

The light of the Shabbat candles is a light of 'Shalom Bayit' (household peace). The original function of the Shabbat candles was to fill the home with light, so that families could enjoy the Shabbat meal without sitting in darkness. Although we have electric lights the Shabbat candles remain a symbol of family connectedness; some families light one candle for each family member. To share the light of Shabbat – whether with family, friends, or one's community – is to share a blessing of peace with loved ones.

The light of the Shabbat candles serves as a mark of Jewish continuity through time. The first Friday night lighting, described in The Midrash, took place in the very first Jewish home – of Abraham and Sarah. The Rabbis recount that a special miracle occurred for Sarah's candles: they remained lit each week from one Friday to the next. After Sarah passed away, the miraculous weeklong lights faded too. The miracle returned for Isaac's wife, Rebecca, which Isaac understood as a sign that she was the perfect partner with whom to continue the Jewish story.

Just as Rebecca and Isaac took up the Shabbat torch from Sarah and Abraham, Jews throughout history strove to preserve the light of Shabbat from week to week. Even from the darkest periods of Jewish history, there are stories of brave Jews lighting candles despite unspeakable hardship. At each step in the journey of the Jewish people, the lighting of Shabbat candles has represented the continuity of our ancestors' traditions, and our hopes and prayers to pass these on to the next generation.

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The Mitzvah of Lighting

The time for lighting candles is approximately twenty minutes before sunset (check the weekly times published by your local synagogue).

Usually, married women light two or more candles. If no women are present, a man can light the Shabbat candles.

The candles should be lit in the room where the Friday night meal will be eaten.

Recite the Bracha

Once the candles are lit, wave your hands in front of the flames three times, as if drawing in the light. Cover your eyes, and say:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik neir shel Shabbat

Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, who has made us holy with His commandments and commanded us to light the Shabbat light.

