**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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Candle-Lighting II: When and How

at what time do we light candles? How does this Relate To our accepting Shabbat? What is the optimal procedure for lighting?

# Timing

[Previously](https://www.deracheha.org/candle-lighting-1/), we addressed who lights candles, where, and why. Now we turn our attention to the timing of lighting and how one should light.

We've seen that we need to light the candles before Shabbat begins, as an act of preparation for Shabbat, when it's forbidden to kindle a flame. How early we should light, however, is less clear.

A Talmudic passage compares the Shabbat candle to the pillar of fire that escorted *Benei Yisrael* in the desert, teaching that we should not delay lighting to the last possible moment, because the pillar of fire would appear while it was still day, before the pillar of cloud departed. The passage goes on to say that one should light neither too early nor too late, but it does not specify precise times.

*Shabbat* 23b

Rav Yosef's wife was late and lit candles. Rav Yosef said to her: It is taught in a baraita, the pillar of cloud will not depart during the day and the pillar of fire [will not depart] at night. This teaches that the pillar of cloud complements the pillar of fire, and the pillar of fire complements the pillar of cloud. She thought to make it earlier. That elder said to her: We learned: One should just not make it early and not delay it.

In practice, one may light Shabbat candles as early as *pelag ha-mincha*, a halachic time that falls in the late afternoon (1¼ halachic hours prior to *sheki'a*). This is also the earliest point from which we can recite Ma'ariv or accept Shabbat.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Shulchan Aruch OC 263:4

One should not make things early to hurry to light it [the Shabbat candle] when it is still daytime, for then it is not recognizable that one lights it in honor of Shabbat and one also should not delay [lighting]. If one wants to light the candle when it is still daytime and to accept Shabbat upon oneself immediately, it is permitted, because since one accepts Shabbat immediately it is not making it early, as long as it is from *pelag ha-mincha* and onward, which is 1¼ [halachic] hours prior to the night.

How late can we light candles? The mitzva of *tosefet Shabbat* requires us to add on to the sacred day of Shabbat (or Yom Tov) from the workday.

*Yoma* 81b

Every place where it was said to rest, we add from the regular [day] onto the sacred.

In accordance with the view that *tosefet Shabbat* should include a time before *sheki'a* (sunset), we don't light candles at *sheki'a* itself, but rather up until a little before *shekia*.

Shulchan Aruch OC 261:2-3

There are those who say that one needs to add from the regular [day] onto the sacred, and the time of this addition is from the beginning of sunset…as long as he adds some time that will certainly be daytime from the regular [day] onto the sacred.

Mishna Berura 261:23

Even labor for a mitzva such as lighting candles for the Shabbat meal one should also be very careful to finish lighting them before the sun sets…And from the outset [*le-chat'chila*] one should not wait until the last minute, but rather advance their lighting from the time that the sun is at the tops of the trees ... And someone who is stringent upon himself and separates himself from labor a half hour or at very least a third of an hour prior to sunset, his lot is happy, for he discharges through this the view of all the early authorities.

As Mishna Berura notes, common custom is to light Shabbat candles about twenty minutes prior to *sheki'a*, to satisfy a minority opinion that views *sheki'a* as taking place about eighteen minutes before our calendars mark it.[[2]](#footnote-2) (In Jerusalem, and some other locales, the timing is commonly extended to forty minutes.) These accepted candle-lighting times facilitate women's fulfillment of *tosefet Shabbat*, because women typically accept Shabbat with candle-lighting.

Erica Brown describes how her relationship to time changes at the moment of lighting.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Erica Brown, Candle Talk, the New York Jewish Week March, 2017

On Friday afternoon, we rush to light candles at a very specific minute so that after we light them, time ceases to matter. We enter the sanctity of a time-free zone where our only clock for the next 25 hours measures the spiritual force we put into making Shabbat extraordinary. As someone always bound by the demands and confines of time, I take off my watch right before candle lighting to remind myself to step into that transcendent zone and leave this world behind for a little while.

Timing on Yom Tov

We need to light Shabbat candles before Shabbat starts, because the Torah prohibits kindling a flame on Shabbat itself. On Yom Tov, however, we are permitted to light a new flame from an existing one. Should we light Yom Tov candles on *erev Yom Tov*, like Shabbat candles? Or can we light them from an existing flame later on Yom Tov night?

Let's start by discussing the second night of Yom Tov (on any Yom Tov in the diaspora, and on Rosh Ha-shana in Eretz Yisrael as well). Since we may not prepare on one day of Yom Tov for the next, it would seem that candle-lighting should wait till night-time, making this question simple to answer. Nevertheless, Tosafot justify women lighting second-day Yom Tov candles prior to nightfall:

Tosafot *Beitza* 22a s.v. *Ein mechabin et ha-beka'at*

…The common practice to light a candle from Yom Tov for its fellow [Yom Tov, i.e., for the second day] without being careful that it is night, [although] above I explained that it is preparation, and Yom Tov is not [allowed] to prepare for its fellow, one can say that even though it is not night, in any case it is close to dark and even on that [first] day [of Yom Tov], that lighting serves a need.

Halachic authorities, including Levush, rule that a woman may light candles as early as *sheki'a*, so that she can benefit from their light:

Levush OC 488

We wait between *mincha* and *ma'ariv* until nightfall in order not to perform labor from this Yom Tov for that Yom Tov while it is still daytime for the needs of the night…These matters are for stringency and not for leniency. Only, we have the custom to light candles from when it gets dark [*sheki'a*] even before *barechu*, since from when it gets dark it is the need of that moment, and is not called preparing from Yom Tov for its fellow…

Still, many women adopted the practice of lighting after nightfall on the second night, and even on the first night would light only after nightfall. Rebbitzen Bayla Falk, however, suggests that it's a mistake to delay the first day's lighting until after nightfall. Since there is no halachic factor preventing us from preparing for the first day of Yom Tov before sunset, we can and should enter into Yom Tov by lighting earlier, as we do on Shabbat.

Introduction of the Author's Son to Perisha and Derisha

Look now and see how she [Rebbitzen Bayla Falk] sensed the error of women in their candle-lighting on Yom Tov…That women are accustomed to light their Yom Tov candles after the community has prayed *ma'ariv* and after they have left the synagogue for their homes before eating, and this is not correct. Let's allow that on second day Yom Tov, where [the status of] the day is in doubt and it is prohibited to prepare from the first Yom Tov to the second, it is fitting to do thus. But what developed from this, that they are accustomed to light thus on the night of the first Yom Tov also, is not correct, and it would be better halachically to light the candles also before *ma'ariv* and to accept Yom Tov with their lighting, everything as we do in honor of Shabbat…And our custom is that any labor that is permissible to perform on Yom Tov, if one can perform the same labor on *erev Yom Tov*, it is prohibited from the outset [*le-chat'chila*] to perform it on Yom Tov…And I sought after this in the halachic authorities and it seems in my humble opinion that the halacha is in accordance with her, and her secret is blessed and her reasoning is of the best and I wished to publish this in the book in her name…

Rebbitzen Falk's son quotes her in his introduction to his father's commentary to the Tur, and rules in accordance with her view. Others, including Rav Betzalel Zolty a few hundred years later, defend the practice of lighting Yom Tov candles on both days after nightfall, in order to keep lighting consistent:

Mishnat Ya'avetz OC 34

Indeed, there seems to be a basis for the general custom to light the Yom Tov candle when it is really night and not while it is still daytime, for in the diaspora the second day of Yom Tov is practiced. It is explained in Shulchan Aruch OC 503:1, that it is prohibited to prepare from Yom Tov to its fellow, and see Magen Avraham there. How much more so now that we are expert in establishing the lunar calendar, and the second day of Yom Tov as compared to the first is a workday, and it is prohibited [to prepare for it on the first Yom Tov]. And if so, lighting the candle of the second day of Yom Tov is certainly prohibited while it is still daytime; rather, one must light when it is really night. Therefore, they are accustomed also to light the candle of the first day of Yom Tov only at night and not while it is still daytime, as a decree on account of the second day of Yom Tov.

As Rav Zolty notes, this logic would only apply in the diaspora or in Israel on Rosh Ha-shana, when there are two days of Yom Tov, and it follows the view that lighting for second day of Yom Tov before nightfall is prohibited.

Rav Ovadya Yosef rules that it is preferable to light candles for first day of Yom Tov prior to sunset, as Rebbitzen Falk suggested, but that it is permissible to light them later:

Responsa *Yechaveh Da'at* 1:28

Therefore, the women who are accustomed to light Yom Tov candles at night, they have on what to rely. And in any case, those who wish to be stringent and to light the Yom Tov candles when it is still daytime, may a *beracha* befall them.

# Accepting Shabbat

We light Shabbat candles to honor and prepare for Shabbat. Does the act of lighting candles also signify acceptance of Shabbat?

In his explanation for lighting Chanuka candles before Shabbat candles, Behag implies that candle-lighting is inherently an act of accepting Shabbat.

Halachot Gedolot 9 Laws of Chanuka

Where one needs to light the Chanuka candle and the Shabbat candle, first he lights [the candle] of Chanuka and then he returns and lights [the candle] of Shabbat, for if he lights [the candle] of Shabbat first, it becomes prohibited to him to light [the candle] of Chanuka because he accepted Shabbat upon himself.

According to many other opinions, however, candle-lighting itself is not necessarily an act of accepting Shabbat. As Ramban notes, it would be hard to justify lighting any Shabbat candle after the first one if the lighting itself were automatically considered an acceptance of Shabbat:

Ramban *Shabbat* 23b

But the lighting of the Shabbat candle, if he lit it while it was still daytime, what acceptance of Shabbat is there in that? Behold he does it [lighting] in order that he not be preoccupied in the evening. If so, he lit the Shabbat candle and should not light another candle! And on the contrary, he lights not because it is Shabbat, but rather he lights because it is not yet Shabbat. And does the completion of lighting bring on refraining from labor?

Shulchan Aruch presents the debate, but Rema writes that common practice is to accept Shabbat through candle-lighting. Thus, some women allow the match or candle with which the candles were lit to go out on its own, rather than actively extinguishing it.[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 263:10

For Behag, since he lit the Shabbat candles, Shabbat has taken effect for him and he is prohibited from labor. And according to this, a few women have the practice that after they have recited the *beracha* and lit candles, they cast to the ground the wick in their hand with which they lit, and do not extinguish it…And there are those who disagree with Behag and say that accepting Shabbat is not dependent on lighting the candle, but rather on the *ma'ariv* prayer...Rema: And the custom is that the woman who lights accepts Shabbat through her lighting, if she did not make a condition first, and even a mental condition suffices, but the rest of the household members are permitted in [performing] labor until *barechu*.

Rema notes that once a woman has accepted Shabbat, she may no longer perform *melacha*, labor, but that members of her household can. Therefore, she can ask other family members to perform *melacha* for her till close to *sheki'a*, as is true in any case in which one household member accepts Shabbat early:

Shulchan Aruch OC 263:17

There are those who say that one who accepted Shabbat upon himself before it grew dark [*sheki'a*] is permitted to say to his fellow Jew to perform labor for him.

Lighting Conditionally

As Rema notes in the passage above, many halachic authorities permit a woman to light on condition that she not accept Shabbat with her lighting, so that she can continue to perform labor after lighting. Some even allow for a condition not expressed verbally. In practice, out of concern for the dissenting opinion, lighting conditionally is restricted to a case of need.

Magen Avraham 263:20

That she made a condition in advance - And in any case it seems to me that one should not make a condition unless necessary, since there are those who disagree [about it taking effect]…

For example, Tzitz Eliezer permits women to travel to the Kotel for prayer after candle-lighting, because in his view the spiritual importance of praying there together fulfills a great need:[[5]](#footnote-5)

Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 10:19

Regarding dear women whose souls long to go to greet the Shabbat Queen by the remnant of our Beit Ha-mikdash, the Western Wall, to say the *ma'ariv* prayer. For the awakening at this time is very great there in a multitude of the nation and with pouring out of the soul, as is known. But this is the problem, that they live far away and it is difficult for them to go by foot there and back, if there is any counsel that they will be able to travel there [in a vehicle] on the way there even though they already lit Shabbat candles, and I was asked about this by several…The women can make a condition at the time of candle-lighting that they still do not accept Shabbat through this until they come to the Western Wall, for there they will accept Shabbat together with the congregation of there…Indeed Magen Avraham 263:20 writes that in any case one should only make a condition when necessary since there are those who disagree. But one can say even here to make a condition so that they will be able through this to fill their spiritual thirst and longing of the soul to wander to the house of God, and to draw special elevated inspiration is also called a need, so that they should be able to make a condition.

In a fairly common scenario, a woman may not yet have recited *mincha* when she reaches candle-lighting time. In this case, if she has time, she can recite *mincha* before lighting, even pushing off lighting a bit till a couple of minutes before *sheki'a*.

If she does not have time, however, she can recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *ma'ariv* twice, as a make up prayer. Alternatively, she can light candles on condition that she not accept Shabbat till *Kabbalat Shabbat*, and then she can recite *mincha* after lighting.

Mishna Berura suggests the first option:

Mishna Berura 263:43

She accepts Shabbat [through lighting] - and she should recite *mincha* first, for once she has already accepted Shabbat, she is no longer able to recite a *tefilla* of a weekday. And when there is no time for this it is better that she recite *ma'ariv* twice.

Kaf Ha-chayyim presents the second option, of lighting conditionally prior to *mincha*. This plan can be especially useful when a woman plans to attend synagogue where *mincha* will be recited after candle-lighting.

Kaf Ha-chayyim 263:35

If she is delayed in praying *mincha* and there isn’t time to pray and light afterwards, it seems that she should make a condition before she lights that she is not accepting Shabbat through lighting but through saying "*Bo'i kalla*" and "*Mizmor shir le-yom ha-Shabbat*" [in *Kabbalat Shabbat*] as men do, in order that she be able to recite *mincha* afterwards.

# How to Light

Since women typically accept Shabbat through lighting, a woman should dress for Shabbat beforehand, if she possibly can.

Mishna Berura 262:11

Immediately after etc. - And also women are accustomed before candle-lighting to bathe themselves and to put on Shabbat clothing, and happy is their lot. But during the short days, when they sit in the store late and afterwards bathe and dress and thus will come, God forbid, to a possible violation of Shabbat; therefore, it is good to caution them to come early to bathe and to dress, and when they are delayed it is a greater mitzva that she light [the candles] thus in workday clothing than to come, God forbid, to a possible violation of Shabbat and if the husband sees that she is delayed, it is a great mitzva that he light the candles…

Following from a Talmudic passage that connects candle-lighting with learned children, it is customary for a woman to recite a *tefilla* after lighting for her children to light up the world with Torah.

*Shabbat* 23b

Rav Huna said: One who is accustomed to the [Shabbat] candle will have children who are Torah scholars.

Rabbeinu Yona *Iggeret Ha-teshuva* Day 7 Rule 1

A woman when she lights the candle on Erev Shabbat should take care to pray at that time over her children that they be successful in Torah and in *mitzvot* and in awe of Heaven, since this prayer is fitting to pray at a time when she has illuminated the candle of Shabbat, as the matter as is said "for a candle is a mitzva and Torah is light."

A common text for a *yehi ratzon* prayer for after candle-lighting well suited for women who have or hope to have children can be found [here](https://www.shabbatuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Friday-Night.pdf#page=4). A single woman might omit the prayer's mention of a husband, or keep in mind a future husband.

A woman may choose to recite personal prayers instead. (We quote one originally in Ladino [here](https://www.deracheha.org/three-mitzvot-2/).) Or she might take inspiration from Shelah, who suggests reading the entire story of Chana, culminating with her *tefilla*:

Shelah *Shabbat, Perek Ner Mitzva*

I have received [a tradition] that the woman should read at this time the haftara of Rosh Ha-shana, of Chana (*Shemuel* I 1:1) until "and He will raise the horn of his anointed one" (2:10)

*Tefillat Chana* ([2:1-10](https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt08a02.htm)) in particular is appropriate for anyone to recite, and can be a meaningful option for someone seeking a prayer that does not entail mention of husband or children. Women who wish to have children may find the entire passage mentioned by Shelah, starting from the beginning of *Shemuel*, to be especially relevant. We can also take candle-lighting as an opportunity to pray for others. For example, [Yesh Tikva](yesh-tikva.org) has published a prayer on behalf of those facing fertility challenges.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In a blogpost, Rivki Silver shares how meaningful praying after lighting is to her:[[7]](#footnote-7)

Rivki Silver, Shabbos Candle Lighting Challenge, Blogpost, 2.2021

One thing I especially appreciate about lighting early is that I feel like I have “extra” time to daven. Yes, it is often too hectic to really focus on davening (and yes I sometimes am davening by the candles while holding my toddler), but on the nights when I’ve lit early and the children are miraculously behaving, I’ve taken that time to really pray. For the people who need a refuah. For the success of my children. Of my family. Of my loved ones. Of the whole Jewish people.

Many women also have the custom of adding weight to the prayer over the candles by giving *tzedaka* in advance of lighting.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The *Beracha*

Surprisingly, the Talmud makes no mention of a *beracha* upon lighting Shabbat candles. Nevertheless, the Ge'onim rule that one recites the *beracha* of "*le-hadlik ner shel Shabbat*," which is similar to the Talmudically-prescribed *beracha* over lighting Chanuka candles.

Seder Rav Amram Ga'on *Seder Shabbatot*

One who lights the Shabbat candle must recite a *beracha*: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the world, Who has sanctified us with His *mitzvot* and commanded us to kindle the candle of Shabbat."

A Ge'onic teshuva explains that the obligation stems from the fact that candle-lighting is called an "obligation" in the Talmud.

Ge'onic Responsa - Mussafieh 82

Of Rav Sherira and Rav Hai. You asked if the essence of the *beracha* "to kindle the candle of Shabbat" is a custom or a halacha, and if it is a halacha, where is it written in the Talmud…The *beracha* over the Shabbat candle is a halacha, even though it was not stated clearly, for behold Rava said to Abbaye (*Shabbat* 25b) "For I say the lighting of the Shabbat candle is an obligation."…And it is established for us [as halacha] in accordance with Abbaye, who said (*Shabbat* 23a): A definite Rabbinic [commandment] requires a *beracha*.

Questions about whether to recite the *beracha* continued into the Middle Ages. In a correspondence with Rabbeinu Tam, Rav Meshullam of Melun argues against reciting a *beracha* over lighting Shabbat candles because kindling does not complete the mitzva act[[9]](#footnote-9) (we fulfill *oneg Shabbat* only later, when eating by candlelight), and because the lighting is fundamentally functional in nature.

*Sefer Ha-yashar* (Responses section) 47

From Rav Meshullam…VI (in the matter of the *beracha* of the Shabbat candle). And the *beracha* of the candle similarly he [Rav Eliyahu] ruled and practiced first—and so we saw in many other places—that they are not accustomed to recite a *beracha*. And the reason that makes sense is that its lighting is not the completion of a mitzva, and is only for illumination at night. And if a lantern were continuously lit, he would not be obligated to extinguish it and light it [for Shabbat]…

Rav Meshullam sees the Shabbat candles as primarily functional, so that lighting them is a form of preparation for Shabbat. To the extent that there is a mitzva, it takes place only after the lighting, when we enjoy the candlelight on Shabbat night.

Rabbeinu Tam rejects Rav Meshullam's arguments. He argues that *shalom bayit* takes effect immediately upon kindling the candles, and furthermore one should rely on Ge'onic precedent – and on women's received tradition:

ספר הישר (חלק התשובות) סימן מח:ו-ז

ו. (בענין ברכת נר בשבת). ומה שכתבת שגם הורה בנר שבת שלא לברך ומסתבר טעמא שאינה גמר מצותה הא ליתא שגמר מצותה היא כנר חנוכה דלפרסומי ניסא היא וה"נ [=והכי נמי] מדהוה שלום ביתו דאין לו להקדים ולא לאחר... ותמיה אני עליך ...ואינך מאמין לרב עמרם…לברך על הדלקת נר בשבת…ולפי שהנשים מברכות בלחש וקולם לא ישמע, שכחת המנהג שגם אני לא שמעתי מימי, ופעמים שהיתי מדליק היתי שוכח לפי שאינה באנשים כבושים /כבנשים/. ועוד ראיה לברכה שכן כתב בהלכות גדולות המדליק נר חנוכה ונר שבת תחילה מדליק נר חנוכה דאי אדליק שבת ברישא איתסר ליה. מכלל שהוא מברך, שאם אין ברכה קבלה מניין... ומה שכתבת שאם היתה עששית דולקת והולכת אינה מכבה ומדליקה ...שנשים שלנו מנהג בידם לכבות ולהדליק. ואני ראיתי בעיני ואשאלם ותאמרנה כן. ואם אינן נביאות בני נביאות הן.

*Sefer Ha-yashar* (Responsa Section) 48:6-7

(Regarding the *beracha* over the Shabbat candle). What you wrote, that he [Rav Eliyahu] also ruled regarding the Shabbat candle not to recite the *beracha* and the reasoning makes sense because it is not the completion of its mitzva. This is not so, for it [kindling] is a completion of its mitzva, as with the Chanuka candle, which is to publicize the miracle, and this too since it is his *shalom bayit*, for he should not make it early and not delay it… And I am surprised at you… do you not believe Rav Amram…to recite a *beracha* over lighting the Shabbat candle!.…And because women recite the *beracha* in a whisper so their voice is not heard, you forgot the custom that also I had not heard in my days, and occasionally when I was lighting I would forget because it is not for men as for women. And there is further proof for the *beracha*, for it is written in Halachot Gedolot that one who lights the Chanuka candle and the Shabbat candle lights the Chanuka candle first, for if he lights for Shabbat first, [lighting] becomes forbidden to him. The inference is that he recites a *beracha*, for if he does not recite a *beracha*, whence is acceptance [of Shabbat]?…And what you wrote that if a lantern were continuously lit, she does not extinguish it and light it … our women have a custom to extinguish the candle and then light. And I saw it with my eyes and asked them and they said so. And if they are not prophets, they are children of prophets.

Rabbeinu Tam focuses on the candles' role in creating *shalom bayit*, which is both a functional and spiritual concept. He also mentions that women would make sure to kindle a new flame for Shabbat rather than rely on an old one. Rabbeinu Tam recognizes the ritual significance of candle-lighting for women, so that reciting a *beracha* seems natural.

We learn some additional points from Rabbeinu Tam: Women would recite the *beracha* quietly, and the halachic position that one accepts Shabbat at candle-lighting depends on reciting the *beracha*, not the lighting itself. Rabbeinu Tam's overall approach to the *beracha* has prevailed, and universal practice is to recite a *beracha* over Shabbat candles. Beyond that, his approach to respecting the primacy of women's customs in this area has also prevailed.

How could Rabbeinu Tam not know what his wife did with the Shabbat candles, and why is it significant?

In his response to Rav Meshullam of Melun, Rabbeinu Tam makes it clear that his experience and expertise lighting Shabbat candles is limited. He acknowledges forgetting to recite the beracha when lighting on his own, and he turns to women with questions about correct practice. He also gives great weight to his wife's account.

This teshuva exemplifies a trend we've mentioned [previously](https://www.deracheha.org/candle-lighting-1/) regarding Shabbat candles—for halachic authorities to defer to women's practice. It also speaks to a broader trend, one that we tease out more thoroughly in our [Introduction to Deracheha](https://www.deracheha.org/concepts-introduction/): We transmit halachic tradition in two ways, through texts and through mimesis, imitative practice. The case of candle-lighting is a particularly fascinating example of this because here the mimetic practice is maintained almost exclusively by women, and our textual tradition slowly conforms to it.

Candle-lighting is one area among many in which women have exercised a form of authority over how Halacha is lived in the home. Candle-lighting may be unique because of the extent to which women have retained that sense of mimetic authority over the mitzva.

# Timing of the *Beracha*

The timing of the *beracha* is likewise contentious. Ordinarily, we recite *berachot* over a mitzva **prior** to performing the mitzva act. Here, too, Rambam rules that a woman recites the *beracha* over Shabbat candles prior to lighting:

Rambam, Laws of Shabbat 5:1

One is obligated to recite a *beracha* before lighting: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the world, Who has sanctified us with His *mitzvot* and commanded us to kindle the candle of Shabbat," as one recites a *beracha* over all things in which one is rabbinically obligated.

Shulchan Aruch seems to rule accordingly. In discussing the question of accepting Shabbat, his formulation implies that the *beracha* precedes lighting:

Shulchan Aruch OC 263:10

…Who after they have recited the *beracha* and lit the candles…

He also mentions nothing unusual about the order of *beracha* and kindling.

Shulchan Aruch OC 263:5

When one lights, one should recite the *beracha* "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the world, Who has sanctified us with His *mitzvot* and commanded us to kindle the candle of Shabbat."

Reciting the *beracha* over Shabbat candles prior to kindling them remains the practice of many Sefardi women, and of many men when they light candles.

As early as the Ge'onic period, however, questions were raised about how it is possible to recite the *beracha* before lighting. If a woman accepts Shabbat at the moment she recites the *beracha*, she is then no longer permitted to kindle a light.

Ge'onic Responsa (Mussafiyeh) 82

Of Rav Sherira and Rav Hai. You asked…If the householder has to light many candles beyond the first one, does he recite a *beracha* over the first one or over the last one? If he recites a *beracha* over the first one, how can he light [other candles] after accepting Shabbat? And if he recites a *beracha* over the last one, it is a *beracha* after [the mitzva] act….And as to whether he recites a *beracha* over the first or last [candle] we don't need so much precision this matter…And further, according to your reasoning, if [the obligation] to refrain from labor [takes effect] with the *beracha*, then he should not light even one!...And we are not precise in this specifically to [recite the *beracha*] prior to the [mitzva] action, and even though if it were necessary, he would initially not accept Shabbat upon himself until he had set all of the candles, [so] he would not be obligated in refraining from labor until setting all of the candles, and it would be a *beracha* prior to the [mitzva] action and work out well.

The Ge'onic response is that this is not really a concern, and that even if it were, a person could light on condition not to accept Shabbat until after lighting all the candles. Many other halachic authorities also rejected this concern. However, in a number of communities, women adopted the custom of reciting the *beracha* only **after** lighting:

Darkei Moshe Ha-katzar OC 263:2

Mordechai wrote at the end of the second chapter of *Shabbat* that one recites the *beracha* prior to lighting. But the custom is to recite the *beracha* after the lighting.

Many women wave their hands over the candles after lighting, and then place their hands over their eyes when reciting the *beracha*. These gestures heighten the ritual aspect of lighting. Hand-waving may be a sort of gesticulation for prayer, symbolizing the light of Shabbat spreading *shalom* throughout the home.

Halachically, waving one's hands and covering one's eyes also serves to obscure the candles. By covering her eyes, a woman delays deriving benefit from the candles, and perhaps even symbolically mimes extinguishing and rekindling them, creating a sense that the *beracha* is recited prior to the mitzva action.

Sefer Ha-minhagim (Turna) Shabbat

See Maharai Weill, who permitted to light while it is still daytime and afterwards to spread their hands over the candles and recite the *beracha* in order that the *beracha* be prior to the [mitzva] action.

This has become common practice among many women:

Rema OC 263:

Gloss: There is one who says that we recite the *beracha* prior to lighting, and there is one who says that one recites the *beracha* after lighting (Mordechai, end of the second chapter of *Shabbat*), and in order that it be prior to the [mitzva] action one should not benefit from it until after the *beracha*, and we place the hand before the candle after lighting and recite the *beracha*, and afterwards remove the hand, and this is called prior to the [mitzva] action, and thus is the custom (Maharil).

It logically follows that when a woman lights only conditionally, and thus does not accept Shabbat with her *beracha*, then she **should** recite the *beracha* prior to lighting, though this is debated.

Bei'ur Halacha 263:5 s.v. After the lighting

A woman who made a condition that she not accept Shabbat through lighting…that even so they should light and spread their hands and afterward should recite the *beracha* in order to keep practice consistent and in accordance with the view of Magen Avraham, but from the words of Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his novellae and from the words of Chayyei Adam, it is demonstrated that in this [case] they should recite the *beracha* and afterwards light.

So, too, when lighting candles on Yom Tov, one could argue that a woman should recite the *beracha* first, since lighting a candle from a pre-existing flame is permissible on Yom Tov. Rebbitzen Bayla Falk is quoted approvingly by her son as making this argument:

Introduction of the Author's Son to Derisha and Perisha

Look now and see what she [Rebbitzen Baila Falk] sensed regarding the mistake of women in their lighting Yom Tov candles…That they are accustomed to light Yom Tov candles as on Shabbat, which is that they light the candles first and afterwards place their hands before the candles and recite the *beracha* over the candles and afterwards remove their hands, all like Shabbat candles…It makes sense with lighting candles for Shabbat, for after the *beracha* lighting further is prohibited, but on Yom Tov, when it is permissible to light the candle on Yom Tov itself, it is better that we make the *beracha* of the candles as its enactment for the *beracha* to be before the act…And it seems in my humble opinion that the halacha is with her…

Some halachic authorities, including Magen Avraham, disagree, and rule that women who recite the *beracha* on Shabbat after lighting should recite the *beracha* following lighting even on Yom Tov, to keep matters consistent:

Magen Avraham 263:12

After the lighting - For if she recites the *beracha*, she has accepted Shabbat and is prohibited from lighting and if so, on Yom Tov she should recite the *beracha* and afterwards light, so it is written in the Derisha in *Even Ha-ezer* in the name of his mother, but there is no wisdom for women [except in the spindle], for the sages did not distinguish…

But Mishna Berura notes that many others rule in line with Rebbitzen Falk:

Mishna Berura 263:27

After the lighting - He thinks that if she recites the *beracha* it is as though she accepted Shabbat explicitly and is prohibited from lighting further, and if so on Yom Tov, when according to all views this is not applicable, she should recite the *beracha* and then light. And the view of Magen Avraham is not to make a distinction, but many later authorities think as I wrote from the beginning.

The fundamental tension regarding the timing of the *beracha* for Yom Tov candles reflects a broader issue: the lack of a functional need for Yom Tov candle-lighting. After all, lighting from a pre-existing flame is permissible on Yom Tov. But the ritual and symbolic significance of ushering in sacred time through lighting makes Yom Tov candles essential, notwithstanding the halachic questions that it raises. Here, as we saw with regard to Rabbeinu Tam and Shabbat candles, women's voices have been part of the halachic discussion from the outset.

# Further Reading

Rav David Auerbach. *Halichot Beitah*, ch. 14.

Rav Yehuda Brandes. "*Mitzvat hadlakat ner Shabbat*," *Mada Toratecha*, available [here](https://bmj.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/MT.Shabat.11.pdf).

Rav Yehoshua Yeshaya Neuwirth. *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah*, ch. 43-45.

Yisrael Ta-Shema. "*Kisui Ha-einayim Be-et Hadlakat Ner Shabbat*." *Minhag Ashkenaz Ha-kadmon.* Jerusalem: Magnes 1999, pp. 136-141.

Yisrael Ta-Shema. "*Ner shel Kavod*." *Minhag Ashkenaz Ha-kadmon.* Jerusalem: Magnes 1999, pp. 125-135.

*Ner Yom Tov*, Olamot Shiur, available [here](https://olamot.net/shiur/%D7%A0%D7%A8-%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%98%D7%95%D7%91).

1. Tosafot *Berachot* 27a

For Rav prayed the [evening prayer] of Shabbat on *erev Shabbat*…the reason is because he thought like Rabbi Yehuda…regarding the matter of the evening prayer, that it [may be prayed] a [halachic] hour and a quarter prior to the night…immediately after *pelag ha-mincha*, and so it is regarding the matter of *tosefet Shabbat* (and Tish'a Be-Av) and Yom Kippur, for we establish for halacha that it is on a Torah level, if so one does not need such a great amount of time.

Rema Shulchan Aruch OC 261:2-3

Gloss: And if he wants to make it early and accept Shabbat upon himself from *pelag ha-mincha*, he may do so… [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Yere'im* 274 [formerly 102]

…Thus seems to me the fundamental halacha, that "from when the sun sets" is prior to Ulla's sunset according to the explanation of my Rabbis, who explained that it is [the time it takes to walk] three portions of a *mil* [i.e., about ¾ of a kilometer] before the stars are seen outside. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Available here: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/candle-talk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Aruch Ha-shulchan questions this practice, at least for Ashkenazi women:

Aruch Ha-shulchan OC 263:14

Our Rav Beit Yosef wrote in *se'if* 10 that "according to this [accepting Shabbat through lighting], a few women have the custom that after they have lit the candles with a *beracha*, they cast to the ground the wick in their hand with which they lit, and do not extinguish it." And it seems that those women recited a *beracha* prior to lighting, for if they were to recite a *beracha* afterwards, couldn't they still extinguish prior to the *beracha*, for it is obvious that prior to the *beracha* it is still not an acceptance of Shabbat. And according to this, our women, who recite a *beracha* after the lighting as I wrote in the previous section, can certainly extinguish and afterwards recite the *beracha*, and it seems to me that so is the custom and one shouldn’t doubt it. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Even those with reservations about relying on a condition at candle-lighting for the purpose of traveling to a given place would permit a woman to travel in a vehicle driven by one who has not yet accepted Shabbat. Rav Moshe Sternbuch applies this to *tefilla* at the Kotel:

*Teshuvot Ve-hanhagot* 4:61

I was asked by a woman who is married for a long time and has no children, and there is a confirmed *segula* to pray at the Kotel for forty days straight over a single request, and she has begun to do this—since she lives far from the Kotel and it is impossible for her to walk there and back on Shabbat, she wants on Friday to light the candles early at home on condition to be able to perform labor, and she'll travel by car to the Kotel before the forty minutes [before *sheki'a*, when candles are customarily lit in Yerushalayim], and will walk back. In my humble opinion, it seems fitting to permit it in accordance with what that Dagul Mi-rvava and Griz innovated, that an individual who accepted Shabbat on himself is prohibited only from labor and is permitted in rabbinically prohibited acts performed by a non-Jew for the purpose of a mitzva even during *bein ha-shemashot* [between *sheki'a* and nightfall]…it appears that one can permit it in a place of mitzva and distress, and therefore, even if she accepted Shabbat, it is permissible to travel prior to the forty minutes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Available here: <https://yeshtikva.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Yesh-Tikva-Fertility-Prayer.png> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Available here: <https://lifeinthemarriedlane.com/2021/02/01/shabbos-candle-lighting-challenge/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 75:2

…Through the mitzva candle comes the light of Torah. Therefore, it is fitting for a woman to pray at the time of lighting, that God grant her male children who illuminate with Torah, and it is good that she first give some coins to tzedaka… [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Menachot* 42b

Every mitzva whose action is the completion of the mitzva, like *berit mila*, even though it is fit [when performed] by a non-Jew, a Jew [performing it] must recite a *beracha*. And any mitzva whose action is not the completion of the mitzva, such as [writing] *tefillin*, even though it is not fit [when performed] by a non-Jew, a Jew [performing it] need not recite a *beracha*… [↑](#footnote-ref-9)