

SHABBAT CANDLES

SHABBAT: CANDLES: MEANING

Shabbat: Candles: Peace of Home and Festive Feeling

The original purpose for lighting Shabbat candles was to enhance the peace of the home (shalom bayit --so that people could walk around without stumbling in the dark), and so Shabbat candles were lit where people would eat dinner Friday night. But we now rely on the idea that candles help provide a festive atmosphere.

SHABBAT: CANDLES: WHEN TO LIGHT

Shabbat: Candles: Earliest Time To Light

You may not light Shabbat (or Jewish festival) candles before plag ha'mincha. The candles must burn until at least dark (tzeit ha'kochavim) and someone must be there to see the light from the candles after dark.

SITUATION Mincha minyan begins at plag ha'mincha. You cannot light candles at home and still get to mincha minyan on time.

WHAT TO DO You must say mincha on your own (anytime from half an hour after mid-day until sunset). You will light candles after plag ha'mincha but before sunset and not join the mincha minyan.

Shabbat: Candles: Normal Lighting Times

In many countries, candle lighting time is 18 minutes before sunset.

NOTE In Jerusalem, many people have the custom of lighting candles 40 minutes before sunset.

Shabbat: Candles: Lighting with Delay until Sunset

Under extenuating circumstances, women may make a “condition” by saying “I am lighting Shabbat candles but not starting Shabbat until sunset” to delay Shabbat until sunset, when it will begin anyway.

NOTE Women should not routinely start Shabbat at sunset since the proper time for women to begin Shabbat is at candle lighting (typically 18 minutes before sunset).

REASON An opinion exists that Shabbat actually begins at 18 minutes before sunset; that is the origin of this time for women to begin Shabbat.

Shabbat: Candles: Latest Time To Light

You may not light after sunset (or after whatever time the entire community starts Shabbat if they start Shabbat before sunset).

NOTE If a woman lights candles after sunset, she not only violates Shabbat but she must light one extra candle on every subsequent Shabbat for the rest of her life.

SHABBAT: CANDLES: WHERE TO LIGHT

Shabbat: Candles: Lighting at Dinner Location

Light Shabbat candles wherever you will eat dinner.

NOTE If eating elsewhere, do not light Shabbat candles at your own home unless you will be home for some period of time after dark while the candles are burning (otherwise you have made a bracha l'vatala). You must see the candles burning for at least one minute after dark (tzeit ha'kochavim).

SHABBAT: CANDLES: WHO LIGHTS

Shabbat: Candles: One Person per Home Lights

Shabbat candles should be lit only by one person per home. Priority order: wife; then husband; then children. Girls should not be encouraged to light Shabbat candles except when no parent can.

NOTE Single people should light Shabbat candles in their homes if they will eat there.

Shabbat: Candles: Have Others in Mind When Lighting

Whoever is lighting the Shabbat candles should light for all other people who will be eating dinner in that home. So a host/hostess where you will eat should have you in mind when he or she lights Shabbat candles. However, it is customary for any married woman to light candles wherever she will eat. Unmarried women do not need to light their own candles (as long as the host/hostess has them in mind when lighting), but they are not prohibited from doing so.

SHABBAT CANDLES: HOW MANY TO LIGHT

Shabbat: Candles: Wives: Light Two (or More)

Wives should light two candles for Shabbat (and Jewish festivals), even though we say the blessing over “ner” (“candle” in the singular). Lighting any more candles than two is custom.

Shabbat: Candles: How Many To Light when Eating Elsewhere

A wife lighting Shabbat candles in a place other than her own home lights only two candles, even if she normally lights more than two candles in her own home.

Adding a Candle

If you missed lighting candles one Shabbat, the custom is to light an additional candle with your normal candles every subsequent Shabbat during your lifetime.

NOTE If you eat at someone else's home for Shabbat and they light candles for you, you do not (even as a custom) then add a candle to those you normally light on subsequent Shabbats.

SHABBAT: CANDLES: BLESSING

Shabbat: Candles: How To Do Blessing: Women

Here is the order for blessing over the Shabbat candles by women:

- Light the candles,
- Put your hands in front of your eyes (this a universal custom), and
- Say the blessing lehadlik ner shel Shabbat.

NOTE It is a custom to make requests at candle lighting, but rabbinic guidance may be helpful in how to structure the request.

Shabbat: Candles: How To Do Blessing: Men

Here is the order for blessing over the Shabbat candles by men:

- Say the blessing, and then
- Light candles.

NOTE If a man accepts/starts Shabbat when he lights Shabbat candles, he should cover his eyes and say the blessing AFTER lighting, as women do. Otherwise, he does not need to cover his eyes when saying the blessing.

Shabbat: Candles: Lighting with Wrong Blessing

If you said the blessing for Jewish festival candles instead of for Shabbat candles:

- Women may not correct themselves, but

- Men may say the correct blessing and light the candles.

NOTE If the man has already lit the candles before realizing that he had said the incorrect blessing, he should:

- Extinguish the candles,
- Say the correct blessing, and then
- Light again (assuming he has not yet started Shabbat and that it is not yet sunset).

SHABBAT: CANDLES: HOW LONG MUST BURN

How Long Must Shabbat Candles Burn

Shabbat candles must burn at least until dark and you have also eaten the bread of ha'motzi.