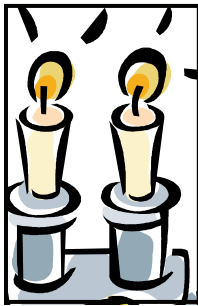


# Shlom Bayyit

## ...and there was **Light**

On the first day of creation, God said, "Let there be **light**, and there was **light**." Thus we have the first of at least 36 references to **light** in the Torah. In the Book of Isaiah there is the prophecy that Israel will be a "**light** unto the nations." Psalms contains hundreds of references. In Psalm 36:1 is the sacred phrase, "By Your **light** do we see **light**" - *B'oraykh neer-eh-or*. **Light** is incorporated into numerous *Midrashim*. One imagines a "world to come" when the righteous will simply "sit and bask in the *ziv shechina*— the radiance (the **light**) of God's presence." Judaic art is aglow with it. Pnina Usherovitz's photographs entitled "**Light** in Judaism" are on exhibit in the Mercaz Sapir Synagogue in Sapir, Israel. The *Zohar* is Judaism's mystical text. The term means "shine" or "glow" and the book speaks of God's **Light**. It is no wonder that candle lighting plays such a significant role in our weekly and holiday rituals.

### Shabbat



We usher it in with the lighting of the Shabbat candles, a home ritual connect to Jewish women. We light two candles but tradition allows additional ones for each of our children. A widespread custom, that probably began in the Middle Ages, is using our hands to sweep light from the candle toward our face three times thus bringing its warmth and radiance to us. With covered eyes, a silent prayer for our family may be said before reciting the Shabbat blessing. With this ritual, women bring joy, peace ...and light into their Shabbat.

### Havdalah

We bring Shabbat to a close with the Havdalah ceremony. At this time a braided, multi-wicked candle is lit. While saying the blessing it is customary to look at our palms, hands, and nails in the light of the candle. Why? One explanation is that it is a sign of the pleasure derived from the light. Another is that the reflection of the light on the fingernails casts a shadow on the palm which shows the distinction between light and darkness - the holy Shabbat and the secular week.



### Chanukah

This celebration is known as the Festival of Lights. The religious mandate that you display the nine-branched menorah in a window is an opportunity to share God's light with others. Falling during the darkest time of the year, Chanukah is a time to shine the light of Torah onto the world.

### Ner Tamid

In the synagogue sanctuary, the *ner tamid*, above the Torah ark, is our eternal light. It symbolizes the seven branched menorah from the Temple of ancient Israel. When the Temple was destroyed, the display of light was transferred to the synagogues. Our sages interpreted the *ner tamid* as a symbol of God's eternal and imminent presence in our communities and in our lives. Its light should never be extinguished.

### Wedding Ceremony

It is a custom that the two people who bring the bride and groom to the chupah (wedding canopy) hold a candle. One explanation for this tradition is that the word candle, *ner*, has a numerical value of 250 (nun is 50, raesh is 200). Double it and the value, 500, has its equivalence in the commandment in the Torah to be "fruitful and multiply."

### Yahrzeit

After a Jewish funeral, a candle is lit at the home of the mourners and burns through the seven days of Shiva. Again a candle is lit on the Hebrew calendar anniversary of the death of a loved one. It burns all day. We also light a yahrzeit candle on Yom Kippur and on the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot). The flame of the candle symbolizes the flame of life that is gone and is a reminder that his or her memory continues to **light** our path in life.

As a ceremonial object, the candle has great significance. In Hebrew, the many words for **light** are a sure indication of its importance in Judaism. **Light** is a metaphor for hope, learning, inspiration, and survival. May the **light** of the glowing candle illuminate our lives and allow us to tap into the **light** within us.