

תנא דבי אליהו, כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא

**IT WAS TAUGHT IN THE ACADEMY OF ELIJAHU, WHOEVER STUDIES TORAH LAWS
EVERY DAY IS ASSURED THAT HE WILL BE PRESENT IN THE 'WORLD TO COME'**

~ Shabbat Candles: Making the bracha after lighting ~

It was a late Friday afternoon and there was an unusual atmosphere of calm in the classrooms of St Katherine's School for Girls. The girls were busy undertaking their end of year examinations and all that could be heard was the scratching sound of pen-on-paper and the occasional cough echoing through the school corridors. The sixth form art examinations were also underway. The art students were busy finishing off their A-level coursework, which had taken them three weeks to produce under the guidance of Mrs Peters - the head of the art faculty. It was a very exciting time for the art students. Mrs Peters had arranged an overseas trip to the city of Jerusalem for the class. She very much wanted the girls to gain inspiration from the religious art and architecture of the ancient city and they were due to leave for Israel the following day.

On the wall of the classroom hung a wooden plaque engraved with the following words from the famous writer and poet, Oscar Wilde:

Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter.

The silence was abruptly broken by the sound of the school bell ringing;

"Ok girls, exam over." said Mrs Peters. "Put your pencils and brushes down. You may now take a look at each other's courseworks if you wish."

There was a quick chorus of laughter and relief as the girls rushed all over the classroom to see each other's work. After a few minutes Mrs Peters noticed a crowd forming in the corner of the class. The crowd became larger until all the girls were gathered around a single pupil and her painting. Mrs Peters quickly made her way through the girls, whilst hearing them saying; "It's just beautiful!"... "I've never seen anything quite like it before!"... "What is it?" She finally came through and saw Deborah Hope sitting on her stool, in front of her painting, surrounded by the whole class.

Even though Deborah Hope was known by everyone as an exceptional artist, this particular painting had clearly surpassed anyone's prior expectations of her. It was truly a magnificent piece of art and the whole class gazed at it, struggling to figure out the story it was trying to tell.

The painting was of a woman, who was dressed immaculately, as if she were about to attend a royal ball. The woman's hair was covered with a scarf, which draped down either side of her head and lay on her shoulders. The scarf was cream in colour and subtly imprinted with pink-like images of pomegranates. The woman was covering her eyes with both of her hands, in quite a submissive fashion. Her lips were also half open, as if in prayer. All this gave the mysterious painting a strong element of intrigue. In front of the woman were two silver candle-sticks, holding two candles. The candles were lit and burning brightly. The orangey-yellow flames of the candles were tantalisingly bright, making them the focal point of the painting.

"Is she a nun?" asked Emily, acknowledging the spiritual theme of the painting.

"She looks like a saint from Rome!" said Christine.

"Quiet girls." said Mrs Peters. "Deborah... why don't you tell us about your painting."

Deborah looked around the room and then back at her painting;

"Well... well I don't really know who she is." she said innocently. "She's just someone I often dream about."

"How interesting." said Mrs Peters. "And what is she doing exactly? Is she in prayer?"

"Yes, she's reciting a prayer. Whenever I dream of her I hear the prayer... and I know it. But when I awake... I always forget the words."

Mrs Peters put her hand on Deborah's shoulder;

"I am sure you'll remember it one day. Perhaps it will come back to you in the holy city of Jerusalem." she said with a warm smile.

Mrs Peters was always affectionate towards Deborah, ever since she learned that Deborah is an orphan, adopted after the war by Mr & Mrs Hope when she was just a mere toddler.

Before they knew it the class were seated on the plane and in flight to the Holy Land. They landed in Ben Gurion airport where a coach took them straight to their hotel in Jerusalem. They spent the next few days visiting various religious sites, where they sketched and learned about their religion's history. Friday was the last day of the trip and Mrs Peters decided the girls should spend the afternoon in the Old City, where they could relax and buy gifts and souvenirs from the various shops in the Jewish Quarter.

It was now late afternoon and the sun was slowly beginning to descend. As Deborah made her way through the narrow cobble-stone streets she could not help but notice how all the Jews were in such a rush, as if in preparation for some big event. She carried on walking with the group when, as she turned a corner, her face was caressed by a breath-taking sun-set transfixed at the end of one of the streets. The orange and yellow beams of the sun's rays were beautifully reflecting off the cream Jerusalem stones that cladded the buildings of the little street. Deborah then noticed a very old-looking tree that was lit-up by the sun's rays. The tree was adorned with pretty pink fruits, which looked like pomegranates. She had never seen a real pomegranate tree before and she walked down to take a closer look. Deborah took out her sketch book to take a rough image of the scene; the pink pomegranates against the cream Jerusalem stones. As she studied the tree, peering through its branches, her eyes suddenly met another pair of eyes that were looking straight at her. It was a little girl who was standing at an open window in one of the buildings behind the tree. Deborah took a few steps to the side for a clearer view of the girl. She then noticed there was a woman standing next to the girl. The woman's hair was covered with a scarf and she had two silver candlesticks in front of her, holding two candles, ready to be lit. The woman struck a match and began lighting the candles.

Deborah stood there frozen. She could not believe what she was seeing. She was looking at her painting - her dream! After the candles were lit the woman covered her eyes with her hands and began reciting a prayer:

“Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Asher Kiddishanu B’Mitzvotav Vetzivanu Lehadlik Ner Shel Shabbat.”

As soon as she finished the prayer, Deborah and the little girl simultaneously answered "Amen" together. Deborah shuddered. She recognised this prayer. It was the exact same prayer of the woman in her dreams. She instinctively knew to answer "amen" to it?!

Deborah's "amen" was much louder than she realised and the woman in the window noticed her standing there, white and motionless. With a look of concern the woman quickly made her way to the front door.

"Shabbat Shalom my dear. Are you lost?" she asked.

"Yes... I think I am..." Deborah said hesitantly.

"Do you have a place to be for dinner tonight?" asked the woman.

"Errrrmm.... no. Not particularly." Deborah was hoping the woman would invite her.

"Well you're welcome to join us if you wish. We should be starting soon."

Deborah took one step into their home and, as she did so, she came to understand who she really was.... and she knew her life was about to change forever.

If there is one childhood memory that is the most impressionable, the most precious to every Jewish girl, it is the magical image of her mother lighting the Shabbat candles. It is for some children the most spiritual moment of the week; watching their mother in front of the bright burning candles, with her hands covering her eyes, reciting the precious b'racha (blessing) of **להדליק נר של שבת** *Lehadlik Ner Shel Shabbat*. However, this powerful image, which has been the very soul of Jewish identity for girls and women over countless generations, is becoming increasingly under threat in Sephardi Jewry.

In recent years more and more Sephardim are beginning to accept a halachic opinion, which claims that Sephardi women have been lighting their Shabbat candles incorrectly over the centuries by lighting in this manner. Not only does the assertion claim that we have been lighting our Shabbat candles incorrectly for hundreds if not thousands of years, it also purports to say that all these women of today and the past, who no doubt number in their millions, have been reciting a "b'racha levatala" - a void or null blessing, Heaven forbid. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate, b'ezrat Hashem, how this simply is not true.

The story above describes how the candles are first lit, followed by the woman covering her eyes and only then is the b'racha recited, i.e. at the end. Reciting the blessing after the candles are lit, whilst covering one's eyes, is the image we are trying to save. This was the minhag (custom) of the holy **Ben Ish Hai** (HaRav Yosef Ha'im of Baghdad: 1832 - 1909) who reveals that there are deep Kabbalistic reasons for lighting one's Shabbat candles in this way:¹

האשה, לא חל עליה קבלת שבת בהדלקת נרות שבת אלא עד שתסיים כל הנרות אשר מדלקת במקום השלחן ששם תהיה הברכה שלה. ואחר שתסיים כל הנרות, תכף ומיד תזרק מידה הפתילה שמדלקת בה את הנרות, ותניח ידה על עיניה, ותעצם עיניה ותברך תכף. ויש טעם על פי הסוד בעצימת עיניה אותה שעה. ואחר סיום הברכה תפתח עיניה ותראה זריחת אור הנרות והתפשטות אורן במקום ההוא.

[For] a woman, the acceptance of Shabbat does not occur until she finishes lighting all the candles in the place where the [dinner] table is, for that is where her blessing should be [recited]. And after she finishes [lighting] all the candles, immediately afterwards she should drop the matchstick from her hand that she used to light the candles with, and place her hand on her eyes and close her eyes and recite the blessing immediately. And there is a reason according to the Kabbalah in the [action of] closing her eyes at that moment. And after she recites the blessing she should open her eyes and see the light from the candles and the spreading of the light in that place.

We are not able to delve into the deep Kabbalistic aspects of this topic within the context of this essay. However, it is clear that the Ben Ish Hai is referring to the teachings of the **holy Ari z'l** (HaRav Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi, Sefat: 1534-1572), who reveals that there is a mystical necessity to close one's eyes at the moment one accepts the sanctity of Shabbat.² Since it is known that women accept Shabbat through the mitzvah of candle-lighting, the Ben Ish Hai teaches that there is a necessity to close one's eyes at this spiritually potent moment in time. The order in which the Ben Ish Hai describes one should light their Shabbat candles is the same way in which most Sephardi women have been accustomed to light their candles in various communities across Europe, the Middle East and Asia.³ This has also always been the practice of all Ashkenazi communities.

1. בא"ח שנה ב, נח אות ח

2. עיין שער הכוונות, דף סד:

3. See later on in the essay for testimonials on this subject from different Sephardi communities.

The alleged controversy about this minhag is that it seems to go directly against a well known and accepted rule in halacha, which is that a b'racha for a mitzvah must be recited **עובר לעשייתו - before the performance of the mitzvah**. However, in our case, the Ben Ish Hai clearly teaches that the custom is to recite the b'racha only after the lighting of the Shabbat candles. This does seem to contradict this important rule.

The rule of 'making the b'racha first' is routed in the **Babylonian Talmud**, in tractate Pesahim, which states the following:⁴

דכו"ע מיהא מעיקרא בעי לברוכי מנלן? דא"ר יהודה אמר שמואל כל המצוות מברך עליהם עובר לעשייתן וכו' חוץ מן הטבילה דאכתי גברא לא חזי.

According to everyone you need to recite the blessing beforehand. From where do we learn this? For Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel; All mitzvot, you recite the blessing on them before you perform them, etc. Except for immersion [in a mikveh] because since he's not a 'man' yet, it is not fitting.

The Talmud above states quite clearly that in cases where a b'racha is required, one has to recite the b'racha before the performance of the mitzvah. This is also the undisputed ruling of the **Rambam**,⁵ the **Shulhan Aruch**⁶ and all accepted halachic authorities. Everyone agrees that one has to make the b'racha first and only then perform the mitzvah, just like we do for the mitzvot of Lulav, Succah, Tzitzit, Tefillin, etc.

Tosefot⁷ (a medieval commentary on the Talmud) then explains that the exception to this rule is the b'racha recited by a person converting to Judaism. Tosefot understands from the Talmud above that Shmuel (who was a Talmudic Sage) is referring to the conversion of a non-Jew to Judaism, which requires immersion in a mikveh. Shmuel says that the person converting can only recite the blessing after immersing in a mikveh, as in this unique case he simply cannot recite the blessing beforehand, whilst he is still a non-Jew.

4. דף ז:

5. בהל' ברכות פרק יא, וכן הוא פסק גבי הדלקת נרות של שבת

6. ס' כ"ה ס"ח גבי תפילין

7. שם (ד"ה על) ודלא כפירש רש"י דאירי בבעל קרי

We have so far explained the order in which one should light their Shabbat candles according to the Ben Ish Hai and why this order is considered problematic according to some opinions. Let us now explore the following questions, which will clarify why our custom is specifically to light the candles first and only then reciting the blessing:

1. **Does one really transgress the issue of b'racha levatala by reciting the b'racha on Shabbat candles only after lighting them?**
2. **Why are we accustomed to recite the b'racha on Shabbat candles after lighting them, rather than beforehand?**

We find the answer to our first question addressed by the **Rambam** (HaRav Moshe ben Maimon, Egypt: 1135 - 1204) and the **Ohr Zarua** (HaRav Yitzhak ben Moshe, Vienna: 1200 - 1270), who were amongst the greatest of Rabbinic authorities of the Middle Ages. The Rambam first gives us the golden rule on b'rachot, in line with the Talmud above:⁸

וכל מצוות בין אדם למקום, בין מצוה שאינה חובה ובין מצוה שהיא חובה,
מברך עליה קודם עשייתה.

*And all mitzvot that are [in essence] between man and G-d, whether it is a mitzvah that is not obligatory, or whether it is a mitzvah that is obligatory, you recite the blessing **before** doing [the mitzvah].*

The Rambam, very interestingly, then clarifies that if one did perform a mitzvah and did not make a b'racha, the halacha is that he is **still allowed to make the b'racha afterwards**, as long as the mitzvah is still occurring or happening.⁹ If the mitzvah has finished, however, then according to the Rambam one could not make the b'racha afterwards and if he did so the b'racha would be levatalah (in vain). The classic example that the Rambam uses for this rule is the shehita (slaughtering) of an animal, i.e. once the animal is slaughtered the mitzvah has passed and one could not recite the b'racha on the shehita afterwards. This is also the opinion of HaRav Yosef Caro of the Shulhan Aruch.

8. הל' ברכות פ"א סוף ה"ב

9. בהל' ה

The **Rema** (HaRav Moshe Isserles, Poland: 1520 - 1572), who was an eminent Ashkenazi Rabbinic authority and inline commentator on the Shulhan Aruch, argues with the Shulhan Aruch and subsequently the Rambam on this point. According to the Rema, if one could not make the b'racha beforehand, one can still recite the b'racha for a mitzvah afterwards - even if the mitzvah has passed!¹⁰ The Rema follows the opinion of the **Ohr Zerua** in this regard who rules as follows:¹¹

ולמדנו מכאן דכל היכא שלא בירך קודם המצוה, **מברך אחר כן** ויוצא ידי ברכה...

*And we learn from here that in every case that one did not recite a blessing before the mitzvah, **he can recite the blessing afterwards and fulfil the blessing.***

The Ohr Zerua brings a proof to his assertion from the **Jerusalem Talmud**,¹² which says explicitly that one is allowed to recite the b'racha on shehita after the animal is slaughtered. The Jerusalem Talmud's reasoning is that there is a risk one will find a problem with the animal that would render it a nevela and therefore non-kosher, which is why the b'racha is left till after the slaughtering, i.e. after the animal's been checked. Even though the Shulhan Aruch rules¹³ that one must always recite the b'racha of shehita before the animal is slaughtered, in line with the teachings of the Rambam, we learn clearly from the Jerusalem Talmud above, however, that if one did recite the blessing afterwards the blessing is still a valid one.

Therefore in regards to our topic of candle-lighting, the **Rema** first teaches us that there are two opinions on how one should light their candles. He then rules according to the latter opinion, which is our custom, confirming that this was the prevalent minhag. He also explains that covering the flames with one's hands (so that they are not seen and benefitted from) is a way of *bringing* the b'racha before the actualisation of the mitzvah.¹⁴

יש מי שאומר שמברכין קודם הדלקה ויש מי שאומר שמברך אחר ההדלקה. וכדי שיהא עובר לעשיתן לא יהנה ממנו עד לאחר הברכה ומשימין היד לפני הנר אחר ההדלקה ומברכין ואח"כ מסלקים היד וזה מקרי עובר לעשייה וכן המנהג.

10. בהגהת אשר"י פ"ק דחולין סי' ה, ומקורו באור זרוע הל' שחיטה סי' שפ"ז (ע"ש דגם בענין כיסועי הדם הדין כן).

11. בס"ל כ"הגבי ברכות ק"ש ראיתו מירושלמי (פ' הרואה ה"ג).

12. בפרק הרואה ה"ג.

13. הל' שחיטה סי' י"ט ס"א.

14. סי' רסג, ס"ה.

*There is one opinion that you recite the blessing before the lighting and there is another opinion that you should recite the blessing after the lighting. And in order for this [blessing] to be [recited] before performing [the mitzvah] one should not benefit from them (the candles) until after the blessing and **one should place their hand in front of the candles after they are lit and recite the blessing**. Afterwards one removes the hand and this is therefore considered [reciting the blessing] before performing [the mitzvah] and this is the custom.*

We have now answered our first question. According to the **Ohr Zerua** a b'racha that is recited after the performance of a mitzvah is indeed a valid b'racha and certainly not a b'racha levatalla. The source of the Ohr Zerua is the Jerusalem Talmud. The **Rambam** also agrees that b'rachot recited after the performance of mitzvot are valid b'rachot, as long as the mitzvah in question is still occurring or happening. In other words, whenever the halacha states that b'rachot have to be recited **עובר לעשייתן** (before the performance of the mitzvah), this only means that the b'racha has to be recited **lehatchila** (in the first instance), but if a b'racha was recited **bedi'aved** (after the fact) it is still a valid b'racha, as long as there was an acceptable reason for postponing the b'racha.

Our learning of the Rambam (that there is no b'racha levatalla as long as the mitzvah is still happening) fits in nicely with our custom of lighting the Shabbat candles first. For it states clearly in the Talmud in tractate Pesachim¹⁵ that one does not complete the mitzvah of Shabbat candles until he partakes of the Shabbat meal next to the candles.

The Mordechai (Mordechai ben Hillel HaKohen, 13th century Germany) in fact rules that if one lit the Shabbat candles and did not benefit from them, e.g. by having the meal in the same room, the b'racha that was recited is invalid.¹⁶ This is also the ruling of Mar'an in the Shulhan Aruch.¹⁷

Accordingly, if one does have the custom of reciting the b'racha on Shabbat candles only after lighting them, the b'racha is a valid one according to both the Ohr Zerua and the Rambam who, may we stress, were one of the earliest of halachic authorities.

15. דף קא:

16. ב"מ סי' רצד.

17. סע' ט.

The **Shulhan Aruch** is exactly in line with the Rambam on this point. As mentioned, Mar'an (our teacher)¹⁸ rules that all b'rachot for mitzvot have to be recited עובר לעשייתן - before performing them. He also agrees that one can recite the b'racha if the mitzvah is still being performed. For example, on the topic of netilat yadayim (washing the hands), the Shulhan Aruch says that we should recite the b'racha only after we wash our hands.¹⁹ One would have thought we should recite the b'racha beforehand, but Mar'an clarifies that sometimes the hands are not clean and that is why we can postpone the b'racha to after washing our hands.

Whilst we are on the subject of the Shulhan Aruch's opinion, it is very interesting to note that Mar'an does not seem to give a clear preference in the Shulhan Aruch as to which order one should light their Shabbat candles. After much research in the teachings of Mar'an we found that with all the other mitzvot he makes a **clear point** to say that one should ensure the b'racha is recited before performing the mitzvah. Examples of this are the b'rachot concerning Tefillin, Sefirat HaOmer, Birchot HaEiruv, Lulav, Tevila, Eirusin, etc. Below is a clear example of how Mar'an stresses the importance of reciting the b'racha first before performing the mitzvah of Bedikat Hametz:

קדם שיתחיל לבדק יברך "אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על בעור חמץ

Before one begins to search he should recite the b'racha:

"...who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to remove Hametz"

However, there are **only two exceptions** where Mar'an does not say explicitly that one should recite the b'racha beforehand and these are concerning the mitzvot of putting up a **Mezuzah**²⁰ and **Nerot Shabbat** (Shabbat candles). Not only does Mar'an not say one should recite the blessing beforehand, but from his ambiguous choice of words we can certainly infer quite the opposite!²¹

18. A title normally given to HaRav Yosef Caro - the author of the Shulhan Aruch & Beit Yosef.

19. סי' קנח סי"א בדין נטילת ידים שכתב לברך קודם שישפוך מים שניים, על אף שכדי שיהיה עובר לעשייתן צריך לברך קודם הנטילה.

20. ביו"ד סי' רפ"ט.

21. עי' ספר ברית כהונה, מערכת ש אות ב, שדייק כן מלשון מרן השר"ע.

Regarding lighting the Shabbat candles Mar'an writes:²²

כשידליק יברך....

When one lights he should recite the blessing...

Why in these two particular cases does the Shulhan Aruch not mention one should recite the blessing before doing the mitzvah? Furthermore, from the language he uses it can easily be understood that Mar'an is inferring that one should light the Shabbat candles first and then recite the blessing!

We would like to offer the following answer to explain the reason for this change in Mar'an's style of writing. His specific choice of words is very clear and much in line with the opinions of the Rambam and Ohr Zerua we mentioned above. In both the cases of Mezuzah and Shabbat candles **the mitzvah still continues after the mitzvah is performed**. The mitzvah of Mezuzah is always occurring whilst it is fixed onto the wall and the mitzvah of Shabbat candles is still 'happening' as long as you are benefiting from the lights. Furthermore, what is unique about these two mitzvot is that there is a **secondary aspect to them, which is of far greater importance** than the action of simply performing the mitzvah. The mitzvah of dwelling in a house and the mitzvah of benefiting from the light of the Shabbat candles is of greater importance and value than simply performing the mitzvah. What we mean to say is that if one recited a blessing and then fixed a mezuzah but did not dwell in the house, or if one lit the Shabbat candles and did not benefit from their light, then such an action would invalidate the b'racha that was recited on these mitzvot. Therefore in both of these cases Mar'an agreed with the Rambam and the Ohr Zerua, that a b'racha which is recited afterwards is still a valid one if the mitzvah is still happening. He therefore did not find it necessary to stress the importance of reciting the b'racha before the mitzvah, as he did with the other cases, as he was aware there were different minhagim at the time and preferred to remain ambiguous.

Having satisfied ourselves with the knowledge that the minhag of reciting the b'racha on Shabbat candles after lighting them is not a b'racha levatala, we can now move on to exploring the answer to the second question.

בס"ד רס"ג, ס"ה. 22.

If there is such a strong rule that blessings for mitzvot have to be recited before performing them, why do we find that so many communities, both of Ashkenazi and Sephardi origin, are not particular in this halacha when it comes to the mitzvah of lighting the Shabbat candles?

The answer to this question is very obvious. In fact, this topic was discussed with a young teenager²³ who had not looked into the sources of the debate before and he immediately suggested: **“Is it because once you’ve said the b’racha you’ve already accepted Shabbat?”** Little did this young man know that his answer was actually an echo of the teachings of a great 13th century Rabbinic sage from Rome called the **Shibuleh HaLeket** (HaRav Tzidkiya ben Avraham HaRofeh, 1210-1280).

The Shibuleh HeLeket discusses this question and concludes that the reason why the blessing is left to the end is because the sanctity of Shabbat is accepted at candle-lighting! He quotes an earlier Rabbinic authority known as the **Behag** (Ba'al Halachot Gedolot), who lived in the period of the Ge'onim in the 8th or 9th century. Whilst discussing the laws of when to light the Hanukah candles on Erev Shabbat, the Shibuleh HaLeket makes the following ruling:

וגם בה"ג אוסר להדליק נר חנוכה אחר נר שבת שכיון "שבירך" על נר של שבת כבר קיבל עליו את השבת ואסור להדליק נר חנוכה.

*And also the **Behag** forbade to light one's Hanuka candles after the Shabbat candles, for since one has recited the blessing on the Shabbat candles he has already accepted Shabbat upon himself and it is forbidden for him to light the Hanuka candles.*

We learn from the Shibuleh HaLeket that the **recital of the b’racha** on Shabbat candles is in itself an automatic acceptance of Shabbat. This should be no novelty to us. One only has to do some research and ask the women of our communities when exactly they accept Shabbat. The answer will always be at candle-lighting. Since according to the Shibuleh HaLeket it is specifically with the blessing of **להדליק נר של שבת** that one accepts the

23. Zacharya Binyamin ben Avraham Yehuda HaCohen הי"ו

sanctity of Shabbat, we can understand now why the b'racha had to be postponed to after the lighting. For if it was not postponed, then how could one light the candles after the recital of the b'racha? Shabbat would already be in! We find that this was also the opinion of **HaRav Ya'akov Weil** who was a 15th century Rabbinic authority from Germany.²⁴

It should be noted that Mar'an brings this opinion of the Behag in the Shulhan Aruch.²⁵ And it is an accepted rule that if Mar'an quotes an opinion of another halachic authority, it means that he believes **such an opinion should be respected**. Mar'an also shows his reverence to the opinion of the Behag elsewhere in the Shulhan Aruch, where he rules explicitly that one must light the Hanuka candles before the Shabbat candles.²⁶

HaRav Yehuda Ayish of Algeria (1688-1760) also agrees that Shabbat is accepted by the recital of the b'racha. He writes the following ruling in his sefer *Match Yehuda*:²⁷

נראה דהא דאמרין כשמדליקין הנר בע"ש יכול להתנות היינו דוקא לבני הבית, אבל האשה עצמה המדלקת אסור לה לעשות שום מלאכה אחר שהדליקה, **זכיון שברכה על הנר אין לך קבלה גדולה מזו ואין מועיל להתנות, וכן איתא בפסקים דרבינו יודא.**

*It seems that that which we say that one makes a tenai (condition) regarding the Shabbat candles on the eve of Shabbat (that you will still do melacha after lighting) that only works for the people in the household, but for the woman herself who is lighting it is forbidden for her to do any melacha whatsoever after she has lighten. **For since she has recited the blessing on the candles - there is no greater acceptance [of Shabbat] than this and making a tenai does not help. The same is taught in the rulings of Rabbeinu Yuda.***

Even though women accept Shabbat at candle-lighting, it should be noted that men do not do so. It is the custom of men to accept Shabbat at end of the "Lecha Dodi" prayer, or at the recital of "Barechu" in synagogue on Friday night, which is the correct manner of accepting Shabbat according to the opinions of the **Ramban** and **Rashba**.²⁸

24. דינין והל' שבסוף שו"ת מהר"י וויל אות כט.

25. ס' רס"ג סע' י.

26. ס' תרעט.

27. ס' רסג אות ב.

28. על' ב"י ס' נ"ט.

It should now be clear that the custom of reciting the b'racha on Shabbat candles after lighting them is indeed a perfectly legitimate one that should be upheld. We have shown that according to the opinions of the Rambam, the Ohr Zerua, Shulhan Aruch, Rema, etc. that one does not transgress the issue of b'racha levatalah by reciting the blessing after lighting.

We have also demonstrated that this minhag carries the stamp of approval of many great Rabbinic authorities, including the Behag, the Shibuleh HaLeket, HaRav Yehuda Weil, HaRav Yehuda Ayish and the Ben Ish Hai. The list does not end here. This was also the minhag of the **Hida**²⁹ (HaRav Ha'im Yosef David Azulai - 1724-1806) who was a great Sephardi Kabbalist and halachic authority from Jerusalem and Italy, the **Kaf HaHa'im**³⁰ (HaRav Ya'akov Haim Sofer - 1870-1939) and **HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu** zt'l.

We mentioned at the beginning of the essay that many Sephardim have been changing their custom of Shabbat candle-lighting, due to certain doubts or other influential factors. The table below includes Rabbinic rulings and some very recent testimonials obtained from individuals of various different Sephardi countries, confirming that the custom in those communities was to light their Shabbat candles according to the minhag of the Ben Ish Hai. This evidence may help mitigate any doubts people may have about their custom.

Community	Name	Minhag
Afghanistan	Mrs Devorah Ambalo ה"ו from London	The minhag in the cities of Herat and Kabul was to light the Shabbat candles first and then recite the b'racha.
Buchara	Mrs Miriam Abramoff ה"ו from London	Mrs Abramoff (maiden name: Issacharoff) is an elderly Buchari woman who confirmed that the custom was always to light first and then recite the b'racha.
Egypt	Mrs Arlette Gabbai ה"ו from London	Mrs Gabbai (maiden name: Dwek) confirmed that the minhag was to light first and then recite the b'racha.

29. מחזיק ברכה אות ד.

30. ס' רסג ס"ק לד.

Community	Name	Minhag
Gibraltar	Rabbi David Abecasis שליט"א from London	The Minhag in Gib is to light, then close the eyes and then make the beracha.
Iraq	The Ben Ish Hai Kaf HaHa'im HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu zt'l	As mentioned in the essay, these Gedolim all confirmed that the minhag in Baghdad was to light first and then recite the b'racha.
Iran	Mrs Farideh Rebecca Namdar ה"י from Hamburg	The minhag in Iran was to light first and then make the beracha.
Lebanon	Rabbi Yitzhak Aghai שליט"א from Bnei Brak	The minhag in Beirut was like the Rema - to light first and then recite the b'racha. Rabbi Aghai is a Rosh Kollel from Bnei Brak.
Libya	Rabbi Avraham Lavi שליט"א from London	The minhag was to light first and then recite the b'racha.
Morocco	HaRav Mashash zt'l Rebbi Baruch A. Toledano zt'l Rebbi Refael B. Toledano zt'l	All three of these important Rabbinic leaders from Morocco confirmed that the minhag was to light first and then make the b'racha.
Spain	Mrs Sarah Benasuly ה"י from Spain	Mrs Benasuly (maiden name: Sabah) confirmed that in her family they pray, light and then end with the beracha.
Sudan	Mrs Freda Myers ה"י from London	Mrs Myers confirmed that it is her custom and the custom of her mother and grandmother to light first and then recite the b'racha.
Syria	Mrs Viviane Aghai ה"י from London	Mrs Aghai (maiden name: Arazi) confirmed that her mother and her grandmother, who were both from Syria, would light first and then recite the b'racha. It should be noted though that many Syrians have changed their custom in the last 50 years or so.
Tunisia	HaRav Moshe Kalfon HaCohen zt'l	Confirmed in his sefer 'Brit Kehuna' that the custom was to light first and then recite the b'racha.

There are people who follow a school of thought, which preaches that everyone should be the same. This theory stems from an idealistic view that the less differences we have, the more united the Jewish people will be as a nation. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the reason why Hashem split the Jewish nation into twelve tribes was to clearly show us the importance of our individuality and how each and every Jew has a specific characteristic and significant role to play in the spiritual cosmos.

Our minhagim, as long as they are rooted in respectable halachic sources, are the very foundation of our heritage and culture. It is unfortunate to live in a generation where we see people from such holy communities dropping their minhagim under the slightest of pressures without researching the sources of their customs properly. We will only achieve unity as a nation when we learn to tolerate each other's genuine differences and to value and respect one another's holy minhagim.³¹

Only then we will be able to save those precious images that remain with us forever. Those powerful childhood memories that are part and parcel of our Jewish identities. Like the warm maternal image of candles burning, eyes covered and a b'racha being said. The very image that brought hope to the Devorah of our story, whom, with paintbrush in hand, was able to draw an unforgettable memory. A memory that remained with her, imprinted in her dreams and led her back home.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Yosef Haim David

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עין מה שכתב הרב יהודה עייאש בספרו בית יהודה ס' סוף ד"ה "זאת אומרת".³¹