



THE MITZVAH OF KINDLING SHABBOS LIGHTS

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One of the most ubiquitous aspects of Shabbos is the mitzvah to kindle lights on Friday prior to the onset of Shabbos. This article will examine the source and underpinnings of this mitzvah and the ramifications of those underpinnings, as well as some practical questions that arise regarding lighting.

The source for lighting Shabbos candles is a passage in the Gemara (Shabbos 25b) that states that it is a Rabbinic obligation. However, what is not addressed by the Gemara is the reason for this obligation. Rashi (ibid. s.v. *chovah*) explains that the candles honor Shabbos, as they create a refined ambiance. Tosafos (ibid. s.v. *hadlakas neiros*) write that they bring enjoyment to Shabbos, as food is more enjoyable when there is light with which to see it. The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 5:1 and 30:5) incorporates both reasons.

Practical halacha recognizes both reasons, and there are various halachic consequences that emerge due to the two reasons. Let us examine some of these outcomes.

The Rema (Orach Chaim 263:4) states that if the Shabbos lights were kindled too early in the day, one is obligated to extinguish them and rekindle them for Shabbos. The Bais Halevi (Shu"t Bais Halevi 1:11) explains that this is due to the concept of honoring Shabbos, as it is not apparent that the candles were lit in honor of Shabbos when they are lit too early. The reasoning that light brings joy would not affect the proper time to kindle the Shabbos lights, as there would be joy through the light regardless.

In another ruling, the Rema (Orach Chaim 263:10) states that one needs to light the candles in the

room where one plans on eating as it honors Shabbos by creating a refined ambiance, as opposed to lighting them in one room and transferring them to another. The Levush (ibid.) explains that this is based upon the concept of honor, as it is not apparent that the candles were lit in honor of Shabbos. Here again, the concept that the lights provide joy would not be a factor, for candles which were lit and then transferred also provide joy.

The Gemara (Shabbos 23b) wonders, if one has only enough money for either Shabbos candles or wine for Kiddush, which takes precedence. The Gemara concludes that the candles have priority, as they create *shalom bayis* (peace in the home). Rashi (ibid.) explains that without light, people will trip over each other, bump into things, and chaos will ensue. The Levush (Orach Chaim 263:10) writes that this is not another reason; rather, it is an extension of the reason to provide joy.

This halacha creates a significant halachic ramification, for one ought to have light in any part of the home that will be used to ensure *shalom bayis*. Indeed, the Mishna Berura (Orach Chaim 263:4) records as practical halacha that one should do so.

There is a question as to whether one can fulfill the mitzvah of kindling Shabbos candles by turning on electric lights. This is relevant if someone is staying in a hotel or hospital over Shabbos, where lighting candles may not be feasible. There are four opinions in the halachic authorities: 1) Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Eidus L'Yisroel pg.122) rules that it is permissible to use electricity for Shabbos candles, and the standard blessing may be recited.

2) The Tchebiner Rabbi, Rabbi Dov Berish Weidenfeld, (quoted in Shraga haMeir 5:11) rules that it is not proper to use electric lights for this mitzvah. 3) Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (oral ruling quoted by Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen, The Radiance of Shabbos [Artscroll/Mesorah Publications], pg. 2, note 26) ruled that it is permissible to use electric lights, but the blessing should not be recited over them. 4) Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (quoted in Shemiras Shabbos Kihilchasa ch. 43 note 22) ruled that a blessing could be recited over a battery-operated light but not over other electric lights. The reasoning for this opinion is that for a regular electric light, there is no present fuel source; the light is constantly drawing new electricity from an outlet or similar power source. A battery-operated light, however, is similar to a candle in that the fuel is present at the time of lighting.

No clear-cut custom exists regarding electric lights exists, and one should consult a competent halachic authority. It is important to note that this discussion pertains only to lighting the candles in the room one will eat in; however, as far as lighting in other rooms for *shalom bayis*, one may utilize electric lights. The reason for this distinction is that to honor the Shabbos, actual candles, oil lamps or the like must be lit, while for enjoyment and *shalom bayis*, any light source suffices.

An additional issue concerning electricity is the concern whether one can light the candles with a blessing when the electric lights are on, since the candles are not adding any light to the room. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein would advise his wife to turn off the lights and switch them back on and then light the candles. (see The Radiance of Shabbos pg. 20) However, the common practice in most homes is not to turn the electric lights off prior to lighting. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 5:20[30]) offers two reasons to defend the common custom. The first reason is that if the

electricity goes out, the candles would provide benefit. He adds that although this alone would not necessitate one to light the candles, since there already exists an obligation, this reason explains the logic to carry on performing the mitzvah. Another reason is to fulfill the concept of having lights that were lit specifically in honor of Shabbos.

The obligation to light applies to both men and women. However, the halacha is that the women in the house should perform the lighting. There are two reasons for this halacha. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 263:3) says that since they run the household, the obligation to light is primarily their responsibility. Another reason cited in the Mishna Berura (ibid. 12) is that it serves as atonement for the sin of Chava, who, by feeding her husband Adam from the Tree of Knowledge, extinguished the light of the world by bringing death to humanity.

It is important to stress the importance our Sages attach to this mitzvah. The Gemara (Shabbos 23b) teaches us that one who is careful to consistently perform this mitzvah will merit children who are *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars). It is for this reason, says the Likutei Mahariach (vol. 2, conduct of Erev Shabbos pg. 13b), that there is a custom to add a candle for every new child in the family, as the candles are a merit for the child to grow into a *talmid chacham*.

There is another interesting reason given for adding a candle for every new child. Our Sages penalize a woman who missed a week of lighting due to a degree of negligence (Rema Orach Chaim 263:8). A prominent halachic authority in Lakewood, NJ once suggested that since following a birth, it is not uncommon for a woman to forget to light, there emerged a custom to add a candle following the birth of a new child.