



What is the Mystical Significance of Women Lighting the Shabbat Candles?

What is the Connection Between Candles and Spirituality?

I literally became Torah observant through lighting the Shabbat candles for the very first time in my life. I was led to a room where two silver candlesticks awaited me. Chava, the girl from the Yeshiva I had just met, taught me to say the blessing, and I lit the candles. As I gazed at the lights of the Shabbat candles, the world was transformed. The room was aglow with holiness and serenity, as though we had entered a higher realm of existence. It struck me that here was the expanded consciousness for which I had been searching all my life. I had never expected to find it within my own tradition. Here, I was no longer a stranger exploring other people and places. I saw truth very clearly for the first time, and it was a truth to which I belonged. I would keep learning and exploring together with others like myself. I had finally come home. (For my full story of return, see my blog [My Journey Back Home, Life Lessons from the Rebbetzin's Heart - Parashat Lech Lecha](#)). Candle lighting is so central to Judaism, as 'light' represents the Divine. Any darkness that we experience is only the hiding of Hashem's light. We relate to Hashem as ultimate light. In Kabbalah, Hashem is called *Ohr Ein Sof* (the Infinite Light). When Hashem created the world, He contracted, so to speak, His Infinite Light to make room for something other than Himself. Yet, He gave us an opportunity to return this lost light by keeping Torah and mitzvot. When we light candles, especially for Shabbat and holidays, we return sparks of the original Divine light back into creation. We can understand the special mitzvah of lighting candles in honor of Shabbat as a way of recognizing the flow of the Infinite Light into the world. Creation began with the first *tzimtzum* – the initial contraction of G-dly light – to allow the creation of physicality or non-infinite existence. On Shabbat, G-d rested and did not create. He did not retract His light. He simply allowed the flow of Divine light to penetrate the universe. When we light the Shabbat candles, we make an opening for Hashem's Infinite Light to return into the world.

Candles and Eternity

Without the menorah, the Tabernacle and Temple are incomplete. This explains why the mitzvah to ignite the candelabra is placed in the section describing the Tabernacle's inauguration ceremony rather than in *Bamidbar* 4-6, along with the discussion of other Tabernacle operations.

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דַּבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ אֶת הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יָאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּרוֹת:

"Speak to Aaron and say to him: 'When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the menorah'" (*Bamidbar* 8:2).

If you regard lighting the menorah according to its spiritual rather than its technical aspect, then it becomes the purpose of the entire service of the Mishkan – which is the elevation of the soul towards the Divine light through the mitzvot of the Torah (Nechama Leibowitz, *Parashat Tetzaveh*). Therefore, it is not surprising, that unlike the case with nearly every other Tabernacle vessel, the function of the menorah does not cease with the destruction of the Temple. The sacrifices are brought only so long as the Temple stands; yet the candles are forever [through lighting the Chanukah candles (Ramban, *Bamidbar* 8:2 citing *Midrash Tanchuma Beha'alotcha* 5 and *Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar* 15:6). How fitting that the menorah has become the emblem of

the State of Israel and the most enduring of all Jewish symbols. The menorah serves as a spiritual beacon – reflecting the presence of light during the Israelites' long years in the wilderness, and a sign for entering the promised land. The oil for the menorah was provided by the entire people (*Vayikra* 24:1-2). Thus, the candelabra represents how we all play a role in returning Divine light to the universe, propelling the world toward redemption. (Inspired by Sarah Rindner *Why the Menorah Is the Most Enduring of All Jewish Symbols*).

Igniting Shabbat Candles in Halacha

One of the ways the menorah has become eternalized is through the lighting of the Shabbat candles throughout every time-period. Just as the menorah causes the *Shechina* (Divine Indwelling Feminine Presence) to dwell in the Tabernacle and Temple, lighting the Shabbat candles ushers the Shechina into the Jewish home. Lighting a candle in honor of Shabbat is a rabbinic mitzvah (not mentioned in the Torah itself). We light Shabbat candles 1. to honor shabbat, 2. for *oneg shabbat* (to enjoy shabbat), and 3. for *shalom bayit* (bringing peace into the home). The Shabbat candles give profound expression to the essence of Shabbat. When we are mired in darkness and cannot find what we are looking for, our entire home seems chaotic. Yet, the moment we light the Shabbat candles, peace enters our home. Similarly, when we look at the world superficially, it seems hopelessly divided and conflicted, full of strife and war. By looking beyond the surface, we notice Divine providence and the light that makes the darkness disappear. We then realize that the opposing sides actually complement one another, and from all the troubles and afflictions, redemption and comfort will emerge. The Shabbat candles, which bring peace to the home by adding light, thus allude to the repair of the world that comes about by increasing the light of Torah and *emunah* (faith). This explains the great love that everyone has for the mitzvah of Shabbat candles. It alludes to the overarching goal of the Jewish people – to make peace by adding light. With this in mind, we can understand the Sages' statement, that one who is meticulous about lighting Shabbat candles, will be privileged to have children who become Torah scholars, and add the light of Torah to the world (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 23b). Accordingly, after lighting the Shabbat candles, it is a custom to pray that our sons become Torah scholars. "The glory of Shabbat is its candles. If you keep the mitzvah of Shabbat candles, I will show you the candles of Tzion... [says Hashem]. It will not be necessary for you to use the light of the sun to see; rather, I will provide illumination for you with My glory... In the future, the nations will walk by your light.... Why do you deserve all of this? Because of the candles you light for Shabbat" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Beha'alotekha*); [Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, Hilchot Shabbat 4:1](#)).

Why Do Women Light the Shabbat Candles?

On Shabbat, Hashem stopped contracting His essence by ceasing to create. Therefore, every Shabbat, the constricted nature of Divine light is transformed into a continuous flowing stream. Since Shabbat is the time for receiving Divine Light, it is the source of blessings (*Lecha Dodi* Hymn). Just as Shabbat receives Hashem's light, according to kabbalah, women are receivers (The Holy Shelah, *Toldot Ha'adam, Beit Hashem*). Shabbat is 'the receiving female' in relation to the six days of the week, which correspond to 'the giving male.' While the six days of the week represent the six masculine *sefirot* [from chesed to yesod], Shabbat represents *malchut* (royalty) (*Sefer Yetzira* 1:5). This explains why the Shabbat, representing the feminine malchut, is called Shabbat *Hamalka* – the Shabbat Queen. Whereas, the masculine sefirot are directed outward in the influencing activity of doing, the feminine malchut – which is directed inward – represents the state of being. Also, biologically, women are receivers as during conception. The fact that Shabbat corresponds to the feminine sheds light on why it is the woman who receives Shabbat into her home by lighting the Shabbat candles. Moreover, the *Zohar* reveals why the woman was chosen for the specific task of lighting the Shabbat candles. Chava, unwittingly expelled much of the Divine light from this world in the Garden of Eden. It is, therefore, her duty to light the Shabbat candles, as an attempt to restore what was lost (*Zohar, Part 1:48b*). The first man was the candle

of the world, as it states, "The candle of G-d is the soul of man." Chava caused his death. Therefore, they handed over the mitzvah of lighting the candles to the woman... (*Talmud Yerushalmi Shabbat 20a*). Although it may be true that the light of the world was lost on account of Chava's actions (who is the spiritual root of all female souls in existence), it is also womankind's greatest honor to effect such a lofty rectification. The greater the transgression, the more challenging the task of rectification; and yet, for that very reason, it is ultimately all the more rewarding (Based on [Tamar Kramer, Of Candles and Creation](#)). Understanding the lofty rectification enacted by women when we light shabbat candles, inspires us to put more energy into performing this mitzvah par excellence. As the *Zohar* concludes: "A woman should light the candles of Shabbat with a joyful heart and great concentration, because the supernal Glory is hers. It is a great merit for her to beget, IN LIGHTING THE CANDLES, holy sons who are the shining candles of Torah and Piety, and who will bring peace to the world. By lighting the candles, she also gives her husband long life. Hence, she should be very careful with THE LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES AND SHOULD DO SO WITH GREAT CONCENTRATION" (*Zohar*, Part 1:48b).

Prayer Following Lighting the Shabbat Candles

יְהי רָצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי. (וְאֶת אִשִּׁי וְאֶת בְּנִי וְאֶת אָבִי וְאֶת אִמִּי) וְאֶת כָּל קְרוֹבֵי. וְתֵתֶן לָנוּ וּלְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל חַיִּים טוֹבִים וְאָרְכִּים. וְתַזְכְּרֵנוּ בְּזִכְרוֹן טוֹבָה וּבִרְכָּה. וְתַפְקִדְנוּ בְּפִקְדֹת יְשׁוּעָה וְרַחֲמִים וְתִבְרַכְנוּ בְּרִכּוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת. וְתִשְׁלִים בְּתֵינוּ. וְתִשְׁכֵּן שְׂכִינְתְּךָ בֵּינוּ. וְזַכֵּנִי לְגִדְל בָּנִים וּבָנֵי בָנִים חַכְמִים וְנְבוֹנִים. אוֹהֲבֵי הָשֵׁם. יְרֵאֵי אֱלֹהִים. אֲנָשֵׁי אֱמֶת. זֶרַע קִדְּשׁ בְּהֶשֶׁם. דְּבָקִים וּמְאִירִים אֶת הָעוֹלָם בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים וּבְכָל מְלָאכַת עֲבוֹדַת הַבּוֹרָא. אָנָּה שִׁמְעֵ אֶת תְּחִנָּתִי בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת. בְּזָכוֹת שְׂרָה וּרְבֵקָה וְרַחֵל וְלֵאָה אֲמוֹתַי. וְהָאֵר גִּרְנוּ שְׁלֵא יִכָּבֶה לְעוֹלָם וְעַד וְהָאֵר פָּנֶיךָ וְנִשְׁעָה. אָמֵן:

May it be Your will, Hashem my G*d and G*d 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 learned children and grandchildren, who are wise and understanding, who love and fear G*d, people of truth, holy and attached to G*d, who will dazzle the world with Torah and goodness and service of G*d. Please hear our prayers, in the merit of our matriarchs Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah, and ensure that the glow of our lives will never be dimmed. Show us the glow of Your face and we will be saved. Amen.