

# 7 REASONS FOR LIGHTING SHABBAT CANDLES

## 1 SETTING THE TONE

The Shabbat celebration is meant to be a warm, intimate setting where the family, relieved of their weekday duties, unite around one table. We light candles at its onset to set the tone and create a sense of peace, calm, and harmony in the home.



## 2 SHOWING HONOR

The Torah commands us to honor the Shabbat (Exodus 20:8) and make it a day of pleasure (Isaiah 58:13). Candles are used in Judaism to show the significance of a person, place, or time. One of the ways we honor the Shabbat is by lighting candles at its onset.



## 3 A SPIRITUAL GLOW

The glow of the Shabbat candles shines a spiritual light into our homes. Every Shabbat our soul increases its connection to its Creator, and it is this spiritual light that enables us, on one special day of the week, to create a spiritual haven, sheltered from the mundane affairs of the weekdays. The Sfas Emes notes that, "on Shabbat the internal light of everything is revealed, and to see it, all that is required is the will to receive it."



## 4 MARKING A TRANSITION

Candles in Judaism are also lit to express transitions. A flame converts the environment from dark to light, and so we mark the transitional holiness of Shabbat apart from the mundane week through the lighting of candles, at either end.



## 5 BRINGING ORDER TO THE CHAOTIC WEEK

The Torah records that the world was empty, chaotic, and dark until God uttered His first divine command, "Let there be light." The same way that God imposed order on an otherwise chaotic world through the bringing of light, so too do we convert our chaotic week to a thoughtful, intentional weekend by lighting candles.



## 6 OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

On Shabbat we celebrate the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Our relationship to God is best symbolized by a flame dancing atop a candle. Just as the flame adheres to, relies on, and emanates from the candle, so too the Jewish people depend on and emanate from God. The candles are a reminder that God is our life source and the closer we adhere to Him, the brighter we shine.



## 7 A METAPHOR FOR THE HUMAN SOUL

Fire defies the rule of displacement. No matter how many other fires you light aflame, the original will never weaken, nor diminish. This is Jewish nature. We can inspire and uplift thousands around us without sacrificing anything of our own!



Fire is also unique in that it defies gravity. Even when faced down, it will always reach upward. We, too, share the ability to transcend challenges and always reach upwards. The candles thus allude to these two unique characteristics of the human soul.

# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LIGHTING SHABBAT CANDLES

## Origin

The first woman to light Shabbat candles was our Matriarch Sarah. Sarah would light the Shabbat candles on the eve of the Shabbat, in the tent she shared with Abraham, and the candles would miraculously burn from one Friday to the next. Thus, the pleasant sight of Sarah's candles greeted the many guests that visited Abraham and Sarah's tent throughout the week. Our Sages later implemented the lighting of Shabbat candles as a way of bringing the peace, honor, and the pleasure of Shabbat into the home.

## Who?

The job of lighting the candles is given to the women of the home as they are the ones who set the foundation of every Jewish home. It is the woman's primary task to ensure that the home is an environment where light, peace, and harmony prevail, suffusing it with an atmosphere conducive for spirituality and Godliness. Shabbat is like a "date" between God and the Jewish people, and Jewish women are the ones to ignite this romance.

## When?

Since the Torah does not permit one to light candles on Shabbat, the candles should be lit just before Shabbat begins, at sunset on Friday evening. In order to ensure that we do not light the candles accidentally after Shabbat begins; we try to light them eighteen minutes before sundown.

## Why?

In the Ten Commandments, we are commanded both to "guard" and "remember" Shabbat. "Guarding" the Shabbat encompasses all of the prohibitive actions associated with Shabbat, while "remembering" Shabbat encompasses all the positive commandments associated with Shabbat. Because God intended for us to be fully connected and present on this special day, He first commanded us to remove all distractions and stay away from any *physical* creative activity, to allow for a day that emphasizes *spiritual* creative activity. On Shabbat, we take the opportunity to disconnect from technology, work, and the distractions of the weekday, and use this time to connect with ourselves, those closest to us, and The One Above who showers us with blessings! To represent our acceptance of both aspects of Shabbat observance ("guarding" and "remembering"), we light two candles that correspond to these two commands.

## A Time for Prayer

Lighting the Shabbat candles brings peace, harmony, and spirituality into the home and to all its inhabitants. A woman lighting candles has the power to grace her entire household. The powerful time of lighting the candles is therefore an opportunity to ask for blessings for the house and family. The Zohar notes that "a woman kindling the Shabbat candles, with joy in her heart, brings peace on earth, health and happiness to her family, and is blessed with children who brighten the world with the light of tradition."



# 4 STEPS TO LIGHTING SHABBAT CANDLES

## STEP 1: LIGHT

Light the candles.  
After lighting, place the lit match down on a fire-proof surface. One should refrain from blowing out the match directly since it is forbidden to extinguish a fire once Shabbat has been accepted.



## STEP 2: CIRCLE

Circle your hands three times over the candles and towards you as if to bring the light of the candles toward you. This practice signifies that you are drawing the spirituality and holiness of Shabbat into your life and home. The number three represents commitment and strength.

## STEP 3: BLESS

Say the blessing below. The blessing can be said in Hebrew or English.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי-י אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

*Baruch Ata Adonay Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam  
Asher Ki'deshanu Bi'mitzvosav  
Vi'tzivanoo Li'hadleek Ner Shel Shabbat.*

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe,  
who has sanctified us with His commandments,  
and commanded us to kindle the light of the Shabbat.

## STEP 4: PRAY

With eyes still covered, many take special time to thank God for the many blessings of health, prosperity, and joy in their life. It is a time to talk to God. Have a conversation with Him, and ask for all that you desire. God wants to hear your prayer! Just take a deep breath, take in the serenity of Shabbat, and pray for the wellbeing of yourself and others who need blessings and good health.

***Some add the following prayer to their own prayers after lighting:***

May it be Your will, Lord, my God and God of my fathers, to be gracious to me (and to my spouse, children, parents) and to all my family; grant us and all Israel good and long life; remember us for good and blessing; consider us for salvation and compassion; bless us with great blessings; make our household complete, crowning our home with the feeling of Your Divine Presence dwelling among us. Make me worthy to raise children and grandchildren who are wise and understanding, who love and fear God, people of truth, holy and attached to God, who will illuminate the world with Torah and goodness and service of God. Please hear my prayers, in the merit of our matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and cause our light to illuminate that it be not extinguished forever, and let Your countenance shine so that we are saved. Amen. (ArtScroll Siddur, p.297)



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי-י  
אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

*Baruch Ata Adonay  
Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam  
Asher Ki'deeshanu Bi'mitzvosav  
Vi'tzivanoo Li'hadleek Ner Shel Shabbat*

**Blessed are you, Lord,  
our God, King of the universe,  
who has sanctified us with  
His commandments,  
and commanded us to kindle  
the light of the Shabbat**

*Some add the following prayer to their own prayers after lighting:*

May it be Your will, Lord, my God and God of my fathers, to be gracious to me (and to my spouse, children, parents) and to all my family; grant us and all Israel good and long life; remember us for good and blessing; consider us for salvation and compassion; bless us with great blessings; make our household complete, crowning our home with the feeling of Your Divine Presence dwelling among us. Make me worthy to raise children and grandchildren who are wise and understanding, who love and fear God, people of truth, holy and attached to God, who will illuminate the world with Torah and goodness and service of God. Please hear my prayers, in the merit of our matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and cause our light to illuminate that it be not extinguished forever, and let Your countenance shine so that we are saved. Amen. (ArtScroll Siddur, p.297)