The Shabbat Candles

Why do we light Shabbat candles if nothing is written of it in the Torah?

**Let there be Light**

The spiritual light generated by a woman's Shabbat candles illuminates the home, not only on Shabbat, but also during the weekdays that follow. In this vein the Midrash tells us that the Shabbat lamps kindled by our Matriarch Sarah continued to burn for an entire week. Moreover, the miracle repeated itself whenever her daughter-in-law, Rivka, lit her candles. And less visibly, the same miracle occurs whenever a woman or girl lights her Shabbat candles. Just as in the physical sense, a candle reveals the otherwise unseen contents of a room, so, too, in a spiritual sense, the Shabbat candles reveal the unseen and intangible Divine energy which permeates our existence.

For centuries, lighting the Shabbat candles has been one of the most significant mitzvot bestowed upon women. Tradition recounts the miracle of Sarah, whose Shabbat candles burned from Friday eve through the following Friday eve. Our sages tell of Rivka, who lit the Shabbat candles at the tender age of three.

The Shabbat lights are an eternal bond with our ancestors, our heritage and one another. Through these lights, we are forever united with generations to come.

The sages teach, "A woman kindling the Shabbat candles, with joy in her heart, brings peace on earth, health and happiness to her family, and is blessed with children who brighten the world with the light of tradition."

Because we live in a tumultuous world that can often challenge a Biblical spirit, lighting the Shabbat candles every Friday is now more important than ever. The flickering flame is a reflection of the divine spark within each of us.

A woman invites the Shabbat Queen into her home. Light is born. Darkness recedes. Behold the peaceful glow of the Shabbat lights.

It is truly a gift from on high.
The Tradition

The Talmud
There are many that do not agree with the use of the oral Torah (the Talmud) as a learning medium, but I have found it a very helpful work. The sages of old tell us that that Torah tells us what to do but not how to do it. This was or is the purpose of the oral Torah. The Talmud should have remained an oral tradition as that would have kept it current with daily living but one can understand the concern of the elders that during the dispersion, the tradition would be lost.

According to Rashi (Talmud, Shabbat 31b), women are obligated to light Shabbat candles because women were responsible for dimming the world's light (Eve was tempted by the snake) and now they must bring light back into the world. Others say women are obligated simply because they are more associated with the home. The explanation I like best is that the naturally spiritual nature of women best qualifies them to be responsible for bringing the spirit of Shabbat into the home.

The Shabbat candles are lit 18 minutes before sunset every Friday evening.

The most common custom is to light two candles for the two important Biblical references to Shabbat: "Remember the Sabbath" (Exodus 20:8) and "Observe the Sabbath" (Deuteronomy 5:12). However, many people light an additional candle for each child in the family, and others light seven candles for each day of the week or for the Temple's seven-branched menorah.

Spread your hands around the flames and draw them inward, in a circular motion, three times indicating the acceptance of the sanctity of Shabbat. Then cover your eyes and recite the blessing.

After lighting the candles, the woman covers her eyes with her hands and recites the blessing. After the blessing, some women add a silent prayer for the family.

Only after the blessing is recited, the woman uncovers her eyes and looks at the light. By covering her eyes, the woman can focus more fully on the blessing and can postpone the enjoyment of the fruits of the blessing (seeing the light) until after the blessing is recited.