



The Edible Torah

...or...

One way to make Torah Study palatable
and Judaism easier to swallow

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Not every Shabbat includes an epiphany.

INTRODUCTION

"Marketing wisdom" (whatever that is) usually says a good article should draw the reader in and keep them hooked. The writer should try to get the reader so involved that they are drooling to buy what you are selling by the time you get around to "the ask" (which is when you lower the boom and try to get their money.)

I'm not selling anything, so I'm not going to bother stringing you along. For those of you with limited time, here's the quick and dirty summary:

- Observing Shabbat doesn't mean changing your entire life.
- Shabbat might be simply another opportunity to pull your family together and connect.
- Not every Shabbat includes an epiphany. If the evening turns out to be "normal" it doesn't mean Shabbat "failed".
- You don't have to be (or become) a Rabbi to make Shabbat "work" for you.
- Observing Shabbat doesn't mean changing your entire life.
- Getting friends involved can make Shabbat easier and more meaningful.
- Even though it's thousands of years old, a good gimmick can still help your Shabbat experience. If it works for major soft drinks and fast food chains, it can work for you.
- Did I mention that you don't have to change your entire life?

I'm going to go into more detail in later chapters, but if you are on a tight schedule or just have a limited attention span, here is the information you probably need to think about, based on the bullet points above:

As kids, my brothers and I might have tried to “help” my Mom with Shabbat by singing the candle blessings (for Hanukah, not Shabbat), which probably only frustrated her more.

Observing Shabbat doesn't mean changing your entire life.

Nobody is holding a gun (or a Torah) to your head. A bit of perspective and realistic expectations can go a long way. You can do as much or as little as you want regarding Jewish observance. You can do some this week, nothing next week, something the week after. It's really between you and your family, with God as a partner in the mix.

Don't think of "observing" or "practicing" or "celebrating" Shabbat as some massive sea-change in your lifestyle. Because if you do, you'll likely never try it. Heck, I've avoided any significant attempt at weight loss and exercise for most of my life because of that same issue. If someone said to me "I don't want to start a diet. I just want to skip dessert today. Just for today." I'd have a lot fewer excuses about how I needed that double-fudge brownie.

Not every Shabbat includes an epiphany.

Not every baseball game features a grand-slam-home-run, but that doesn't make it a bad game. Luciano Pavarotti didn't sing a high "C" in every opera, but that didn't make his performance a flop. In fact, one of the criticisms in sports and other forms of entertainment is the urge these days to "manufacture" excitement, to make every moment legendary. Which usually results in making the entire experience feel contrived and empty.

If you have a quiet Shabbat evening that doesn't contain riveting conversation or some deep emotional discovery, you still had the blessing of a quiet evening with family and friends. Plus, by encouraging the weekly (or at least regular) practice of Shabbat, you are setting the stage for some amazing moments later on.

At this point, you
are on your own!!

... except not
really.

Shabbat might be simply a chance for family time

I'm not going to try to pull out statistics about how good "family time" and dinner table discussions can be, because I can't validate those studies and honestly, if you didn't believe them before, I'm not the expert opinion who is going to convince you. I happen to think that the more time families spend actually engaging with each other (whether that is through play, work or talking) the better it is overall for everyone. But that's my opinion.

I don't think, however, that positive family time has ever been shown to HURT. So what's the excuse?

You don't have to be a Rabbi to make Shabbat "work" for you

There is a self-consciousness that comes with trying something new, a concern about getting it right. It doesn't help that Shabbat carries with it the implication of thousands of years of tradition, not to mention the whole "God is watching" concept.

All I can offer in response is: God has probably seen worse screw-ups than you might make, and nobody has been struck by lightning yet. No really!

Just get over yourself, take a shot, and be willing to call a do-over if you need it. While the appendix will cover the absolute essentials, your one take-away from this section is to remember that there's a lot of latitude. You can say the prayers in English instead of Hebrew. You can make blessings over grape juice instead of wine. You can get things out of order if you forget. I'll bet you double-or-nothing on what you paid for this book that it will all be OK.

You'll be modeling lifelong Jewish learning for your kids - something that gets a lot of press these days but which families struggle to actually achieve.

If you are still concerned, I want to share the acronym CYLR - "Consult Your Local Rabbi". Give him or her a ring, explain what you are doing, and I'm sure they will offer a helping hand. You may even get another guest on the list!

Getting friends involved can make Shabbat easier and more meaningful

The core of this book is about encouraging people - which goes beyond your immediate family - to participate in a Shabbat celebration, and to do so in a way that is non-threatening, enjoyable, engaging and fun. Having friends pitch in with meals and ideas, bring their experiences, help out with blessings and traditions, and just share the conversation around the table can be a huge help both emotionally and practically.

My advice? Get friends involved from the very beginning if you can.

Even though it's thousands of years old, a good gimmick can help get people psyched for Shabbat.

Now we get down to what this guide (and TorahDinner.com) is all about. I'm not out to "improve" Shabbat, or tell you that I know some secret to making it work that other people don't. At heart of the matter, I want to share one trick that has made weekly Shabbat gatherings fun and engaging for people from all walks of life - all ages, family dynamics, and religious traditions. It's not the ONLY trick. It's not even necessarily the BEST trick. It's just MY trick, and I want to share it.

Remember:
Observing
Shabbat doesn't
mean changing
your entire life.

What is that trick?!?

Plan Friday night Shabbat as a pot-luck dinner. Invite friends and family. And make the pot-luck food assignments relate to the Torah portion being read that week.

For the details on how that works, exactly, you really need to read the rest of this guide!

TORAH PORTIONS THEORY AND PRACTICE

This is the main event. If you don't read any further than this chapter, you will have everything you probably came for. I'm putting this chapter up front because, again, I've got nothing to sell here and nothing to gain by making you wait until some grand reveal later on.

So how does it work?

The Preparation

- You start with a group of people that want to come together for a meal, preferably on Friday night (although it could be any time).
- You need to have a space available that is big enough to accommodate the group and has the right facilities (like cooking, room for kids to play, places to sit, etc). USUALLY someone's house will work, but your situation may dictate otherwise.
- Look at the Torah portion for the week of the get-together. A great place to find this is <http://www.torahdinner.com>. Of course, I'm usually just posting a week ahead. To look a few weeks in advance, another good resource is <http://www.hebc.com/>
- Then the real work starts: Look over the portion and find a theme - something that is interesting enough to hook the guests and also accessible enough that you can bring a food that represents that theme in some way.

If you want personalized gold leaf invitations wrapped in parchment and sealed with wax, then by all means go crazy!

I find myself in a state of blessed tension, of holy contradiction, where I can't make a break with my past or find the courage to explore this new territory.

The Invitation

- Write up your invitation and send it out (email works, but this is YOUR gathering. If you want personalized gold leaf invitations wrapped in parchment and sealed with wax, then by all means go crazy!)

TorahDinner.com is here to help. Each week I post precisely that information. Feel free to crib my notes with impunity. Of course, please remember to mention where you found the ideas. Just because I want to share doesn't mean I don't take pride of ownership. On the [main page](#) I post the invitation itself, which has the chapter-and-verse for the portion, a link to the JPS translation, an overview the theme-related elements of the Torah reading, and the food related theme. If you sign up for my [weekly email](#), you also get - for the low, low price of \$0.00 - a summary of the portion AND discussion points you can use during Torah study.

So... you send out the invitations, and immediately people are replying, saying "Yee Haw! Sign me up. What can I bring?". Your next steps are:

The RSVPs

- Make food assignments - we usually try to cover the bases with appetizers, main dish, challah, vegetable dish, starch, salad and dessert. You can, of course, do less, or have people double-up. You can also assign more categories like beverages, fruit, etc if you have lots of people coming.

RELAX! God has probably seen worse screw-ups than you might make, and nobody has been struck by lightning yet. No really!

The Big Day

(Once again, this is served with a big helping of "do what works for you". If you don't like this format, feel free to invent your own. And PLEASE [email me](#) and tell me how it went! I love the feedback.)

- On the day of the gathering, we usually start with appetizers as soon as it arrives. It gives people a chance to socialize, decompress from the week, etc before getting down to serious Torah study.
- Once everyone is there, someone should recap the invitation - briefly what the Torah portion is about, the food theme and maybe why that specific theme was selected.
- Go around the group and let each person/family explain what they brought and how it fits the theme. This is NOT a competition. Points are not awarded. Unless your group is into that kind of thing.
- Light candles, say Kiddush and Motzi, etc. Whatever Shabbat traditions your group is comfortable with.

One more time: this is only a suggestion. Some groups we know have Torah study as soon as people arrive and then spend the rest of the night socializing. Do whatever works best for your group.

As minimalist as it now seems, (looking back), our original Shabbat traditions were enough to give my wife and I the grounding we needed.

Meal Mechanics

We usually serve the main meal (main dish, appetizers, etc) as a buffet. But again, your group and circumstances will dictate what works.

Once people have had a chance to eat (along with more socializing and general schmoozing), we put out coffee and dessert and immediately get down to Torah study. I've found that waiting until after dessert pushes Torah study too late for some folks (especially those with younger kids.). So crack open the books and get started!

At this point, you are on your own!!

... except not really. Torah study is best when it's a collaborative experience. Nobody should be expected to be THE expert at the table. Everyone has a voice, everyone gets to offer their questions, insights and observations. Just dig in, start reading and start asking questions. There are some amazing study guides, translations and resources (which can be found in the [Appendix](#) of this book) if you are stuck for ideas.

One technique that I've found is successful is make sure everyone has a copy of the Torah portion, but to pass out different copies or translations for each person. You'd be amazed at the variety of ways a seemingly simple thought in Torah can be translated. Let one person read a section, but make sure everyone knows that if their translation says something different or interesting, they should "stop the train" so to speak and discuss what the differences in wording may reveal.

...familiar faces
made strange
prayers and
traditions less off-
putting.

Kids Korner

Depending on the family makeup of your group, kids activities may be a great addition. For teens, I've found that doing a short discussion specifically geared for teens and/or tweens earlier in the evening (perhaps while the adults are socializing and eating appetizers) is a great way to make that age group feel engaged, but also doesn't overwhelm (or bore) them with the adult discussion.

The same goes for younger kids, although here I try to work in an activity of some kind to make it more hands on.

I'll be honest, making the evening "work" for kids is way way harder than the adult component. Luckily, in most instances the non-adults will be happy to simply hang out. And more importantly, they may be intrigued by the fact that adults are modeling lifelong Jewish learning - something that gets a lot of press but which many families are challenged to find (or make) time to do.

A (NOT SO) BRIEF HISTORY OF ME (AND SHABBAT)

The only way I can illustrate how a simple idea like "pot luck Shabbat" can work, and the kind of impact it can potentially have is to put it in context. And the only real context I've got is my own - mine and my family's. So please bear with a little autobiography.

My wife and I grew up in very similar households - what I'll call "normal" Reform Jewish environments where we weren't High Holiday Jews, but our synagogue attendance definitely tapered off after October or November and didn't pick up again until Purim. We attended Sunday school, and we have extremely strong and fond memories of weekend retreats at [Camp Wise](#) (a nearby campground that focused on Jewish themes and activities).

Our holiday observances included Hanukah, Purim and Passover but not Shavuot or Simchat Torah. And not Shabbat.

I have a distinct memory of one particular Friday night when I was about 10. (I believe many people have had similar experiences). Gathered around a pair of dusty and little-used candle sticks, my 2 brothers and I watched in bemusement as my Mom muddled through the lighting of the candles, not knowing exactly what to say. We might have even tried to "help" by singing the candle blessings (for Hanukah, not Shabbat), which probably only served to frustrate her more. I don't remember if we even got to kiddush or challah. It was the first and last time I can remember us attempting to welcome Shabbat in our house.

...give everyone
a different
translation of the
Torah Portion...

The items brought that first week betrayed our enthusiasm for this new concept. We were eager to explain each food and what it had to do with the portion (at least our understanding of it).

When Debbie and I were first married, we were living in a tiny overpriced apartment working as we also finishing up college. As newlyweds, life was incredible. As Midwest transplants living in Queens, New York, life was unreal. It was Debbie who first suggested we "do something" for Shabbat, as a way of getting away from the craziness of our weekly experience. "Something" mostly involved defrosting a Kineret™ Challah and baking it, lighting candles, and sharing a sip of grape juice. As minimalist as it now sounds (to me, at least), it was enough to give us the grounding we needed.

That comfortable routine continued through several years, several cities and homes and the birth of 2 children. As our daughters grew, we learned a little more about Shabbat and Judaism in general, but nothing that rocked our world. On rare occasion we shared Shabbat with more observant friends but each time we found the depth of their practice to be overwhelming and daunting, rather than comforting or engaging.

Nevertheless we continued to learn and grow Jewishly, albeit in small incremental steps.

At this point in my life - I was in my early thirties - I had never read any Torah, could only say a handful of prayers, and found organized Jewish worship to be largely un-engaging.

Then things changed.

HOW THIS ALL GOT STARTED

The [introductory post](#) on [TorahDinner.com](#) summarizes how things began, but I'm going to repeat a bit of that history here, in the context of my specific experiences.

Naomi grew up in the same synagogue as my wife and I. She was (and is) a gifted educator and insightful, spiritual human being. She and her sisters started getting together on Friday night as a way of maintaining a connection to each other and to their pre-teen children. Included in these informal gatherings were various friends and coworkers, invited as mood, space and availability permitted.

My family and I were invited to one such Shabbat, and we found it to be a wonderful, laid back experience. The familiar faces made strange prayers and traditions less off-putting, and most of what was said or done was close enough to our own traditions so as not to be completely unfamiliar. The focus was definitely more social than educational. There was no attempt to "teach" us or "encourage us" to become something more than we were.

After blessings were said Naomi would offer her opinion of the Torah portion. Sometimes a brave soul would pipe up with an idea or question. But for the most part, the group continued to be passive participants in the Shabbat experience.

It wasn't until we'd been attending for about half a year that Naomi made an off-hand joke about food assignments for the coming week. The portion was Toldot (*Genesis* 25:19 - 28:9). Naomi suggested the food we bring should be red. Nobody could figure out why until she explained that this portion included the moment when Esau, starving perhaps to death, trades his birthright for "some of that red, red stuff" (*Genesis* 25:30).

There is no dividing line that says "cross this and *poof* you are conservative!" (or Reform, or Orthodox, or...)

You may want to try out new Jewish traditions. But does that make you a different kind of Jew?

The group thought the idea was hysterical, and also intriguing. The items brought the following week betrayed our enthusiasm for this new pot-luck concept. We were eager to explain how each food was red, why it was red, what it had to do with the portion (at least our understanding of it).

Naomi, never one to let a teachable moment pass, conjured up a food assignment theme for the coming week. As she came up with more and more intricate assignments, the group was drawn in to her cunning web. We began to read about the Torah portion during the week, trying to figure out ways to top her assignment, and in some cases simply looking for hints on how to find a food that fit at all.

Things just seemed to progress naturally from there. Once people were reading the portion, even just part of it, they started to ask questions and make points on Friday night. This quickly turned into a full-blown Torah study session.

Remember, we weren't a group of Judaic scholars, Jewish educators, or people who had grown up in an extremely traditional Jewish environment. To be sure, there were a few educators among us (and even clergy, from time to time), but for the most part we were raised in the Reform Jewish movement and had little, if any, Jewish education beyond typical Sunday school. And here we were diving into Torah and asking questions and looking to expand our understanding. There were times it seemed pretty surreal to me that I would be spending my Friday night arguing why I thought Moses was sad after the death of his brother and sister, and hit the rock as a way of being relieved of his job of leading the Israelites.

MY TORAH PORTIONS EXPERIENCES

What all of it comes down to is this: it seems like a lot of Jews today are looking for a way to connect with their religious tradition, but find it to be a daunting task. More so, making a connection to our ancient texts can feel like an even larger stumbling block than issues such as dogma, spirituality, or daily practice. Conversely, if people can connect to these central texts, it unlocks the door to finding a connection to Judaism as a whole. People are just looking for something familiar to hook onto, that can help them bridge the gap into a deeper understanding.

The Shabbat dinner theme I'm describing is one such hook.

What if my experience is a fluke, a coincidental mix of people with the right chemistry at the right point in their lives and the right spark to get things rolling?

I'm willing to admit that it might be. Except that this weekly chavurah has been meeting in people's homes for over 7 years, and shows no sign of stopping. Of course, the group has changed over the years - people's schedules and lives have shifted. There have been marriages and divorces that pull people away, and a couple of folks who simply lost interest. That's been countered by families that "discovered" our group (usually after being invited, as my family was) and kept coming back for more. We have weekly "regulars", people who show up about once a month, and a few who we see once or twice a year when the stars align just right.

...there are many many more traditions, blessings and nuances that can make your Shabbat evening even more special, meaningful and engaging.

...if you start hosting regular Shabbat Torah study gatherings like this, you are undoubtedly going to encounter people who observe Judaism differently than you.

ABOUT SHABBAT ITSELF

There are approximately 613 bazillion books already written about Shabbat: Its history, importance to Judaism, recipes, rituals, and more. While I certainly like a challenge, there's no way I think I'm going to write *the* book on Shabbat. Or even *a* book on Shabbat. I'm even reluctant to recommend one because everyone who reads this guide is likely to come from a wide of experiences and traditions.

So I'm calling "uncle" on this one. Go patronize your local Jewish book store, or ask the clergy and educators at your synagogue for some suggestions. See what your friends are reading. Then you should feel free to share your favorites with me [by email](#), or in the comments section of the [web site](#)

THE JEWISH JOURNEY

This observation is based on my experiences over the last several years, after talking with friends and clergy from the various Jewish movements (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Renewal, etc): There's an awful lot of tension and misunderstanding between the groups. There's a feeling among many that other groups view them as either "fanatics" or "not really Jewish" (depending on which other group they are talking about). There is discomfort with tradition, which sometimes comes out as defensiveness ("well those other guys aren't so perfect either") and sometimes as dismissiveness ("oh that tradition isn't important, nobody really needs to observe it").

I'm reminded of the joke that anyone who cleans more than you is a neat freak, and anyone who cleans less than you is a slob. YOU are (of course!) the baseline against which all others are measured.

I also find that, despite convenient labels like "Reform", and "Orthodox", when you ask a specific person "what are you?", the answer is usually more complicated. For example, one recent acquaintance told me, "Well, I belong to a Conservative Shul, but I drive there on Shabbat, but we don't really use electronics and we keep kosher in our house, but not when we go out". Another has said "I always thought of myself as Reform, but I wear a kippah around the house and when I'm at temple, but not when I go to work. And my family is eating kosher style - we don't mix meat and milk but we also don't get hung up about hekshurs."

To be honest, as my Jewish learning progresses, more and more often I find myself in a state of blessed tension, of holy contradiction, where I can intellectually understand how a particular observance might be rewarding but either I can't make a break with my past or can't find the courage to explore this new territory.

I truly, honestly,
sincerely believe
God knows when
we are trying
hard and are just
clumsy or
inexperienced.
Keep trying.

I believe God is cheering us on, knowing that in our first tentative baby steps, we're going to smack into the coffee table a few times

Maybe you find yourself in the same conundrum. You are Jewish. You do whatever it is that you do, Jewishly speaking. You currently do more (or possibly less) than you did at an earlier point in your life. And maybe you have found out about something else that intrigues you, or moves you. So you want to try it out. But does that make you a different kind of Jew? How would you answer the "what are you" question then?

I'd like you to imagine a bridge. It's a pretty wide bridge, and spans a long river. An infinitely long river. I won't be coy about it - the bridge represents the Jewish Journey that we're all on.

There's no real end point to this bridge, no finish line that you cross and are suddenly "there" in some other state of being. So a bridge isn't the perfect way to visualize this, but I didn't want to use a circle because it implies coming back to the same place again and again, and that didn't work either. You're simply going to have to go with the bridge image, for now. Just don't go and think that the "end of the bridge" is the goal. The goal is your journey on the bridge.

Anyway, back to the bridge...

Some people aren't actually on the bridge. They're on the ground, looking at the bridge saying "I don't think that looks safe" or "that's a long way to the other side" or whatever it is they are saying. But you, you're on the bridge. How far across you are, only you can say. Up ahead there are people doing more, observing more of the traditions. And behind you are people doing and observing less.

That, of course, doesn't make the people "up ahead" better than you, any more than people standing ahead of you on a real bridge are better. They're merely standing in a different place.

Once you start fostering an environment of Jewish learning in your home (and life), you will undoubtedly find that you are unable to remain exactly the same as you were.

There is no dividing line on the bridge that says "cross this and *poof* you are conservative!". There are no lanes for HOV's (Highly Orthodox Vehicles). My point is that you stand on this bridge, this Jewish continuum, wherever you stand. Wherever you are, you stand as an example to some, just as people further "ahead" might be a role model for you.

Because, while one branch of Judaism isn't better than another, there is something to be said (at least *I* think) for encouraging fellow Jews to learn more and try more.

So the next time you find yourself having that "neat freak / slob" response; when you see someone else's observance and think that they are crazy, or up tight, or have gone way too far (or conversely, if you feel like they do so little that they are not really Jewish) it might be useful to imagine that they are simply standing at a different place on the bridge. Maybe you stood there once too.

Why is any of this important? Why am I bothering to spew my little soapbox idea at you here? Now?

Because if you start hosting regular Shabbat Torah study gatherings like this, you are undoubtedly going to encounter people who observe Judaism differently than you. And then they (and you) are going to have to negotiate how the blessings are said, what kinds of food are served, etc.

But even more to the point, once you start fostering an environment of Jewish learning in your home (and life), you will undoubtedly find that you are unable to remain exactly the same as you were.

And that's really the point, isn't it?

APPENDIX: SHABBAT ESSENTIALS

For all my free-wheeling, "do what makes you feel good", "everyone is different" attitude, you probably thought, deep down, that there are a FEW things that you sort of had to do, in order to call your little gathering "Shabbat". I mean, I like dancing naked around a tree at midnight as much as the next short paunchy middle-aged un-athletic white guy (now there's an image!), but you can't call that Shabbat.

Here are the absolute essentials for a "complete" Shabbat.

I want to re-iterate that if you aren't up to these yet - if you aren't comfortable with the blessings and you really have nobody else to lean on to show you the ropes, please do not think you are somehow "blaspheming" or insulting God. I truly, honestly, sincerely believe God knows when we are trying hard and are just clumsy or inexperienced. Keep trying. Like any skill, you will feel more comfortable with time and practice. Like a parent watching a child take their first steps, I believe God is cheering us on, knowing we're going to smack into the coffee table a few times before we're able to strap on our backpack and walk this Jewish Journey on our own two feet.

Take it slow, do the parts you can do. Read the prayers in English if the Hebrew feels overwhelming. The key is to keep trying and learning and growing to the place where you want to be, not to expect to have it all come together the first time.

Credit and appreciation to Hillel.org for their wonderful "[Shabbat Notes: A Companion to the Day of Rest](#)" guide for the blessings. It's worth checking out and printing copies for your gathering.

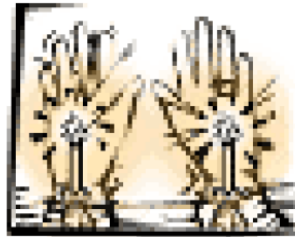
From "[Day of Rest](#)", by [Hillel.org](#)

Blessing over the Shabbat Candles

- The types of candles or candle sticks you use is unimportant. They just have to burn for at least 18 minutes. So ball up some tin-foil for candle holders, and use tea lights, oil lamps or a whole mess of birthday candles.
- Men or women can light the candles.
- One person can light candles for everyone present, or each person can light for themselves and/or their family.

Any more detail gets us beyond the essentials. For more information, do an internet search on "How to light Shabbat candles" You will find enough information to keep you reading for a week!

Light the candles, and then say the blessing:



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

Praised are You, Sovereign of the Universe, who has sanctified us
with Your commandments and has commanded us to kindle light
for the Sabbath.

From "[Day of Rest](#)", by [Hillel.org](#)

Blessing over Wine (Kiddush)

- This blessing can be said over any liquid grape product - wine, grape juice, etc.
- One person can say the blessing for all present, or each person can say the blessing for themselves.



סְבִרֵי מִנְּנוּ וְנִבְּנוּ וְנִבְּוֵי:
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי
הַגֶּפֶן: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ. וְשַׁבַּת קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה
וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ. זְכוֹרֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית: כִּי הוּא
יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ. זְכוֹר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם:
כִּי-בָנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים. וְשַׁבַּת
קֹדֶשׁ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מִקְדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, borei p'ri
hagafen. Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher
kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'ratza vanu, v'shabat kod'sho b'ahava
uv'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'ma'asei v'reisheet. Ki hu yom
t'chila l'mikra'ei kodesh, zeicher litziat Mitzrayim. Ki vanu
vacharta v'otanu kidashta mikol ha'amim, v'shabat kod'sh'cha
b'ahava uv'ratzon hin'chaltanu. Baruch ata Adonai, m'kadeish
hashabat.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe: You call us to holiness with the Mitzvah of Shabbat--the sign of Your love, a reminder of Your creative work, and the liberation from Egyptian bondage: our day of days. On Shabbat especially, we hearken to Your call to serve You as a holy people. We praise You, O God, for the holiness of Shabbat.

From "[Day of Rest](#)", by [Hillel.org](#)

Blessing over Challah (Motzi)

- There are traditionally two loaves of challah set out for Shabbat
- The loaves are covered before candles are lit
- Once the Kiddush (blessing over wine) is said, the challahs are uncovered and the next blessing is recited.
- After the blessing, the challah is cut or torn into pieces and each person has a piece.
- Some people either salt the challah, or put out salt for people to dip the challah into.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. הַמּוֹצִיא
לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, hamotzi
lechem min ha'aretz.

Praised be our Eternal God, Ruler of the universe: who brings
forth the bread from the earth.

APPENDIX: SHABBAT BONUS ROUND

The previous chapter covered the basics, those specific elements that signify your gathering as Shabbat and not just a social get-together.

But there are many many more traditions, blessings and nuances that can make your Shabbat evening even more special, meaningful and engaging.

I've got no point of pride here, and I'm not trying to prove that this guide is "better" or more "useful" than other resources. In fact, I want to encourage you to go out and seek resources that work for you. As is the case more and more often these days, there are wonderful resources on the internet. So I would like to highlight some of these great sources by providing links here, along with an explanation of traditions and observances I have find meaningful to me.

Baking your own challah

Baking your own challah can set the stage for the evening to come - certainly in terms of your experience of the day, but also with regard to the ambiance the smell of fresh-baked bread creates in the home. If you have kids, making Challah is a fantastic hands-on activity that can lead to discussions and teachable moments.

- <http://kosherfood.about.com/od/sabbathcooking/ht/challah.htm>
- <http://www.beliefnet.com/Video/Faiths/Judaism/Faith-in-the-Family/How-To-Bake-Challah-Braiding--Baking.aspx> (video)
- <http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/My-Challah-235867> (recipe)
- <http://www.haydid.org/challah.htm>
- [Debbie's bread machine challah recipe](#)

Eshet Chayil

This blessing (really a poem, actually, which is found at the end of the book of Proverbs) has a rich history, being attributed as everything from Abraham's eulogy to his wife Sarah to a love song from all of Israel to the Sabbath Queen. In the context of Shabbat, it is a custom (not requirement) to be recited by a husband to his wife, as an expression of gratitude for everything she has done for him.

- <http://judaism.about.com/od/shabbatprayersblessings/f/eshetchayil.htm>
- <http://sidduraudio.com/Audio/EishetHayil.mp3> (with audio)

Blessing Children

Praising and rewarding our children is not the same thing as blessing them. Offering your blessing - your unconditional acceptance of them and your belief in their inherent goodness - can be a powerful moment between you. Unlike many of the Shabbat blessings, which are often spoken together as a group; or by one person on behalf of the group, the blessing for children is a private moment.

- <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Shabbat2.html#Blessing>
- <http://urj.org/shabbat/blessings/> (with audio)

Washing hands

After the Kiddush (blessing for wine), but before Motzi (blessing over challah), you can say the blessing for washing. Traditionally, one shouldn't speak after this blessing is done until you say the blessing over challah - which can become an amusing experience as more and more of the guests stand around, unable to speak.

- <http://www.beingjewish.com/shabbat/washing.html>
- http://www.aish.com/shabbathowto/fridaynight/Washing_for_Bread.asp (with audio)

Birkat Hamazon

The blessing after meals is longer than those said beforehand. The explanation is that before we eat we're hungry, and it would be hard to give a heartfelt and thoughtful "thank you" when we're distracted by the meal to come. Afterward, however, we are encouraged to take a few moments and offer up sincere thanks for the meal we just enjoyed.

There are several "versions" of this blessing, the differences having to do with overall length. I'm providing links to two styles: the full version and a shorter one used in less traditional settings.

Full Length

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/birkat_hamazon.pdf

<http://sidduraudio.com/> (with audio)

Shorter Version

<http://urj.org/PrintItem/index.cfm?id=18964&type=Articles>

<http://media.urj.org/shabbat/blessings/BirkatHaMazonfull.mp3> (with audio)

APPENDIX: TORAH TOOLS

Here is a list of books, web sites, and specific links that you may find helpful in organizing a TorahDinner experience. By no means exhaustive, this list is intended to as an appetizer of sorts, just to get you started.

Jewish Movements

- Union for Reform Judaism - <http://www.urj.org/>
- United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism - <http://www.uscj.org/>
- Union of Orthodox Union Congregations of America - <http://www.ou.org/>
- Jewish Reconstructionist Federation - <http://jrf.org/>
- Alliance for Jewish Renewal - <http://www.aleph.org/>

Jewish Learning, Education and Outreach

- Aish Ha-Torah - <http://www.aish.com/>
- Chabad - <http://www.chabad.org/>
- Hillel - <http://www.hillel.org/>

Independent / Unaffiliated Jewish Resources

- The Velveteen Rabbi - <http://velveteenrabbi.blogspot.com/blog/>
- Modern Jewish Moms - <http://www.modernjewishmom.com/>
- Jewish Virtual Library - <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>

Torah Study Resources

- [Teaching Torah](#) (link to Amazon.com)
- [Commentary on the Torah](#) by Richard Friedman (link to Amazon.com)
- [The Five Books of Moses...](#) " translation by Everett Fox (link to Amazon.com)
- [Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary](#) (link to Amazon.com)
- [The Torah: A Women's Commentary](#) (link to Amazon.com)
- [Artscroll Interlinear Chumash](#) (link to Artscroll.com)

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I almost put this at the beginning of the guide. Then I realized that it would annoy those who would only skip over it anyway, and I didn't want to annoy anyone who might otherwise appreciate and gain from this guide; and anyone who wanted to read this part would be happy to flip to the back anyway.

So here you are. You are probably a friend of mine already. If not, I consider you one now. Drop me a line and let me know how you are doing. We probably ought to catch up.

Credits

I cannot say it better than Fred Rogers did in 1997, as he accepted a lifetime achievement award: "All of us have special ones who have loved us into being..." To list the people who have loved me (and taught me, and in some cases dragged me against my will) to this point in my life would be impossible.

Specific to this project, there are a few people who deserve mention:

- Naomi Chase for being the creative spark behind this entire process; for being patient enough to continue to listen to my ideas and wait for me to learn a fraction of what she already knows; and for being generous enough to allow me to take this idea, one of her children, and run with it. Hopefully
- Rabbi Susan Stone for providing insight and being a reliable reality check as the web site and this guide took shape. And for offering to serve as editor when it was clearly a task nobody else wanted.
- To the entire weekly Shabbat group. Every week you show up, ready to play and learn and willing to put up with whatever silly idea pops into my head. Without your involvement, none of this would ever have come to be.

Dedications

To Debbie:

As with anything I have ever done that mattered, this is dedicated to my best friend and my closest confidant. Every day of our life together has been a miracle and a blessing.

And to my children:

Sometimes I think it is for your sake that I am learning something new to teach you; or that I'm modeling a new tradition so you will feel comfortable with it. But when I look closer, I realize you already know - that you are my teachers, and I am the one who is growing and is comforted.

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