

Traditional Candle Lighting:

Light a candle. (Some people light a single candle. Some light a candle for each person in their household. Do whatever you prefer.)
Extend your hands over the candles, draw them inwards three times in a circular motion, and then cover your eyes.
Say the blessing.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam,
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the
Universe,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ

asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu

who sanctifies us with his commandments, and
commands us

לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

l'had'lik neir shel shabbat

to light the candles of Shabbat

Now, while your eyes are still covered, is an auspicious time to pray for your heart's desires. Some people try to focus on happy or joyous thoughts. Some think about what they want to leave behind from the past week.

Uncover your eyes, gaze at the candles, and then say "Shabbat Shalom" to the people around you. You have now entered Shabbat (like a cathedral in time.)

A Meditation:

This evening, just before the sun begins to set, people all over the world are lighting Shabbat candles. They are using the same words and actions that you use tonight, the same words and actions that have been used for years and years.

Imagine the view from outer space – as darkness creeps around the earth, little flames flash upward to illuminate it. First in New Zealand, then Australia, and around the whole globe. Over 24 hours, the world is never left in darkness.

Some History About the Blessing:

The blessing for lighting Shabbat candles is about 900 years old (it's not in the Torah or Talmud.) It was probably invented by women.

Before the 11th century, most rabbis said that lighting a Shabbat lamp was not a ritual obligation – it's simply what women did to prevent the family from sitting in the dark during dinner. (Women did it because they were at home - their husbands were praying in shul.) By the 11th century, lighting Shabbat lamps had come to be seen as a religious obligation for women, but there was no blessing for it. But this presented a problem – if they were obligated to do it, they needed to say a blessing on it. With no other source to consult, these women used the Talmud's blessing for the Chanukah menorah (a blessing more than 1,000 years older than the one we now use for Shabbat) and substituted the word "Shabbat" for "Chanukah."

This was first documented (in medieval France) by Rashi's granddaughter, Hannah, who describes her mother lighting the candles and reciting the blessing just as we do today. Do you think that Shabbat candles and Chanukah candles have anything else in common?

Another Meditation:

Shabbat is the day that brings illumination to our world, which so often seems to be dark and negative. Furthermore, candles are a metaphor for the human soul. *Ner HaShem Nishmat Adam* - "The soul of man is the candle of G d."

On a deeper level, the Chassidic masters explain that the various components of the candle - the wax that fuels the flame, the wick that channels the flame, the variety of hues of light in the flame they jointly produce - parallel the various components of the human being: our body; our multi-layered soul with its complex, even paradoxical strivings; our achievements. The candle and its flame offer us a vision of a harmonious joining of opposites to produce light, mirroring, and evoking in us, our own power to harmoniously join the various forces at play within our own complex being to illuminate our surroundings.

Why do we cover our eyes when saying the blessing on the Shabbat candles?

Normally, the blessing is recited before the performance of a mitzvah, but here we light the candle and only afterwards recite the blessing. This is because once the blessing is recited Shabbat has been ushered in, and lighting the candle would be forbidden. For this reason, we cover our eyes immediately after lighting to recite the blessing. Thus, our first enjoyment of the Shabbat light - and the fulfillment of the mitzvah - occurs after the blessing.

Why do we circle our hands over the candles three times?

The hand-circles aren't actually necessary under Jewish law – it's an old custom. Some people say that it serves to magnify the light of Shabbat, such that it fills the room and surrounds the person. Others say that it helps to draw the warmth and light inside of oneself. And yet others say that it is related to Jewish mysticism. According to the Zohar (the foundational book of kabbalah) the human soul has three internal elements that comprise your individual self: the basic animating force that allows you to wake up in the morning and be alive (*nefesh*); the mind/will/intellect (*ru'ach*), and the pure spiritual element (*neshamah*). To accept Shabbos into one's entire self, one needs to prepare body, mind, and soul - *nefesh*, *ru'ach* and *neshamah*. With each wave of the hands, one should consciously take a deep breath and try to feel the atmosphere of Shabbos touching another aspect of your being.