

# The Power and Beauty of Shabbos Candles

One of the main ways in which we honor Shabbat is by lighting candles. Apart from enjoying the Shabbat meal by candlelight, the light of the candles has a deep spiritual significance, as does the fact that they are usually lit by the woman of the home.

## A. Honor and Delight

Candles serve the purpose of bringing both honor and delight to our homes on Shabbat.

What are the sources which say that candlelight honors the Shabbat?

### **Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 5:1**

הדלקת נר בשבת... חובה. ואחד אנשים ואחד נשים חייבין להיות בבתיהן נר דלוק בשבת. אפילו אין לו מה יאכל שואל על הפתחים ולוקח שמן ומדליק את הנר שזה בכלל עונג שבת. וחייב לברך קודם הדלקה ברוך אתה ה' א-להינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת.

*We usher in the Shabbat by lighting candles, which enhance the enjoyment of the meal. It is an obligation to light candles for Shabbat. Both men and women are required to have lit candles in their homes on Shabbat. Before lighting the candles one is obligated to make the blessing, "Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the candles of Shabbat."*

☞ Thought Question:

How does candlelight enhance the enjoyment of the Shabbat meal?

### **Rashi, Shabbat 25b**

הדלקת נר בשבת חובה - כבוד שבת הוא, שאין סעודה חשובה אלא במקום אור כעין יממא

The candles give importance to the Shabbat meal and show honor to the day. "It is an obligation to light candles before Shabbat" – It gives honor to Shabbat, since an important meal is only eaten in a well-lit place.

## B. Two Candles

Most have the custom of lighting specifically two candles for Shabbat. What is so special about two?

### **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 263:1; Rema, ibid.**

ויש מכוונים לעשות ב' פתילות אחד כנגד זכור ואחד כנגד שמור.

*There are those who light two candles: one corresponding to zachor (remember) and the second to shamor (keep).*

The Torah writes the Ten Commandments in two places. (Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy, 5:12) The first time it says "Remember (Zachor) the Shabbat to make it holy" and the second time it says "Keep (Shamor) the Shabbat to make it holy

*Remember* = all of the positive things we do to make Shabbat a special day

Give an Example:

*Keep* = keep away from things that will make it just an ordinary day, like every other day of the week

Give an Example:

Two candles also contribute to the general theme that Shabbat is the “mekor haberachah,” the source of all blessing. We want blessing in our lives to keep multiplying, more and more

☞ *Thought Question:*

When we appreciate what we have G-d is inclined to give us more. Why is this so?

### C. Peace in the Home

Apart from honoring the Shabbat with light, the Sages highlight the importance of Shabbat candles in creating a peaceful atmosphere in the home. Shabbat is a family time, when the various members of the family, relieved of their weekday duties, are able to unite around one table. Before the advent of electric lights, the candles also prevented people from stumbling around in the dark. This is one of the main reasons for the institution of lighting Shabbat candles.

#### ***Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 23b; Rashi***

היום - נר ביתו עדיף, משום שלום בית רש"י: שלום ביתו - שבני ביתו מצטערין לישב בחשך.

*There should be enough light to ensure a peaceful atmosphere. If one can only afford either Shabbat candle or wine for Kiddush, the candle is preferable because of shalom bayit creating peace in the home. Rashi: Since members of the family feel troubled if they sit in the dark.*

Even now, when we have electricity, there is beauty in the simple light of the candles

#### ***Ohel Rachel, p. 123***

טבע החושך שהוא מפריד בין חלקי הבריאה ... לעומת זה האור מעמיד לפני האדם את העולם המלא, שהוא נמצא בתוכו, יחד עם רעיו וסביבתו, ואשר בתוכו הם פועלים יחדיו ויוצרים חיים משותפים.

*Darkness disconnects the various elements of the world [for*

*one cannot see others or the rest of the world when it is dark] ... Light, on the other hand, allows one to see the entire world in which he stands. It allows him to see the people who are close to him and the environment they share, in which they cooperate to create a shared life.*

Light symbolizes connection and relationship with others.

☞ *Thought Question:*

In order to see with candlelight you have to hold the light close to what you want to see. What does this tell us about how we can build and strengthen our relationships with others on Shabbat?

#### ***Rebbetzin Denah Weinberg, in “Jewish Women Speak About Jewish Matters,” p. 30***

Prepare, think, and be focused on the great experience of lighting Shabbat candles. Candles are lit at romantic dinners. What makes a dimly lit room romantic? It's the candles – they draw people together on a soul level. It goes beyond eating a meal together – that's mundane, that's physical. Rather, it's about two humans connecting on a deep, spiritual level. That's exciting. That's romantic! The candles do it. This, too, is Shabbat. The candles draw us to each other, and they draw us to God. Our soul is drawn to Him, and vice versa. Shabbat is a love song. It is romance. It is a date between God and us. (Remember, on Shabbat, don't concentrate on your food – concentrate on your date!) We women are the ones who ignite this romance with God. This is what Shabbat candle lighting is all about. So let's give our mitzvah some thought and put it into its proper spiritual dimension. Do you feel the light on Shabbat? Do you feel your soul light up? Our tradition gives us guidelines to experience the spiritual dimension of candle lighting. Buy beautiful candlesticks; make sure they and the tray they rest on are polished to emphasize the importance of this mitzvah.

Lighting with olive oil is highly regarded because of the intense light it produces. Be dressed in beautiful clothes at candle lighting time and, of course, be on time (18 minutes before sunset on Friday afternoon). Prepare, think, and be focused on this great experience.

### D. Spiritual Light

The glow of the Shabbat candles shines a spiritual light into our homes. It is symbolic of the Divine soul as well as the light of the World to Come. It is this spiritual light that enables us, one day a week, to create a spiritual haven, sheltered from the mundane affairs of the weekdays. It is instructive to note that the numerical value (gematria) of or, light, is equivalent to that of raz, secret. Light, embodied in the Shabbat candles, is a deep secret of the Creation.

#### *Mishlei (Proverbs) 20:27*

נר ה' נשמת אדם

*The soul of man is called the candle of G-d.*

This means that a lit candle is a metaphor for a person's soul.

How is a flame like a soul?

A flame is always flickering and moving; a soul is always yearning to learn and grow

A flame always rises up no matter which way the candle is facing; a soul keeps a person elevated and striving to do more

A flame can light other flames without diminishing itself; a soul can inspire, compliment, support and encourage others without becoming diminished

#### *Sfas Emes, Parshat Eikev, 5632*

שכל העולם יש לו חיבור ושייכות להקדושה ובשבת מתגלה הארה הפנימיות בכל דבר וא"צ רק הרצון לקבל ההארה.

*On Shabbat the world "glows" since the inner light of everything is more readily perceived. The whole world has a connection and relationship with holiness. On Shabbat the internal light of everything is revealed, and to see it, all that is required is the will to receive the light.*

### E. The Woman's Role

Although both men and women are obligated in lighting Shabbat candles, they are customarily lit by women. This custom is very ancient, and it serves to illustrate the special role played by women in infusing the home with the holiness of Shabbat. By ushering in Shabbat, and doing so earlier than necessary, women add holiness to the week.

#### *Zohar I: 48b*

ואתתא בעיא בחדוה דלבא ורעותא לאדלקא בוצינא דשבת, דהא יקרא עלאה היא לה, וזכו רב לגרמה למזכי לבנין קדישין, דיהון בוציני דעלמא באורייתא ובדחלתא, ויסגון שלמא בארעא ... בגין כך בעיא לאזדהרא בה.

*A woman who lights candles with joy brings peace, health, and happiness to the world. 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 ... She should therefore be very particular about this.*

### F. Candle Lighting Customs

It is customary to **give some coins to charity** before kindling the Shabbat candles. Before we pray to Gd and ask Him kindly to grant our deepest wishes, it is appropriate to display kindness to others.

## Prayer After Candle Lighting

As has been the custom of Jewish women for generations, the woman who lights the candles takes the opportunity to **use this moment of sanctity to pray** for the well being of loved ones, as well for the sick or needy

**Bringing the hands over the flames toward you** signifies that you are drawing the spirituality and holiness of Shabbat into your home and into your life. According to Jewish tradition, the number three represents commitment and strength. When a good act is performed three times, there is a sense of integration that takes place for the positive.

☞ *Thought Question:*

What positive things do you hope to incorporate into your life this coming week?

### Key Themes of Candle Lighting

- ☞ Lighting candles serves to bring both honor and delight to the home on Shabbat. It creates a mood of intimacy that brings the family together, as well as ensuring shalom bayit, peace in the home.
- ☞ Lighting two candles is reminiscent of the two mitzvot of Shabbat, shamor and zachor. It also reminds us to appreciate the blessings we have and to ask for them to keep multiplying, knowing we try to use all we have for the good.
- ☞ Light, especially candle-light, is a metaphor for spirituality.
- ☞ Women are instrumental in lighting the Shabbat candles in order to increase holiness in the world and set the calm and peaceful tone in our homes.
- ☞ The time of candle lighting is used to stop all other activity and pray for our family members and others for anything they need and appreciate all of the people in our lives.

*Complete ArtScroll Siddur, p.297*

A woman lighting candles has the power to grace her entire household.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' א-להי וא-להי אבותי. שתחונן אותי (ואת אישי ואת בני ואת אבי ואת אמי) ואת כל קרובי. ותתן לנו ולכל ישראל חיים טובים וארכים. ותזכרנו בזכרון טובה וברכה. ותפקדנו בפקדת ישועה ורחמים ותברכנו ברכות גדולות. ותשלים בתינו. ותשכן שכינתך בינינו. וזכני לגדל בנים ובני בנים חכמים ונבונים. אוהבי י-י. יראי א-להים. אנשי אמת. זרע קדש בי-י דבקים ומאירים את העולם בתורה ובמעשים טובים ובכל מלאכת עבודת הבורא. אנא שמע את תחנוני בעת הזאת. בזכות שרה ורבקה ורחל ולאה אמותינו. והאר נרנו שלא יכבה לעולם ועד והאר פניך ונושעה. אמן

*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.*