



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

Like few others, the candle lighting bracha exemplifies the emotional and spiritual power that a bracha can attain. The customs surrounding this bracha are halachically surprising in numerous ways, and came about because of the special spiritual relationship that grew up between the bracha and its (historically) primary reciters.

The traditional Friday night sequence, to first light the candles and afterwards to recite the bracha, flies in the face of the usual halachic convention. The Sages specifically designed brachot to be recited *prior to* the performance of a mitzva, as a means of concentrating our kavannah on the performance. This is why, if we have already begun performing a mitzva and suddenly remember that we never recited the bracha, we specifically do NOT go back and recite the bracha, for by that point its purpose has been obviated. Remarkably though, the near universal custom when it comes to candle lighting is to light first and bless second!

To compound things, the explanation for this reversal is itself surprising. The working explanation is that the women of Israel came to regard the verbal declaration that they are performing the kindling of the Shabbat candles as - in and of itself - an acceptance of Shabbat and all of its prohibitions. It would thus be impossible for them to light the candles *after* they had recited the bracha! Which left reversing the usual order as the only option! This is an especially surprising turn of halachic events because:

(a) as we saw last week, one *can* have in mind to not accept Shabbat at candle lighting, and

(b) the bracha is merely describing what will be done; it is not the thing itself. And yet!!

The unexpected halachic path that this bracha and its primary reciters forged, is a great testament to the profound emotional and spiritual relationship that grew up between them. To even speak of the kindling of Shabbat candles, is to be in Shabbat.

Three other important details on this:

(1) This same line of reasoning leads to the custom to not blow out the candle lighting match (an act forbidden on Shabbat), rather to let it burn out on its own.

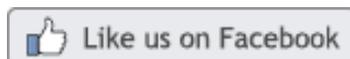
(2) According to many halachic authorities (cited by the Biur Halacha), if a woman IS having in mind to not yet accept Shabbat when she lights, for example when she knows she will still be driving to shul for Mincha, she should in that case recite the bracha before lighting, in accordance with the general rule of brachot. The same would hold true anytime a man is lighting, as the implicit association between lighting and the acceptance of Shabbat is not presumed present for men (who are more likely to accept Shabbat via Tefilla in shul).

(3) The "premature" recitation of the blessing is also what generated the tradition to hold one's hands over one's eyes while reciting the bracha. More on the how and why of this - and some of its surprising implications - next time on Shabbat Shorts!

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