

## RECITING A ברכה BEFORE LIGHTING CANDLES FOR שבת

In last week's newsletter we learned the following:

סידור רב סעדיה גאון – ונבאר תפלות השבת וברכותיה ונאמר: לפני שקיעת החמה ביום הששי חייבים להדליק נר לשבת, ורובינו מברכים עליו להדליק נר השבת.

*Translation: Let us begin by examining the prayers of Shabbos and its Brachos: before sunset on Friday, we are required to light candles for Shabbos. The majority recite a Bracha for lighting candles.*

רב סעדיה גאון reported that in his day, the practice of reciting a ברכה before lighting candles for שבת was not universally accepted. Why not? From the following, we can conclude that the objection to reciting the ברכה stemmed from the fact that the ברכה included the word: "וציונו" for a practice, lighting candles, which was instituted by חז"ל. The ספר העיתים provided two grounds for reciting a ברכה before lighting candles for שבת, a practice instituted by חז"ל; i.e. מלא תסור, do not deviate from what your Sages teach you, and שאל אביך ויגדך, ask your father and he will tell you<sup>1</sup>.

ספר העיתים סימן יג-דקיי"ל הדלקת נר בשבת חובה חייב לברך על הדלקתו כדרך שמברכין על כל המצות ומאי מברך ברוך אקב"ו להדליק נר של שבת והיכין ציונו מלא תסור כדאמרינן בענין נר של חנוכה, אי נמי שאל אביך ויגדך וכדאמרינן נמי וודאי דדבריהם בעי ברכה.

*Translation: We hold that lighting candles on Shabbos is obligatory, meaning that it is necessary to recite a Bracha while lighting the candles just as we recite a Bracha while performing other Mitzvos. What Bracha does one make? Asher Kidishanu B'Mitzvotav V'Tzeivanu L'Hadlik Neir Shel Shabbos. Where do we find that G-d commanded us to light Shabbos candles? From the words: Lo Tasur, do not deviate from what you are taught as we learned concerning the performance of the Mitzvah of lighting candles for Chanukah. A second basis: Ask your father (your religious leaders) and they will direct you as we learned. Those directions should include the obligation to recite a Bracha.*

The ספר העיתים failed to address an important issue; i.e. the גמרא did not provide for the recital of a ברכה before lighting candles for שבת. Given that the ספר העיתים provided the same reason presented in the גמרא for reciting a ברכה before lighting candles on חנוכה as the basis for the recital of a ברכה before lighting candles for שבת, we can conclude that the ספר העיתים drew a connection between the practice of lighting candles before שבת and the practice of lighting candles on חנוכה. He did so because both acts of lighting shared many requirements. Was the ספר העיתים on strong footing when he concluded that a requirement to recite a ברכה before lighting candles on חנוכה necessarily leads to a requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting candles on שבת?

1. Both these rules are based on verses that are interpreted as authorizing חז"ל to institute practices. A further example is found in the excerpt from מסכת שבת below.

To answer that question we need to review the גמרא that set forth the requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting candles on חנוכה:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כג' עמ' א'—אמר רב חייא בר אשי אמר רב: המדליק נר של חנוכה צריך לברך. ורב ירמיה אמר: הרואה נר של חנוכה צריך לברך. אמר רב יהודה: יום ראשון הרואה מברך שתיים, ומדליק מברך שלש. מכאן ואילך, מדליק מברך שתיים, ורואה מברך אחת. מאי ממעט? ממעט זמן. ונימעוט נס! נס כל יומי איתיה. מאי מברך? מברך אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה. והיכן צונו? רב אויא אמר: (דברים יז) מלא תסור. רב נחמיה אמר: (דברים לב) שאל אביך ויגדך וזקניך ויאמרו לך.

*Translation: Rav Hiyya ben Ashi said: He who lights the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing; while Rav Jeremiah said He who sees the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing. Rav Judah said: On the first day, he who sees the lit candles must pronounce two Brachos, and he who lights the candles must pronounce three blessings; thereafter, he who lights pronounces two, and he who sees pronounces one. What is omitted? The Bracha of Shebechayanu is omitted. Yet let the 'miracle' be omitted? The miracle holds good for every day. What benediction is uttered? This: Who sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukkah. And where did He command us? Rav Avia said: It follows from you shall not turn aside which they shall show you. Rav Nebemiah quoted: Ask your father, and he will show You, your elders, and they will tell you.*

The two rules of חז"ל provided שאל אביך ויגדך וזקניך and לא תסור with the authority to establish the holiday of חנוכה. As part of the authority to establish the holiday of חנוכה, חז"ל had the power to institute a practice of lighting candles. They further had the authority to institute a requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting candles on חנוכה. However, concerning שבת, חז"ל did not establish שבת as a day of rest nor did חז"ל enact a requirement to light candles at sundown. Jews already lit candles each night at sundown in order to have light at home. Furthermore the משנה and the גמרא discuss the מצוה of lighting candles before שבת without requiring that a ברכה be recited before performing the מצוה.

משנה מסכת שבת פרק ב משנה ו— על שלש עבירות נשים מתות בשעת לידתן על שאינן זהירות בנדה ובחלה ובהדלקת הנר:

*Translation: For committing one of the following transgressions, women die during childbirth: for not being careful about family purity, setting aside part of what is baked and in lighting candles before Shabbos.*

משנה מסכת שבת פרק ב משנה ז—שלשה דברים צריך אדם לומר בתוך ביתו ערב שבת עם השכה עשרתם ערבתם הדליקו את הנר.

*Translation: A husband must remind his wife to perform three acts as it becomes dark before Shabbos; to tithe, to convert a public courtyard into a private one and to light candles.*

It is possible that חז"ל did not require that a ברכה be recited in advance of lighting candles on שבת because lighting candles was an act that was generally performed in homes everyday so that the homes would be lit. Because of the prohibition of starting a fire on שבת, חז"ל were particularly concerned that the lighting of candles take place before שבת

# להבין את התפלה

began. Viewed in this manner, the מצות of lighting candles on הנוכה and before שבת are fundamentally different. A requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting נירות הנוכה would not necessarily lead to the conclusion that a ברכה should be recited before lighting candles for שבת.

We can conclude from the failure of the משנה and the גמרא to require that a ברכה be recited before lighting candles for שבת that the practice existed for several hundred years without a requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting שבת candles. Given the fact that the requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting candles for שבת appeared in סדר רב עמרם גאון and several תשובות הגאונים, we can narrow the time frame in which חז"ל instituted a requirement that a ברכה be recited before lighting שבת candles to the period between the final editing of the גמרא and the period of the גאונים. What events could have transpired during that era to cause חז"ל to institute the practice of reciting a ברכה before lighting שבת candles? Many believe that the practice of reciting a ברכה before lighting שבת candles was instituted as a reaction to the rise of the Karaite movement at the time of the גאונים. Professor Yitzhak D. Gilat, in his book: פרקים בהשתלשלות ההלכה in an article entitled: ליל התקדש שבת, pages 343-344, provides the following:

העובדה שברכת נר של שבת מופיעה לראשונה רק במקורות מן המאה התשיעית, ואף לאחר מכן לא פשטה בכל מקום, מעלה על הדעת את ההשערה, כי ברכה זו נתקנה בתקופת הגאונים בקשר לפולמוס נגד הקראים, שאסרו להדליק נר לשבת. הכתוב "לא תבערו אש בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת" (שמות לה, ג) נתפרש על ידי הקראים כאילו נצטוונו שלכל ישראל לא יהיה אור במושבותיהם ביום השבת, אף אם האור נדלק מבעוד יום. הקראים ראו בהדלקת נר של שבת חילול שבת, והוקיעוה בין החטאים החמורים של הרבנים: "כל עת שהאש דולקת בשבת כאלו עוברים בלאו" (אדרת אליהו לאליהו בשייצי, דף נ ע"ב).

*The fact that the requirement to recite a Bracha before lighting Shabbos candles did not appear in sources until after the Ninth century and that even then the practice was not universally accepted leads one to think that the requirement to recite a Bracha was instituted at the time of the Gaonim as part of their polemic against the Karaites who prohibited the lighting of candles for Shabbos. The verse: do not light a fire in all your homes on Shabbos (Shemos 35, 3) was interpreted by the Karaites as a commandment not to have light in their homes on Shabbos even if the light was lit before Shabbos. The Karaites viewed the act of lighting candles before Shabbos as a transgression of Shabbos and listed it as one of the gravest sins of the Sages: during the whole time that a light is burning in a person's home on Shabbos a person is transgressing a negative commandment (Aderes Eliyahu of Eliyahu B'Sheitze, page 50, side 2).*

הגאונים נאלצו להתמודד עם טענות הקראים ולהתנצח אתם בכתב ובעל פה, כדי להוכיח שפרשנות חז"ל "ביום השבת אי אתה מבעיר, אבל אתה מבעיר מערב שבת לשבת" (מכילתא, ויקהל, עמ' 346) מעוגנת בפשוטו של מקרא ובמסורת אבות. לשם הדגשת השיבותה של מצוות הדלקת נר לשבת תיקנו הגאונים שלפני ההדלקה תיאמר הברכה: "ברוך אתה ה' אמן", אשר

קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת". בברכה זו מרומזת אמונה בסמכות חכמים, השואבים את כוחם מדבר ה', כדברי התלמוד: "והיכן צונו? רב אויא אמר: מלא תסור מן הדבר אשר יגידו לך ייו ושמאל (דברים יז, יא). רב נחמיה אמר: שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך (שם לב, ז). הברכה על אורה של שבת בשם ומלכות שימשה איפה אמצעי לפרסום מהימנותה של הקבלה וחובת הדבקות בתורת חז"ל, כנגד הכיתות המכחישות ומלעיזות על התורה שבעל פה<sup>115</sup>.

*Translation: The Gaonim were compelled to tackle the issues raised by the Karaites and to battle them in writing and orally in order to bolster the interpretation of the Sages that on Shabbos it was prohibited to light a flame but it was permitted to light a flame before Shabbos that would remain burning on Shabbos (Mechilta page 46). They further needed to support the argument that their interpretation was rooted in the simple meaning of the words of the Torah and in the tradition of our forefathers. In order to reinforce the importance of the Mitzvah to light candles for Shabbos, the Gaonim composed a Bracha to be recited before lighting candles for Shabbos: Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'Olam Asher Kidishanu B'Mitzvotav V'Tzeivanu L'Hadlik Ner Shel Shabbos. In this Bracha was embedded a reference to the belief in the power of the Sages, who drew their authority from the words of G-d, as the Talmud says: Where did G-d command the Jewish people to light candles for Chanukah? Rav Avia said: It follows from: "you shall not turn aside which they shall show you" (Devarim 17, 11). Rav Nehemiah quoted: Ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you (devarim 32, 7). The Bracha that was composed to be recited on the light prepared for Shabbos which contained G-d's name and His hegemony served as a means of publicizing the reliability of the oral transmission of Torah and the need to abide by the Torah as interpreted by the Sages in opposition to those groups who contradicted and mocked the Oral Law.*

115 ייתכן שבמקומות שבהם לא חדרה הקראות, או שהשפעתה היתה מועטה, לא נתפשטה הברכה על נר שבת, שנתקנה בעיקר נגד הקראים. מכאן חילופי המנהגים בנידון.

*Translation: It would appear that in those places where the Karaite movement did not take hold nor exerted any influence, the requirement to recite a Bracha before lighting Shabbos candles was not followed since that requirement was instituted primarily as part of the battle against the Karaites. That is the source of the difference of opinion that is being discussed here.*

It cannot be denied that the the Karaite movement which began with the failure to appoint Anan ben David as successor to Exilarch Solomon in 762 CE in Babylonia coincided with the establishment of the practice to recite a **ברכה** before lighting candles on **שבת**.

Heinrich Graetz in Volume 3 of his History of the Jews presents the following picture of the Karaite movement:

Anan became hostile to the Gaonate and directed his animosity against the Talmud, the principal source of its importance. He displayed, in fact, a fierce hostility to the Talmud and its supporters. The advice which he impressed on his followers was "to seek industriously in the Scripture." On account of this return to the letter of the Bible (Mikra), the system of religion which Anan founded received the name of the Religion of the Text, or Karaism. In his hostility to the Talmud the founder of the Karaite sect increased rather than lessened the religious duties of life. Concerning the strict observance of the Sabbath, Anan far outstripped the Talmud. He pronounced it unlawful to administer any medicines on the Sabbath, even in the case of dangerous illness, or to perform the operation of circumcision, or to leave the house in those cities where the Jews did not live separate from the non-Jewish population; he did not allow any warm food to be eaten, nor even a light or fire to be kindled on the eve of the Sabbath by the Jews themselves, or by others for their use. Anan introduced the custom among the Karaites of spending the Sabbath-eve in entire darkness.