

# HOW TO TALK ABOUT SHABBAT

(with *~literally~* everyone)

HOST EDITION



## 1. REFLECTING ON THE WEEKEND

If you're hosting a diverse group of guests, you're going to have people at your table who have very little (if any) Shabbat dinner experience. One way to talk about Shabbat generally and Shabbat dinner specifically is to begin with a broad and inclusive question that can help your guests understand that what they value about Friday night and the weekend, regardless of their background or faith of origin, are already part of the Jewish value of Shabbat.

### FOR EXAMPLE:

- What do you love about Friday night? What do you most look forward to about Friday night?
- What do you love about the weekend? What do you most look forward to about the weekend?
- *<Shabbat generally>* Think back to the best weekend you've ever had. What made it special? Where were you? Who were you with? What sensory experiences do you remember, i.e. what do you see, hear, smell, taste, feel when you think about this weekend? What feelings and emotions does the memory of this weekend evoke for you?
- *<Shabbat dinner specifically>* Think about the best meal you've ever had, or the best dinner party you've ever been to. What kind of food and drinks were served? What was the ambiance like? What made it so special — was there music, flowers, décor, a great location, an incredible server, amazing conversation? Who was there? Who were you sitting with? What did you talk about? How did the dinner make you feel?

These questions work great one-on-one, but are also excellent as table-wide icebreakers to help people get to know each other as they get to know Shabbat.

## 2. FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION

What you will find is that the things people love about the best experiences they've had on Friday night, over the weekend, or at dinner parties in general are **the very things we strive to magnify on Shabbat**. Here they are, broken down into categories that you can share back to your guests.

### TIME

- the workweek is over
- time to do what you want to do instead of what you have to do
- stay in, go out, or both

## SPACE

- indoor ambiance is made special by music, lighting, décor, etc.
- outdoor scenery is beautiful, majestic, unique

## INTENTION

- food and drink are special in some way, delicious, thoughtful
- the experience resulted in a strong emotional imprint, feelings of joy, belonging

## COMMUNITY

- with friends and/or family, people you know and love who matter to you
- meeting new people, broadening your community and forming new bonds

# 3. BRINGING IN RITUAL

In Jewish tradition, we call Shabbat holy, or in Hebrew, *kodesh*. The holiness of Shabbat doesn't have to do with how religious you are, or how much experience you have practicing Judaism. **Shabbat is about otherness, a combination of time, space, intention, and community that results in an experience that is different from the regular week.** At its best, this experience results *oneg Shabbat*, literally the **joy** of Shabbat.

Ritual is what helps us get there.

You can help your guests get there by asking: What is ritual? What are some of the "secular rituals" in your life? People might say things like "having a cup of coffee every morning while I check my Twitter feed" because that's something they do every day. That is a *habit* not a *ritual*.

What's the difference?

A ritual *accomplishes* something through a symbolic shift in time, space, intention, and/or community. For example, lighting and blowing out birthday candles is a ritual because the practice adds a candle to symbolize another year of life, and blowing them out symbolically grants your wish for the next year of life. Like birthday candles, Friday night rituals serve a very specific symbolic purpose. They are an ancient technology designed by the sages to "flip the switch" so to speak, to help us **demarcate time, distinguish space, create intention, and share communally.**

Whether this Shabbat is your first time facilitating ritual or your fiftieth, ritual belongs to you. **There is not, nor has there ever been, one way to do these rituals.** Judaism has traditions, but it isn't a monolithic faith. From here, see the OneTable ritual guide to step into specific rituals, their traditional practice, and options to help you make them your own.

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