

Spirituality at Your Fingertips

Sanctifying Shabbat:

A Guide To Kiddush and Ha'mo'tzee



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Kiddush -- Sanctification, the Blessing Over Wine

Kiddush, sanctification, is the prayer said over wine and/or grape juice through which Jews proclaim the uniqueness of Shabbat. Reciting or hearing Kiddush is a Shabbat obligation for all adult Jews. The Friday night Kiddush contains verses from Genesis describing the Sabbath of Creation, followed by the blessing over wine, and closes with a blessing affirming the sanctification of Shabbat. The blessing is recited while holding the kiddush cup in the right hand.

Friday Night

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי, וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צָבָאָם: וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ, כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

סִבְרִי מֶרֶנָּן וְרַבְּנָן וְרַבּוֹתֵינוּ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ, וְשָׁבַת קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ וּזְכָרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרָאשִׁית, כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קִדְּשׁ, זִכָּר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, כִּי בָנוּ בְּחֶרֶת וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מְכַל הָעַמִּים, וְשָׁבַת קִדְּשְׁךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָתָנוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מִקְדֵּשׁ הַשָּׁבֶת.

Va'yehee erev va'yehee vo'ker yom ha'shees'hee, va'y'chooloo ha'shah'ma'yim v'ha'ah'retz v'chol tz'vah'ahm.

Va'y'chahl Eh'lo'him ba'yom ha'sh'vée'ee m'lach'to ah'sher ah'sah, va'yish'boht ba'yom ha'sh'vée'ee mee'kol m'lach'toh ah'sher ah'sah. Va'y'vah'rech Eh'lo'him et yom ha'sh'vée'eeh va'y'kah'daysh oh'toh, kee vo shah'vaht mee'kol m'lach'toh ah'sher bah'rah Eh'lo'him la'ah'soht.

Sah'v'ree mah'rah'nahn v'rah'bah'nahn v'rah'boh'tai: Ba'ruch Ah'tah Ah'doh'nai Eh'lo'hay'noo Melech ha'oh'lahm bo'ray p'ree ha'gah'fen.

Ba'ruch Ah'tah Ah'doh'nai Eh'lo'hay'nu Melech ha'olam ah'sher kidishanu b'mitz'vo'tahv v'rahtzah va'noo v'Shabbat kawd'sho bah'hah'vah oo'vrah'tzohn hin'chee'lah'noo zee'kah'rohn l'mah'ah'say v'ray'sheet, kee hoo yom t'chee'lah l'mik'rah'ay ko'desh zay'cher leet'zee'ah Mitz'ra'yeem, kee vah'noo vah'char'tah v'oh'tah'noo kee'dahsh'tah mee'kol ha'ah'meem, v'shabbat kawd'sh'chah bah'ha'vah oo'vrah'tzohn hin'chal'tah'noo. Ba'ruch Ah'tah Ah'doh'nai m'kah'daysh ha'Shabbat.

It was evening and it was morning, the sixth day. The heavens and the earth were finished, with all their complement. On the seventh day, G-d had completed His work which He had undertaken, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had been doing. Then G-d blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all His creative work, which G-d had brought into being to fulfill its purpose.

Blessed are You L-rd, our G-d, Ruler of the world, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are You L-rd, our G-d, Ruler of the world, who made us holy with His commandments and favored us, and gave us His holy Shabbat, in love and favor, to be our heritage, as a reminder of the Creation. It is the foremost day of the holy festivals marking the exodus from Egypt. For out of all nations You chose us and made us holy, and You gave us Your holy Shabbat, in love and favor, as our heritage.

Blessed are You, L-rd, Who sanctifies the Shabbat.

The person reciting the Kiddush then drinks from the wine and distributes it so that everyone present can actively participate in the mitzvah. The actual obligation, however, is fulfilled by everyone simply hearing the Kiddush recited.

There are various customs regarding standing or sitting for the recitation of the Kiddush. Some people stand throughout the entire Kiddush, while others stand only for the first paragraph and sit when saying the blessing over the wine and the blessing sanctifying Shabbat.



The Daytime Kiddush

As with the evening meal, the meal after the morning prayers on Saturday begins with Kiddush, the blessing over the wine that sanctifies the day. The daytime Kiddush is of rabbinic origin and is therefore of lesser status than the Torah ordained Kiddush recited on Friday night. Below is the long version of the daytime Kiddush; however, not all communities recite all of the introductory paragraphs:

Shabbat Day Kiddush*

אִם תִּשְׁיב מִשְׁבֶּת רַגְלְךָ, עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצְךָ בְּיוֹם קֹדֶשׁ, וְקִרְאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֲנֵג, לְקֹדֶשׁ ה' מְכַבֵּד, וְכִבְדְּתוּ מַעֲשׂוֹת
דְּרָכֶיךָ מִמִּצּוֹא חֲפָצְךָ וְדִבֵּר דְּבַר. אִזּוּ תִתְעַנֵּג עַל ה', וְהִרְפַּבְתִּיד עַל בְּמַתִּי אֶרֶץ, וְהֵאכְלִיתִיד נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב
אֲבִיךָ, כִּי פִי ה' דִּבֵּר.

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם: בְּנֵי וּבִין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹת הִיא
לְעוֹלָם, כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיְנַפֵּשׁ.

זְכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁ: שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעֲשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלָאכָתְךָ: וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת לַה' אֶל־לִקְיָד לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה
כָּל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי,

עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ ה' אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ:

סְבִרֵי מְכֻנָּה וְרַבִּינוּ בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

*Eem tah'shiv mee'Shabbat rahg'leh'chah, ah'soht chah'fah'tzeh'chah b'yom kawd'shee, v'kah'rah'tah la'shabbat
oh'neg likdohsh Ah'doh'nai m'choo'bahd, v'chee'bah'd'toh may'ah'soht d'rah'cheh'chah mim'tzoh chef'tz'chah
v'dah'bayr dah'vahr. Ahz ti'ah'nahg ahl Ah'doh'nai v'hir'kahv'tee'chah ahl bah'mah'tay ah'retz,
v'hah'ah'chahl'tee'chah nah'chah'laht Yaakov ah'vee'chah, kee pee Ah'doh'nai dee'bayr.*

*V'shah'm'roo v'nay Yisrael et ha'Shabbat, la'ah'soht et ha'Shabbat l'doh'roh'tahm b'reet oh'lahm. Bay'nee oo'vayn
b'nay Yisrael oht hee l'oh'lahm, kee shay'shet yah'meem ah'sah Ah'doh'nai et ha'shah'mah'yeeem v'et ha'ah'retz,
oo'vayom ha'sh'vee'ee shavat va'yee'nah'fahsh.*

*Za'chor et yom ha'Shabbat l'kahd'sho. Shay'shet ya'meem tah'ah'vohd v'ah'see'tah kol m'lahch'teh'chah. V'yom
ha'sh'vee'ee Shabbat l'Ah'doh'nai Eh'loh'beh'chah, lo tah'ah'seh chol m'lah'chah ahtah oo'vin'chah oo'vee'teh'chah
ahv'd'chah va'ah'mah't'chah oov'hem'teh'chah v'gayr'chah ah'sher bish'ah'reh'chah. Kee shay'shet yah'meem ah'sah
Ah'doh'nai et ha'shah'mah'yeeem v'et hah'ah'retz et ha'yahm v'et kol ah'sher bahm va'yah'nach ba'yom ha'sh'vee'ee.*

Ahl kayn bay'rach Ah'doh'nai et yom ha'Shabbat va'y'kah'd'shay'hoo.

*Sav'ree mah'rah'nahn v'rah'bah'nahn v'rah'bo'tai: Baruch Ahtah Ah'doh'nai, Eh'lo'hay'noo Melech ha'oh'lahm bo'ray
p'ree ha'gah'fen.*

If you restrain your feet because of Shabbat and refrain from accomplishing your own needs on My holy day, and you proclaim Shabbat “a delight,” G-d’s holy day, honored day, and you honor it by not doing your own wants, not seeking your needs or discussing the forbidden. Then you shall be granted pleasure with G-d, and I shall mount you astride the heights of the world and provide you the heritage of your forefather Jacob, for the mouth of G-d has spoken.

And the Children of Israel will observe Shabbat, to make Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the Children of Israel it will be an eternal sign, that in six days G-d made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for the L-rd your G-d. On it, you shall do no work, you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, and the convert who lives in your gate. For in six days G-d made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day.

Therefore, G-d blessed the seventh day and He sanctified it.

Blessed are You L-rd, our G-d, Ruler of the world, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

*There are varying customs as to which paragraph begins the Daytime Kiddush. Please consult your local rabbi as where best to begin.

What's So Special About Wine?

Kiddush is one of the primary components of the commandment to “remember the Sabbath Day” (*Za'chor et Yom Ha'Shabbat*), which is the umbrella commandment for all of the positive mitzvot of Shabbat (lighting the candles, eating three meals, etc.). Kiddush is recited over a glass or cup of wine,* for the Talmud (Pesachim 106a) states: “Remember the Sabbath day and sanctify it, ‘remembering’ is over wine.”

The “fruit of the vine,” as wine is poetically called, is a rare synthesis of nature and Judaism’s philosophy of free will. Everything in a person’s life can be used for good or for bad. For instance, wealthy people can hoard their wealth or can use their wealth to help the people around them. This is exactly the reason that wine is used for Kiddush. We take something that can easily lead one away from G-dliness and, instead, elevate it to bless and sanctify G-d's name. Taken in moderate amounts, wine leads to pleasant happiness. When drunk in excess, however, it can lead to anger, the total loss of inhibition, depression, etc.

Shabbat, the Jewish holidays and celebrations (which are all sanctified by drinking wine), are days on which Jews choose to make themselves holy by setting their lives apart from their weekday existence. Nothing symbolizes the transformation from the mundane to the holy as much as wine, which can be used for debauchery or for spiritual elevation.

From a less philosophical perspective, the mitzvot that fall into the category of *Za'chor et yom Ha'Shabbat* (Remember the Sabbath Day) are all meant to assist a person in truly enjoying Shabbat. Psalms 104:15 notes that “Wine gladdens a person’s heart” and Talmud Pesachim 109a states that “there is no joy unless there is meat...there is no joy unless there is wine.”



*Wine is the ideal. However, if one does not like wine or may not have wine, grape juice may be used. For the Daytime Kiddush, one may also use other beverages such as whiskey.

Talmud *Pesachim* 106a: Remember the Sabbath day and sanctify it, “remembering” is over wine.

ת"ר זכור את-יום השבת לקדשו זוכרהו על היין.

Psalms 104:15: Wine gladdens a person’s heart.

ויין ישמח לבב-אנוש.

Talmud *Pesachim* 109a: It was taught: R' Yehuda b. Beteira says. “While the Temple is standing, there is no joy unless there is meat...Now that the Temple is not standing, there is no joy unless there is wine, as it says (Psalms 104) ‘And wine will rejoice the heart of man.’”

רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר: בזמן שביית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא בבשר...ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים אין שמחה אלא ביין שנאמר “ויין ישמח לבב-אנוש.”

Washing Of The Hands

N'tee'laht Ya'da'yim--The Ritual Hand Washing:

After Kiddush, the celebrants at the meal wash their hands. This is not meant to be a hygienic washing of one's hands with soap and water, but rather a ritual washing -- a sanctification, if you will. A cup is filled with water which is poured twice over the right hand, then twice over the left hand. (Some have the custom of pouring 3 times over each hand.) The entire hand up to the wrist, with all jewelry removed, should be rinsed and a blessing recited as the hands are dried. There should be no talking between the washing of hands and eating the bread because one washes in order to eat bread, and there should be no interruption between these related actions.

HAND WASHING HOW TO:



Hold cup in right hand and fill with water.



Transfer cup to left hand and pour water over right hand up to the wrist, front and back.



Refill cup, holding in right hand, and pour over left hand, front and back.



Recite the blessing while drying the hands.

ברוך אתה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם.
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ
עַל נְטִילַת יָדִים.

*Bāruch Ah'tah Ah'doh'nai Eh'lo'hay'nu
Melech ha'o'lam ah'sher kidishanu
b'mitz'vo'tav v'tzee'vanu al n'tee'laht
ya'da'yim.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us in His commandments and commanded us to wash our hands.

Raising Up The Hands

ברוך אתה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדִים.

*Bāruch Ah'tah Ah'doh'nai Eh'lo'hay'nu Melech ha'o'lam ah'sher kidishanu b'mitz'vo'tav v'tzee'vanu
al n'tee'laht ya'da'yim.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us in His commandments and commanded us to “wash” our hands.

Important Hebrew Words

Lifting Up (*n'tee'laht*) = נְטִילַת Washing (*r'chee'tzat*) = רְחִיצַת

Notice that the word used for washing in the blessing is *n'tee'laht*. Technically the Hebrew word “to wash” is *lir'chozt* (which in the grammar of the blessing would be *r'chee'tzat*). One should note that the unusual words used for “washing hands” are *al n'tee'laht ya'da'yim*, literally meaning “the lifting up of hands.” The washing of *n'tee'laht ya'da'yim* is all about holiness. When performing this ceremonial washing, one “lifts” one’s hands to a higher level and consecrates them for nobler deeds in fulfillment of G-d’s commandments. Indeed, this washing of the hands is performed in the same way that the priests of old washed their hands in the Holy Temple.

"Breaking Bread"

Making HA'MO'TZEE:

Two complete loaves of bread, called challah, are used for *ha'mo'tzee*, the blessing over the bread. The challah should be covered from before Kiddush until everyone is ready for the blessing over the challah following the ritual hand washing. The person making the blessing over the challah makes a gentle knife mark on the challah that will be eaten first and then raises both challot and recites the blessing. The marked challah is then cut, dipped in salt (just a pinch) and distributed to everyone at the table.

HA'MO'TZEE HOW TO:



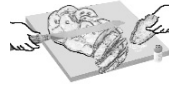
Two complete challot are covered until everyone is ready for the Ha'mo'tzee blessing.



The challah that will be served first is marked (lightly) with a knife.



Both challot are raised and the blessing is recited.



The challah is cut and dipped in salt.



Everyone at the table is served a piece of the challah that was used for the blessing.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם
המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

*B'ruch Ahtah Ah'doh'nai
Eh'lo'hay'nu Melech ha'o'lam
ha'mo'tzee lechem min ha'aretz.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

The Meaning Of Challah

Bread holds special significance in Judaism. Bread represents the great potential that G-d put in the world. Bread begins as a seed, grows to wheat (which is still inedible), is winnowed and ground before it is transformed into flour, which is baked into bread. All this from a small kernel of wheat!

When eating bread, the hands must be washed in the ritual manner, the blessing of *ha'mo'tzee* recited, and, afterwards, the full Grace After Meals is to be recited. On Shabbat, however, there is much ceremony and symbolism that is tied to the challah:

Why two challot? The blessing over bread at each Shabbat meal, in contrast to during the week, is said with two complete loaves as a reminder that in the wilderness G-d provided manna every day except on Shabbat. Throughout the week, the Israelites collected only enough manna for a single day, but on Fridays they collected a double portion to last through Shabbat. The requirement to have two complete loaves is known as *lechem mishne*.

Why is the challah braided? While the traditional image of challah is the braided loaf, this is not a requirement. As long as the two loaves of bread are whole (they could even be two uncut rolls or two pieces of matzah), then the mitzvah of *lechem mishne* is fulfilled. The braiding of the challah, however, has taken on symbolic significance.

There are several ways one may braid the challah--three strands, four strands, and six strands are the most common. At weddings and bar/bat mitzvahs one may even see challot of twelve or more strands.

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Exodus 16:16-27

Every man shall gather [the manna] according to his needs; an omer per head...according to the number of people that are in his tent...And Moses said unto them: "Let no man leave it over till the morning." They did not listen to Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and rotted...And it came to pass that on the sixth day...And [Moses] said to the [leaders]: "This is what G-d said: Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Shabbat to G-d. Bake that which you will bake, and cook that which you will cook; and all that remains, keep over until the morning." And they kept it till the morning, as Moses bade; and it did not rot, nor were there any worms in it. Moses said: "Eat that today; for today is Shabbat to G-d; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you will gather it; but on the seventh day is the Shabbat, in it there shall be none." And it came to pass on the seventh day, that there went out some of the people to gather, and they found none.

The three-strand braid is symbolic of the commandments to observe Shabbat. The first braid represents the word *Zachor*/ Remember. The second braid represents the word *Shamor*/ Guard. The third braid is for *B'Dibbur Echad*/With One Utterance, indicating that the commandments of "Remember" and "Guard" were said by G-d simultaneously.



Making the *ha'motzee* blessing on two loaves of six-strand challah also has inherent symbolism. Each strand is representative of six of the tribes of Israel. When the two loaves are held together, all twelve tribes are represented at the Shabbat table--a beautiful symbol of the unity of the Jewish people.

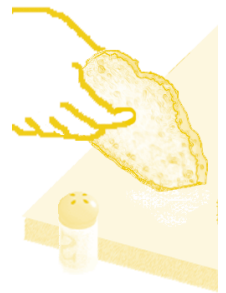


Why is the challah covered during Kiddush? In the standard order of blessings over food, because of its importance, one would normally recite the blessing over bread prior to any other blessing. On Shabbat, however, we recite the blessing over the wine first in order to begin the sanctification of the day with wine. The bread is covered so that it should not “feel shamed” at having lost its natural place of honor. By covering the bread, it is as if it is not actually there.

(Code of Jewish Laws: Orach Chaim 271:9, *Mishna Berura* quoting the Tur in name of Jerusalem Talmud) The purpose, of course, is not to protect the “feelings” of an inanimate object--which does not have feelings--but to teach us a lesson about respecting our fellow human beings and going out of our way not to shame them.

A second interpretation of why the challah is covered reflects back to the manna in the wilderness. When the manna fell in the wilderness, it was covered by a layer of dew that acted as protection. Since the manna was covered, the challah is covered.

What is the meaning of the salt? The challah is dipped into salt to commemorate the sacrifices that were always salted and offered up on the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. There are two meanings behind the commemoration of the salt. As one sits at the Shabbat table, ready and waiting to enjoy the sumptuous meal that will soon appear, one must remember with sadness that the Temple is no longer standing--the salt represents that sadness. On the other hand, the salt is also meant to remind us that our table is like an altar, and with every offering brought to Temple, a salt offering was also prepared (Leviticus 2:13) to commemorate the eternal covenant with G-d, which, like salt, never spoils.



Why is this bread called challah? While today the term challah refers to the bread of the Shabbat table, the actual word “challah” refers to the tithe of the bread that was given to the ancient priests (Numbers 15:20). While the Temple no longer stands, and the mitzvah of tithing the dough cannot be fulfilled as commanded in the Torah, the sages decreed that the act of separating should continue so that the understanding of the mitzvah not be lost. Today, therefore, if one is baking a large amount of dough (generally 5 lbs or 15 or more cups of flour), one is obligated to “take challah,” to remove a portion of the dough, before baking the bread. This portion is generally burned and disposed of so that no one will eat it.

Leviticus 2:13: And you will season every meal-offering with salt; neither shall you suffer the salt of the covenant of your G-d to be lacking from your meal-offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

וְכָל-קֶרֶבֶן מִנְחָתְךָ בַּמֶּלֶח תִּמְלֹחַ וְלֹא תִשָּׁבֵית מֶלֶח בְּרִית אֲ-לֹהֶיךָ מֵעַל מִנְחָתְךָ עַל כָּל-קֶרֶבֶןךָ תִּקְרִיב מֶלֶח:

Numbers 15:20-21: Of the first of your dough you shall set apart a portion for a gift; as that which is set apart on the threshing-floor, so shall you set it apart. From the first of your dough you shall give to G-d a portion for a gift throughout your generations.

רֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסְתֵכֶם חֲלָה תָרִימוּ תְרוּמָה, בְּתְרוּמַת גֶּחָן כֵּן תָרִימוּ אֹתָהּ: מִרֵּאשִׁית עֲרֹסְתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ לַה' תְרוּמָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

The Shabbat Table

by Varda Brantman

My first glimpse of a Shabbat table was in a book of photographs taken of Eastern European immigrants on the Lower East Side at the turn of the century. There was a man sitting alone at a tiny wooden table cramped into the space underneath an overhanging bed. This was the space he had carved out for himself in a room shared with other working men who were separated from their loved ones while they saved to bring them over to America.

The table was bare except for two small loaves of bread. The caption read: "A poor laborer at the end of the week sits at his table and celebrates the Sabbath day."

The photograph affected me powerfully. I sensed in that old photo a certain majesty and definite transcendence in the face of the man where he had set up a porthole to Eternity.

It took many years after I saw that old photo for me to actually sit at a Shabbat table. I was visiting Jerusalem with my mother. A friend from the Old Country who was newly observant invited me to spend Friday night in the Jewish Quarter.

It was a card table with the addition of a coffee table to fit the extra guests. I was squeezed into a corner with my mother at my side. I can't remember what we discussed or what we ate. Only the Shabbat melodies stand out in my memory as hauntingly beautiful. And the weariness I carried with me to that table had vanished by the time I made my way back through the Old City gate and the long trek to my hotel at the bottom of King George. It was after 3 A.M. by the time I got to bed, but I was kept awake by my mind trying to process my experience.

I had finally made my way to a real Shabbat table, and there was no turning back. Less than one year later, I was Shabbat observant, married, and savoring the privilege of sitting at my own Shabbat table with my husband and guests.

What happens at the Shabbat table that can infuse even old planks of wood with a quality of the sacred? After we sit down at the Shabbat table, we begin by welcoming the angels who have come to join us. Is there nothing in all the celestial worlds to rival the beauty of Shabbat? Apparently not.

We, ourselves become elevated beings with the Divine mission to proclaim the purpose of earthly life and acknowledge the Creator of the Universe. We do this by saying Kiddush which blesses the Seventh Day and proclaims its purpose in Creation in the blessing we say over a raised cup of wine.

We pour water over our hands and sanctify them for their service in the Sabbath meal. This eating is like no other eating. We are honoring G-d, thanking and praising Him with each bite. The challah, fish, cucumber salad, chicken soup, and all the other foods laid out before us. And if, for some reason, there is only bread or only beans, as in a famous Baal Shem Tov story, then even these simple foods can taste like the greatest delicacies when a person is infused with the Shabbat spirit.

The Shabbat table heightens all the senses. As we look around the table, it is possible to see the souls within the faces. The clanking of the silverware against the plates sounds like celestial bells.

The Shabbat table is a raft boat bringing us safely through the stormy waters. It anchors us all to a point of interface with G-d, with the Creator of the World and all worlds. Here we remember our true identities as beloved children sitting at our Father's table. Children, even the ones of us with white in our beards and faces that tell of journeys lasting thousands of years.

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The National Jewish Outreach Program was established in 1987, by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald and has become one of the world's largest and most successful Jewish outreach organizations. NJOP offers free programs at thousands of locations across North America and in 37 countries worldwide. Through programs such as SHABBAT ACROSS AMERICA/CANADA and READ HEBREW AMERICA/CANADA, NJOP has successfully reached over one million North American Jews and engaged them in Jewish life.

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Written and designed by Sarah Rochel Hewitt

Dedicated in honor of our special friend Andy Siegel, who has been an extraordinarily devoted and generous supporter of our work.

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald and Rabbi Yitzchak Rosenbaum