



Early Lighting and/or Late Beracha

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: I, a single man, take in Shabbat early and have no one to light candles for me after *plag hamincha* (= *plhm*, a “relative” 1¼ hours before sunset). Considering the light will be in place on Shabbat, may I, in a case of need, light before *plhm* with or without a *beracha*? If it is too early, can I make the *beracha* on it when I return home, as sometimes *berachot* can be made later than the *mitzva* action?

Answer: While the best option (someone else lighting) is unavailable, both of your options are supported by significant but minority opinions.


The *gemara* (Shabbat 23b) says that one should not light Shabbat candles too early, because it is not clear that it is being done for Shabbat (Rashi ad loc.). The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 263:4) rules that this is problematic even after *plhm* if she does not


accept Shabbat at that time and that it cannot be before *plhm*, which is too early to accept Shabbat (Magen Avraham 261:10). Therefore, the standard assumption of *poskim* is that it is impossible to fulfill the *mitzva* of candle lighting before *plhm* (see Be’ur Halacha to 263:4; Shemirat Shabbat K’hilchata 43:12; Orchot Shabbat 33:35).


However, it is possible to question this assumption. Firstly, on a certain level, avoiding lighting “too early” may be only *l’chatchila* (Mishna Berura 263:20 regarding after *plhm* but well before sunset without accepting Shabbat). While many apply this only after *plhm*, others say that *plhm* is a strict cutoff only for ushering in a new day early, not for candle lighting done for Shabbat use (Eretz Tzvi I:103, based on R. Akiva Eiger on Rama, OC 263:4). Second, some *Rishonim* and *poskim* allow lighting two hours before nightfall (see Be’ur Halacha *ibid.*). On the other hand, Orchot Shabbat (35:(83)) says that this is said only within Rabbeinu Tam’s opinion that nightfall is very late.


We can logically add that if the problem before *plhm* is that it is too early to connect a lighting to Shabbat the situation is different in the summer in places where it is common to accept Shabbat soon after *plhm*. Would anyone watching you light candles and run to *Mincha*, followed by *Kabbalat Shabbat*, think


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that you did not light for Shabbat?! This is strengthened by the fact that you, as a man, do not accept Shabbat for around a half hour after lighting candles, all year. Furthermore, nowadays virtually the only reason to light candles is for Shabbat. Despite these arguments, I cannot recommend relying on and certainly not making a *beracha* on a lighting that the consensus of *poskim* says is ineffective for the formal *mitzva*.

Your idea of making a *beracha* later touches on how we view the *mitzva* of lighting candles. The main **purpose** of the *mitzva* is apparently to make a nicer Shabbat atmosphere (see Shabbat 23b; Living the Halachic Process VI, C-17). It is less clear if its halachic nature is the **act** of lighting the candles with the purpose in mind (see *ibid.*; compare to Chanuka, based on Shabbat 23a), or the *mitzva* fulfillment is in receiving the benefit on Shabbat, with technical grounds dictating that one lights earlier. If the latter is correct, then making the *beracha* at the time one is experiencing the benefit can work (see Divrei Malkiel IV:5; Rambam, Berachot 11:5).

Indeed, a venerable opinion says that one

who will be out of the house at the time of lighting can light before leaving and make the *beracha* upon returning. Most *poskim* reject the idea (Magen Avraham 263:11; Mishna Berura 263:21) of making a *beracha* on a light that was already lit, but the opinion is not fully rejected (see Be'ur Halacha to 263:5).

In short, each of your ideas is reasonable from a halachic perspective. On the other hand, as practical Halacha, neither is recommended. My recommendation is to *daven Mincha* earlier, light candles at *plhm*, and proceed immediately to *Kabbalat Shabbat*, where you need not be more than a couple of minutes late. However, if a *rav* with whom you confer recommends one of your approaches, I have no qualms. ■

Having a dispute?



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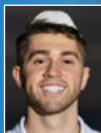
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