



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

INSIGHTS INTO CANDLELIGHTING SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



No Shabbos would be complete if we didn't have the candles radiating light and spirituality into our homes. The mitzvah of candle-lighting is actually incumbent upon both men and women, yet women have traditionally lit them throughout the ages. We do this mitzvah for a number of reasons, including showing proper respect for the "Shabbos Queen" that graces our home, and also as a way to increase our joy (oneg) in Shabbos, similarly to the way we use candles to create ambiance for a romantic dinner for two.

Remember and Safeguard the Shabbos - The Connection to Candlelighting

It's a universal custom to light at least 2 candles for Shabbos.

Q: Why do you think we light 2 candles at a minimum?

One answer is that we light one for the husband and one for the wife. Another explanation found in the Midrash is that many things related to Shabbos are doubled. This is explained as suggesting that Shabbos is the source for blessing in the world, and the doubling signifies that blessing. In a mystical twist, Shabbos is understood as the source for blessing for the week to come.

Another central explanation is found in the following source:

SOURCE 1: *Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) 263:1; Rema, ibid. – The Candles Correspond to Shamor and Zachor – to guard and to remember.*

There are those who light two candles: one corresponding to **zachor (remember)** and the **second to shamor (to guard)**

ויש מכוונים לעשות ב' פתילות אחד
כנגד זכור ואחד כנגד שמור

Q: What does the idea of remembering and safeguarding have to do with Shabbos?

They are actually found in the Torah's two renditions of the ten commandments:

SOURCE 2: *Shemos (Exodus) 20:8 and Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:12 – Keeping Shabbos is the fourth of the Ten Commandments. We are required to remember and safeguard the Shabbos.*

Shemos 20:8
Remember the day of Shabbos to make it holy.
Devarim 5:12
Safeguard the day of Shabbos to make it holy.

שמות כ, ח: זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ
דברים ה, יב: שָׁמֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת,
לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

To give some context, G-d gave the ten commandments to the Jewish People at Mt. Sinai one time, not twice, although they are recorded in the Torah twice; first in the second book of the Torah (when the giving occurred) when it says “remember” and then later as a retelling of the story in Devarim which says “guard”.

Q: What was it that God really said, zachor “remember” or shamor “guard”?

We’ll take a look at the famous Lecha Dodi Song that we sing in shul each Shabbos, all over the world and what it has to tell us about the answer to this question?

SOURCE 3: *Lecha Dodi Song – “Shamor v’Zachor verse”*

Safeguard and **remember in a single utterance**, the One and Only God made us hear, Hashem is One and His Name is One, for renown, for splendor and for praise.
(Shemos 20:8).

שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדְבוּר אֶחָד. הַשְּׁמִיעֵנוּ אֵל
הַמִּיחָד
ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד. לְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת
וּלְתִהְלָה

The Rabbis tell us a miracle took place and we heard both, “**remember and guard**” in one utterance by God. It’s pretty mystical and cool, but what does it mean?

Guarding Shabbos is accomplished by refraining from doing something, in this case work, while **remembering** is taking a positive action, typically Kiddush. Often in Judaism holding oneself back from action relates to the body, while propelling oneself into positive self-actualization involves the soul. On Shabbos, this tension between body and soul melts away in a day of unity.

To expound on this a little more let’s take a look at the master work of Maimonides called the Mishna Torah in which he codifies all the mitzvos of the Torah. He breaks them up into positive commandments (Do’s) and negative commandments (Don’t Do’s).

Take a look at how Maimonides classifies the command “not to work on Shabbos”:

SOURCE 4A: *Maimonides codifies the Mitzva “Not to Work on Shabbos”*

To rest on the seventh day of the week is a **positive command**, for it is written: “On the seventh day you shall rest” (Exodus 23:12).

Anyone who works on it negates a positive command **while also transgressing a negative command**, for it is written: “You shall do no work” (Exodus 20:10).

שְׁבִיתָהּ בְּשָׁבִיעִי מִמְּלָאכָה מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה
”וּבִיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִשָּׁבֵת”

וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה בּוֹ מְלָאכָה בִטֹּל מִצְוַת
עֲשֵׂה וְעֵבֵר עַל לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה שְׁנֵאֲמַר
דְּבָרִים ה' יד “לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה.”
וְיָמָּה

In the case of Shabbos (above) the Rambam breaks from the norm and includes the mitzvah of not doing work on Shabbos as both a positive and negative commandment, which is really strange!

Q: The mitzvah he is codifying is Don’t do any work on Shabbos. What type of mitzvah is that, a positive commandment (Do) or a negative commandment (Don’t do)?

Of course, it’s a negative commandment!

Question: So, why do you suppose he also classifies it as a positive commandment? What can be positive about not doing work?

(Hint: take a look at the verse used as a support for the positive command above)

The sum total of refraining or not doing work creates a positive result, an environment where Hashem's presence is felt. Hashem is always there, but we are often too involved with "our work" to notice. However, what do you suppose happens when we take away all the ways we "hide Him" during the week?

We feel His presence. We feel more spiritual. We feel connection, to ourselves, to G-d, to those we love and even to our community.

Shabbos is all about duality melting into unity. The imagery of a Shabbos being a wedding uniting the bride (Jewish People) and groom (God) together, the integration of the body and soul that we feel, and the connection to others all vibrate with this energy of harmony and oneness. We leave the binary, fractured weekday world of "becoming" symbolized by 2, and entering into the zone of being and unity that is 1.

Shabbos is the day of Oneness. We don't interfere with our Shabbat rest by doing work. Not interfering would be considered at best a neutral action. However, Maimonides teaches us that on Shabbos it's different, not doing work is every bit as positive and constructive as remembering the Shabbos. Shamor and Zachor, do's and don't do's, body and soul, all other divisions, melt away by virtue of the Oneness of Shabbos.

The Candles help Create a Peaceful Spiritual Environment in the Home.

There are several reasons the Rabbis give for the practice of candle-lighting, including adding to our pleasure on Shabbos (oneg) and giving honor to the Shabbos, by enhancing the ambience as would befit such an important guest as the "Shabbos Queen". However, one principle reason which seems to be behind the candlelighting is to create a feeling of peace in the home:

SOURCE 4B: *Talmud Shabbos 23b and Rashi - Candles Ensure Peace in the Home*

If one can only afford either] a Shabbat candle or [wine for] Kiddush, the candle is preferable because of **shalom bayit [creating peace in the home]**.
Rashi: Since members of the family feel troubled if they sit in the dark.

נר ביתו וקידוש היום - נר ביתו עדיף, משום
שלום ביתו
רש"י:
שלום ביתו - שבני ביתו מצטערין לישב בחשך

Rashi gives us a practical reason, that people are unsettled sitting in the dark. Other commentators say if it's dark, people bump into one another which can lead to arguing.

On a deeper level, peace is not just the absence of quarreling. It's truly a force bringing people together:

SOURCE 5: *Ohel Rachel*, p. 123 – *Light symbolizes connection and relationship with others.*

Darkness disconnects the various elements of the world [for one cannot see others or the rest of the world when it is dark] ... Light, on the other hand, allows one to see the entire world in which he stands. **It allows him to see the people who are close to him and the environment they share, in which they cooperate to create a shared life.**

טבע החושך שהוא מפריד בין חלקי
הבריאה ... לעומת זה האור מעמיד
לפני האדם את העולם המלא, שהוא
נמצא בתוכו, יחד עם רעיו וסביבתו,
ואשר בתוכו הם פועלים יחדיו ויוצרים
חיים משותפים

Light is a great metaphor for Unity. We all know that white light is made up of the 8 colors of the spectrum, yet we see it as 1, totally unified. That is one of the deepest secrets of the 2 candles, light creates peace and harmony in our homes.

Women's Special Connection to Candle-lighting.

Although both men and women are obligated in lighting Shabbat candles, they are customarily lit by women.

Q: Why do you suppose this is so?

You may answer that it's more practical for them to light the candles, or that it is more fitting because they infuse the home with Jewish tradition.

There is another reason as well, and that is because they have a special ability to let spirituality into their homes and into their hearts:

SOURCE 6: *Chassidic Master Sfas Emes – On Shabbat the world “glows” .*

The whole world has a connection and relationship with holiness. On Shabbat the internal light of everything is revealed, and to see it, all that is required **is the will to receive the light.** (Sefas Emes, Parshat Eikev 5632)

שכל העולם יש לו חיבור ושייכות להקדושה
ובשבת מתגלה הארה הפנימיות בכל דבר
וא“צ רק הרצון לקבל ההארה

The women were chosen to kindle the lights because she has a deep ratzon (desire) to receive the light of spirituality and kindle the lights of others that she deeply loves.

Q: Do we see this power in women being open and able to receive spirituality and seeking to pass it on to those in her home and sphere of influence?

As Rebbetzin Dina Weinberg would say about the precious mitzvah of the candles:

The candles draw us to each other, and they draw us to God. Our soul is drawn to Him, and vice versa. Shabbat is a love song. It is romance. It is a date between God and us. We women are the ones who ignite this romance with God. This is what Shabbat candle lighting is all about.