



THE SHAB-BASICS

ONETABLE COMPLEMENT TO THE RITUAL GUIDE



WHAT IS SHABBAT? WHERE DOES THE PRACTICE OF CELEBRATING SHABBAT COME FROM?

In Jewish tradition, the world is created in an evolution of seven days: six days of work that culminate in the seventh day, Shabbat, a day of rest. Shabbat is not a postscript, it is as important a part of creation as any of the days of active work. Whether or not we believe in God (*a dinner conversation for another night*), Judaism teaches that we, human beings, have an active creative partnership with the divine to continue the work of creation, to continue to make the world a better place, day after day, week after week. That work requires **rest**. Shabbat isn't about what we can't do on this one day, it's about what we *can* do on the other six if we take the time to truly restore and replenish ourselves.



DO YOU HAVE TO BE "RELIGIOUS" OR "BELIEVE IN GOD" TO CELEBRATE SHABBAT? DO YOU HAVE TO BE JEWISH?

You don't have to be religious or believe in God to celebrate Shabbat. You don't even have to be Jewish — a lot of people who aren't Jewish host Shabbat dinner. Maybe their partner is Jewish or their roommate, maybe they just love hosting because it's a great way to end the week, start the weekend, meet new people, and gather old friends. Shabbat is a time that anyone can appreciate to unplug and recharge. You can find the groundwork for the traditional practice of Shabbat in ancient texts (including the *Torah*, the Jewish Bible) but its implications are modern: a way to end the week with intention with good food, good wine, and good people.



WHY IS RITUAL A PART OF THE DINNER?

Every week, the Shabbat dinner table gives you an opportunity to take a break and be fully present. Ritual and blessings can help carve out a moment to connect to yourself and others.

But what is ritual? If you think about some of the secular rituals in your life, you might consider things like "having a cup of coffee every morning while I check my Twitter feed" because that's something you do every day. But that is a routine not necessarily a ritual. What's the difference? A ritual accomplishes something through a symbolic shift in time, space, intention, and/or community. Lighting and blowing out birthday candles, for example, 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.

Like birthday candles, Shabbat rituals serve a very specific symbolic purpose. They are an ancient technology designed to "flip the switch" so to speak, to help us demarcate time, distinguish space, create intention, and share communally.



CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE RITUALS THAT HAPPEN BEFORE THE MEAL?

The three main Shabbat dinner rituals focus on light, wine, and bread. Each ritual includes a blessing, symbolism, and choreography that imbues deeper meaning, connecting us to our past and allowing us to create intention for our future.

Light: Bringing light to the table marks the start of Shabbat. Your host might light candles on behalf of their guests, or set up candles for guests to light.

Wine: At the start of the meal, a glass of wine (or special beverage) brings intention and holiness to the table. You can also think of *kiddush*, the blessing over wine that sanctifies Shabbat, as an opportunity for a toast, a time for everyone to raise their glass in celebration.

Bread: Nourishing your meal with challah signifies the abundance that is available during Shabbat. You can think of having two challahs and not one as a perfect symbol of this. The *hamotzi* blessing is a time to be thankful for all that we have, and then enjoy the wonderful bread.



CAN I USE MY PHONE AT THE DINNER TABLE?

Everyone embraces Shabbat in their own way. For some it's an opportunity to unplug, for others it's a way to recharge. Traditional Jewish practice invites us to think of Shabbat as a time to connect with each other in real life and in real time without our phones, but plenty of people want their phones to access resources. Blessings, music, quotes, meditations, the OneTable Shabbat Dinner Guide — all of these resources are just a tap away, and a great reason to keep your phone at the table. The best advice is to follow your host's lead!



CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JEWISH DENOMINATIONS A LITTLE BIT MORE?

Denominationalism is relatively new to Judaism, emerging in the mid-19th century. The Reform movement began as a modern effort to reform the strict adherence to Jewish law, and the Conservative movement followed as a response to what was perceived as too much reform. There are also smaller movements such as Reconstructionist and Renewal, each with its own approach, and of course the Orthodox streams which are generally the most traditional.

