

Session 3

SHABBAT UNPACKED

PREPARING FOR THE QUEEN

Shabbat is likened to a royal queen or Shabbat Hamalka. When we anticipate the Divine presence that descends on our home, we imagine that we are singled out for a personal VIP visit from the queen. Just as we would prepare ourselves and our homes for a royal visit, we dedicate time and effort into ensuring that we are ready and that our home sparkles when we are graced by the Shabbat Hamalka.

In the previous session we mentioned a number of practical things that we do to put ourselves in a Shabbat state of mind. In this session, we will unpack those ideas and add many details to give us a more practical handle on these customs and observances.¹

1. Preparing the home:

- a. One's home should be swept and tidied, the beds should be made and a special Shabbat tablecloth should adorn the table.
- b. One should trim their nails, bathe or shower as well as shave in anticipation of Shabbat.²
- c. One should don special Shabbat clothing in honor of Shabbat.

¹ Many of the laws and customs can be found in the Shulchan Aruch/Code of Jewish Law (Authored by 15th Century R. Yosef Karo). It is fascinating to note that the basic structure for the Shabbat meals is thousands of years old and that the Shabbat experiences have been the cornerstones of Jewish life since the Jews left Egypt in the year 1310 BCE.

² Mishna Brurah 260:1

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2. Shabbat Candles:

To usher in the Shabbat we light Shabbat candles to add additional light to our homes. The light serves as a catalyst to increase shalom or peace in the home.

- a. The woman of the house is tasked with lighting the Shabbat candles, as it is the woman who brings light into the home, by providing the atmosphere in which she, her husband, and her children can shine and flourish. In a home where there is no female to light the candles, the mitzvah of Shabbat candles shifts to the men.
- b. It is the custom that in the home of a married couple the husband prepares the Shabbat candles for his wife to ignite.
- c. Shabbat candles should be kindled 18 minutes prior to sunset. You can now ask Google “What time is candle-lighting?” to get the exact time wherever you are in the world.
- d. The actual law is that one kindles two candles.¹ There are many customs as to the number of candles to light; the most common custom is to light one candle for each family member.
- e. When a woman kindles Shabbat candles, she first lights the candles, covers her eyes, recites the blessing and then uncovers her eyes and gazes at the candles.² If a man is lighting, the blessing is recited before kindling the candles.³

¹ One corresponding to “zachor” the positive commandments of Shabbat and one to “shamor” the things we refrain from doing on Shabbat.

² Shabbat begins at the moment of making the blessing on the candles. Therefore, were a woman to recite the blessing for the Shabbat candles before igniting the candles, that would constitute her accepting the holiness of Shabbat and prohibit her from actually lighting the candles. To circumvent this issue, she lights the candles and covers her eyes so as not to derive benefit from the light. She then recites the blessing and uncovers her eyes to see the flames that she lit.

³ For a man, lighting candles does not constitute accepting the holiness of Shabbat, as men will only accept the Shabbat later at Shabbat services. Therefore the blessing is recited prior to performing the mitzvah of lighting candles as is done with all other mitzvot.

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- f. The following blessing should be recited upon lighting the candles:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָיִי אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שַׁבָּת

Transliteration: Bah-rookh ah-tah ah-doh-noi eh-loh-hay-noo
meh-lekh hah-oh-lahm ah-sheh ki-deh-shah-noo beh-mitz-voh-
tahv veh-tzee-vah-noo leh-hahd-lik nehr shehl Shabbat.

Translation: Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe,
who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded
us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

- g. Candle lighting is an auspicious time for prayer, and many recite prayers for their children and families during this time.
- h. Candles should be lit in a safe place where they can be visible during Shabbat dinner.

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3. Shabbat Dinner

Prior to sitting down to eat a festive Shabbat dinner, there are a number of laws and customs that give context to this special time of week.

a. **Blessing the children:**

There is a beautiful custom for parents to bless their children prior to the Shabbat meal. One places their hand on the head of their child and gives them a heartfelt blessing. Boys are blessed to be like Efraim and Menashe and girls like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel & Leah.

Singing Shalom Aleichem and Eshet Chayil:

- b. **Shalom Aleichem/Welcoming the angels:** The Talmud¹ teaches us that when we enter our homes on Shabbat evening we are accompanied by two angels, one good and one bad. If the home is prepped properly and peace and tranquility prevail then the good angel blesses the home by saying, “may your home be this way next Shabbat”. The bad angel is forced to respond “amen”, so may it be. However, if the home is in disarray and unprepared for Shabbat then the bad angel says, “may your home be this way next week” and the good angel is forced to respond “amen”, so may it be. We sing a song to welcome the angels and ask them to bless our home.

Eishet Chayil: The entire family sings a song (written by King Solomon)², in honor of the Eishet Chayil, or the Woman of Valor in the family. When we sing eishet chayil we think about the Jewish mothers and wives who nurture so much love, spirituality, and personal growth into the home. Once a week we take a moment to sing their praises!

¹ Shabbat 119a

² Proverbs (31:10-31)

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C. Kiddush:

Kiddush, which literally means to sanctify, highlights the sanctity of Shabbat and refers us back to Torah sources that speak of the sanctity and reasons for keeping Shabbat.¹

- The kiddush is recited over a cup of wine or grape juice. The mitzvah of kiddush applies twice on Shabbat; once at the Friday evening meal and once during Shabbat day.
- Both the Friday night and Shabbat day liturgy include references to Shabbat from the Torah and conclude with the blessing on the wine:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי־אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן

Transliteration: Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam borei pri hagafen.

Translation: Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

- It is preferable to pour wine or grape juice into an elegant clean cup that is at least 4 oz. in volume. Most families have a dedicated silver kiddush cup that they use for this purpose.
- There are varying customs about one's posture for kiddush. Some stand the entire kiddush, some stand for the first half and sit for the second half, others sit for the entire kiddush.²
- Upon finishing the recitation of kiddush, one sits down and drinks about 2 oz. of the wine and shares the rest with the others at the meal, pouring from the kiddush cup into smaller cups to be distributed among all.

¹ See session 1; The What and the Why

² If you are unsure what custom to adopt, please consult your Olami rabbi or educator.

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d. Washing Hands and Challah

- Prior to reciting kiddush, the table should be set with two whole loaves of challah¹ or bread covered with a challah cover or napkin.²
- Upon conclusion of the kiddush, those assembled rise to wash their hands before eating the challah. The concept of washing hands before eating bread dates back to the Temple where one would wash their hands for added ritual purity.³
- Shabbat kitchens typically have a large washing cup but any cup can be used. Hold the cup in your right hand and fill it, then transfer to the left to begin pouring. Pour over your right hand two times, making sure the water reaches the entire hand. Repeat, pouring on the left two times.

¹ The reason for the two loaves is to remind us of the double portion of manna that fell each Friday as the Jews traveled through the desert after they left Egypt. The extra portion was put away to be used on Shabbat so that the Jews would not have to collect the manna on Shabbat.

² We cover the challah to commemorate the layer of dew that covered and protected the manna.

³ Washing hands for bread is not exclusive to Shabbat and is done whenever one eats bread.

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- Recite the blessing, then dry your hands.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי־י אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם

Transliteration: Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam,
asher kideshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu al netilat yadayim.

Translation: Blessed are you, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe,
who has sanctified us with His commandments, and
commanded us concerning the washing of the hands.

- The host recites the blessing of hamotzi on behalf of all guests:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי־י אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Transliteration: Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech
Ha'Olam Hamotzi lechem min haaretz.

Translation: Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

Guests should refrain from speaking until they have taken a bite of challah.

- After reciting the blessing, the challah¹ is cut into pieces, dipped lightly
in salt² and distributed to everyone at the meal.

¹ On Friday evening we cut the bottom one and on both Shabbat day meals we cut the top one.

² When we eat bread, we dip it in salt to remind us of the sacrifices that were offered in the temple that were brought with salt.

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e. The Shabbat Meal

There are three Shabbat meals that take place as follows: Friday night after sunset, Shabbat morning after prayer services (typically around noon), and Shabbat afternoon before sunset.

- A festive Shabbat meal is enjoyed by the family
- There is a custom to eat fish¹ and meat on Shabbat.
- Shabbat themed songs called “zemirot” are sung together.
- The conversation is enhanced by sharing age appropriate Torah ideas at the Shabbat meals.
- The meal concludes with the Grace after Meal, a blessing we recite to thank the Almighty for our food.²

4. Havdalah:

After the third meal, Shabbat concludes at nightfall with the havdalah ceremony. Havdalah literally translates as “separation³”, and marks the separation between Shabbat and the rest of the week. (More about havdalah in subsequent sessions.)

The Shabbat customs create a routine that represent a mindfulness that allows us to tap into the blessings each week.

¹ The Hebrew word for fish is דג whose gematria or numeric value is 7 as in the 7th day or Shabbat.

² A Bencher or prayer book for Shabbat meals can be purchased online [here](#).

³ Nightfall is typically 50 minutes after sunset or when three small stars are seen outside.



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