

## Where do Shabbat Candles Come From?

Exd. 35:3 Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.

Many wonder where the tradition of lighting the Sabbath candles come from. For indeed it is not an actual “Thou shalt...” command you can find in the Torah. It is actually take from the prohibitive verse stated above. Since it was prohibited to light a fire on the Sabbath, everyone made sure that they had the necessary wood and cooking fires, oil lamps lit so they could see at night when Sabbath began. This eventually evolved into a ceremony of lighting two candles to officially welcome the Sabbath. They are lit approximately 18 minutes before sunset and forty minutes before nightfall so as not to break the commandment of kindling a fire on the Sabbath. The two candles remind us to “Remember the Sabbath” (Exo. 20:8) and to “Observe (keep) the Sabbath.” (Deut. 5:12). I keep this tradition and personally think it is a beautiful way to kick off the Sabbath day.

The family gathers around the dinner table where many times you will find the Sabbath candles. A glass of wine and a platter of bread covered with a cloth are also near the Sabbath candles. The mother will light the candles and bless the L-RD with a traditional blessing. Then everyone greets one another in the home with a hearty, “Shabbat Shalom.” Then the Father will bless the wife and children with traditional blessings. After which a loaf (sometimes two) of challah bread is blessed along with a glass of wine. Then thanks is given for the food and dinner is served. After the meal there is a song of thanksgiving to God which is usually sung. The family may continue to sing other traditional Sabbath songs together and the Father may even bring a devotional word about the Torah portion for that particular week.

It is usually the women’s responsibility to light the Sabbath candles, but if no women are present, it is permitted for a man to light them. According to the Talmud (Shabbat 31b) since it was the woman who caused mankind’s downfall by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge offered by the serpent, thus causing the spiritual light in this world to dim, therefore it is the woman’s duty to light the Sabbath candles.

Shalom,

-- Yehudah ben Shomeyr