



The Mitzvah of Lighting Shabbat Candles

Part I

The mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles is generally assumed to be a woman's mitzvah. Nevertheless, Rambam, *Hilchos Shabbat* 5:1, states that both men and women are obligated to ensure that a candle is lit in their home on Shabbat. However, Rambam, *ibid*, 5:3, writes that women have the primary obligation to perform this mitzvah.

One can question the nature of the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles. Is the mitzvah to ensure that a candle is lit in the home, or is the mitzvah to actually light a candle? This question is addressed by Tosafot, *Shabbat* 25b, s.v. *Chovah*, who quote an opinion that if there is already a candle lit in the home, there is no specific obligation to light Shabbat candles. Tosafot then cite Rabbeinu Tam who rejects this opinion and contends that if there is a candle already lit, one must extinguish the candle and rekindle it prior to Shabbat. Apparently, the first opinion maintains that the mitzvah is to ensure that a candle is lit, and therefore if there is a preexisting light, there is no obligation to light candles. Rabbeinu Tam is of the opinion that the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles demands that one light a candle specifically for the purpose of Shabbat, and a preexisting light does not suffice.

R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik, in *Chidushei HaGrach Al HaShas* no. 11, notes that in fact there are two aspects to the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles. One aspect of lighting candles relates to *oneg Shabbat*, the mitzvah to enjoy Shabbat. In order to enjoy Shabbat properly one must ensure that one's home has sufficient light. However, there is an additional aspect of lighting candles which relates to *kavod Shabbat*, the mitzvah to honor the Shabbat. Rambam, *ibid*, 30:2-5, writes that the mitzvah of *kavod Shabbat* is fulfilled on Erev Shabbat by preparing for Shabbat. Rambam includes lighting candles among the activities that are part of the mitzvah of *kavod Shabbat*. R. Soloveitchik notes that even if it were permissible to light candles on Shabbat, one would still be required to light the candles prior to Shabbat as lighting candles is part of the mitzvah of *kavod Shabbat*. [See R. Yosef Falk, *Introduction to Perisha and Derisha, Yoreh Deah*, who notes that his mother was insistent on lighting Yom Tov candles prior to Yom Tov (whenever it is permissible) even though it is permissible to light candles on Yom Tov. She did this in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *kavod Yom Tov*.]

Accepting Shabbat Immediately After Candle Lighting

The dual nature of the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles manifests itself in numerous

ways. First, the Gemara, *Shabbat* 23b, quotes a *Beraita* that one should not light the Shabbat candles too early or too late. Why can't one light the Shabbat candles too early? Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *Shelo*, explains that if one lights too early, it is not recognizable that it is done for the purpose of Shabbat. Tosafot, *Berachot* 27a, s.v. *D'Rav*, add, that the *Beraita* is referring to someone who lights the candles but does not accept Shabbat immediately. If someone lights candles early and then accepts Shabbat, it is recognizable that the lighting was done for the purpose of Shabbat. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chaim* 263:6,11, notes that one who lights and does not accept Shabbat immediately does not fulfill the mitzvah of *kavod Shabbat*. This is why Rabbeinu Tam rules that one must extinguish a candle that was already lit and relight it immediately prior to the acceptance of Shabbat. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* adds that if a woman must perform *melacha* after lighting the Shabbat candles, she should designate a different member of the household to accept Shabbat at the time in which she lights candles. By doing so, one can ensure that the lighting is recognizable that it was done for the purpose of Shabbat.

Reciting a *Beracha* on *Oneg Shabbat*

Second, *Magen Avraham* 263:11, discusses a case of a woman who attends a wedding on Friday afternoon (which was common in earlier times) and does not want to accept Shabbat prior to the wedding. He quotes Maharam who suggests that she should light the candles prior to the wedding, and after the wedding she may recite a *beracha* on the candles. *Magen Avraham* questions this practice because at the time of the *beracha* she didn't perform the mitzvah of lighting the candles.

R. Ya'akov B. Zolty, *Mishnat Ya'avetz, Orach Chaim* no. 75, explains that in such a situation there will be no fulfillment of the *kavod Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles because at the time the candles are lit, it is not recognizable that they are lit for the purpose of Shabbat. However, there still is a fulfillment of the *oneg Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles because the woman ensures that there is sufficient light in the home for Shabbat. Maharam is of the opinion that one may recite a *beracha* upon fulfillment of the *oneg Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles. *Magen Avraham* maintains that one may only recite a *beracha* upon fulfilling the *kavod Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles.

Magen Avraham notes that this dispute also applies to a case where a woman lights the candles in the proper time, but forgets to recite a *beracha*. According to Maharam, she may recite a *beracha* on the *oneg Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles, and may recite a *beracha* until the candles are extinguished. According to *Magen Avraham's* own opinion, if she forgot to recite a *beracha* at the time of lighting, she may no longer recite a *beracha*. *Magen Avraham* admits that *b'dieved*, ex post facto, one may rely on the opinion of Maharam.

Third, Mordechai, *Shabbat* no. 294, quotes Maharam as ruling that in the summertime, one may light the Shabbat candles indoors, and eat in the courtyard during the daylight hours. Maharil, *Teshuvot Maharil* no. 53, disputes this position and contends that if the candles do not have enough fuel to last until everyone returns to the house, the

beracha recited on the candles is considered a *beracha l'vatala* (a blessing recited in vain). Apparently, Maharam is of the opinion that one may recite a *beracha* on lighting the Shabbat candles even if those candles are for *kavod Shabbat* purposes only, and do not contribute to *oneg Shabbat*. Maharil maintains that one cannot recite a *beracha* on candles that are not going to be used for *oneg Shabbat*.

Alternatively, one can suggest that the dispute between Maharam and Maharil is contingent on whether one can fulfill the mitzvah of *kavod Shabbat* in the absence of *Oneg Shabbat*. Maharam is of the opinion that *kavod Shabbat* can include preparations that are not necessarily for the purposes of enhancing one's enjoyment of Shabbat. Therefore, one can light Shabbat candles for the purpose of *kavod Shabbat* even if one is not planning on deriving any benefit from them. Maharil is of the opinion that *kavod Shabbat* only includes preparations for the purpose of *oneg Shabbat*. Therefore, if one lights candles without any intention of benefiting from those candles, one does not even fulfill the *kavod Shabbat* aspect of lighting Shabbat candles.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 263:9, rules in accordance with the opinion of Maharil. *Mishna Berurah* 263:41, adds that if one derives benefit from the candles prior to the meal, the *beracha* is valid. [*Mishna Berurah* adds that the benefit one receives from the candles must relate in some way to the preparation of the meal. *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata* ch. 45, note 41, based on *Mishna Berurah* 263:45, notes that the benefit does not have to be specifically related to food preparation, but rather to any activity that requires light.] Therefore, one who is not going to eat in the same place as the candles must either derive benefit from the candles before the meal or after the meal, in order to fulfill the *oneg Shabbat* aspect of the lighting of the candles.

For safety reasons, it is not advisable and it may be dangerous to leave lit candles unattended. One who is not eating the Friday night meal at home should light candles that will only last a short amount of time and derive benefit from the candles during that time. If that is not possible, one should light an electric light in addition to the Shabbat candles at the time of candle lighting. In this way one can derive benefit from the electric light after returning home, and need not worry about using candles that will last a long time. The use of electric lights for the purpose of lighting Shabbat candles will be discussed in next week's issue.

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