

# HALOCHOSCOPE

**This week's question:**

**A couple has separated in preparation for a divorce. They have two children, one of whom is adult and no longer lives at home. They used to kindle four candles for *Shabbos*, corresponding to the four family members. Now that they live separately, each of them kindles the candles at their respective homes. The husband began by kindling all four candles. However, he wonders whether he should really kindle three, since his wife is no longer part of 'his' family. May he, or should he stop kindling a candle 'for her'? May he revert to kindling only two, if that was the practice of his own mother?**

**The issues:**

**A) *Ner Shabbos***

**B) Who kindles?**

**C) How many candles are kindled, and why?**

**A) *Ner Shabbos***

According to most poskim, the *mitzvah* to kindle *Shabbos* lights is not Scriptural. Some consider it *divrei sofrim*, a Prophetic *mitzvah*. Rabbinical *mitzvos* like *Chanukah* and *Purim* could only have been instituted after the giving of the Torah. Others were instituted by *Moshe*, or even earlier, such as by the court of *Shem*, for those who observed the Torah, including the *Avos*. Reference is made to the *Shabbos* lights of *Sarah Imainu* and of *Rivkah Imainu*. A minority consider this *mitzvah* Scriptural.

*Ner Shabbos* could be a *mitzvah* in its own right, or part of a larger *mitzvah*, but significant enough to merit its own *brocha*. The two main sources for the *mitzvah* are *kavod* and *oneg Shabbos*. Both are based on the verses in the *Navi Yeshaya*, making reference to long-standing observances, dating back, at least, to the times of the Exodus. *Kavod Shabbos* is the *mitzvah* to honor *Shabbos* by preparing specially for it. This includes dressing specially nicely and cleaning, tidying and arranging the home. *Oneg Shabbos* refers to enjoying oneself on *Shabbos*, specifically in the physical sense. This includes enjoying special foods and resting. Some say this refers to having the entire home well lit. Having the table set with lights is part of *kavod Shabbos*. In another view, having the home well lit is part of *kavod*. Eating is enjoyed when the dining area is lit. Based on this, all would agree that one must kindle lights in both the living and dining areas.

*Shabbos* is the time for *shalom bayis*, domestic harmony. The first instance of domestic discord took place right before the first *Shabbos*. Adam and Eve argued about who was responsible for the sin of eating of the tree of knowledge. In essence, if people are unable to navigate the house easily, there will inevitably be a lack of *shalom bayis*. Since one may not kindle lights on *Shabbos* itself, it is essential to kindle them before *Shabbos*. With the addition of this idea, the obligation is expanded. It now includes areas that do not appear to be part of the general living or dining areas. On the other hand, were

the obligation based purely on *shalom bayis*, the lights would be unnecessary in a home that is already well lit. To fulfill *kavod* or *oneg Shabbos*, one must kindle lights specially.

This last matter is debated. A minority view says that one need not recite a *brocha* on these lights, since one need not always kindle them. If there is light in the home without these special lights, one has no further obligation. Therefore, even if one needs to specially supply the light, this kind of obligation could not be considered a *mitzvah* in its own right, with its own *brocha*. The majority view rejects this, maintaining that on the contrary, one would extinguish the existing lights and rekindle them for *Shabbos*.

By kindling the lights, one ushers in his or her personal *Shabbos*. One should try to begin *Shabbos* a little early. To satisfy the view that one must kindle special lights for *Shabbos*, they must be kindled at a time that this is evident: after the earliest time that *Shabbos* can be ushered in (*plag hamincha*, see below) and before *Shabbos* actually begins (*shkia*). They are the ideal way to start *Shabbos*. The woman of the house accepts *Shabbos* with the *brocha*. A man can do the same, but since he is obliged to participate in the service of *kabolas Shabbos*, he would stipulate that his kindling should not be considered his personal acceptance. This idea is not really a reason to kindle as much as a result of the other reasons. Since these are *Shabbos* lights, their kindling or the *brocha* recited on it is an indication of one's personal ushering in of *Shabbos*.

Another reason arose in later times. Sects of Jews began to preach a misleading version of the *mitzvah* forbidding kindling fires on *Shabbos*. The text of the verse states: 'You shall not burn fire in your homes.' The deviant sects translated this to ban artificial light in the home, even if it was kindled before *Shabbos*. The traditional and Rabbinic meaning is that one may not do the *melacha* on *Shabbos* to produce fire. To show that one follows the Rabbis, one must kindle these lights before *Shabbos*, which is entirely permissible. The source for this reason is an almost explicit Scriptural reference to the *mitzvah*. The Torah says: You shall not kindle a fire in your homes **on the day of Shabbos**', implying that one may kindle it before *Shabbos* and let it burn on into *Shabbos*.

Esoteric connections are made between *Shabbos* and light. The most basic of these is that the Midrash says that when Hashem blessed *Shabbos* at Creation, it was with light. [See Vayakhel 35:3 Mechilta, Yeshaya 58:13-14, commentaries. *Shabbos* entire second perek, Poskim. Beraishis Rabah 60:15, Rashi 24:67, commentaries. Avudraham Lail *Shabbos*. Tur Sh Ar OC 263, commentaries. Behag mitzvos kum asei 138. Sefer Chasidim 1147. Bais Halevi 11. Yabia Omer II:17.]

### **B) Who kindles?**

The obligation applies to all Jews. As we have been discussing, the obligation is partly to light up the home. Nonetheless, it is a personal obligation as well. Thus, in a home or household, one fulfills both obligations at the same time. If a room is already lit up, it cannot be lit up again. Therefore, in one home, one person kindles for all members of the household. Priority is given to the woman who runs the house. This is her *mitzvah*. Some link it to atoning for Eve's part in eating from the *aitz hadaas*, tree of knowledge. A guest or lodger may participate in the household's lights. One sleeping at home, but eating at a host's home, is in a quandary. His own home requires *ner Shabbos*, but he will probably not be able to benefit from them before they extinguish. He could delay going

to his host until he is able benefit from the lights after dark, or get back early enough for that. Or he can rely on other lighting at his home for the 'home' obligation, while participating in his hosts lights by giving a small donation towards them for the personal obligation. The poskim say that one who plans to eat food prepared by the host need only ask the host to have him in mind when kindling.

There is discussion about married men who are away from home. In this instance, the wife may be considered the agent of her husband. However, there is much discussion about how this works. Many poskim maintain that the husband should also try to fulfill the *mitzvah* himself in some form. Such agency also works, according to many poskim, in the reverse. Some say this only works for the home obligation. If both spouses are away from home in different locations, they must both kindle or participate separately.

If an obligation is fulfilled through agency, one may opt out of it. In this way, a husband can perform the *mitzvah* in another part of the house. Since the ideal location for the lights is the eating area, the poskim debate whether one should recite a *brocha* when kindling in another area. One may certainly do it for the sake of the *mitzvah*.

Single men and women who have homes of their own would follow the basic procedures mentioned here. If a man is divorced or widowed with a daughter home, the daughter should kindle for the family. Otherwise, he is treated like a regular single. Some men adopt the stringency of kindling for themselves even with a resident daughter.

When a husband resolves to divorce his wife, he may not continue to expect her to act as his wife. Thus she may not provide a service usually done by a wife. However, if he informs her of his decision, and she accepts upon herself to continue providing services anyhow, he is not held liable. Accordingly, as long as the two share a home, the wife may kindle for the home, and the husband need not perform the *mitzvah* himself. If they have moved apart, they clearly do not agree to continue as one household. The question arises whether they could agree to act as agents of one another. What if the husband pays for the *nairos*, or they share in the payment? Since the entire concept of spousal agency is questioned, it would appear that this solution is unacceptable. [See Refs to previous section. Chovas Hadar, Nairos Shabbos 4-6 8 11-13, notes. Gitin 90a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar EH 119:2, commentaries.]

### ***C) How many candles, and why?***

The basic *mitzvah* is to kindle one lamp. Since the idea is to provide light, one may kindle as many lamps as he wishes. The common practice is to kindle two lamps. The Talmud relates how people sometimes do things for *kavod Shabbos* in pairs. This symbolizes the duality of *shamor* and *zachor*, the two ways the *mitzvah* to observe *Shabbos* is worded in the *aseres hadibros*. Accordingly, it has become the *minhag* to kindle two lights for *Shabbos*. Additional lights are added in accordance with various *minhagim*.

One common *minhag* is to add a light for each new child. There is no recorded early basis for this, but that it is so widespread that it must be quite well-established. In recent *halachic* works, various explanations have been suggested. The *zachor* and *shamor* lights double as lights for the husband and wife. By adding one for each child, there is a lamp for each member of the home. This concept exists in the *mitzvah* of *Chanukah*. Some say, the Talmud says that faithful adherence to this *mitzvah* evokes divine assistance in raising

scholarly children. Thus, one *ner* connects to each child. A novel idea is suggested. Should a woman neglect to kindle one week, every week after that she must kindle an additional light. When a woman gives birth, the common practice is that her husband kindles that week. Though she was not negligent, she still compensates for it by kindling an additional light each week after that. She ends up kindling a number corresponding to her family members. This *minhag* is continued even after children leave home or pass away.

Once a woman begins kindling a specific number, it is treated as a *hanhagah tova*, meritorious practice. This has the status of a *neder*, voluntarily adopted practice, which is binding for the future. In order to change or stop the practice, she must obtain *hataras nedarim*, annulment of her vow, by going before a panel of three men. Her husband may do this on her behalf. There should also be a reasonable excuse for making the change.

If a woman is divorced or widowed, even if she moves back into her mother's home, the poskim say that she continues kindling the number she originally kindled. A man who is divorced or widowed need not continue kindling the number that his wife kindled. It is considered his wife's *neder*, rather than his own. He should kindle two lights to represent *zachor* and *shamor*, since this is the basic common *minhag*. He may undertake to continue the full number anyhow, for the same basic reasons mentioned earlier [except the novel approach, which does not apply to him]. If he remarries and the new wife has a different *minhag*, he does not require *hataras nedarim*. [See Tur Sh Ar OC 263:1, commentaries. Piskei Teshuvos notes 19-20 30, refs.]

In our case, due to the souring of the relationship, the husband wishes to kindle three lights, for himself and the two children. He needs at least two lights, to comply with the basic *minhag*. Were he to kindle four lights, he could consider the first two representing *zachor* and *shamor*, and the third and fourth representing his two children. Thus, he need not be concerned about the impropriety of kindling for his estranged wife. If he kindles only three, it would be hard to connect the third light. Therefore, if he still wishes to kindle on behalf of his children, he should kindle four. Though the adult child does not live at home, and the other sometimes spends *Shabbos* with his wife, anyone may continue a practice of additional lights. To be safe, he should do this *bli neder*, non-binding.

**On the Parsha ...** *To the tent of Sarah, his mother .. and [Yitzchok] loved [Rivkah] .. [24:67] [Rivkah] was like Sarah .. As long as Sarah was living the lamp burned from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos .. when she died it stopped. When Rivkah came it started again. [Rashi] After Sarah's passing, Avraham or Yitzchok kindled the *nairos*. Nonetheless, their lights did not have the same *brocha* that Sarah's or Rivkah's had. The simple message is that no matter how great the man of the house is, it is the woman who brings in the *brocha* of *nairos Shabbos*. Perhaps a secondary message is that *ner Shabbos* is connected to shalom bayis. Marriage to the right woman brings its *brocha*. Thus, when Yitzchok saw this, he was inspired to love Rivkah.*

**Sponsored by Robin Knee in memory of her father Dovid Teivel ben Yehuda Lipa a"h,  
whose *yahrzeit* is on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan. ☞**

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