

# Spirituality at Your Fingertips

## Enjoying Shabbat:

### A Guide To The Shabbat Meals



**NJOP**

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# Friday Night Dinner

With the arrival of Shabbat on Friday night, tranquility descends. Before the candles are lit, cooking and preparing must be concluded. Friday night services begin in the synagogue and are followed, after returning home, by the singing of *Shalom Alechem* and *Aishet Chayil*. As the household gathers around the table, family members are enveloped by tradition, as *kiddush* (blessing over the wine) and *ha'mo'tzee* (blessing over the bread) are recited. Then comes the Shabbat meal.

The actual fare of Shabbat dinner varies depending on custom and personal taste. Many people prefer to eat their favorite foods, while others elect to serve the traditional Shabbat cuisine. A typical, traditional Shabbat menu includes:

## *Fish*

Because fish is a reminder of both the creation of life and of the Messianic Age (when it is said that the righteous will feast upon the Leviathan, a giant fish), it has almost always held a special place at the Shabbat table. In the Talmud (*Shabbat* 118b), fish is specifically listed as a way in which one can show delight in Shabbat. Generally served as an appetizer, fish is never eaten together with meat, and is, in fact, served on separate plates with separate “fish forks,” in light of a Talmudic warning that eating fish and meat together can lead to illness (*Pesachim* 76b). While any kosher fish may be served (to be kosher, a fish must have both fins and scales), a traditional Ashkenazi dish is gefilte fish. This dish of filleted chopped fish originated in Europe where it served not only as a good way to stretch a limited budget, but also avoided the prohibition of *borer*, separating the bad from the good (i.e. removing fish bones) on Shabbat. In many Middle Eastern communities, stuffed fish is part of the traditional meal.

## *Chicken Soup*

While there is no known source for serving chicken soup on Shabbat, it is a staple dish in many traditional homes.

## *Chicken/Meat*

It is a special mitzvah to experience “*oneg Shabbat*,” the enjoyment of Shabbat. The sages often associate the feeling of *oneg* (enjoyment) with the eating of meat (“There is no joy except with meat and wine” - Talmud *Pesachim* 109a). Since eating meat was often financially prohibitive, chicken became the traditional main course on Shabbat.

## *Rice/Kugel*

In Sephardi homes, it is customary to have a dish that is made with rice, a staple in the diet of many Middle Eastern countries. In Ashkenazi homes, one is often served kugels on Shabbat. There are two main types of kugel, *lokshen* (noodle) and potato. Kugel is usually translated as “pudding” (souffle) and is a baked or fried dish that varies greatly in its ingredients, depending on the taste of the chef/family. The serving of kugel is often related to the manna from heaven that had a layer of dew below the manna and a layer on top. Kugel often has a crust below and on top.



# Shabbat Day Lunch

The actual fare of Shabbat Lunch varies depending on custom and personal taste. Many people, again, simply serve their favorite foods, while others stick to traditional Shabbat cuisine. In addition to a fish course, a typical, traditional Shabbat menu features *cholent/chamin*.

## Cholent/Chamin

While everyone's food choices vary, there is a strong custom to serve something hot at the day meal, usually a stew known to Ashkenazim as *cholent* (a combination of two old French words for hot and slow) or *chamin* (meaning hot) to Sephardim. Eating *cholent* or *chamin* demonstrates belief in the Oral Tradition of the Mishna and the Talmud. The Oral Law explains that a Jew is permitted to have a fire burning in the house on Shabbat, as long as it is not lit or enhanced on Shabbat. The Karaites, a 9th century splinter group that rejected the oral law and accepted only a literal interpretation of the written Torah, maintained that the prohibition of fire on Shabbat was total, i.e. that "Thou shalt not burn fire in all your houses" (Exodus 35:3) excluded allowing even a pre-lit fire to burn from before Shabbat. Consequently, Kairites sat in the dark, ate cold food, and froze in the winter.

Hot food on Friday night would not indicate commitment to rabbinic law as it could have remained warm from before Shabbat without an actual fire. Having hot food at Shabbat lunch means that a fire was burning the entire time\*, thus assuring that this is not the home of a Karaite. What unites Ashkenazi *cholent* and Sephardi *chamin* is not the ingredients, but the purpose, which is to enjoy the Sabbath and to confirm belief in the Oral Tradition.

\*Please note that there are many details involved in properly preparing food on Shabbat. The *cholent/chamin* must be set on a covered flame (or in a crockpot) before Shabbat begins. The laws are far too detailed for this module. We recommend speaking to your local rabbi.



## The Third Meal Seudah Shlishit/Shalosh Seudot

Both *Seudah Shlishit* and *Shalosh Seudot* are Hebrew names for the third meal of Shabbat. On Shabbat one should eat three meals: Friday night dinner, Shabbat lunch, and *Seudah Shlishit*. In Exodus 16:25, Moses instructs the Jewish people: "Eat [the manna] today, for today is Shabbat to God, today you will not find it in the field." The repetition of the word "today" three times is the source for the third Shabbat meal. (This meal is often referred to in Yiddish as *Shalehshudis*.)

The *Seudah Shlishit* meal should be started before sunset on Saturday afternoon. There is no kiddush recited at *Seudah Shlishit*, although some are careful to drink wine at this meal as well. There are differing opinions whether two complete loaves of bread are required for this meal. The actual fare of *Seudah Shlishit* varies depending on custom and personal taste. Many people serve simple foods like tuna and egg salad.

It is customary to extend the third Shabbat meal into Saturday night as a means of prolonging the holiness of Shabbat. Many synagogues offer *Seudah Shlishit* for its congregants between *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv* (the afternoon and evening services).

# What Makes The Shabbat Table Unique

There are three characteristics that make the Shabbat table different from a regular weeknight dinner table:

## Divrei Torah

While the Shabbat table is a wonderful place for a busy family to “catch up” with what is going on in each other’s lives, it is also a place of *kedushah* (holiness). The sages noted that any meal shared by three or more Jews should contain more than just food; it should also have words of Torah. This is especially true of all the Shabbat meals, when it is customary for *divrei Torah* (words of Torah) to be shared. Most commonly, people discuss the Torah portion that is read that particular week in synagogue. The Shabbat table is an excellent opportunity to educate and engage children. Children should be encouraged to discuss things they may have learned about the Torah portion in school, online, or elsewhere, and important lessons from the Torah portion should be shared with them in a manner they will easily understand.

A weekly *D’var Torah* by NJOP’s Founder and Director, Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald, can be found on [www.njop.org](http://www.njop.org).

### *Mishna Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) 3:3

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׂאֲכָלוּ עַל שֻׁלְחָן אֶחָד וְלֹא אָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה, כְּאִלּוּ אָכְלוּ מִזִּבְחֵי מֵתִים... אֲבָל שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׂאֲכָלוּ עַל שֻׁלְחָן אֶחָד וְאָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה, כְּאִלּוּ אָכְלוּ מִשֻּׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל מְקוּם...

Rabbi Shimon said: If three have eaten at the same table and have not spoken words of Torah there, it is as if they have eaten of offerings to idols... But if three have eaten at the same table and have spoken words of Torah there, it is as if they have eaten from the table of the Omnipresent...

## Hachnassat Orchim

*Hachnassat Orchim* means welcoming guests. Abraham, the first patriarch, set the tone for the Jewish attitude towards hospitality when he ran to greet three strangers on the third and most painful day after his *brit milah* (circumcision). It is thus quite common to find Shabbat tables graced with the presence of friends, family and, indeed, strangers.

One of the best methods for learning more about the Shabbat experience is to be a guest at a traditional Shabbat table. If one is looking for such an experience, a local synagogue is often able to help make these arrangements. What is important to remember is not to feel as if this is an imposition, but to recognize that, indeed, most traditional families feel that it is an honor and privilege to have guests. Actually, the guests are doing the hosts a favor in helping them fulfill the mitzvah of *Hachnassat Orchim*.



# Zemirot--The Music of the Shabbat Table

Another popular way to enhance the Shabbat table is by singing *zemirot*, special songs sung at Shabbat dinner, Shabbat lunch, and the Third Meal. Singing *zemirot* is a custom instituted by the medieval kabbalists, and many of the lyrics of the *zemirot* contain kabbalistic references. Most of them discuss the sanctity of the Sabbath, God's covenant with the Jews, and His role as Supreme Creator. Many are written in rhyme, and are often acrostical. A special type of *zemer* is the *niggun*, a wordless tune generally sung by chassidim (often consisting of a repetition of the syllable "na"). The playing of instruments is prohibited on Shabbat, lest one come to repair the instrument on Shabbat, so all of the *zemirot* are sung *a capella*.

Following is an explanation of the contents and background of some popular *zemirot*. The words to these songs can be found on NJOP's website, [www.njop.org](http://www.njop.org).



## Yah Reebohn

*Yah Reebohn Olam*, a popular *piyut* (poem) written in Aramaic and sung universally on Shabbat evening, describes the wonders of God's creation and concludes with a hope for the redemption of the Children of Israel and the restoration of Jerusalem. It was written by Rabbi Yisrael Najara (Syria, 16th century).



## Yom Zeh Mechubad

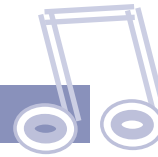
The honored quality of Shabbat is expressed in this *zemer*, by an author known only as Yisrael. A person's six days of physical activity parallel the six days of creation. On Shabbat, when God ceased His activity, we also refrain from physical pursuits and involve ourselves more in prayer, mitzvot, and Torah study.



## Friday Night

## Tzur Mee'shelo

This *zemer*, attributed by some to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (2nd century), parallels the invitation to join the leader in Grace After Meals. It includes a reference to God sustaining humankind, the Land of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. One commentary notes that the *zemer's* theme is based on the *Midrash Bereishit* that relates that when passers-by would visit Abraham, they would extol his kindness after they ate and drank their fill. "Don't thank me," Abraham would say, "extol the virtues of the One Who really sustained you."



## Yom Zeh L'Yisrael

The full version of this song contains an acrostic with the name Isaac Luria Chazak, and is attributed to the *Arizal*, the great 16th century Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria. Shabbat brings spiritual contentment and the mystical *neschama yetayrah*, additional soul, that enters every Jew on Shabbat, to enhance their tranquil spirit.



## Shabbat Lunch

## Yom Shabbaton (Yonah)

The acrostic of the first paragraph of this *zemer* spells "Yehuda," leading to the assumption that the author is Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, a Spanish poet and author of the *Kuzari* (Spain, 1075-1140). The verses of the *zemer* exalt the Children of Israel's acceptance of the commandments, in particular the Sabbath. The chorus makes reference to Noah's dove finding rest on Shabbat, just as we rest on Shabbat. Thus the Children of Israel are compared to a dove.



## Dror Yikra

Dunash ibn Labrat of Morocco, a renowned 10th century grammarian, wrote this *zemer*, beseeching God to exact retribution from the nations of the world who oppress Jews. The song emphasizes that reward is given to those who are exacting in the observance of Shabbat, and also to those who assist others in keeping its laws.

## Seudat Shlishit

## Mizmor L'David

Psalm 23, *Mizmor L'David*, is generally recited three times during the final Shabbat meal. This psalm expresses our love for God, our devoted Shepherd, and our confidence in His benevolent protection.



## Yedid Nefesh

This *zemer*, written by Rabbi Eliezer Azikri (16th century), contains an acrostic in which the first letter of each paragraph spells out the Hebrew name for God. This *zemer* underscores the Jew's intense yearning to attain a spiritual relationship with God.

## The End Of The Meal

### Mayim Acharonim (Literally "Final Waters")

Just as the hands were washed prior to the meal, there is a special washing of the hands after the meal. Originally, this washing was to remove *melach s'domit* (salt from Sodom), which caused blindness if it entered the eye. Although that pungent salt is no longer used, the custom of washing remains as a way of preparing for the spiritual experience of thanking God with the Grace After Meals. Customs for *mayim acharonim* vary. Some people only wash when there are three or more people present, some when there is a *minyan*, and others do it whenever they eat bread. Likewise, how much of the hand or fingers are washed varies by custom. Unlike the washing before the meal, *mayim acharonim* is usually done at the table with a small cup of water and a small bowl into which to spill the water. No blessing is recited. *Mayim acharonim* is generally done after the singing of *Shir Ha'ma'alot* (Psalm 126) and before *Birkat Ha'mazon* (see below). The "dirty" water should either be covered or removed from the table before *Birkat Ha'mazon*.

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ...

And you shall eat and you shall be satiated and you shall bless the Lord your God...

*V'achalta v'savata u'vayrachta et Ah'doh'nai Eh'lo'hecha...*

### Birkat Ha'mazon--Grace After Meals--Bentching

How easy it is, when we are hungry, to remember our "please" and "thank you," and to be grateful when we see food before us. It is much harder to recall that sense of gratitude once the hunger has been satisfied. Grace After Meals, known in Hebrew as *Birkat Ha'mazon* and in Yiddish as *Bentching*, reminds each person of the need to express gratitude *after* the meal as well. *Birkat Ha'mazon* is recited after any meal with bread, for which one would also have washed their hands (*n'teelat yadayim*) and recited the *Ha'mo'tzee* blessing. There are also shorter blessings which are recited after eating snacks without bread.

Due to space considerations, only the Shabbat additions will be discussed. *Birkat Ha'mazon* may be found in any prayer-book or in special mini-books known as *bentchers* or *birchonim*.

### Shir Ha'ma'alot - Psalm 126

On Shabbat and Festivals, Psalm 126, foretelling the restoration of Zion, is sung before *Birkat Ha'mazon*.

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הֵינּוּ כְּחֹלְמִים: אִזּוּ יִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ וּלְשׁוֹנֵינוּ רִנָּה אִזּוּ יֹאמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם  
הַגְּדִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם אֱלֹהֵי הַגְּדִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הֵינּוּ שְׂמֵחִים: שׁוּבָה ה' אֶת שְׁבִיתֵנוּ כְּאֶפְיָקִים בְּנִגְבִּי:  
הַזֹּרֵעִים בְּדִמְעָה בָּרְנָה יִקְצְרוּ: הַלּוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבָכָה נִשְׂא מִשָּׂרָף הַזֹּרֵעַ בָּא יָבֵא בְרִנָּה נִשְׂא אֶלְמֹתָיו:

*Shir ha'ma'alot b'shuv Ah'doh'nai et sheevat Tzion, ha'yeenu k'cholmim. Az y'malay s'chok peenu ool'sho'nay'nu reena. Az yom'ru va'goyim higdeel Ah'doh'nai la'asot eem eyleh. Higdil Ah'doh'nai la'asot ee'manu ha'yeenu s'may'chim. Shoova Ah'doh'nai et sh'veetay'nu ka'afeekim ba'negev. Ha'zorim b'deema b'reena yik'tzoru. Haloch yaj'lech oo'vacho nosay meh'shech ha'zara bo yavo v'reena nosay ah'loomo'tav.*

A Song of Ascents. When the Lord brought the exiles back to Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with glad song. Then it was said among the nations: "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord had done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our captives, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. Though the farmer bears the measure of seed to the field in sadness, he shall come home with joy, bearing his sheaves.

## The Shabbat Additions in Birkat Ha'mazon

The passage of *R'tzay* is inserted into the *Birkat Ha'mazon* on Shabbat.

### Grace After Meals Shabbat Addition

רְצֵה וְהַחֲלִיצֵנוּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּבְמִצְוֹת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּעִי הַשֶּׁבֶת הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקְדוֹשׁ הַזֶּה. כִּי יוֹם זֶה גָּדוֹל וְקְדוֹשׁ הוּא לְפָנֶיךָ, לְשֶׁבֶת בּוֹ וְלַנּוּחַ בּוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה כְּמִצְוֹת רְצוֹנָךְ וּבְרָצוֹנָךְ הַנִּיחַ לָנוּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ, שְׁלֹא תִהְיֶה צָרָה וְיָגוֹן וְאֲנָחָה בְּיוֹם מְנוּחָתָנוּ. וְהִרְאֵנוּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ בְּנִחְמַת צִיּוֹן עִירָךְ, וּבְבִגְדֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר קְדוֹשְׁךָ, כִּי אַתָּה הוּא בֹעֵל הַיְשׁוּעוֹת וּבֹעֵל הַנְּחֻמוֹת:

*R'tzay v'ha'cha'lee'tzaynu Ah'doh'nai Eh'lohay'nu b'mitzvo'techa, oo'v'mitzvat yom hash'vee'ee ha'Shabbat ha'gadol v'ha'kadosh ha'zeh, kee yom zeh gadol v'kadosh hu l'fah'necha, lishboht bo v'lanu'ach bo b'ahavah k'mitzvat r'tzo'necha, oo'vir'tzon'cha ha'nee'ach lanu Ah'doh'nai Eh'lohay'nu, shelo t'hay tzarah v'yah'gon va'anachah b'yom m'noochataynu, v'haraynu Ah'doh'nai Eh'lohay'nu b'neh'chamat Tzion ee'recha, oo'v'vinyan Yerushalayim eer kohd'shecha, kee Atah hu ba'al hay'shuot oo'va'al ha'neh'chamot.*

Favor us and strengthen us, Lord our God, with Your commandments, and with the commandment concerning the seventh day, this great and holy Sabbath. This day is great and holy before You to abstain from work and rest on it with love according to Your will. In Your will, Lord our God, grant us rest so that there be no sorrow nor grief on our day of rest. Let us, Lord our God, live to see Zion Your city comforted, and Jerusalem Your holy city rebuilt, for You are Master of all salvation and consolation.

### Additional Line

הַרְחֵמֵנוּ, הוּא יִנְחִילֵנוּ יוֹם שְׁכֻלוֹ שֶׁבֶת וּמְנוּחָה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָמִים.

*Ha'rachaman, hu yan'chee'laynu yom sheh'kulo Shabbat um'nuchah l'cha'yay ha'olamim.*

May the Merciful One cause us to inherit the day which will be all Sabbath and rest in the eternal life.

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### FOR DISCUSSION--IN YOUR OPINION

What elements of the Friday evening Shabbat celebration appeal most to you? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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What questions do you have about the celebration of Shabbat on Friday night? \_\_\_\_\_

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(Now transfer your questions to an email and send them to [info@njop.org](mailto:info@njop.org).)

Can you envision yourself and your family creating a Friday night Shabbat celebration? What elements of Shabbat do you feel would be easiest to incorporate? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Shabbat Entertainment

The meal is done, and there are still hours to go before “bedtime,” or there is a long stretch of afternoon ahead of you. Here are some Friday night and Shabbat afternoon suggestions:

### Intellectual

Prepare in advance and challenge yourselves and/or friends with “Jewish Jeopardy” or some other quiz on the weekly Torah portion or on Judaism in general.

### Friends

Charades anyone? Many games can be played on Shabbat, so spend an evening getting to know your friends and family better.

### All Alone

Curl up with a good book. Friday night is a great opportunity to relax and finish that book you’ve been reading or buy/borrow a book on a Jewish topic of interest.

### Family

Make Judaism fun! A great way to get kids involved is to help them put on a show for the adults. Find a theme or a story related to the Torah portion of the week and help the youngsters put on a skit.

### Romantic

Want some more “time alone”? Friday nights are ideal for aimless strolls (weather permitting). If there’s no one to watch the kids, sit on the porch or the couch and just share “together time.”

### Adventurous

Do you live near a Jewish neighborhood that has a Chassidic community? Experience the joyous celebration of Shabbat at a Chassidic *Tish* (Table)...or make a *tish* of your own!

## 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 AND CANADA and READ HEBREW AMERICA AND CANADA, NJOP has successfully reached hundreds of thousands of North American Jews and engaged them in Jewish life.

Visit our website: [www.njop.org](http://www.njop.org)

Written and designed by Sarah Rochel Hewitt

*Dedicated in honor of Dr. Naama & Rabbi Elie Weinstock  
a very special couple who have played a leading role in the transformation of  
the Upper East Side into a warm & welcoming outreach community.*

*May they continue to do Hashem's work for many years to come.*

*by Andrew R. Siegel*