

Spirituality at Your Fingertips

Welcoming Shabbat:

A Guide To Lighting Shabbat Candles



NJOP
1345 Avenue of the Americas, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10105-0014
646-871-4444 800-44-HEBRE(W) programming@njop.org www.njop.org

Before We Begin--The Meaning of Shabbat

Shabbat -- G-d's Day of Rest

What Is Shabbat

Shabbat, the Hebrew word for the Sabbath, is the seventh day of the week. It is the day on which the Torah states that G-d rested from His work of creation. The name "Shabbat" derives from the Hebrew word *lishbot*, which means to rest (see Genesis 2:1-3, below). Since the seventh day was the day that G-d rested from working, and on which the Jewish people were commanded to rest from working, it is known as "the day of rest."

It is not just that G-d finished his work and rested on the seventh day; the Torah explains that **G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it**. The seventh day therefore became G-d's special day.

Why Shabbat Is Holy To The Jews

G-d brought the Jewish people out of Egypt and had Moses lead them to Mount Sinai, where He gave them the Torah. The giving of the Torah at Sinai is compared by the sages to a wedding, with G-d as the groom and the Jewish people as the bride. Like a typical groom, G-d wished to give the bride a gift, and the gift He gave them was Shabbat (see Talmud *Shabbat* 10b, below).

The Mitzvah Of Shabbat

The observance of Shabbat is the fourth of the Ten Commandments. The commandment states both "Remember, *Zachor*, the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8) and "Guard, *Shamor*, the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:12). In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, Jews are instructed that Shabbat be made holy and that no *melacha*, creative work, be done on that day. *Zachor*, remember the Sabbath, refers to the positive commandments: making Kiddush (the blessing over the wine), having three meals, lighting the candles, etc. *Shamor*, guard the Sabbath, refers to the negative commandments, the 39 prohibited acts, which make certain that the day remains holy.

Genesis 2:1-3

וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם: וַיְכַל אֱ-לֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּו שַׁבַּת מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָא אֱ-לֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

- (2:1-3) And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their hosts.
(2) And on the seventh day G-d finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.
(3) And G-d blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because on it He rested from all His work which G-d in creating had made.

Important Hebrew Words: To Rest (*Va'yish'boat-Shavat*) = לִשְׁבֹּת (וישבת-שבת)
Creative Work (*M'lachto*) = מְלַאכָה (מלאכתו)
To Sanctify, Make Holy (*Va'ye'ka'daysh*) = לְקַדֵּשׁ (ויקדש)



Talmud Shabbat 10b

אָמַר לּוֹ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמִשְׁהָ: מִתְּנָה טוֹבָה לִּי בְּבֵית גְּנֹזֵי וְשַׁבַּת שְׁמִי, וְאֲנִי מִבְּקִשׁ לִיתְּנָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. לָךְ וְהוֹדִיעֶם.

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said to Moses: I have a special gift in my treasure house and Shabbat is its name, and I wish to give it to Israel. Go and make it known to them.

If Shabbat Is Saturday, Why Does It Begin On Friday Night?

And There Was Evening, And There Was Morning...

When following the gregorian (secular) calendar, it is natural to think of the days of the week as Sunday, Monday, Tuesday...Friday, Saturday, each day beginning at midnight and ending at midnight. In the Jewish calendar, however, the names of the days are given as we count toward Shabbat: Day One, Day Two, Day Three....Day Six, Shabbat, and each day begins and ends at sunset.

In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, the description of each day's creation is noted with the same language: *Va'yehee erev va'yehee voker* -- And there was evening and there was morning. It is therefore understood that according to the order of creation, evening precedes morning. Thus, each day begins at sunset. Shabbat and all Jewish holidays, therefore, begin at sunset, the evening before the day of the holiday marked on a secular calendar.

Since the precise time of sunset is difficult to determine (whether sunset means the beginning of the setting of the sun or once the sun has completely set), Shabbat is observed from the beginning of sunset on Friday through the end of sunset on Saturday -- a time period that works out to just about 25 hours.

Genesis 1:5, 8, 31

וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד... וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי... וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי

And there was evening and there was morning, day one...and there was evening and there was morning, the second day... and there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Greeting Shabbat: Candle Lighting

Lighting The Way To Peace

The very last act performed before bringing Shabbat into the home is the lighting of the Shabbat candles. While this mitzvah is considered one of the three primary mitzvot of a Jewish woman, Shabbat candles must be lit in every home, by either a man or a woman.

Shabbat candles have long been the symbol of Shabbat. Why are they so important, especially if the mitzvah of lighting candles is done even before Shabbat actually begins? The candles are lit just before Shabbat because one may not kindle a flame on Shabbat, since kindling is considered "creative work." The actual candles, however, must burn well into Shabbat evening, since the light of the Shabbat candles is perceived as a critical part of creating *oneg Shabbat* -- an enjoyable Shabbat atmosphere.

One is supposed to enjoy Shabbat, and stumbling about in a dark house is hardly a way to experience enjoyment. Today, when every house is filled with electric light, it may be difficult to grasp the importance of candles. It should be recalled, however, that electric light came into use only at the beginning of the last century. The burning Shabbat candles, often placed on or near the dining room table, ensure *Shalom Bayit*, peace in the home, for Shabbat evening. And even today, in rooms filled with electric light, there is a special soothing feeling when watching the flickering flames of the candles cast playful shadows as they add a glow of sanctity to the Shabbat setting.

Talmud Shabbat 25b and Rashi: Rabbi Nachman the son of Rabba said in the name of Rav: Lighting candles for Shabbat is obligatory. **RASHI:** This is to honor Shabbat, for there is no significant meal [served] except in a place of light.

אמר רב נחמן בר רבא אמר רב: הַדְּלָקָת נֵר בְּשַׁבַּת חֻבָּה. רש"י: כְּבוֹד שַׁבַּת הוּא, שְׂאִין סְעוּדָה תְּשׁוּבָה אֵלָּא בְּמָקוֹם אוֹר.

Rambam Hilchot Shabbat 5:1 Even if one has nothing to eat, he must go from door to door to borrow money and purchase oil to light the candle(s), for this is included under the obligation to enjoy Shabbat.

אֶפְיָלוּ אֵין לוֹ מָה יֵאָכֵל, שׂוֹאֵל עַל הַפְּתָחוֹת וְלוֹקֵחַ שְׂמֹן וּמְדַלֵּק אֶת הַנֵּר, שֶׁזֶּה בְּכָלֵל עוֹנֵג שַׁבַּת.

How To Light Candles For Shabbat

When Are The Candles Lit?

Shabbat candles are generally lit 18 minutes before sunset to ensure that they are not lit on Shabbat. For lighting times in major cities, please visit www.njop.org. For lighting times in other locations, please call NJOP at 646-871-0113.

CANDLE LIGHTING HOW TO:



Two candles are lit.



Both hands are waved towards the face, symbolically drawing in the light of the candles and the sanctity of Shabbat.



The eyes are then covered and the blessing is recited:

ברוך אתה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.

Báruch ah'tah Ah'dónai, Eh'ló'hay'nu melech há'ólam, ah'sher kidishanu b'mitzvótav v'tzeévanu l'habd'leek nayr shel Shabbat.

Blessed are you L-rd, our G-d, Ruler of the world, Who sanctified us through His commandments and commanded us, to kindle the lights of the Sabbath.

You can also add your own prayer -- ask G-d for whatever you wish. Now, uncover your eyes, enjoy the soft light of the candles, and feel the holiness of the Shabbat descend upon you and your household.

An Additional Prayer

After the candles are lit and the blessing is recited, it is customary to say a special prayer asking G-d to watch over the family. In addition, many take a few moments of personal time to reflect on the past week, and on the week to come, and to have a "private conversation" with G-d.

יְהִי רְצוֹן לְפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, שֶׁתְּחַוֶּנּוּ אוֹתִי [וְאֵת-אִשְׁתִּי
וְאֵת-בְּנָי] וְאֵת כָּל קְרוּבֵי וְתַשְׁלִים בְּתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁכַּן שְׁכִינְתְּךָ בֵּינֵינוּ. וְזַכְּנֵנו
לְגַדְל בָּנִים וּבָנֵי בָנִים חֲכָמִים וּמְאִירִים אֶת הָעוֹלָם בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמַעֲשֵׂים
טוֹבִים. אֲנָא שְׁמַע אֶת תְּחִנָּתִי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת בְּזִכּוֹת שָׂרָה וְרֵבֶקָה וְרַחֵל וְלֵאָה
אֲמוֹתֵינוּ. וְהָאֵר נֵרֵנוּ שְׁלֵא יִכָּבֵה לְעוֹלָם וְעַד וְהָאֵר פְּנֶיךָ וְנוֹשְׁעָה. אָמֵן.

Y'hee ratzon l'fa'neh'chah, Ah'dónai Eh'ló'hai, vay'lo'hai ah'vótai, sheh't'cho'nayn ótee [v'et eeshee, v'et ba'nai] v'et kol krovai, v'tash'leem batay'noo v'tahsh'kayn sh'chee'nah't'chah bay'nay'noo, V'zah'kay'nee l'gah'dayl bah'neem oov'nay vah'neem chah'chah'meem oom'eer'eem et há'ólam ba'Tórah, oov'ma'ah'seem to'veem. Ah'nah sh'mah et t'chee'nah'tee bah'ayt házot, biz'choot Sarah, v'Rivkah, v'Rachel, v'Leah eemótay'noo. V'ha'ayr nay'ray'noo sheh'lo yich'beh l'ólam va'ed, v'ha'ayr pah'neh'chah v'neevah'shay'ah. Amen.

May it be Your will, L-rd my G-d and G-d of my ancestors, to be gracious to me [and to my spouse, to my children] and to all my family. Make our household complete, with Your Divine Presence dwelling among us. Make me worthy to raise children and grandchildren who are wise and brighten the world with Torah and goodness. Please hear our prayers for the sake of our matriarchs, Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel and Leah, and ensure that the brightness of our soul will never be muted. Show us the radiance of Your visage and we will be saved. Amen.

Women and Candle Lighting: A Special Mitzvah, A Special Moment

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On Friday night, as they light the Shabbat candles, Jewish mothers are given the keys to unlock storehouses of goodness for their children. Upon their return from synagogue, Jewish parents bless their children, beseeching G-d to make them G-d-fearing and righteous. We pray to G-d that our daughters emulate the character traits of the Matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah -- their kindness, their modesty, their compassion and their selflessness that made them the role models for future generations of young women.

As the foundational pillars of our nation, the Matriarchs created the spiritual base for all future generations. Our commentators question the grammatical structure of the verse *הַחָכְמָה בְּנִתּוֹת בְּיָתֶהּ*, "The wisdom of women built her home" (Proverbs 14:1). Why does the verse begin using the plural form, women, and then use the singular form, her home?

To successfully create the spiritual and emotional environment necessary to sustain a Jewish home, a woman requires more than her merit alone. According to tradition, she brings with her the character traits, the wisdom and the faith that are the legacy of her mother, grandmother and all the generations since the Matriarchs. It is these women who help build her home and provide her with the necessary tools to pass on these characteristics to her descendants.

Sarah, who helped Abraham promote the concept of one G-d to the world, was a role model for teaching the value of personal modesty to future generations. Rebecca, young as she was, rushed to do *chessed*, acts of lovingkindness, and taught this virtue to young women by example. Self-sacrifice became ingrained in our spiritual fiber when Rachel selflessly allowed Leah to marry Jacob, giving Leah her secret signals to save Leah from humiliation. "There was no person who praised G-d until Leah" (*Midrash*). She recognized that one must be thankful to Hashem for the seemingly commonplace as well as for the miraculous. As the holiness of Shabbat descends upon the Jewish home, we bless our daughters that they live a life of holiness.



Common Questions About Shabbat Candle Lighting:

1) Why two candles?

The two Shabbat candles represent *shamor* (guarding) and *zachor* (remembering), the two commandments of the Shabbat (to guard the Sabbath and to remember the Sabbath). In many households, it is common for extra candles to be added for each child that is born.

2) Why are the eyes covered while the blessing is recited?

The sages taught that a blessing should always precede the action, meaning that the blessing for a mitzvah is recited before performing the mitzvah. For instance, one says a blessing over an apple and only then eats the apple; one says the blessing over the Chanukah candles and only then lights the candles. On Shabbat, however, the laws of Shabbat prohibit the creation of a flame. Since Shabbat is accepted as soon as the blessing is recited, one must light the candles (do the action) before making the blessing. By covering the eyes before reciting the blessing, one is unable to benefit from the light of the candles until after the blessing is said. When the person making the blessing uncovers her/his eyes, it is as if she/he is seeing the light of the Shabbat candles for the very first time. In this way, the blessing has been recited before the action of the mitzvah is performed.

Please note that, according to Jewish law, it is better not to light the Shabbat candles, than to light them after Shabbat has already begun.

*The candles are lit--it is time to say
"Shabbat Shalom (a peaceful Shabbat)."*

About NJOP

NJOP 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 41 countries worldwide. Through programs such as SHABBAT ACROSS AMERICA/CANADA and READ HEBREW AMERICA/CANADA, NJOP has successfully reached hundreds of thousands of North American Jews and engaged them in Jewish life.

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Written and designed by Sarah Rochel Hewitt

*Dedicated in honor of Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald,
a true tzaddik, who continues to help so many Jews find their Jewish heritage.
May our Rav continue to do Hashem's work for many years to come.*

by Andrew R. Siegel