

# A MINDFUL SHABBAT

ONETABLE COMPLEMENT TO THE RITUAL GUIDE



## **Welcome to the OneTable Mindfulness Shabbat Guide.**

Relinquishing control, being present, quieting the thoughts in our minds — these things are hard. Like many of us, I conditioned myself to work, to relish a busy schedule, and to embrace anxiety as a necessary tool for success. Three things have helped rescue me from constant doing: Shabbat, meditation, and yoga.

My family wasn't "observant" in a traditional sense. My mother isn't Jewish and my father doesn't have a Jewish practice. I didn't embrace Shabbat until college, when I spent time abroad in Jerusalem. How unnerving that first unplugged, twenty-five hour Shabbat experience felt! Slowly, after weeks of engaging with Shabbat, I became acquainted with something that had long been dormant inside myself: patience. I felt a sense of pride that Judaism embraced this practice of rest.

Around this time I also began going to a yoga studio and exploring mindfulness-based meditation. I learned how to breathe deeply, how to close my eyes, how to intuit the movements that my body craved. For a long time I saw yoga and meditation as my weekday mindfulness practice, and Shabbat as my weekend mindfulness practice. I separated them as though they weren't teaching me similar skills. In reality, Shabbat, meditation, and yoga are all acts of radical rebellion against a world that is constantly moving and a society that values doing over being.

Lighting the candles on Friday night can be a tool to meditate on gratitude; sharing challah with friends can be a tool to eat with awareness. There is no disconnect between the healing aspects of Shabbat and the restorative aspects of yoga and meditation.

My hope is that this guide will give you additional resources to deepen your Shabbat practice with new teachings, movement meditations, and ways of looking at Jewish ritual as a gift from our ancestors to mindfully pause, reflect, celebrate and nourish yourself and your community each and every week.

Shabbat Shalom,

Natalie Bergner  
Colorado Hub Manager



# ORDER OF OPERATIONS



**KAVANAH: SETTING INTENTIONS**



**GROUNDING + EMBODIMENT: YOGA**



**LIGHT: THE FEMININE DIVINE**



**SANCTIFY**



**MINDFUL EATING**



**SONG**



**APPRECIATE**

# MINDFULNESS

WHAT IS IT? AND WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH SHABBAT?

Mindfulness is a state of engaged, open connection with the now--with what is. When we are mindful, we have the space to notice the things and people surrounding us and then move through the world conscientiously. Today, it's common to associate mindfulness practices, such as meditation or yoga, with Buddhism or ancient near eastern traditions. Dig a bit deeper though, and you will find that Judaism holds its own mindfulness rituals.

We can look to Biblical characters like Isaac, who was found "meditating in the field" when he met his soon-to-be wife, Rebecca. Or the Kabbalists of the 2nd century who visualized the Hebrew letters of God's name so that they could align their souls with the Divine. Or the Jewish mystics of the 18th century who could be found in the rolling hills of Jerusalem engaging in walking meditations or dancing ecstatically to reach states of spiritual connection.

While all of these practices are Jewish mindfulness tools, one of the most profound and commonly enacted Jewish mindfulness practices is Shabbat itself.

Shabbat is a day of rest. To quote the renowned Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Shabbat is the "palace in time," where we re-acquaint ourselves with patience, a sense of awe, and being. Shabbat is an inherently mindful practice of connecting to the world around us, to community, and to the deeper, often concealed aspects of ourselves.



# KAVANAH

## INTENTION SETTING

While Shabbat technically begins at sundown on Friday evening, we encourage you to start thinking about Shabbat several days earlier. Why? Because to make a Shabbat dinner meaningful, welcoming, and engaging, you need to cultivate *kavanah* (intention).

There is a dance in Judaism between *kevah* (fixed or standard ways of practice) and *kavanah* (intentional modes of practice). One cannot be without the other. You need the foundation of the practice itself, the *kevah*, in order to infuse it with intention, *kavanah*. The danger with a Jewish practice that is enacted only from a place of *kevah* is that it can feel stagnant. The Jewish sages agree that to have a practice that is deeply personal, lively, and inspiring, each of us needs *kavanah*.

Let's use the standard practice of setting up your Shabbat dinner as the *kevah*, the foundation. Now, you could stop here, and simply decide that you are going to host a Shabbat gathering and leave it at that--your friends will come, you'll have food. But let's go deeper and ensure that your Shabbat dinner is saturated with *kavanah* so that it feels elevated and special.



## HERE'S A JOURNALING EXERCISE YOU CAN USE TO GET YOUR CREATIVE INTENTION-SETTING JUICES FLOWING:

What aspects of Shabbat do you connect to? And why are you choosing to host a Shabbat dinner?

Choose a word that you want to characterize your Shabbat: joy, contemplation, food, art, outdoors, etc. What are things you can bring to your shabbat dinner to make that characterization come alive?

What feeling do you want your guests to leave with?

What is something special you want to share with your guests? (*A text, a song, a toast, an activity, etc.*)



# GROUNDING + EMBODIMENT: YOGA

Once you have some of your intentions, or *kavanot*, set for your Shabbat, you are ready to set up your dinner and start inviting your guests!

As a host, you want your guests to feel welcome, to enjoy themselves, and feel satiated. But before getting fully preoccupied with your guests, let's think about you. Before you can create the space for others to feel immersed and nourished in the Shabbat spirit, you yourself have to make sure that your body and mind are open and at ease.

The Hebrew word, *halacha*, refers to Jewish laws and commandments, one of them being the observance of Shabbat. The root of the word *halacha*, literally means "to go" or "to walk" — indicating that we enact Jewish practice spiritually and physically.

In fact, we are told that the Jewish sages used to exercise moving meditation during prayer. A tale from the *Talmud* (the Jewish compendium of stories and laws) tells us that when Rabbi Akiva used to pray he moved from one corner of a room to the other. Like the sages, we can use movement as a way to feel more engaged and to better unite our body, mind, and spirit.

To help you feel embodied, as though you are truly "walking" Jewish practice, here is a simple yoga sequence you can do before your guests arrive. And - bonus! - if you want to practice some gentle guided yoga with your guests, there is a guided table sequence too.



## YOGA FOR THE HOST: A STANDING GUIDE

Find a comfortable seat (using a chair, cushion, or the floor) and gently close your eyes. Ground down through your sit bones, tuck your chin slightly and reach up through the crown of your head. Inhale deeply through your nose, open your mouth and exhale all of your breath. Take another deep inhale and this time, as you exhale, imagine you are letting go of your thoughts and feelings from the week. Gently seal your lips, leave a slight space between your teeth, relax your jaw and begin to breathe in and out through your nose. Take several more breaths here, feeling your ribcage and belly expand with each inhale and contract with each exhale. Begin to notice the length you have created along your spine.



Keep your eyes closed; on an inhale, sweep your arms out to the side and overhead; bring your palms to touch and, exhale, draw your hands to your heart. Continue this movement with your inhale and exhale. As you do this, think of one *middah*, or character trait, you would like to embody this Shabbat. Perhaps it is contentment, loving-kindness, gratitude...Imagine you are reaching for that attribute and bringing it down into your heart and body.



Slowly open your eyes and come to stand with your feet hip distance apart and parallel. Sweep your arms up overhead, clasp your left wrist with your right palm and reach over towards the right. Continue to breathe into your left side body: inhale to lengthen, exhale to deepen your stretch. Come back to center and switch sides.



Move into a forward fold. Clasp your hands to opposite elbow and begin to sway from side to side. Notice if you are still holding tension in your neck and let it go. Imagine spilling all of your thoughts from the day out of your head, releasing any residual worries or to-dos.



Slowly come back up to stand, stacking vertebrae on top of vertebrae, feeling your spine elongate once more. Step your feet wide, turn toes out slightly and heels in. Bend your legs so that your thighs are parallel to the ground. Place your hands on your thighs and begin to gently twist. Exhale, your right shoulder dips slightly as you look to the left; inhale back to center, and exhale your left shoulder dips as you look to the right.



Straighten your legs; bring your toes in and heels out slightly. Interlace your hands at your low back and, as you exhale, begin to fold forward and down, reaching your fist up and overhead. Notice the stretch in your shoulders and hamstrings. Exhale to further release into the stretch.



Let go of your fist, bring your fingertips to touch the ground and inhale come back up to standing. Place your feet at hips-width distance. Moving to Tree Pose, shift your weight into your right foot and bring your left foot to touch the inside of your right leg (above or below the knee). Bring your palms to heart center and gradually let your tree-branches grow, reaching your arms up overhead. As you breathe in Tree Pose, embody the balance and stability that you want to cultivate in your Shabbat practice. Take several more breaths, allowing that sense of harmony to sink in. Then, switch sides.

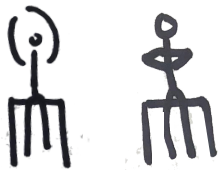
Come back to a simple stance, softly close your eyes and place your right hand on your heart and left hand on your belly. Feel your feet rooted, evenly, into the ground. Feel your breath come in and down and then up and out. Notice what it feels like to hold your self, sending love and compassion from your hands to your body. With these last inhales and exhales, offer thanks for your body for all the wondrous ways in which it carries you through this world; offer gratitude to your breath that keeps you alive and present; lastly think of someone or something you want to thank this week: send them the love and compassion you have just given to yourself.



Gradually open your eyes, come back to the space you are in, and carry this awakening, this conscious breathing, and intentional movement with you as you continue to prepare for Shabbat.

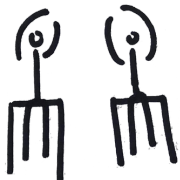
## YOGA AT THE TABLE: A SEATED GUIDE

Find a comfortable seat, plant your two feet on the floor, and gently close your eyes. Ground down through your sit bones, tuck your chin slightly and reach up through the crown of your head. Inhale deeply through your nose, open your mouth and exhale all of your breath. Take another deep inhale and this time, as you exhale, imagine you are letting go of your thoughts and feelings from the week. Gently seal your lips, leave a slight space between your teeth, relax your jaw and begin to breathe in and out through your nose. Take several more breaths here, feeling your ribcage and belly expand with each inhale and contract with each exhale. Begin to notice the length you have created along your spine.



Keep your eyes closed; on an inhale, reach your arms overhead, bring your palms to touch and, exhale, draw your hands to your heart. Continue this movement with your inhale and exhale. As you do this, think of one *middah*, or character trait, you would like to embody this Shabbat. Perhaps it is contentment, loving-kindness, gratitude, humility... Imagine you are reaching for that attribute and bringing it down into your heart and body. Keeping your eyes closed, begin to make gentle circles with your neck. Notice if there is a particularly tense spot and hold there, breathing into that tension in order to release it.

Gently open your eyes. Keeping a tall spine, bring your left hand outside your right thigh and begin to twist from your rib cage, gazing over to the right. Inhale to lengthen, exhale to deepen into the twist. Come back to center and switch sides.



Sweep your arms up overhead, clasp your left wrist with your right palm and reach up and over towards the right. Continue to ground down through your left sit bone as you breathe into your left side body. Inhale to lengthen, exhale to deepen into your stretch. Come back to center and switch sides.

Cross your right arm underneath your left, bending at the elbows, bringing your palms to touch. (If this is uncomfortable for your shoulders, give yourself a hug, crossing right arm over left). Inhale, lift your elbows up, coming into a subtle backbend. Exhale, draw elbows towards belly button, slightly arching your back. Continue this movement, opening up the shoulders and bringing some movement into your spine. Switch sides.



Come back to your neutral seat, softly close your eyes and place your right hand on your heart and left hand on your belly. Feel your feet rooted, evenly, into the ground. Feel your breath come in and down and then up and out. Notice what it feels like to hold yourself, sending love and compassion from your hands to your body. With these last inhales and exhales, offer thanks for your body for all the wondrous ways in which it carries you through this world; offer gratitude to your breath that keeps you alive and present; lastly think of someone or something you want to thank this week: send them the love and compassion you have just given to yourself.

Gradually open your eyes and come back to this beautiful Shabbat gathering.



# THE FEMININE DIVINE + SHABBAT CANDLES

*“Because of its home-based nature and Judaism’s patriarchal roots, candle lighting has, over the centuries, become one of the few ritual practices traditionally dominated by women.”<sup>1</sup>*

Since this is a traditionally female-centric ritual, let’s take this opportunity to learn about the Jewish concept of the “Feminine Divine.”

The Feminine Divine?! For many of us, when we think of God, we have an image of a male guy in the sky, or at least a feeling of a masculine energy. The Torah, as a text, anthropomorphizes God, and Hebrew, as a language, is gendered. So, while Jews do not believe that God has a gender, gendered language is used, often in the masculine form, in reference to God.

But there are female-gendered renditions of God’s name, and one of the most profound is: *Shekhinah*. A direct translation of *Shekhinah* is “to dwell within.” Tradition tells us that the *Shekhinah*, the feminine Divine, “dwelled” in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, but that when the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the *Shekhinah*’s spirit moved with the Jewish people into exile, where she remains today.

If you dig into Jewish mystical teachings about the *Shekhinah* you will find that this feminine divine energy is often connected with the earth, the moon, and the metaphor of a Sabbath Queen. She is the symbol of what it means to embrace the physical world, and elevate it. Cooking an amazing meal, sharing food with friends, drinking lovely wine, all become spiritual, holy acts. The *Shekhinah* transforms the mundane into the holy, and calls on us to respect that these acts are just as sacred as traditional prayer.

<sup>1</sup> Although keep in mind that whatever gender you may identify as, if any, you are obligated to light. As the 12th-century rabbi and scholar Maimonides writes in his legal compendium Mishneh Torah, “Both men and women are obligated to ensure that a candle is lit in the home, and obligated to bless before lighting.”



## SO, YOU ARE ABOUT TO LIGHT YOUR SHABBAT CANDLES, HOW CAN YOU INVITE THE PRESENCE OF THE *SHEKINAH* TO YOUR GATHERING?

1. **Pause:** Take a moment to close your eyes and think of a woman in your life who has empowered you, or the women in the world at large who inspire you. What characteristics do these women carry that you want to embody throughout shabbat: is it strength, compassion, courage?

2. **Share:** Jewish tradition tells us that the Shekinah is present when ten people come together (how ever many you have is okay too!). To cultivate that sense of close community, ask your guests to turn to the person next to them and share who they thought of as an empowering female-figure in their life.

3. **Light:** The act of lighting the candles themselves, draws in the energy of the Sabbath Queen, or the Shekhinah to your space. Ask your guests to gather in as the candles are lit.



## BLESS

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav  
vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.*

Blessed are You, Infinite One, Who makes us holy through our actions  
and honors us with the light of Shabbat.

*or*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who commands  
us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

### **Reflection**

On Shabbat, the light within everyone and everything is revealed.

We need only the will to see it.  
— *Sfat Emet (1847-1905, Poland)*





# CANDLE LIGHTING MEDITATION

Light your Shabbat candles, preferably two, in any way you feel comfortable. This is an open-eye meditation that focuses attention on the candlelight, letting go of the week that was, and welcoming Shabbat.

Bring your attention to the flame. Draw in a long, slow breath through your nose, and as you slowly exhale through your mouth let the busyness of the day drop away. Take in another long, slow, deep breath through your nose, and as you slowly exhale through your mouth, let go of the worries that may have been troubling you this week. Take a third long, slow, deep breath, breathing all the way down into your belly. As you slowly breathe out through your nose, allow yourself to sink comfortably into your posture, to settle into Shabbat. Whether you are sitting or standing, become aware of your back and gently straighten it, allow your shoulders to gently slope downwards, let your face be smooth and serene.

Now allow your breathing to come naturally, keeping your focus on the candle flame. Hear these words and let them go, just being aware of the guidance but not holding onto the words. Gaze softly at the flame, and as you continue to do so if you feel you are starting to stare at the light, ever so gently blink and refocus your eyes, gazing softly at the candlelight once more and allowing your mind to quiet down, allowing the thoughts that enter your mind to be there, but like these words just letting them drift by. As you softly gaze at the flame, you will notice that thoughts will come into your mind. Just allow them to be there, and allow them to float out of your mind like passing clouds. Just as Shabbat rest takes time to enter your night, your mind takes time to rest, to come to a place of quiet. When your mind influences you with thoughts, bring it gently but firmly back to the flame. This is a meditation practice, this is a Shabbat practice, and it takes time and patience to change.

Continue to gaze gently at the flame. Keep your awareness on the flame, gently gazing at the flame, remaining aware, remaining focused, remaining concentrated, aware, focused, and at rest. Remain aware, letting all thoughts pass through your mind like clouds in the sky.

Allow time for silence.

And now when you are ready, gently lower your gaze from the flame. Bring your consciousness back into the room. Give thanks for having been able to spend this time in meditation. Give thanks for the gift of Shabbat. Slowly turn your head from side to side. Become aware of the temperature in the room. Become aware of your body. Become aware of your thoughts. When you are ready, take a deep and clearing breath.

Option 1) Close with the blessing over the candles:

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.* Blessed are you, Infinite One, who makes us holy through our actions and honors us with the light of Shabbat. Amen. Shabbat shalom.

Option 2) Close with Shabbat Shalom.

*By Elisabeth Blaikie, modified for Shabbat by Rabbi Jessica Minnen*



# SANCTIFY

**Pour a glass of wine or grape juice and sanctify Shabbat before drinking.**

Through the blessing of the wine (*kiddush*), one acknowledges two of God's greatest gifts: creation of the world and the exodus from Egypt. *Kiddush* also creates a moment to express gratitude for Shabbat. The moment following *Kiddush* can present a great opportunity for guests to share the best part of their week, or engage in another type of go-around.





## BLESS

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam borei p'ri ha'gafen.  
Baruch Atah Adonai mikadesh ha'Shabbat.*

Blessed are You, Infinite One, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Blessed are You,  
Infinite One, Who sanctifies Shabbat.

*or*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the  
vine. Blessed are You, Lord our God, Who sanctifies Shabbat.

### Reflection

During the week ... we lose some of the light in our eyes; it is restored to us by the  
reflection of light in our kiddush cup. — *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 113b*

All of creation comes closer to its origin on Shabbat. That moment, that movement,  
begins with kiddush. — *Likutei Moharan*





# DRINKING MEDITATION

Not sure whether to introduce short or long kiddush? A great place to start is short kiddush with Alison Laichter's guided drinking meditation:

Let's start by taking a few breaths, quieting and slowing ourselves down, breathing in and breathing out. Sit how you'd like to feel. Feel your feet on the ground, and feel grounded. Sit upright, and feel uplifted. Notice what it feels like to breathe. You can remind yourself, "Oh right, this is breathing. This is what it feels like to be alive." Close your eyes. See if you can feel where your body ends and the air begins. Notice when you get distracted from simply feeling your breath in your body and gently return to paying attention to your next inhale.

Open your eyes and pick up your glass of wine. Don't drink yet. Feel the weight of the cup in your hand, feel the temperature on your skin. Look at your hand holding the glass. Notice all of the colors you see in the wine. Pay attention and see if you notice more colors as you keep looking. Now, smell your drink. Again, don't drink yet! Notice what you smell and if you can notice more nuances as you keep smelling. Close your eyes, and see if that makes a difference.

Think about what brought your drink to your hand. Start at the very beginning. Imagine seeds plants, grape vines growing. Picture the soil, water, sun that nourished the grapes that created the wine in your glass. Think of the people, the farmers, who cultivated those grapes. The journey from grape, to wine, to bottle. Imagine the people and machines and materials and miracles that worked together to create a bottle of wine. Think of the bottles transported from farm to store to table. Imagine the people who made that happen - the truck driver, the workers, the people who stocked the shelves, the cashier who rang up the bottle at the register, the person who might have poured your drink or handed you your glass. Think of all that went into the glass of wine you're holding, and take a moment to feel gratitude, to feel blessed, and to bless.

Remind yourself of what brought you to this moment. Think way back to what nourished you, who cultivated you, all of the happenings and crazy coincidences that led up to you being right here in this moment holding this particular glass of wine. Think about your life, the past year, the past week, today. Again, take a moment to feel gratitude for being right here, right now, holding this glass. Slowly bring your drink to your lips. Don't drink yet! Feel the desire to drink.

Take a breath. Bless.

*alisonlaichter.com*



## THE BREAKDOWN

Often one person recites or chants kiddush on behalf of everyone present. Short or long, that's a tall order. It is undeniably intimidating to stand up in front of your guests make kiddush.

The words are hard enough. Then there's the choreography. In some circles, everyone remains seated for kiddush, in others everyone stands, and in still others you stand while reciting the kiddush but sit down to drink the wine. What about the wine itself? Does the person who chants kiddush pass their cup around the table for everyone to taste? Or do you invite your guests to pour wine from the bottle into their own glasses before kiddush, recite the blessing, then everyone drinks their own?

The short answer is yes. There are as many ways to make kiddush as there are words in the kiddush itself. Some hosts recite on behalf of everyone present. Some people sit during kiddush and others stand. Women can make kiddush according to some interpretations, while in others kiddush is always recited by men. Some people even have nifty wine fountains that allow the host to divide their own glass of wine into servings for their guests in a single pour.

There are also ways to use wine as a conduit to sanctify Shabbat without the formal recitation of kiddush. In fact, the best part about kiddush might be its parallels to a modern ritual everyone can relate to: making a toast.

Framing kiddush in terms of toasting is a perfect way to step into ritual without feeling stepped on. Every language has a different word for cheers — in Hebrew it's *l'chaim*, "to life" — and your guests will most probably bring to the table some expertise in this regard. Another approach is to explain the purpose of kiddush, to use wine as a conduit to sanctify time, then go around the table and invite each guest to say, as they raise their glass to the weekend, what they're putting down from the week. At the end, you can raise your glasses and toast together, *l'chaim*.



# MINDFUL EATING

Before we move to the blessing over the challah, let's take a moment to think about how we nourish our bodies with food. Eating, according to Jewish teachings, is a holy act. It is a way of strengthening our bodies and minds so that we can continue to do good in this world.

We all know the story of Adam and Eve: God told them they could eat anything in the Garden of Eden, except the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. What did they go and do? They ate from the Tree of Knowledge, and the rest is history!

But, there is an interesting teaching on this Torah story from a Jewish mystic, Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen: he tells us that when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, this act symbolized that they ate in an unholy way: they ate greedily and they did not eat conscientiously.<sup>2</sup>

Now, don't get me wrong, eating brings us a lot of pleasure and joy, and Shabbat is all about that. But, before we get to our challah and meal, let's take a moment to be mindful about our food. Think about mother earth who grew the foods in front of you, and thank the hands that prepared these dishes.

## Reflect on...

*What is my body craving?*

*What foods can I consume tonight that will bring me nourishment: not just to my stomach, but to my mind and soul as well?*

*With this thoughtfulness, we can begin to eat from a place of presence, and gratitude.*

<sup>2</sup> Pri Tzadik, Rabbi Zadok HaKohen Rabinowitz of Lublin (Kreisburg, 1823 - Lublin, Poland, 1900), Torah portion of Genesis, section 8.



## BLESS

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.*

Blessed are You, Infinite One, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

*or*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

### **Reflection**

Challah is one of the three things for which God created the world.

— *Bamidbar Rabbah 15*

On Shabbat, challah represents a taste of *tikkun olam*, the possibility of the world restored.

— *The Maharal of Prague*





## THE BREAKDOWN

In the ancient near east, if there wasn't bread on the table it wasn't a meal, and as a result the Jewish sages viewed bread as the primary source of nourishment, both literally and spiritually. Challah, the slightly sweet, ridiculously good braided bread many enjoy at modern Shabbat dinners, comes from a commandment in the Torah requiring the Israelites to set aside a portion of dough every week as an offering; that donation was called challah. The practice of braiding the bread evolved over time, some with three strands, others six, each with their own referential symbolism to Temple times.

On many tables you will find two loaves of challah rather than one. On Shabbat, we revel in possibility and abundance. We have a double portion of everything just as the Israelites received a double portion of manna on Shabbat during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Also, challah French toast is the best, so don't feel pressure to make it through both loaves in one sitting.

Why cover the bread? In general when faced with more than one food, Jewish tradition dictates that the first blessing offered should be on the species that comes first in the list of the Seven Species (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates) mentioned in the Torah. As such, you would say the blessing on the bread (wheat) before juice (grapes). But since you definitely say *kiddush* to sanctify Shabbat before blessing the bread, there is a dilemma of precedence. So, the sages (in the Jerusalem Talmud, redacted around ca. 400 CE) suggest covering the challah to hide it while we drink the juice first. No one wants a jealous challah.

Yes, the custom anthropomorphizes the bread. No, the bread doesn't actually know what's going on. But that's ritual. It accomplished something for our ancestors and it can accomplish something for us, in this case turning our Shabbat dinner table into a stage upon which Jewish history and learning and drama is enacted in our very homes. It's kind of fantastic.

Once we uncover the challah, the blessing over the bread connects us to the process of work that has to happen in order for the challah to get to our table. Bread isn't just brought forth from the earth, it requires the work of many hands. The possibility and abundance of Shabbat comes with the responsibility to work to make a better world the other six days of the week.

Pass it, rip it, cut it, tear into it like you mean it. There's no right or wrong, as long as the bread makes its way around the table. Lastly, it is common to add some salt to the pieces challah before sharing them with your guests. While this practice has its roots in, you guessed it, Temple times (when offerings were accompanied by salt) it also has a more mystical explanation. According to Isaac Luria, the great 16th century Kabbalist, both bread (חלה) and salt (מלח) are representations of the divine; salt is divine severity and bread is divine kindness. We seek to overpower the severity of the salt with the kindness of the bread. Therefore, when you salt your challah, do not sprinkle the salt on top the bread, but instead to touch the bread to the salt — kindness over severity.



# SING

Singing, especially in community, is transformative. It is a mindfulness practice that awakens parts of ourselves that may have laid dormant all week long; it makes us feel connected to the people around us; it taps into joy.

Shabbat is an excellent excuse to sing. In fact, Jewish tradition encourages us to bring special songs, or *zemirot*, to the Shabbat dinner table. These songs elevate us away from the mundane work week, and into the holy space of Shabbat by connecting us to our bodies and the present moment through vibrational sounds.

Now you might be thinking: I am a terrible singer. Well folks, no one said you need to be Barbra Streisand to enjoy singing. What you need is a bit of curiosity, a willingness to let go, and a desire to be expressive. Honestly, you don't even need to be great at remembering lyrics. Shabbat tunes are meant to be sung from the heart, and sometimes that means you say a bunch of "na-na-na" or "bim-bam-bim-bam" as you join in the melody. This is a practice of merriment — no need to take it too seriously!



**IF YOU HAVE NEVER SUNG AT A SHABBAT DINNER BEFORE, OR, IF YOU HAVE FOUND YOURSELF SURROUNDED BY SINGERS AND NEVER KNOWN WHAT IS GOING ON, HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO LEARN FOUR POPULAR SHABBAT SONGS.**

**Shalom Alechem:** “Peace Be Upon You.” This song is usually sung right before dinner, right after candle lighting. Tradition tells us that on Shabbat, two angels come to stay with us. *Shalom Alechem*, is sung as a way to welcome in these angelic spirits with lyrics like: “May your coming be in peace,” “Bless me with peace,” and “May your departure be in peace.” If angels aren’t your thing, you can still love this tune! Another way to think of this song is that it is a way of bringing in the Shabbat spirit of harmony and well being. It is the first song that helps the guests around your table pause from their conversations and join in a collective activity. Check out [this link](#) to learn the tune and lyrics at a slow tempo. And [this link](#) for a more upbeat version.

**Olam Chesed Yibaneh:** “We will Build this World with Love”. As you sing this song, you may reflect on the loving relationships that you nurture or that nurture you. Or, perhaps you think about what changes you would like to make in this world, and how you can make those changes with a loving, compassionate heart.

**Elul Niggun:** “A song of Elul”. Elul is the 12th month in the Hebrew calendar (usually around Aug/Sept); it is often seen as a month of transition and introspection. As you sing this song, perhaps you think about what transitions you have been through recently: what did you learn from those moments of evolution? What spiritual, emotional, intellectual growth occurred?

**Niggun Neshama:** “A song of the spirit”. This song was composed by a famous rabbi and musician, Reb Shlomo Carlbach. It is generally sung in an upbeat tempo and inspires us to let go of our thoughts, to smile, perhaps even to dance or drum on the table. Allow this song to flow through you with the joyous energy of Shabbat.

There you have it! Four songs and four tastes of the Shabbat singing experience.





## APPRECIATE

Many faiths and cultures have a grace before meals, not quite as many have a grace after meals. The blessing after the meal, or *Birkat ha'Mazon* in Hebrew, like all Shabbat dinner rituals, evolved over time. We do however have a source text for this practice in the Torah, from Deuteronomy 8:10: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, bless."

It's actually pretty radical that in Judaism, the ritual of grace after meals isn't about expressing gratitude for food itself, but for food and a full feeling. To say grace therefore requires a sense of intention around the act of consumption, nourishment, and feeling good as a result.

The traditional grace after meals is long. So long it makes the long version of kiddush seem short. It's long because the sages kept finding more and more things to be grateful for. Food, the earth, God, dinner hosts, parents, Shabbat, Torah, the exodus from Egypt, the list goes on. You can find the full version [here](#), courtesy of our friends at Hillel International.

At OneTable, we are grateful that there is also a succinct grace after meals recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (Brachot 40b) that serves precisely the same purpose in seven words of beautiful second century Aramaic. Way to show up, sages.



## BLESS

ברוך רחמנא מלכא דעלמא מריה דהאי פיתא.

*Brich rachamana malka d'alma marei d'hai pita.*

We are blessed with compassion by You, Infinite One, Who sustains us with bread.

*or*

Blessed are You, Merciful One, Ruler of the universe, Who sustains life with bread.

*or*

You are the Source of life for all that is, and Your blessing flows through me.

### **Reflection**

What shifts in your experience of gratitude at the Shabbat dinner table?

What else nourishes you, besides food itself?





## THE BREAKDOWN

Shabbat dinner doesn't end with the food runs out. Shabbat dinner doesn't even end with grace after meals. Shabbat dinner ends when you walk your guests to the door. It's a last act of ritual hospitality, and one that makes hosting on Shabbat so deeply rooted in Jewish practice.

As Maimonides wrote: "The reward you receive for accompanying guests on their way is greater than for all other *mitzvot*. Our sages teach that showing hospitality for guests is the greatest expression of gratitude, greater even than study or prayer. Accompanying guests on their way is greater still."

Shabbat shalom.



**This mindfulness guide was inspired by Kasey Passen, *zichronah livrachah*, may her memory be a blessing, now and always. Kasey taught us the importance of laughing yoga on lunch breaks, gifted each of us with her incredible generosity of spirit, and truly believed that Shabbat dinner (and good food) would heal us all. She embodied the best of what Shabbat can be: intentional yet spontaneous, grounded yet reaching for the stars. We hope this guide will bring that energy to everyone's Friday night Shabbat.**