

SHABBOS CANDLES: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

QUESTION:

How many candles should a woman light on erev Shabbos?

DISCUSSION:

This depends on family custom. While the basic halachah mandates that a minimum of one candle be lit,(1) it is universally accepted that no one lights fewer than two candles, representing the dual aspects of Shabbos - Zachor and Shamor.(2) Some women light seven candles, others ten,(3) while others light the number of candles corresponding to the number of people (parents plus children) in the family.(4) All customs are halachically acceptable, and each lady should follow her custom and not vary from week to week.(5) Should a lady, however, find herself away from home on Shabbos or Yom Tov, she may light just two candles even though she lights more when she is home.(6)

QUESTION:

Some women do not blow out the flame of the match, lighter, etc. after lighting candles on erev Shabbos; instead they allow the flame to extinguish on its own. They do this in order to avoid transgressing a Shabbos Labor - "extinguishing" - once they have accepted Shabbos with the kindling of the candles. Should all women observe this custom?

DISCUSSION:

No, they need not do so. It is permitted to extinguish the flame after lighting candles as long as one does so before reciting the blessing of le-hadlik ner shel Shabbos. Although Shulchan Aruch does note the custom of "some" women who are careful not to put out the flame after lighting candles,(7) this custom no longer applies today when all women(8) recite the blessing over the candles after kindling them. Since Shabbos does not begin until after the blessing is recited, there is ample time to blow out the flame before reciting the blessing.(9)

On Yom Tov, however, when many women follow the custom of reciting the blessing before lighting candles,(10) care should be taken not to put out the flame after lighting the candles. This is because once Yom Tov has begun, it is forbidden to extinguish a fire. The match, therefore, should be carefully put aside and allowed to extinguish on its own.(11) A lady who is afraid to allow a match to extinguish on its own should light her candles first, blow out the match, and then recite the blessing, as she does on a regular erev Shabbos.(12) Of course, she may do this only if she lit candles before

sunset. If she is lighting after Yom Tov has begun, she may not put out the flame.]

QUESTION:

Who should light the candles if the wife is unavailable to kindle them?

DISCUSSION:

The obligation to light Shabbos candles rests equally on all members of a household. Nevertheless, our Sages established that it is the wife's responsibility to do the actual lighting. One of the reasons given⁽¹³⁾ is that candle-lighting atones for Chavah's part in the sin of the eitz ha-da'as (Tree of Knowledge). Chavah caused Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit for which mankind was punished by losing its immortality. Since Chavah "extinguished the candle of the world,"⁽¹⁴⁾ it is the woman who sets aright Chavah's misdeed by assuming the obligation of lighting candles for her household.¹⁵ Consequently:

Even if a husband demands that he lights the candles, the wife has the right to protest and prevent him from doing so.⁽¹⁶⁾ It is recommended, though, that the husband take part in the mitzvah by lighting and quickly extinguishing the candle wicks, which makes them easier to light.⁽¹⁷⁾ If candles - or electric lights - are lit in other rooms in addition to the eating area,⁽¹⁸⁾ it is the husband who lights them.⁽¹⁹⁾

If one has no wife, or if he sees that his wife is running late and will be unable to light on time, then he should light the candles with the blessing.⁽²⁰⁾

If one's wife is not home for Shabbos, it is preferable that the husband himself light candles and not one of the daughters.⁽²¹⁾ If, however, a daughter who is over twelve years old lights for him, he fulfills the mitzvah through her lighting. One cannot, however, fulfill his obligation by having a daughter under twelve light candles for him.⁽²²⁾

In the event that a brother and sister are at home without their parents, it is preferable that the sister light the candles.⁽²³⁾

Years ago, it was customary for a woman who gave birth not to light candles on the first Friday night after giving birth. For that one Shabbos, candles were lit by the husband.⁽²⁴⁾ Several reasons are offered in explanation of this custom, but apparently the main concern was that women were too weak after childbirth to get out of bed and light candles. ⁽²⁵⁾ In view of the improved health conditions prevalent nowadays, many poskim agree that the custom is no longer valid and the wife should light candles as she does every Friday night.⁽²⁶⁾

QUESTION:

May a woman daven Minchah after she has lit candles on Friday night?

DISCUSSION:

L'chatchilah, all poskim agree that one must recite Minchah before lighting candles. When a woman lights candles, she automatically accepts upon herself the restrictions and obligations of the Shabbos day. This precludes her davening the previous day's Minchah. If, however, a woman is running late and has not davened Minchah by candle-lighting time, the poskim differ as to what she should do. There are three views:

- 1) She should go ahead and light candles. She should then daven the Shemoneh Esrei of the Shabbos Ma'ariv twice to compensate for the lost Minchah(27.) Even though women do not usually daven Ma'ariv, she may do so in this case in order to make up the lost Minchah(28;)
- 2) Before lighting, she should stipulate that she is not accepting the Shabbos until after she has davened Minchah(29.) This should not be done on Yom Tov if she recited shehecheyanu at the candle-lighting(30;)
- 3) A minority view rules that she may daven Minchah after lighting candles even if she did not stipulate that she was not accepting the Shabbos(31.)

Note that when men light candles, they do not automatically accept the Shabbos with their candle-lighting(32.) They may daven Minchah after lighting candles.

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FOOTNOTES:

1 And, indeed, under extenuating circumstances, one may light only one candle and recite the blessing over it; Mishnah Berurah 263:9.

2 Based on Rama O.C. 263:1.

3 Mishnah Berurah 263:6.

4 This custom, although widespread, is not mentioned in any of the classical sources.

5 Based on Beirur Halachah 263:1 (s.v. sheshachecha).

6 She'arim Metzuyanin B'halachah 75:13.

7 O.C. 263:10.

8 Of Ashkenazic descent. Most Sefaradim, however, recite the blessing before kindling; Yechaveh Da'as 2:33.

9 Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:14; Yechaveh Da'as 2:33 quoting Mateh Yehudah 263:2. [Note that Mishnah Berurah does not disagree with this; indeed, he repeatedly rules that Shabbos begins after the blessing is recited; see 263:21 and 27. See also Da'as Torah 263:5 (s.v. v'yesh).] Chayei Adam and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, too, do not mention the custom of allowing the flame to extinguish by itself.

10 As ruled by Mishnah Berurah 263:27.

11 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43, note 179).

12 Based on the ruling of the Magen Avraham (263:12) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (75:4) who rule that women should light on erev Yom Tov exactly as they do on erev Shabbos: first light the candles and then recite the blessing.

13 Tur O.C. 263.

14 This is how the Midrash (Tanchumah, Metzora 9) refers to Adam.

15 Some families have the custom that all the women in the household light candles and recite a blessing over them - Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:7. This was also the custom in the home of the Brisker Rav, as reported by his son Harav D. Soloveitchik (quoted in Az Nidberu 6:68).

16 Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:7.

17 Mishnah Berurah 263:12; 264:28.

18 See follow-up DISCUSSION for explanation of why candles [or electric lights] need to be lit in other rooms.

19 Shulchan Aruch Harav 263:5; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 74 (Badei ha-Shulchan 11). See also Beur Halachah 263:6 (s.v. bachurim).

20 Mishnah Berurah 262:11.

21 Oral ruling by Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in The Radiance of Shabbos, pg. 7); Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43, note 46.

22 Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:7.

23 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 45 note 34).

24 Mishnah Berurah 263:11.

25 See Toras Shabbos 263:4; Tehilah l'David 88:3; Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:7; Hagahos Imrei Baruch 263:6.

26 Oral ruling by Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in The Radiance of Shabbos, pg. 7) Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:9.

27 This is the view of the Mishnah Berurah 263:43.

28 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:110).

29 Eishel Avraham 263:10; Kaf ha-Chayim 263:35; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfe on Tefillah, 2nd edition, pg. 201).

30 Tzitz Eliezer 10:19-5. This is because several poskim hold that one cannot recite shehecheyanu, which celebrates the arrival of the Yom Tov, and at the same time stipulate that he is not accepting Yom Tov's arrival.

31 Several poskim quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:128.

32 Mishnah Berurah 263:42. It is still, however, preferable even for men to stipulate that they are not mekabel Shabbos when lighting candles.

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