

5. Lighting Shabbat Candles

דִּינֵי הַדְּלָקַת נֵרוֹת שַׁבָּת

1. You must stop all weekday work and light Shabbat candles¹ some time before sunset² on Friday, well before the stars appear in the sky signifying

1. **The Shabbat Lights** Shabbat candles are lit in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Kavod Shabbat* (honoring the Shabbat) and that of *Oneg Shabbat* (delighting in Shabbat). The Shabbat lights introduce the Shabbat spirit of peace and tranquility into the home, and envelop it with an aura of holiness; see *Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat* 30:5 and 5:1, and *Hilchot Chanukah* 4:14.
2. **Time of Candle Lighting and Stopping Melachah Before Shabbat** As long as the sun is above the horizon, it is considered to be daytime. Therefore, *melachah* is allowed on Friday as long as the sun can be seen. With the appearance of three stars of medium size in the sky, *halachic* night begins. At that time, all work is forbidden. The time in between sunset and the appearance of the stars is called *bein hashemashot*. This period is considered subject to a *halachic safek*, or doubt, regarding its status; it is unclear whether it is to be considered day or night. Therefore, *melachah* is prohibited, as it might already be nighttime, and candles must thus be lit before sunset. There is a second consideration as well. There is a *mitzvah* called *Tosefet Shabbat* which instructs us to add an extension of sanctified time onto the beginning and end of Shabbat. If, therefore, sunset is, for example, at 6:00 PM on Friday, you would have to light Shabbat candles some time before 6:00 PM to fulfill this *mitzvah* of *Tosefet*, or adding onto Shabbat. In view of the differing opinions, and the time differentials resulting from variables in locality and time of year, the procedure generally followed is to light Shabbat candles at least eighteen minutes before sunset, and to stop all work with the setting of the sun. Some light the candles twenty to thirty minutes before sunset; in Jerusalem the custom is to light Shabbat candles even earlier. All should

I: Welcoming Shabbat, Tefillot and Keriat HaTorah

nightfall.³ If, in the synagogue, the congregation recited *Mizmor Shir*

follow their own custom. If the lighting was delayed for some reason, you may still light them until sunset itself, but not after. If possible, you should also stop doing *melachah* some time before sunset. The woman who lights candles must stop work immediately upon lighting them, as this signifies her acceptance of Shabbat, unless she stipulates that she intends to delay her acceptance of Shabbat, as explained later.

- 3. Determining Bein Hashemashot and Nightfall** The previous note presented the definition of the period of *bein hashemashot* according to generally accepted practice. In truth, though, there is a debate surrounding the issue which revolves around two Talmudic passages. The Talmud in *Pesachim* (94a) states that the period of time from sunset until nightfall is the equivalent of the time it takes an average person to walk a distance of four *mil*. A *mil* is two thousand *amot*, and the time that it represents is variously estimated to be 18, 22½, or 24 minutes, depending on various factors; the first estimate, 18 minutes, is the one usually accepted (see *Mishnah Berurah* 459:15 with *Biur Halachah* s.v. *hevei*). Four *mil*, the time from sunset until nightfall, would thus be 72 minutes. The Talmud in *Shabbat* (35a), however, states that the twilight period *bein hashemashot* begins with sunset and continues for a time period of three-quarters of a *mil* (13½ minutes) until the appearance of three medium-sized stars, which signify nightfall. To reconcile these apparently contradictory statements in the Talmud, the *Rishonim* present differing views as to what constitutes *bein hashemashot*. According to Rabbeinu Tam (cited by *Tosafot* in *Pesachim* s.v. *R. Yehudah* and in *Shabbat* s.v. *trei*), there are two sunsets. First is when the sun descends below the horizon, gradually disappearing from view completely within a time span of three and a quarter *mil* (58½ minutes). This time span is called the beginning of the sunset (*techilat hasheki'ah*), which is still considered daytime. After this, there occurs the second sunset, which is called the end of the sunset (*sof hasheki'ah*), when all light departs from the sky. This is the period of time mentioned in the Talmud in *Shabbat* as lasting three quarters of a *mil* (13½ minutes), which is designated as *bein hashemashot*. At its conclusion three medium-sized stars appear in the sky, signifying nightfall. The entire span of time lasts four *mil* (72 minutes), as per the Gemara in *Pesachim*. This apparently is the view accepted in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 261:2). This opinion yields two *halachic* realities. First, it would still be considered daytime for close to an hour (58½ minutes) after what is commonly called sunset (see *Tosafot* to *Menachot* 20b, s.v. *nifsal*). This position is generally not put into practice, and certainly not when the question pertains to doing *melachah* on Friday evening. The second reality is that nightfall does not arrive until the end of the entire four *mil* time span, which is 72 minutes after sunset. Many communities accept this aspect of Rabbeinu Tam's position as a stringency, and do not end Shabbat until 72 minutes after sunset. Other authorities, however, including the Gaon of Vilna (*Biur HaGra* to *Orach Chaim* 261:2, s.v. *shehu*), are of the opinion that *bein hashemashot* starts as soon as the sun disappears from view, that is, immediately at the beginning of the sunset, and extends for a time period of three-quarters of a *mil*, that is, 13½ minutes, at the end of which time three medium-sized stars become

5. Lighting Shabbat Candles

(*Tehillim* 92), thereby ushering in Shabbat,⁴ even if it is still long before nightfall,⁵ it is considered Shabbat and the laws forbidding work are binding upon the remaining minority in the community as well.⁶ Even a visitor from another city is obliged to begin Shabbat once the congregation has recited *Mizmor Shir*. In a city where there are two or more synagogues, you are not bound by the other.

2. It is a *mitzvah* to light many candles in the home in honor of Shabbat. Some are accustomed to light ten candles, others seven

visible, and according to Torah law it is considered to be night. (These authorities assume the four *mil* period discussed in the Gemara in *Pesachim* is relevant for other matters.) The Gaon of Vilna explains, though, that this time period of three-quarters of a *mil* mentioned in the Talmud is only for the latitude of Babylonia or *Eretz Yisrael* during the months of *Tishrei* and *Nisan*, when the days and nights are more or less of equal length. But for lands that are further to the north, or at other times of the year, *bein hashemashot* is longer, determined by the appearance of three medium-sized stars. In practice, the *Mishnah Berurah* (261:23) advises us to give consideration to the more stringent view and stop all work by the time the sun sets and light the Shabbat lights even earlier, preferably 20 minutes to a half hour before sunset.

4. **Accepting the Holiness of Shabbat** Generally, the person lighting the candles is thereby accepting the holiness of Shabbat. Other members of the household, however, may delay acceptance of Shabbat and continue activities until sunset. In the synagogue, Shabbat is accepted with the recitation of *Mizmor Shir*, after which all *melachah* is forbidden, even if it is still before sunset.
5. **Ushering in Shabbat Early** While you may usher in Shabbat early, you cannot validly do so earlier than approximately two hours before nightfall, depending upon the length of the day (see Chapter 6, note 1). If you did, it is invalid, and you must later relight the Shabbat candles and repeat the Shabbat *tefillot*. Therefore, if you wish, as some are accustomed, to begin Shabbat early in the summertime, you should not light candles when the family goes to synagogue as it might yet be two or more hours before nightfall. Although a woman is not *halachically* bound by her husband's early acceptance of Shabbat, and she can light the candles at the usual time, it is advisable for her to light the candles before he returns from the synagogue.
6. **Congregants in a Synagogue Reciting Early *Kabbalat Shabbat*** When a congregation has early services for *Kabbalat Shabbat*, as often practiced in the summer when the days are longer, their acceptance of Shabbat at the early hour is binding upon the worshippers present. However, in view of the fact that people have the option of attending services at other synagogues, and the congregation that schedules the early services does so not for the sake of the *mitzvah* of accepting Shabbat early, but rather as a temporary convenience, their acceptance of Shabbat at the early hour is not binding upon those congregants who are not there.

I: Welcoming Shabbat, Tefillot and Keriat HaTorah

candles. One of the most common customs is to light one candle for every member of the family. In any case, you should light no less than two candles,⁷ symbolizing *shamor* and *zachor*, the words that the Torah uses to introduce the commandment of Shabbat in the two accounts of the Ten Commandments, respectively. (In *Sefer Shemot*, the verse says, “Remember—*zachor*—the Shabbat day to keep it holy” (*Shemot* 20:8) and in *Sefer Devarim*, the verse says, “Observe—*shamor*—the Shabbat day to keep it holy” (*Devarim* 5:12).⁸ If necessary, though, one candle suffices. The candles should be of sufficient size so that they will burn at least until after the meal. You should try to obtain fine candles that will give a good light.

Rav Huna said, “One who regularly lights Shabbat candles will merit children who are learned in Torah” (*Shabbat* 23b). This is hinted to in the verse, “For the commandment (*mitzvah*) is a candle, and Torah is light” (*Mishlei* 6:23), that is to say, through the *mitzvah* of lighting the Shabbat candles will come the light of Torah (Rashi to *Shabbat* 23b, s.v. *banim*).

7. **A Woman Who Forgot to Light Shabbat Candles** The custom is that if a woman forgets to light the Shabbat candles, she lights an extra candle every week from then on. If she didn't light, however, because she was prevented from doing so for some compelling reason, she does not need to light an additional candle. If a woman could not light the candles, but someone else lit candles for her, she likewise does not need to light an additional candle. Our traditional *minhagim* are to be taken seriously and cherished, as they are passed down from generation to generation. A person should never think that a *minhag* can be treated lightly, as *minhagim* form the bedrock of our experience as Jews. This *minhag* is no exception. Since, however, the purpose of Shabbat candles is to introduce tranquility and *shalom bayit* into the home, it would be both ironic and wrong to impose the penalty of having to light an extra candle on a woman, as in many cases forgetting to light Shabbat candles is part of a more complex dynamic in the home. In the event that the Shabbat candles were not lit, a family would be best advised to seek the counsel of a rabbi who will sensitively direct them towards the proper conduct in the future.
8. **Number of Shabbat Candles** Seven candles are taken to correspond to the seven days of the week and the seven lights of the *Menorah* in the Sanctuary, while ten candles would correspond to the Ten Commandments. The prevalent custom is to light two candles and an additional candle for each child in the family. However, the extra candles over and above the two that are traditional in every home do not have to be on the table where the meal is eaten. If you are away from home, the custom is to light only the minimum two candles, regardless of your practice at home.

5. Lighting Shabbat Candles

You should give some charity before lighting the candles.⁹

3. The *mitzvah* is best performed by lighting with olive oil. You may use other oils as well, provided they burn nicely and easily and do not have a foul odor. The wick should preferably be of cotton, or flax, or such material that will assure a good, steady light. It is also common to use wax candles for the *mitzvah*.¹⁰

4. The following *berachah* is said upon lighting Shabbat candles:¹¹ “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Shabbat light.”

5. As a rule, the *berachah* for a *mitzvah* is recited before it is performed, or in Talmudic language, *berachot* on *mitzvot* are said “*over la’asiyatan*.” Regarding Shabbat candles, however, the blessing is said after lighting them.¹² This is because candle lighting signifies your acceptance of Shabbat, and if you made the *berachah* first, that very act, according to

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9. **Prayers at Candle Lighting** Candle lighting is traditionally a time of prayer as well. Many women have the custom to pray for their children and families at this holy time (see *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 75:2).
10. **Use of Electricity for Shabbat Lights** In the view of some *poskim*, you may use electricity or gas for Shabbat lights and even recite the *berachah*. Others maintain that this view can be relied upon in case of necessity, but are disinclined to allow reciting the *berachah* over such lights. Necessity includes cases such as a woman confined to the hospital or an invalid living alone, when use of candles would involve the danger of fire. The lights should, if possible, be specially designated and arranged so that it is clear that they are in honor of Shabbat. If need be, you can turn off the electric lights in the room and then turn them on, with the thought in mind that they are being turned on in observance of the *mitzvah*. As for the *berachah*, the general rule is to refrain from making a *berachah* whenever *poskim* debate its validity. In any event, refraining from making a *berachah* under such circumstances does not invalidate the *mitzvah* itself.
11. **A Bride Lighting Shabbat Candles** Some have the custom that a bride adds the *berachah* of *Shehechyanu* upon lighting the Shabbat candles for the first time after the wedding. If a girl has been lighting candles before marriage, opinions differ as to whether she should say *Shehechyanu* when lighting candles for the first time after her marriage.
12. **Sefardim Say the Berachah Before Lighting the Candles** The *Sefardim* recite the blessing before lighting Shabbat candles, in accord with the general rule that a *berachah* on a *mitzvah* should be said before performing the *mitzvah*.

I: Welcoming Shabbat, Tefillot and Keriat HaTorah

some authorities, would represent the ushering in of Shabbat, making it no longer possible to light the candles.¹³ In order, however, that the *berachah* should be considered as though it were in fact said beforehand, the practice is as follows: You light the candles, spread your hands before them, and then cover your face so as not to see the candles, and recite the blessing. You then remove your hands and look at the candles. The *berachah* can then be considered as though it were said *over la'asiyatan*. This same procedure is followed when lighting the candles for a Yom Tov (on which lighting after the *berachah* would not be a problem, as it is permissible to light a candle on Yom Tov) in order not to differentiate.

In case of necessity, as when the woman must go to the *mikveh*, or attend to some other urgent matter, she may light the candles with the reservation in mind, preferably spoken, that she is not accepting Shabbat with the lighting of the candles. In this case, she can say the *berachah* and then light the candles,¹⁴ and afterward attend to whatever is necessary until Shabbat actually begins.

6. The duty to light Shabbat candles applies to men as well as to women,¹⁵ except that women take precedence with respect to this

13. **A Man Reciting the *Berachah*** In the case where a man is obliged to light the candles, as when he lives alone or the woman of the house is not at home, he too should light them before saying the *berachah*. Although the man is ordinarily not bound to accept Shabbat with the lighting of the candles, and he would therefore be permitted to light them after reciting the *berachah*, he should follow the same procedure as is done every week in order not to differentiate.
14. **Reciting the Blessing When Lighting Candles Conditionally** In the view of some authorities, even in a case where the woman does not intend to accept Shabbat with the lighting of the candles, she should follow the usual procedure and light the candles before saying the *berachah* as is done every week, in order not to differentiate.
15. **Who is Obligated to Light Candles?** There is often a bit of confusion regarding who is obligated to light Shabbat candles. Casual observation might lead a person to conclude that only married women are obligated to light. This is not so. In order to understand who has to light and when, it might be helpful to organize the *halachah* into the following levels of obligation: The first level is the formal obligation to light candles with a *berachah* every week. This level is generally kept by married women only (see following note). Married women light candles with a *berachah* no matter where they are, and even if many other women are lighting. The second level of obligation is for each individual to ensure that he or she is in a place with light, as everyone is obligated to have lights for the Shabbat meal. The difference between this level

5. Lighting Shabbat Candles

mitzvah, and when a woman is home, she is accorded the privilege of lighting the Shabbat candles.¹⁶ The husband may assist in performing the *mitzvah* by preparing the candles, and by lighting the wicks and then snuffing them out, as this will make them easier to kindle. In the case of a woman who has given birth, although the husband lights the candles at home if the wife is still in the hospital, she may light in her room, where she eats, and make the *berachah* as well.¹⁷

7. It is customary for women to be completely ready for Shabbat before lighting the candles. They are worthy of praise for honoring Shabbat in this manner. A woman should also recite *Minchah* first, because by lighting the candles she signifies her acceptance of Shabbat,

and the previous one is that not everyone is actually obligated to light the candles and say the *berachah*. For example, a student who is away from home is obligated in the *mitzvah* of Shabbat candles, but he or she fulfills that obligation if someone else is lighting. A yeshiva student thus does not have to light candles in the dining room because, generally, one of the faculty or his wife will light there. If no one else lights, one of the students must light for all. Similarly, if a young woman who lives in her own apartment is a guest for Shabbat, she does not need to light candles, as her hosts will provide the lights on her behalf. However, if she is hosting the meal, she would need to light her own candles, as no one else is going to do so. The third level is to avoid being completely in the dark even if it is not during the meal. This would impact someone who would not ordinarily need to light for any of the reasons found above, yet finds himself or herself sleeping in a room that is pitch black. In that case, there is an obligation to light candles with a *berachah*. However, if there is a light from the outside which helps the person to see in his or her room, no additional light is needed. In truth, this third level is much less common in our day and age with street, hall, and house lights as ubiquitous as they are.

16. **The Custom for Girls to Light Shabbat Candles** It is customary in most communities that a woman begins lighting Shabbat candles on the Shabbat following her wedding. A girl who lives at home is not obliged to light Shabbat candles. However, if she wishes, she may light candles without reciting the *berachah*, but listen to her mother's blessing and then say *Amen*. An unmarried woman, as well as a man, who lives independently or away from home, should light candles. Some, such as the Hasidim of Lubavitch, have adopted the custom that girls from three years of age light candles for Shabbat. This is intended to acquaint them with the *mitzvah* and to inspire them for its observance. Others, however, particularly Sefardim, do not follow this practice.
17. **Lighting Candles After Childbirth** In the view of some *poskim*, women should not light the candles on the first Shabbat following childbirth. However, the general custom is for women to light them if they are able.

I: Welcoming Shabbat, Tefillot and Keriat HaTorah

after which she can no longer recite the weekday *Minchah* prayer. Even though people are attached emotionally to this special *mitzvah*, in no way should candles ever be lit after sunset, as doing that would be a desecration of Shabbat. If household activities are running behind schedule, the husband may light the candles if need be.

8. If a man lights the candles, and he has some work that he must do afterwards, it is best that he too stipulate that he does not accept Shabbat with his lighting of the candles. But even if he failed to indicate his intention or to have this reservation in mind, he may still do the work, because it is not customary for him to accept Shabbat with the lighting of the candles.¹⁸

9. The candles should be lit in the place where the meal will be eaten, so that it is apparent that they have been lit in honor of Shabbat.¹⁹ They should not be lit in one place and then moved to another place,²⁰

18. **Activities by Members of the Household After Candle Lighting** Other family members are not bound to accept Shabbat with the lighting of the candles. Therefore, for example, if the woman lights many Shabbat candles, the husband may move some of them and place them elsewhere as needed. Similarly, anybody going to the synagogue may ride there after candle lighting, since those who attend *tefillah* accept Shabbat with *Mizmor Shir*, which is recited later than candle lighting time. Children who remain at home, however, should accept Shabbat with the lighting of the candles.

19. **Lighting Candles in a Hotel** Candles should be lit in the dining room of the hotel. However, you should make sure that there is some light in your room by leaving on the light in the bathroom, a closet, or an anteroom. Indeed, some *poskim* rule that if, as is generally the case, lighting candles in the hotel dining room does not contribute anything to the atmosphere because so many candles are lit there, nor are the candles actually on the Shabbat table, it is preferable to recite the *berachah* over the electric lights left on in the room.

20. **Where to Light Shabbat Candles** Since the lighting is what constitutes the *mitzvah*, they should be lit in their proper place where they will be used. The main place for the Shabbat lights is the dining room. It is not permissible, however, to light the candles in a room where they will not be used and then move them to where they will be used. As a rule, the candles should not be moved from place to place, even if they were lit where there was a use for them, unless there is a pressing need to do so. If it is necessary to move the candles, they should not be moved by the woman who lit them, as she has already accepted Shabbat, but by another person who is still permitted to move them. Once Shabbat has started, of course, the candles cannot be moved at all.

5. Lighting Shabbat Candles

except in times of necessity, as when the woman is sick and unable to go to the table. In such a case, she may light them while in bed, and the candles can then be set on the table, since the entire house is considered as their proper place.

On Sukkot, if possible, you should light candles in the *Sukkah*, as that is the place of the meal. However, the candles should not be lit in the *Sukkah* and then brought into the house. If it is not possible to light and leave them in the *Sukkah* (due, for example, to safety concerns), they should be lit in a part of the house that can be seen from the *Sukkah* or in another place where they will provide some benefit.

If you lit a candle some time before Shabbat, and intend to use it for the Shabbat lights, you should extinguish it and then relight it for Shabbat, so that it is apparent that it has been actually lit in honor of the Shabbat, and not for another purpose. Some suggest doing the same thing for all electric lights left on for Shabbat.

10. Lights should be on in all the rooms that are being used, so that the home will be pleasant and tranquil on Shabbat. Once the *berachah* is recited over the Shabbat candles in one room, you do not say it again even if lighting additional candles in any of the other rooms. If a man is away from home, he must light the Shabbat candles and recite the blessing where he is staying. If several people are staying in one place, they should all contribute towards the purchase of candles. One of the group should then light the candles, having in mind to exempt all with his blessing. They, in turn, should also have the intention of observing the *mitzvah* with his blessing. A man who is staying in a Jewish home, however, need not light Shabbat candles separately, since candles will be lit by his hosts and his wife lights for him at home. A woman who is staying as a visitor for Shabbat should light two candles at the home of her hosts, and her husband must light for himself at home. Students who live away from home are obligated to light Shabbat candles, and say the blessing, when they are staying in yeshiva or school. However, they do not all need to light candles themselves; rather, one student or faculty member should light the candles in the dining room and say the *berachah* on behalf of everybody. The candles should be able to burn

I: Welcoming Shabbat, Tefillot and Keriat HaTorah

until the time they return to their rooms.²¹ If, however, they have no separate quarters, and they have no wives to light for them elsewhere, they should contribute towards the purchase of candles by the host, and thereby share with him. If they are eating a meal at the home of a family, they are included with their hosts and do not need to contribute towards the purchase of the candles.

11. If several women are staying in the same house, it is still customary that each woman lights her own candles and recites the *berachah* over them, as the additional lights add to the sense of joy. If possible, though, they should light their candles in separate candelabra or even in different rooms where light is needed.

12. You may not put water into the socket of the candlestick, even when it is still daytime, so that the candle will be extinguished when it burns down to the water level. In case of necessity, however, you may do so, provided that you put the water there when it is indeed still daytime. You similarly may not place a bowl containing water beneath the candelabra, so that the sparks that fall might be extinguished, even when it is still daytime.²² You may, however, place a bowl *without water* under the candles to catch the sparks, even after dark, since the sparks are not tangible. At the same time, you may not, after dark, place a bowl, even without water, under the lamp for the oil or wax to drip into, because if something indeed drips, the bowl becomes *muktzeh* and it is forbidden to make something *muktzeh* in the middle of Shabbat. You may put it there when it is still daytime, though. Any of the oil that drips into the bowl is prohibited from use for that Shabbat, and you may not move the bowl. If nothing dripped into it, you may move the bowl.

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21. **Students Lighting Shabbat Candles** Students who are away from home in school, where regulations do not permit lighting Shabbat candles in the dormitory rooms because of the danger of fire, should light the candles in the dining hall. As stated, one person may light for all the students, but Shabbat candles should preferably be lit at each table. However, there should also be some light in the dorm rooms, even from the hall or the street, etc., so that the rooms are not pitch dark.
 22. **Placing Candles Above Water or in Sand** Where there is a danger of fire, you may place a bowl with water under the candles to catch the falling sparks. You may also do so if a candle is bent over and is likely to fall onto the table. You may place a candle in sand on *Erev Shabbat* although the flame will go out when it reaches the sand.

5. Lighting Shabbat Candles

13. If you light candles on the Shabbat table, it is best to place the *challot* on the table before lighting the candles, so that the table becomes a “*basis*” (that is, a support or a base) for both the *challot* and the candles and not for just the candles. In this case, the table would not be *muktzeh* and you would be permitted to move it on Shabbat.²³ For a full discussion of the laws of *muktzeh* and their relevance to Shabbat candles, see Part IV, Chapter 4.

14. A blind woman should light the Shabbat candles and say the *berachah*. If, however, she has a husband who can see, he should light the candles and say the *berachah*. If she lives with others and eats at one table with them, and they have lit the candles and said the *berachah*, she should light the candles without saying the *berachah*. If it is her home, she should light the Shabbat candles first and say the *berachah*, and then the others should light the candles and say the *berachah*.

23. **Forgetting to Put *Challot* on the Table Before Shabbat** If you forgot to put the *challot* on the table before sunset (the start of *bein hashemashot*), the table becomes a *basis* for the candles which are *muktzeh*, and thus it too cannot be moved. You may still eat at the table as doing so does not generally involve moving it.