

KINDLING THE FLAME

by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

This week, Women in Judaism presents an anthology of student reflections on Shabbat candle lighting. We received an overwhelming response to our request for your input and are unable to reprint each submission. Rather, we have reprinted a selection that represents the diversity of your thoughts and conveys the common themes of your reflections as a group. Thanks to all for participating and keep in touch. P.S. keep your eyes on your mailbox for a primer on how to light Shabbat candles, to be sent out in the next few days.

Kindling the Flame: An Anthology of Student Reflections on Lighting Shabbat Candles

(When I light Shabbos candles...) I feel the peace that can only come from Heaven drop onto me as I say the blessings. I say each word intensely, dwelling on its meaning before going to the next. I am a single parent; my son usually watches me silently, I hear his breathing in the stillness and know that he is soaking up Judaism with his essence. Usually I am filled with thanksgiving, and I spend more time thanking Hashem for my blessings, rather than asking Him for my needs. But I know He wants to hear my needs, and so I pray for my family (extended), my friends, Rabbi's families that we are close to, and finally for ourselves.

I feel the line of Jewish women that have come before me, stretching back through ...and I know that I am now part of the chain, lighting so that those who come after me can take part. This thought brings me great comfort, I who once lived to rebel, to be apart, now I am a part. I once thought that to be strong meant to stand alone, now all I want is to be part of the fold, to be safe and warm and comforted, and my Shabbos candles do just that for me. They tell me I am home.

Thank you for inspiring me to write this down. I have wanted to for some time, and just never got around to it. Barbara

When I light the Shabbos candles, I feel like I am having a private audience with Hashem. It's a time of peace and I try to put the week's strife out of my mind. When I light my candles I feel a separation between Holy and mundane. It's a very special time for me. Silky

I have many different emotions when lighting Shabbos candles. 1) Lighting Shabbos candles enables me to feel enshrouded in peace and safety. 2) I pray for my children and feel that Hashem is

listening and that there is less distraction. 3) I feel that at least I am doing something right. Karen

Lighting Shabbat Candles: Every Friday night, when I light candles, I feel such a spiritual "rush" and an intense connection with Hashem. The fact that I, as a woman, have been given this job of commencing Shabbat through the lighting of the candles is, to me, a great responsibility and an awesome privilege. I take the opportunity when I am lighting to ask Hashem to fulfill all my prayers, since the holiness and closeness that I feel to Hashem at this time-just a few minutes each week-is truly incredible, and I just can't help but use this time to pray for my loved ones. My personal opinion is that if more women internalized the beauty and meaning of this special mitzvah, there would not be such bitterness that men are more spiritually connected to God Elana

As a single woman living on her own, I light not for a family, but only for myself. These are my thoughts while doing so.

Lighting candles for me is a special time during the week. I am about to bring in the Shabbat, and I am forcing all of the craziness of the week to subside. I focus all of my energy thinking about Shabbat. I literally stop all of the frenziness, slow down, take a deep breath and make a distinction. After I light, I take the time to think about people that I want to pray for: MIA's, Jonathan Pollard, Iranian Jews, sick people, and my family. In addition, I also ask G-d for guidance in my life; I want to be able to make the correct decisions in all facets of my life.

Those are my thoughts. Anonymous

Each Friday night, when I gather my three children around the table to usher in Shabbat, I always try to give them something to think about before the lighting. I keep the thought simple and brief. For example, I might say, "Are you ready to let go of the work week and bring in the holy Shabbos?" or "Just think how many other Jewish women and families are lighting their Shabbos candles right now? We are all connected." Sometimes I make a reference to the parasha or new month. "This is the first shabbos of Adar, the month of simcha. Let's think for a moment of what makes us happy." I might remind them of someone who needs our prayers. I tell them how I pray for peace in our home and that they may grow to be Torah Jews.

By offering these brief thoughts before candle lighting, I catch my children when they are attentive. I give them something to remember and to carry with them. It is my hope that these small reflections will help them grow spiritually, shabbos to shabbos, year after year. Chava

Shabbos candles ... a time for reflection and letting a deep breath out knowing that my worries and

concerns are also those of Hashem's. I love the atmosphere of eating with the candles, and my candleabra is a very cherished possession. It is a time to take time for my thoughts and prayers. It is also part of the theme I enjoy teaching my daughters that since the destruction of the Temple, the shabbos table is the alter we decorate to honor Hashem. By setting the table in a beautiful way--we get to bring "Martha Stewart" decorating in a meaningful way, and we get to do it every week... Susan

When I light the candles each Friday night, I feel connected most with my mother, who will light them an hour later in Chicago, and my grandmothers of blessed memory, whose presence I feel each time. I can look backward in time and space to all the generations of women who have lit these candles, and said these prayers, for the sanctification of HaShem and the hopes of leading better lives as better people. LK Levine

...I have two daughters, 5 and 4, who light with me. The experience is not a meditative one, just a prosaic one. They usually fight about which candle, whether to pick up the whole stick or just the candle, and then we wave our arms three times and cover our eyes and recite the blessing out loud. Immediately thereafter, they are shouting, "good Shabbos!" to me and the rest of the family and there is exactly no time to do any of the other meditating. However, I hope they will store a good memory of lighting candles with me and when the time comes, do the same with their kids. Ellen

I come from Hendon, London, UK. For me, I have had the excitement of lighting candles all my life and as a child I always wanted to "strike the match". But I never felt anything more than just lighting a candle and feeling that it was Friday night with my family.

Now 20 years later I am newly observant and the candles are lit by me every Friday. I make sure that my husband always stands by me when I light as I have only ever kept this one "mitzvah" (obligation) my whole life and in my home all the family watched as my mum lit candles but nothing else was observed. Now when I light I copy the other women I have seen in this community who not only say the blessing, but also say other prayers and reflect on the week. Lisa Gittelmon

... I have only recently "returned" to the synagogue and my religion after many years in which I kept my distance. The first, and most important sign for me, was when I lit my own shabbat candles for the first time. As a child, I only watched as others lit them, and this act of lighting them and saying the blessing was a sign, for me, of my return to the light. Shalom! Valerie

I feel very honored and filled with light. Kristi Lynn

Regarding lighting Shabbos candles. This was the first mitzvah (obligation) I ever took on. I was in my early 30's. Why did I light? Simple: It was my way to say Thank You. I was grateful for my many blessings. It was not enough to simply feel "lucky". I sensed a greater controlling power. This act allowed me to connect with the source of my blessings...For me, lighting Shabbos candles was my gateway to a closeness to Hashem, and I am ever grateful. Shelley

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