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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן רס"ג סעיף ד'

Halacha Highlight

The earliest time to kindle Shabbos lights

Shulchan Aruch Siman 263 Seif 4
ובלבד שיהא מפלג המנחה ולמעלה
As long as it is from plag hamincha and onwards

Shulchan Aruch cautions against kindling the Shabbos lights too far in advance of Shabbos since it will not be discernible that the lights were kindled to honor Shabbos. However, if one will kindle the lights and accept Shabbos he may kindle them even while it is yet day as long as he does not kindle the lights earlier than plag hamincha, which is an hour and a quarter before night. Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק י"ט) explains that Shulchan Aruch is referring to an hour and a quarter before tzeis hakochavim but according to Levush and Vilna Gaon plag hamincha is calculated from shekiah. If one kindled the lights before plag hamincha his acceptance of Shabbos is meaningless, even b'dieved.

Biur Halacha (ד"ה קודם) cites authorities in the name of Yerai'im that one may accept Shabbos as much as two hours before night. Some authorities contend that Yerai'im's position is based on calculating two hours before tzeis hakochavim according to Rabbeinu Tam's position (72 halachic minutes after shekiah) so that two hours beforehand would not be earlier than plag hamincha according to Levush and Vilna Gaon and thus no authority would permit kindling lights earlier than plag hamincha when calculated from shekiah. Nevertheless, there are some authorities who justify the practice of those who accept upon themselves Shabbos two hours in advance of shekiah based on this position. Some authorities write that if an entire community decides to accept Shabbos at a particular time it is binding even if it is before plag hamincha since in such a circumstance the acceptance of Shabbos is discernible. Consequently, if a woman kindled lights before plag hamincha, although Mishnah Berurah writes that she should extinguish the flame and rekindle them after plag hamincha since there is reason to contend that her acceptance of Shabbos is binding, she should not extinguish and rekindle the flames; rather another member of the household should do so (פסקי תשובות אוץ ט"ו).

Overview

Siman 263 Seif 4:

One should not be quick to kindle the lights too early in the day because it will not be recognizable that the lights were kindled to honor Shabbos but one should also not kindle the lights too late. If one wishes to kindle the lights during the day and accept Shabbos he may do so because as long as he immediately accepts Shabbos it is not considered too early as long as it is after plag hamincha which is an hour and a quarter before night. See below siman 267. If the light was kindled during the day it must be extinguished and rekindled for the sake of Shabbos.

- Shulchan Aruch refers to a long period of time in advance of the time of tosefes Shabbos. (M.B. 15)
- In other words one should not kindle the lights at the last possible permitted time for lighting. (M.B. 16)
- One must refrain from all prohibited melachos including those that are Rabbinically prohibited. (M.B. 17)
- Before plag hamincha one's acceptance is meaningless even b'dieved. (M.B. 18)
- This occurs upon the emergence of three stars but according to Levush and Vilna Gaon plag hamincha is an hour and a quarter before shekiah. (M.B. 19)
- This is true even though it was after plag hamincha. Rema refers to where the lights were kindled for another purpose but if they were kindled for Shabbos, it is unnecessary to extinguish them even though he did not accept Shabbos. (M.B. 20)