Have You Ever Wondered...

In the Zechus of a Refuah Shleima of my Rabbeim, Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky shlita, הגאון הרב שמואל בן איטא עטיל and Rav Moshe Heinemann Shlita, הגאון הרב משה בן פיגלא.

Q: How many candles should one light for נר שבת?

A: מעיקר הדין, one fulfills the obligation of נר שבת by lighting a single candle לכבוד שבת, and may even recite a ברכה over that one candle (*Mishnah Berurah* 263:9).

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C.* 263:1) writes:

> יהי זהיר לעשות נר יפה. ויש מכוונים לעשות ב׳ פתילות, אחד כנגד זכור ואחד כנגד שמור. הגה, ויכולין להוסיף ולהדליק ג׳ או ד׳ נרות.

Nevertheless, the universally accepted custom is to light at least two candles, corresponding to the two aspects of Shabbos: זכור / remember and שמור / guard (*O.C.* 263:1).

The *Levushei Mordechai* (*O.C.* 109) cites a Midrash, brought in the *Da'as Zekeinim* (*Bamidbar* 28:9), which explains that many aspects of Shabbos are associated with the concept of כפול / double. We have two *korbanos*, *lechem mishneh*, two souls, etc. Accordingly, we light two candles as well.

Our Sages teach (*Shabbos* 23b) that the *mitzvah* of lighting Shabbos candles is rooted in the importance of bringing peace and harmony into the home. The *Elya Rabbah* (263:2) suggests that this is also why we light two candles: to symbolize husband and wife. He offers a beautiful additional insight: The Hebrew word נר, meaning "candle," has a numerical value of 250. Two נרות therefore have a combined numerical value of 500. *Chazal* teach that a man has 248 limbs and a woman has 252, for a combined total of 500. The two Shabbos candles thus symbolize the union of husband and wife, reminding us that שלום בית, the harmony between them, is at the very heart of the *mitzvah*.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (75:2; see also *Mishnah Berurah* 263:6) mentions additional customs: some light seven candles, corresponding to the seven days of the week, while others light ten, alluding to the עשרת הדברות.

Although the *Kitzur* (ibid.) writes that, in general, מצוה להרבות בנרות לכבוד שבת, the *Poskim* explain that nowadays, when our homes are illuminated by electric lights, there is no particular ענין in adding candles throughout the house simply to increase the light.

A widespread custom among women today is to light an additional candle for each child in the family. Interestingly, the origin of this *minhag* is not readily apparent, as it is not mentioned in many of the classical *halachic seforim*. One of the sources for this custom appears to be the sefer *Likkutei Maharich* [Rabbi Yisrael Chaim Friedman (1852–1922), Rabbi of Rachov (in present-day Ukraine), *Seder Hanhagas Erev Shabbos, s.v. Ve'iyun B'Shulchan Aruch*], who writes:

> והנה מנהג הנשים כאשר יולד להם בן או בת מוסיפין נר אחד. וסמך לדבר משום דאמרינן בפרק במה מדליקין דבשכר שמרבין בנרות שבת הוי ליה בנין ובנין רבנן עייי״ש.

He explains that women have the custom to add another candle upon the birth of each child. The basis for this practice is the Gemara's teaching in *Maseches Shabbos* that, as a reward for increasing the number of Shabbos candles, one merits children who are תלמידי חכמים.

Rabbi Menashe Klein, *zt"l* (1924–2011) later offered a possible explanation for this practice (*Mishneh Halachos* 7:35; see also *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchaso* 43, n. 51). Since a woman who had recently given birth would often be unable to light Shabbos candles on the first Shabbos after childbirth, the additional candle may have been instituted to compensate for that missed lighting and now has become common custom by many.

Rav Moshe Heinemann, שליט״א, shared with me a different פשט in this *minhag*, based on a Gemara in *Shabbos* 31b:

> על שלש עבירות נשים מתות בשעת לידתן, על שאינן זהירות בנדה, ובחלה, ובהדלקת הנר.

The Gemara teaches that there are three *mitzvos* in particular that women must be especially careful to observe: נדה, חלה, and הדלקת הנר. The Gemara associates these three *mitzvos* with the danger of childbirth.

Rav Heinemann explained that, historically, childbirth was a particularly dangerous time for women. During labor, when a woman's life was potentially in danger, she would accept upon herself that, should she and the baby emerge safely from the birth, she would add another candle each week in honor of Shabbos.

This explanation is especially meaningful when viewed against the historical realities of childbirth. Maternal

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mortality rates were dramatically higher in previous generations than they are today. For example, in 1918, during the height of the Spanish flu pandemic, approximately 916 mothers died per 100,000 live births in the United States. Infant mortality was also exceptionally high, with roughly 10% of babies not surviving their first year. The risk skyrocketed specifically for those pregnant women who caught the influenza virus and developed complications like pneumonia, pushing their individual mortality rate to as high as 50%.

It is therefore understandable that women would make such a commitment during the particularly vulnerable period of childbirth, accepting upon themselves an additional candle each week as a way of expressing gratitude for being spared.

See *Teshuvos V'hanhagos* 2:157:10 s.v. *Umnom and Kovetz Halachos* pg 198 note 15 for additional potential sources to this widespread custom.

There are those who maintain this *minhag* even when they are guests in someone else's home, continuing to light the number of candles corresponding to the number of children (see *Orchos Rabeinu* 1:35; *Kovetz M'Beis Levi* 11:7). However, Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, שליט"א (*Kovetz Halachos, Shabbos* I, 7:9) and Rav Moshe Heinemann, שליט"א (*Ma N'daber* 1:31, p. 22) write that אין נוהגים כן אלא בביתה, the custom of adding candles is practiced in one's own home, but not when one is a guest or traveling.

Rav Heinemann (ibid., p. 22) points out that a light is not added in a case of miscarriage or a baby that רח"ל doesn't make it 30 days. Similarly, Rav Kamenetsky (ibid., p. 199) limits the additional נרות to instances in which the אשה herself is lighting. If, for example, a husband is home alone and lights נר שבת, his wife's נדר does not obligate him to add candles, and he lights the standard two.

Ultimately, there are different *minhagim* regarding the number of Shabbos candles one should light. There is no single custom that everyone must follow; all of these practices have a legitimate *halachic* basis, provided one remains consistent with the *minhag* one has accepted upon oneself (*Biur Halacha* 263:1, s.v. *She'achah*).

I still remember, as a *bochur*, walking into someone's small apartment in Eretz Yisroel for a Shabbos *seudah* and seeing an enormous number of candles lit on a shelf high up close to the ceiling. My immediate thought was: Either they have 25 children, or they've forgotten to light candles quite a few times!

Of course, sometimes the display gets so elaborate that it looks less like Shabbos candle lighting and more like a fire hazard requiring its own municipal zoning permit and a dedicated fire truck on standby!

Q: Whose מנהגים are followed in regard to how many candles a woman should light ליל שבת when there is a conflict between his family custom and her own?

A: Typically, a married woman follows her husband's *minhagim*, both the קולות and the חומרות. Marriage signifies a wife's entrance into her husband's domain, and that transition obligates her to adopt his customs (Rav Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל, *Igros Moshe, O.C.* 1:158 and *E.H.* 1:59; Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *Yom Tov Sheini K'Hilchaso*, p. 187). Accordingly, a wife should generally follow her husband's מנהג regarding נר שבת.

There are, however, those who suggest that *mitzvos* specifically associated with women, such as נדה, טבילה במקוה, and הדלקת הנרות, may be treated differently. Since חז"ל specifically entrusted these *mitzvos* to women, one might argue that they are considered "her" *mitzvos*, and she should therefore continue following her own family's customs.

This approach is indeed reflected in the opinions of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halichos Shlomo, Sukkos* 9:37) and the *Shevet Halevi* (7:10:2), who similarly maintain that she may follow her own *minhag*, provided she pays for the candles or oil herself.

I personally faced this very dilemma when I got married. I grew up watching my mother light just two candles while my mother-in-law lights one for each child. Both Rav Moshe Heinemann, שליט"א, and Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, שליט"א, told me that, strictly speaking, the husband's *minhagim* take precedence and prevail. In fact, Rav Yaakov Forchheimer, שליט"א, relates in a footnote at the end of *Kovetz Halachos* (p. 199) that he himself posed this very question to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, זצ"ל, many years ago and received the same response. They both added though that, practically speaking, this may not be a battle worth fighting, particularly if following her mother's *minhag* is especially meaningful and important to one's wife.

Furthermore, one of the primary reasons חז"ל instituted the *mitzvah* of הדלקת נרות was to promote and increase שלום בית. How ironic would it be if a *mitzvah* intended to bring peace into the home were to become a source of מחלוקת!

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