

# Shabbat Candle Lighting Reflections

## Dispelling the Darkness

Shabbat does not just begin – we usher it in. Obviously there is the unarguable reality of a setting sun dipping below the horizon, which heralds the beginning of Shabbat. But after a hard week, we also actively welcome in – with a sense of relief and heightened anticipation – this G-d-given gift. We welcome in Shabbat with candles, and with the beautiful words of the famous Lecha Dodi prayer we sing in honor of the arrival of the “Shabbat bride”.

On a practical level, the mitzvah of the Shabbat candles is about dispelling physical darkness in the home. It was enacted by our sages to help avoid conflicts within the family, which can arise from the confusion and discomfort of not being able to see things, and to facilitate what our sages refer to as shalom bayit, the “peace of the home.”

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### A Splash of Light

(My mother’s candlesticks)

After I had made my home,  
 you gave me  
 the tools to mend  
 the week’s broken circle:  
 a pair of candlesticks.  
 I learned to  
 circle my hands  
 over the flames,  
 to splash light on my eyelids,  
 to whisper prayers and blessings  
 like magic incantations,  
 as you did,  
 seducing the Sabbath Queen,  
 dispelling the misunderstandings of the week,

While I stared out  
 the tall Midwestern window  
 of my childhood,  
 losing myself  
 in the Friday’s last agonising pastels  
 as they stretched, thinned into darkness.

Dr. Michele Ritterman

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### Let There be Love

“Before creation the Universe was “chaos and void, and darkness over the abyss”. And then G-d created light, which our sages explain was not a physical light but a spiritual one. The Chafetz Chaim learns from this that we defeat darkness in the world by increasing light; by following G-d’s example, and proclaiming “Let there be light!” once a week over our Shabbat candles. By lighting Shabbat candles, we bring the light, warmth, heat, love and illumination into our homes and into our lives.”

Chief Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein

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### A Mysterious Place

“Shabbat is a strangely vulnerable day. Without our car keys dangling from our hands, with our technological digits temporarily amputated, with no work to escape into, we enter a scary world – a world which western society is hell-bent on protecting us from. In this unfamiliar world, we are human beings rather than human doings, and what is important is not what we accomplish, but who we are. As we light the candles that illuminate our journey into the magic world of Shabbat, we become the guide sought out by family and friends to help them over the threshold, into that mysterious place.”

Miriam Kosman

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## The Calm During the Storm

“It’s erev Shabbos, and we have a crowd coming for dinner. The table is set, the children have bathed and are ready for shul, and I am wearing my Shabbos best. Everything is ready, and there is perfect calm as I light my Shabbos candles to usher in this holy space in time. Or rather: the remains of the children’s supper is spread all over the kitchen floor, the two-year-old has helpfully rearranged all the cutlery on the table, and I’m chasing after scattering children, still in my dressing gown, trying to get them to put their shoes on. But Shabbos is still coming. Even if I can’t have perfect calm around me, I can be calm inside as I light my Shabbos candles. Because it’s ok if the table isn’t perfect. And it’s ok if there’s a mess in the kitchen. But it’s not ok if I don’t light Shabbos candles because I’m trying to get everything else perfect.”

Gayle Apfel

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## The New York Times 2100

“On January 1, 2000, the New York Times ran a Millennium edition. It was a special issue that featured three front pages. One had the news from January 1, 1900. The second was the actual news of the day, January 1, 2000. And then they had a third front page, projecting future events of January 1, 2100. This fictional page included items such as a welcome to the US’s fifty-first state, Cuba, as well as a discussion on whether robots should be allowed to vote. And so on. In addition to the fascinating futuristic articles, there was one other seemingly mundane item. Down at the bottom of the front page was the candle lighting time in New York for January 1, 2100. The production manager of the New York Times – an Irish Catholic – explained: ‘We don’t know what will happen in the year 2100. It is impossible to predict the future. But of one thing you can be certain, that in the year 2100 Jewish women will be lighting Shabbat candles.’”

Chana Jenny Weisberg

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## My Mother's Candle for Me

“Our Shabbat guest asked why there were six candles burning on our table rather than the usual two. I told him it was traditional in many families to begin lighting two candles after marriage, and to add an additional candle for each child. I recall how much this had meant to me as a child, when I used to watch the flames flicker and realise that the house, nay, the world, was a brighter place because of my existence. The full impact of this message did not occur until many years later, when it became evident to me in my psychiatric practice that countless people have emotional problems and varying psychological symptoms because of deep-seated feelings of inadequacy. The weekly message to a child, delivered at the initiation of Shabbat, that his being has brought additional brightness into the home can be a powerful ingredient in one’s personality development.”

Rabbi Abraham Twerski