

# LIGHTING THE SHABBOS CANDLES

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

The obligation to light Shabbos candles rests equally on all members of a household. Nevertheless, our Sages placed the responsibility for the actual lighting upon the wife. One of the reasons given<sup>[1]</sup> 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 Man was punished by losing his immortality. Since Chavah extinguished "the candle of the world<sup>[2]</sup>, " it is the woman who sets aright Chavah's misdeed by assuming the obligation of lighting candles for her household<sup>[3]</sup>. Consequently:

Even if a husband demands that he light the candles, the wife has the right to protest and prevent him from doing so<sup>[4]</sup>. It is recommended, though, that the husband take part in the mitzvah by lighting and quickly extinguishing the candle wicks, thereby making them easier to light<sup>[5]</sup>. If candles are lit in other rooms in addition to the eating area<sup>[6]</sup>, it is the husband who lights them<sup>[7]</sup>.

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<sup>[8]</sup>.

If one's wife is not home for Shabbos, it is preferable that the husband himself light candles and not one of the daughters<sup>[9]</sup>. 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<sup>[10]</sup>.

In the event that a brother and sister are at home without their parents, it is preferable that the sister light the candles<sup>[11]</sup>.

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<sup>[12]</sup>. 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<sup>[13]</sup>. In view of the improved health conditions prevalent nowadays, many poskim agree that the custom is no longer valid and the wife should light candles as she does every Friday night<sup>[14]</sup>.

Question: How has electrical lighting affected the traditional way of lighting Shabbos candles?

Discussion: When electricity became commonplace, the poskim debated whether the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles could be fulfilled by turning on electric lights. While the vast majority of

poskim were of the opinion that one could indeed fulfill this obligation with electrical lighting, and some even held that it was preferable to use electricity, most women opted to continue lighting the traditional candle or oil-based lights. This remains the prevalent custom today. Still, there is a prominent role for electric lights to play in the performance of this mitzvah and indeed, almost every Jewish household relies on electricity in order to properly and completely fulfill the mitzvah of hadlakas neiros Shabbos. Let us explain:

The halachah states that one is obligated to have light in any room that will be used on Friday night[15]. Our Sages instituted this ordinance so that household members would be able to safely move about the house without fear of injury that would disrupt the harmony of Shabbos. Today, most homes rely on some electrical source (night-light, bathroom-light, etc.) to illuminate the areas in which they will find themselves on Friday night. Thus, they fulfill this part of the mitzvah with electric lights[16].

The appropriate procedure, then, is as follows. When the wife is ready to light candles in the dining room, all the electrical lights in the rooms which will be used on Friday night should be shut off. Those lights should then be turned on by the husband (or wife or another family member), with the intention that they are being turned on for the sake of the mitzvah of Shabbos candles. The wife then lights the candles, and the blessing she recites covers all of the lights in the house, both electrical and otherwise.

There are a number of other scenarios in which electric lights may be used in conjunction with candles in order to properly fulfill the mitzvah:

- Students residing in a dormitory or guests staying at a hotel are obligated to light Shabbos candles. Even if they light candles in the dining hall, they are still required to light in the area where they sleep. Since it is usually unsafe to leave candles burning in a dormitory or in a hotel room, we must rely on electric lights to fulfill that part of the mitzvah. A small light should, therefore, be turned off and on in honor of Shabbos before Shabbos starts. A blessing, however, should not be made, since the blessing is recited over the candles which are lit in the main dining room.
- Shabbos guests can technically fulfill the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles through the lighting of their hosts. Even though they are not required to light a special candle of their own, it has nevertheless become customary that all married women light their own candles. But since the guests are required to have some light in their sleeping area (to fulfill the halachic obligation mentioned above), the proper procedure for them is as follows: Turn on an electric light in or near one's sleeping quarters, proceed quickly to the dining room and light candles, and have the blessing apply to both acts of lighting[17].

Sometimes a situation arises where the mitzvah of hadlakas neiros can be performed by using electric lights only. For instance:

- Moments before Shabbos is about to begin, one realizes that there are no candles in the house and none can be gotten on such short notice. Instead of panicking, the dining room lights should be turned off and then turned on again *lichvod* Shabbos.
- In a situation where using candles would be difficult or dangerous, such as in a hospital, the *poskim* agree that one should rely on the electric lights for Shabbos candles. They should be turned off and then turned on again for the sake of the *mitzvah*[18].

Many *poskim* hold that the blessing of *lehadlik ner shel Shabbos* is recited even when the *mitzvah* is performed by lighting electric lights only[19]. Others hold that in such a case the blessing should be omitted[20]. No clear-cut custom exists and one should follow his or her *rav's* directives.

Question; Does it matter whether or not the electric lights in the dining room are off or on at the time the Shabbos candles are lit?

Discussion: Contemporary *poskim* debate this issue[21]. Some question the custom of lighting candles when the electric lights are on, since the candles are not adding any more light to the room. In their opinion, reciting the blessing over candles which are lit in a brightly illuminated room may be a *berachah l'vatalah*. Other *poskim* dismiss that argument and maintain that since the candles are lit *lichvod* Shabbos and add a measure of festivity and ambiance to the Shabbos table, the candle-lighting is significant enough to warrant the recitation of a *berachah*.

In order to avoid a possible *berachah l'vatalah*, it is recommended that either the husband or the wife turn off the lights in the dining room before the candles are lit, and then turn them on again *lichvod* Shabbos right before (or immediately after the lighting, but before the recital of the blessing) the candles are lit. This way, the blessing which the wife recites over the candles will cover the electric lights as well[22].

- 
1. Tur, O.C. 263.
  2. This is how the Midrash (Tanchumah, Metzora 9) refers to Adam.
  3. Contemporary *poskim* debate whether or not the custom that all of the girls in a household over the age of *chinuch* light candles with a blessing — is valid; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:7; Az Nidberu 6:67-68 and Yechaveh Da'as 2:32.
  4. Mishnah Berurah 263:11.
  5. Mishnah Berurah 263:12; 264:28. See Tosfos Rav Akiva Eiger, Shabbos 2:6. [The Chazon Ish, however, is quoted as ruling that nowadays, when the candles are of superior quality, there is no reason to light and extinguish them first; see Dinim v'Hanhagos 9:6 and Eहेleh be-Tamar, pg. 17.]
  6. See follow-up discussion for explanation of why candles [or electric lights] need to be lit in other rooms.

7. Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 263:5; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 74 (Badei ha-Shulchan 11). See also Be'ur Halachah 263:6 s.v. bachurim.
8. Mishnah Berurah 262:11.
9. Rav M. Feinstein (oral ruling quoted in The Radiance of Shabbos, pg. 7); Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43, note 46.
10. Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:7.
11. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 45, note 34).
12. Mishnah Berurah 263:11.
13. See Toras Shabbos 263:4; Tehilah l'David 88:3; Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:7; Hagahos Imrei Baruch 263:6.
14. Rav M. Feinstein (oral ruling quoted in The Radiance of Shabbos, pg. 7); Rav S.Z. Auerbach (oral ruling, quoted in Halichos Bas Yisrael 15:18); Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:9.
15. Mishnah Berurah 263:2, 29, 31. See Shevet ha-Levi 3:24.
16. Rav Y.Y. Weiss (Kol ha-Torah, vol. 42, pg. 17 and pg. 36).
17. Rav Y. Kamenetsky recommended this procedure for hotel guests as well; see Emes L'yaakov, O.C. 263, note 274.
18. Based on Rama, O.C. 263:4 (concerning candles). See Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:157 quoting Rav M. Feinstein.
19. Teshuvos Beis Yitzchak, Y.D. 120; Machazeh Avraham 41; Melamed Leho'il 47; Rav A. Kotler (quoted in Kochvei Yitzchak 1:2); Rav Y.E. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael, pg. 122); Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Ashrei ha-Ish, vol. 2, 6:33); Yechaveh Da'as 5:24. See also Tzitz Eliezer 1:20-11.
20. Har Tzvi 2:114, quoting the Gaon of Rogatchov; Mishpatei Uziel, O.C. 1:7; Tchebiner Rav (quoted in Shraga ha-Meir 5:11); Rav M. Feinstein (oral ruling quoted in The Radiance of Shabbos, 2, note 26). Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, 43, note 22) maintains that a blessing could be made over a flashlight but not over other lights.
21. See the various views in Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:20-30; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43, note 166 and 171, quoting Rav S.Z. Auerbach; Shulchan Shelomo, addendum to vol. 1, pg. 20; Divrei Yatziv, O.C. 120; Az Nidberu 3:2; Chut Shani, Shabbos, vol. 4, pg. 65-66, quoting Rav N. Karelitz.
22. This was the custom in the homes of a number of prominent poskim: Rav M. Feinstein (The Radiance of Shabbos, pg. 20); Rav Y. Kamenetsky (Ko Somar l'Beis Yaakov, pg. 50), who turned on the electricity after his wife lit the candles but before she recited the blessing; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (after his wife's passing) turned off the lights, lit the candles and then turned on the lights (reported

by his grandson in Kol ha-Torah, vol. 40, pg. 16). See also Be'er Moshe 5:32 and Az Nidberu 1:79-9, 3:2, for a concurring opinion.

---

Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2011 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at [dneustadt@cordetroit.com](mailto:dneustadt@cordetroit.com)