

## Isabel Wiseman's Bat Mitzvah Speech

### December 11, 2015

Good Erev Shabbat Everyone !

Believe it or not, today is the darkest day of the year! If we lived 500 years ago we would might be going to sleep right now because it would be totally dark, and tonight it is even an 'old moon', which means the moon is just a sliver. Being winter in Vancouver, on most nights there is so much cloud cover and rain, that we usually can't even see the moon. All this adds up to a lot of darkness. This is similar to life because there is a lot of darkness out there in the world. Some examples of the darkness are if someone gets shot, if someone has cancer, war, and things like that. This year has had no shortage of Darkness. in just the last month hundreds were killed in Paris by Terrorists, a teacher and an American Yeshiva Student were gunned down in Gush Etzion, 14 people were killed in San Bernardino and three people were murdered outside a planned parenthood center in Colorado. It is at this time of year that we most need the light. When Hashem made the world he created both the light and the darkness. There are several places where we as Jews are commanded to chase the darkness away with special lights. The lights symbolize the various ways in which we bring positive values into the world, the very opposite of the darkness spread by the tragedies I just mentioned. We use these lights to help pick ourselves up when faced with darkness.

One way we chase away the darkness is by lighting the Shabbat candles. The Talmud in the Tractate of Shabbat tells us that we have an obligation to light Shabbat candles in our homes. You must light the Shabbat candles in your dining room or wherever you plan to eat. The reason for this is because Shabbat candles are meant to be used inside your home to create a festive atmosphere for Shabbat.

Interestingly, there was a debate about the bracha, or the blessing for Shabbat candles, that raged between the rabbis about 700 years ago. You already know how it worked out because we DO make a bracha for the candles. however, the debate tells us an important detail about Shabbat candles.

One of the great French Rabbis named Rabenu Meshulam argued that you should not make a bracha on Shabbat candles. He believed you should not make a bracha on the shabbat candles because of a specific law about brachot and mitzvot. This law specifies that you should only make a bracha when the mitzvah is completed immediately. However, if a mitzvah may not actually be completed, like tzedakah that the recipient may not necessarily accept, we should not make a bracha. Lighting the shabbat candles actually has two steps. The first stage is the lighting of the candles, or getting the lights ready for Shabbat. The second step is the enjoyment or the use of the light to bring your family around the shabbat table. Rabbi Meshulam was afraid of the following possible scenario. Let's say you light candles at four-thirty and then you get in a fight with your mom at five o'clock. Maybe the fight was so bad you decide to sit in your room and lock the door for the whole night (Which of course is a very bad idea, very immature, and something I would NEVER do!). If dinner is served at five-thirty, but you skip dinner because you are steaming in your room, then you will have failed to finish the Mitzvah of the Shabbat Candles!! You failed because you have not enjoyed them. You will also have said a bracha and Gd's name in vain.... a very big problem.

What we learn from Rabbi Meshulam is that we all have 2 responsibilities with respect to the shabbat candles.

- 1) You must first prepare the candles, or in other words create a warm and inviting atmosphere for the Shabbat dinner.
- 2) You must enjoy the candles, or in simpler terms enjoy the meal and your family and friends that are gathered around them.

This mitzvah is a reminder that we not only must make preparations for those important shabbat moments, but we must also take advantage of them. This is itself a special kind of light, being able to share a meal and some time with your parents, family and friends without the television, the canucks game, instagram, facebook, candy crush or even the Simpsons to distract you. This light is a special gift a light unto itself. It is like the Zionist thinker Ahad HaAm once said, "More then the Jews have kept the Sabbath, The Sabbath has kept the Jews."

Another example of light is the Chanukah Candle. The Chanukah candle is meant to shine light towards the outside, towards the outdoors, not toward the inside of your home. In fact we are not allowed to use the Chanukah candle for any practical purpose, it is actually a signal fire that should only be used for sending a message to a public place. There are a couple of laws about the Chanukah candle that reinforce the idea that it is a signal light.

One law is that the Candle must be below a height of 20 Amot or 30feet, even for the big Chabad menorah downtown. The reason for this is that if the Menorah is too high it is out of people's line of sight. This mitzvah is about being seen, and if you are too high up you can't be seen. Another law is that the Candles should be lit until "feet disappear from the public space." In other words they need to be out when people are walking past your house. The mitzvah is symbolic of how we need to influence our world on how we need to bring light to our street.

The reason for the lights is because of the two miracles that Chanukah celebrates. Both the miracle of the oil and the miracle of the Maccabees winning the war with the Greeks. The Maccabees had a very small weak army when compared to the Greeks. When the Maccabees won the war it really was a major miracle. A comparable situation would be if you and a few friends decided to take on the entire Canadian army, and you won! The miracle of the oil was less impressive because it was just oil making light last longer than expected. Interestingly we celebrate with lighting the Chanukiah, which is the less impressive of the two miracles. Why? Because that's what Jews do, we fight the darkness with light. When we are attacked we bring more light into the world. Whenever something bad happens in the world the Jews are always the first to help out. So in these dark times Jews have wondered how they can help, how they can educate the world. We want to shine our light into the public space and make it a better and more peaceful place. The Chanukah candles teach us to fight for what we think is right. Even if everybody is doing something wrong you should still stand up for what is right. This can be seen when all the Jews were forced to stop practicing Judaism, and a small Jewish group called the maccabees stood up and said that they were going to study the torah and do mitzvot, and fight the Greeks and prevail.

But which of these two candles is more important, the one that shines in our home, or the one that shines into the street?

The Talmud answers this question by asking another important question, what should a person do if they realize they only have one candle left and it's two minutes before shabbat starts during chanukah?

The talmud in tractate Shabbat 23 b says

The rabbi named Rabba remarked “it’s obvious to me [if one had to choose between] the candle of his house [the shabbat candle], and the chanukah candle, you should use the candle for shabbat because of peace in his house.”

The rabbi chose to use the candle for shabbat because it keeps peace in your home. Shalom Beito—means peace in your house, but it also means the completeness of your house. For example some people have a custom of lighting one candle for each of their children as a way of honouring not just Shabbat, but also each child. The shabbat candles teach us to respect and be kind to other people. A complete house is one in which all the components share together, learn from each other, and grow with each other. The Torah is telling us that building a better world begins by building a better home. If your home is not at peace, then no growth will occur. If your home is not at peace you will not be able to shine a positive light into the street or into the rest of the world.

As a Bat Mitzvah, I will go into the world as an adult and more independent. I am very lucky that my parents have given me tremendous light from our Shabbat table. They reinforce in me my strong Jewish Identity, and remind how I need to stay true to myself. This is one kind of light that they have imported to me. They have also given me strong Jewish values and I know they will always be by my side when I need them.

To symbolize the transition into adulthood I am going to first light the Menorah, and then the Shabbat candles.

The Shabbat candles symbolize kindness and generosity to others. The Chanukah candles, which are lit in the public, symbolize standing up for what you believe in and what is right, especially in the public when Jews, Judaism and Israel are often under attack.

Firstly, I would like to thank all the out of towners who have come to Vancouver From Montreal, Winnipeg, New Jersey, Toronto and Calgary to celebrate with me. It really means a lot to have you all here. I also would like to thank my parents for all they have done for me. From driving to shul and for organizing this event. I love you both so much and thank you both for your hard work and effort to make this amazing event happen! I would also like to thank Jacob and Nikki because even though you often get on my nerves, I guess that's what siblings are for, I love you both very much and thank you for being such great friends. I would like to thank Rabbi Rosenblatt for his wisdom teaching me about my davar torah. Last but not definitely least, I would also like to thank Maya Cantor for first sharing her bat mitzvah party with me, and also for being such a great friend. I am so excited we will be celebrating our special day tomorrow together with all of our family and friends! Thank you everybody for coming tonight! Shabbat shalom and happy Hannukah!