

Lehadlik Ner Shel Shabbat

Leader: *From which source are we prescribed to light Shabbat candles?*

Despite the fact that the Torah mentions the word Shabbat more than 80 times, only a few of these references actually deal specifically with how one is to observe the Sabbath, and only two of them tell us why.

- **Exodus 20: 8-11: Remember** the Sabbath day to keep it holy... (11) For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth...and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
- **Deuteronomy 5:12-15: Observe** the Sabbath day and keep it holy as the LORD your God has commanded you...(15) Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there....

Historical Background of Candle-Lighting

Leader: There is disagreement about when the lighting of Shabbat candles was elevated to the status of a mitzvah for both men and women. In medieval times it was the woman's task to light candles since women were home and men were in synagogue on Friday afternoon. It was important because without a woman lighting the lamp before sunset, the family would sit in the dark. And while the Talmudic tractate *Shabbat* meticulously details what kind of oil and wicks are best to keep the Shabbat lamp from going out, there is no mention of any special ritual for lighting it.

But creating a new blessing is problematic. It is thought that the solution was to take the blessing for lighting the Hanukkah candles, which *is* in the Talmud (*B. Shabbat 21b*), and substitute "...*le-hadlik ner shel Shabbat*" for "*le-hadlik ner shel Hanukkah*." As astonishing as it may seem, the Hanukkah blessing is the original one, hundreds of years older than the Shabbat blessing, its derivative.

Rules about Lighting Candles

Today it is a mitzvah to light the candles at the beginning of Shabbat. They should be placed in the same room where the meal is eaten. (At one time candles also fulfilled the function of allowing the family not to eat in the dark, hence the proximity to the table.)

The commandment applies to men as well as to women, but fell principally on women since they were more closely associated with the home (*B. Shabbat 31b*).

The candlesticks used in kindling the lights should not be moved or touched during Shabbat.

Customs vary as to the number lit:

- We light a minimum of two candles--one for *zakhor* (*remember*) and one for *shamor* (*observe*)--from two different justifications for the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments [see above] Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12.
- Some start with two candles and add one for each member of the family.

Leader: *Why do we cover the eyes after lighting?*

- *Kavanah* (concentration, intention): In closing our eyes we are closing out all mundane aspects of our lives, allowing us to focus on the forthcoming Shabbat.
- Normally the *berakhah* is recited before an act is performed. Since this *berakhah* marks the beginning of the Shabbat, we light the candles first (since we cannot light *on* the Sabbath), but in order to satisfy the requirement that the blessing is recited *before* the act, we cover our eyes so as not to see the light. When we remove our hands and see the light, the blessing is considered to have preceded the act.

Techines: Private Woman's Prayer for Candle Lighting

Techines (*techinot*) are women's Yiddish prayers written in the 16th through 19th centuries, in Eastern and Central Europe. Techines (from the Hebrew word *le-hit'hanen*, to supplicate) were recited by women at home or in the synagogue. They often refer to specific women's commandments like candle-lighting and contain references to the Matriarchs and other biblical women.

For more on techines see Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.

May it be Your will, my God and God of my ancestors, to be gracious to me and to all my family and to give us, and all Israel, a good and long life. Remember us with goodness and blessing, and grant us salvation and mercy. Grant us abundant blessing, and fortify the places we call home. May Your Presence dwell among us as we gather here tonight. May we be blessed with wise and learned disciples and children, lovers of God who stand in awe of You, people who speak truth and spread holiness. May those we nurture light the world with Torah and good deeds. Hear the prayers I utter now in the name of our mothers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. May Your light, reflected in these candles, surround us always. And let us say, Amen.

Adapted by Nurit Shein and Sue Levi Elwell from a traditional Sephardic techine found in Cohen, Jonathon, ed. The Sephardi Haggadah. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1988.

To take home:

Techinah: Private Woman's Prayer for Candle Lighting

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You might want to incorporate the recitation of this techine as part of your Shabbat candle-lighting ritual.

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Mezuzah

Text: *Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:9)*

Activity:

Create your own case for your mezuzah. There are needlework kits, Lucite boxes that can be painted, etc. There is no limitation on decorations other than that they should be appropriate.

Leader: *What is a mezuzah?*

A mezuzah is the *parchment* that we affix to our doorposts, on which a scribe has handwritten two paragraphs from the Torah: The portion of *Shema Yisrael* (Hear O Israel...) in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and the portion of *V'hayah-im-shemo'a* (And it shall happen if you obey...) in Deuteronomy 11:13-21. In these paragraphs, God states that great rewards await those who observe the mitzvot, including prosperity, long life for us and our children as well as tight security for the house. Each of the two paragraphs includes a commandment to affix a mezuzah on the doorpost.

These portions are written on a kosher parchment with special ink by a highly trained and certified scribe. The text is written in a single column on 22 scored lines. Every letter must be properly written; even one letter written incorrectly invalidates the mezuzah.

On the back of the parchment is written the word '*Sha-dai*', along with certain other letters. After the scribe has completed his writing, the parchment is rolled (not folded or creased) from left to right, so that the first word to appear when the mezuzah is opened is 'Shema.' The mezuzah is then placed in a protective cover or case and is ready to be put up on the doorpost. The term "mezuzah" refers specifically to the parchment, not the case in which it is contained.

Some Texts of the Mezuzah

Yerushalmi Peah 1:1

The Parthian king, Artaban, once sent a priceless jewel to Rabbi Judah the Prince (135 - 220 CE), who was the compiler of the Mishnah and one of the wealthiest Jews. The king made it obvious that he expected something of equal value in return. The rabbi's return gift to the king was a mezuzah. The king's reply was: "I sent you something priceless and you sent me something that can be bought for a paltry sum!?" The rabbi answered: "You sent me something that I must hire a guard to watch and I sent you something that will watch over you!"

The Zohar:

Come and see: a person is required to inscribe the Holy Name upon the doorpost of his home. For every place that the Holy Name is found the bad spirits cannot be found there, and they are unable to act upon a person as the verse says: "*lo siuna alecha ru*" When a person puts a mezuzah on his door, and the Holy Name is inscribed within its letters, then the person is crowned with the Crown of his Master, and the bad spirits are unable to get close and therefore cannot be found there.

Laws of Mezuzah

What makes a mezuzah kosher?

A kosher mezuzah is hand-written on genuine parchment prepared from the skin of a kosher animal.

A specially trained scribe, a sofer, carefully writes the words using special black ink and a quill pen.

The letters must be written according to halakhah, and every letter and word must be correct. Any mistakes or missing letters invalidates the entire parchment.

It is not possible to know if a mezuzah is kosher just by looking at it, since part of its being kosher has to do with the scribe who wrote it. It is for this reason that one should buy a mezuzah from a reputable dealer. A kosher mezuzah, usually referred to as a *klaf* (Hebrew for parchment) should cost \$30-\$40. You can purchase valid scrolls online at <http://www.stam.net>

To protect the mezuzah from the elements, you should place it in a case. Jewish bookstores sell a wide range of mezuzah cases -- from inexpensive plastic, to artistic porcelain, to elaborate silver. (If you're putting the mezuzah outside, be sure to buy a waterproof case.)

Because of humidity and natural aging, the letters on a mezuzah can become cracked or faded. For this reason, a mezuzah should be checked twice every seven years.

Rules for Mezuzah Placement

When moving into a new home or apartment a mezuzah should be put up immediately.

When moving out of a home -- and the next occupant is also Jewish -- it is considered disrespectful to remove the mezuzot.

When placing the mezuzah in the case or on the wall, be sure that the word *Shaddai*, which is written on the back of the parchment, is facing outward (i.e. toward the entrance once it is affixed). Also, make sure the mezuzah is not upside down!

The mezuzah should be placed on the right-hand doorpost, on the right side of the door as you enter the room.

The mezuzah should be placed on the lower part of the upper-third of the doorpost, approximately at shoulder height. (The Talmud compares this to tefillin which is placed on the upper arm.)

