



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



Adding a Shabbat Candle after Forgetting

Question: I am a man living alone. Last week, I forgot to light Shabbat candles. Must I light an extra one from now on?

Answer: The Rama (Orach Chayim 263:1) accepts the *minhag* presented by the Maharil (Hilchot Shabbat 1) that if a woman forgets to light Shabbat candles one week, she must add one from that point on. Most see it as a penalty to reduce the likelihood of repeating such mistakes (Mishna Berura 263:7). Therefore, *poskim* assume that if she missed for reasons beyond her control, she does not need to add (Magen Avraham 263:3). The *minhag* has possible negative consequences for those who light exactly two lights, corresponding to *zachor* and *shamor*, as arguably this correspondence is lost when the number is changed (Darchei Moshe, OC 263:1). Nevertheless, it was widely accepted. The Eliya Rabba (263:7) understands the Maharil differently – there is no need for an extra candle, but it suffices to improve the lighting by adding

more oil or having longer candles.

In your case, there are two grounds for leniency. One is that some prominent *poskim* (including Yalkut Yosef, OC 263:26) reason that in our days, when without the ritual candles there is plenty of light for a pleasant Shabbat, there is no need to penalize people for not lighting the candles. There are a few reasons not to agree with this contention. For one, despite the fact that we always have electric lights, we still view the Shabbat candles as a relevant *mitzva*, which we take seriously and make a *beracha* on. As such, if one did not do it, why shouldn't the regular penalty apply? The matter is clearer according to the Pri Megadim (Eshel Avraham 263:3) who says that even if a woman lit one less light than she normally does, she still is penalized. The Melamed L'hoil (I:46) says that there is a need for some penalty, but one can be partially lenient by following the above Eliya Rabba.

The Be'ur Halacha (to 263:1), after citing the Pri Megadim (ibid.) that omitting any of the lights is grounds for the penalty, not only disagrees but also makes a general comment about the penalty: "All of this is only a *minhag*, and let us not add on to it." We see this as a logical direction to take regarding this unusual *minhag*. (Consider that there seem to be many bigger shortcomings in our religious

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lives for which there are no penalties. Have you ever heard, for example, that whoever forgot to *daven Mincha* should add a *mizmor* of Tehillim to it from then on?!). Therefore, some have a rule that when there is doubt whether something is included in this *minhag*, we do not implement it, as Piskei Teshuvot 263:(37) cites in the name of Rav Vosner. On the other hand, not every idea for leniency counts as a doubt, as the same Rav Vosner (Shevet Halevi V:33), Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (43:5), and others did not think having electric lights is strong enough to preclude the penalty. Chut Shani (IV:83) presents an interesting compromise – if one lit the electric lights with intention for it to supplement the Shabbat candles, it precludes the penalty (it is not easy to know where to draw the line on what counts for that intention).

Your case includes another serious reason for leniency. Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (43:(35)) raises and leaves as an unsolved question, whether the penalty applies to men, considering the special connection between women and the *mitzva*. Dirshu (263:(13)) also cites important

contemporary *poskim* who say that men are not penalized despite the identical obligation on a fundamental level. This makes sense according to *Chazal's* shocking statement that women could meet tragedy if they are not careful about Shabbat candle lighting (Shabbat 31b). I would not venture to comment on why this *mitzva*, as dear as it is, mysteriously has such a surprisingly great weight for women, but it can explain the *minhag* of the penalty as well as the logic of not extending it to men.

In the final analysis, we do not think that is necessary for you to add a candle in the future. If you want to do something to enhance the *mitzva*, who are we to object? ■

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beitdin@eretzhemdah.org

