

## ***Shab-Basics***

Shabbat is a time to pause, a time to gather, and a time to reflect. It is also an opportunity to listen—to our own inner voices and to other people around our table. It is not always easy to listen, especially to people who might have different perspectives. Now, more than ever, we know how important the Shabbat table is for teaching and learning so that we all have an opportunity to speak, listen, and empathize. We hope the resources below will help you to continue to stay at the table, to engage, and to be part of community.

### **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 restore and replenish ourselves.

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, yet its implications are modern: a way to end the week with good intentions, good food, good people, and good conversation.

### **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 help to carve out a moment to connect to yourself and others. 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. These rituals take us out of our regular day-to-day life and help us access the incredible time and space of Shabbat each week.

## Can you explain the rituals that happen before the meal?

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

### Light

In Jewish tradition, lighting candles at sundown on Friday is the last act of the workweek, the literal spark that carries us into the weekend. Bringing light to the table marks the start of Shabbat. While you will find no verse in the Torah instructing you to light two candles at dusk, the rabbinic sages over the centuries linked the practice to the concept of shamor (keeping) Shabbat and zachor (remembering) Shabbat.

### Wine or Grape Juice

At the start of the meal, a glass of wine (or special beverage) brings intention and holiness to the table. Kiddush—the blessing over the wine—formally sanctifies time, using the wine to distinguish between every day and the holiness of Shabbat.

### Bread

Before we eat, we pause to recognize and elevate the miracle of nourishment, bread, and its source. On many tables you will find two loaves of challah rather than one. On Shabbat, we revel in possibility and abundance.

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After October 7, the world has needed Shabbat more than ever. Shabbat is here, week after week, as our constant reminder of all we need reminding of: to slow down, to engage across differences, to seek out comfort, to express ourselves, to open ourselves up, to provide ourselves a respite, to connect to others and ourselves across time. [Download OneTable's "Why Shabbat, Why Now?" guide](#) to deepen the experience at your next Shabbat dinner with rituals and reflections.

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There are many ways to enjoy Friday night dinners and Shabbat rituals. Inspired by ancient Jewish wisdom, OneTable is a national non-profit that empowers people in the United States and Toronto (ages 21-39ish, not in undergraduate college) to find, share, and enjoy Shabbat dinners, making the most of their Friday nights. [Explore the OneTable resource library](#) for additional Shabbat ideas and info.