orthodox Jewish solution is to unscrew the bulb in the refrigerator on the Preparation Day so that no light comes on when the door is opened on the Sabbath.

On the Sabbath, a Jew cannot turn the lights on in the house or the burner on the stove. To get around this, Jews use timers. Note that they do these things to "get around" the law. To this end, their sages have come up with the concept of *grama*, and this has nothing to do with the nice older lady who gave you cookies as a child.

In Jewish law, there is a difference in direct and indirect action on the Sabbath. For instance, a Jew cannot intentionally extinguish a flame, but if he opens a window and the wind blows out the candle, he has not violated Sabbath law. Such an indirect action, whose result is not guaranteed, is called *grama*, which comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to cause [something to happen]." If a fire breaks out on the Sabbath, a Jew cannot put it out, but he can fill water jugs and place them in the path of the fire. When—or if—the heat bursts the jugs, the water may put the fire out. There are more subtleties to *grama*, but that is the short explanation.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Exodus 35:3 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

So, in this modern, technological world, the Jews use the grama principle in numerous ways. Opening and closing electrical circuits would be work. But if the switch has a delay so that, when a Jew presses or turns it, nothing immediately happens, yet a few seconds later something does happen, that is not considered work.

Some manufacturers have installed “Sabbath” modes on their appliances. On some new refrigerators, unscrewing the light bulb is not so easy. So now, more than 300 types of ovens, stoves, and refrigerators can be set to “Sabbath” mode, which, when enabled, means lights stay off, displays are blank, tones are silenced, fans are stilled, compressors slowed, etc. To quote *WIRED* magazine's Michael Erard in “The Geek Guide to Kosher Machines”:

In a kosher fridge, there's no light, no automatic icemaker, no cold-water dispenser, no warning alarm for spoiled food, no temperature readout. Basically, [Sabbath mode] converts your fancy—and expensive—appliance into the one your grandma bought after World War II.

If we have to jump through these mental and physical hoops to follow God's laws, have we really learned the principles involved?

— Mike Ford

To learn more, see:
[Do We See the Line?](#)

Related Topics:
[Keeping the Sabbath](#)

Commentary copyright © 1992-2016 [Church of the Great God](#)