

MORE ABOUT SHABBAT

The soul of FridayLight is the celebration of Shabbat, the Hebrew word for Sabbath.

In the Jewish religion it is observed from just before sundown on Fridays until nightfall on Saturdays.

For nearly 4,000 years honoring Shabbat has been the most sacred practice of the Jewish people. It mirrors the creation story from the Book of Genesis in which, after six days of creating the heavens, the earth and everything in them, G-d rests on the seventh day. The seventh day is said to be the time each week in which our lives are most connected to the divine, when we can sense the G-dliness of all things and rejoice at the beauty and wonder of creation. It is a time of wholeness, peace and joy and signifies the purpose of the world's coming into existence. For this reason, the lighting of Shabbat candles is considered more sacred than the candles used in other Jewish ceremonies such as Chanukah and Yahrzeit.

In the Ten Commandments G-d told the people of Israel that they and all of their future generations must remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Abiding by the commandment, many Jews around the world refrain from work on Shabbat and celebrate a day of relaxation and spiritual focus. Some Jews honor Shabbat simply by bringing their workweek to a close on Friday before sundown and reserving the evening for family dinners and the sharing of traditional blessings. Still others interpret the "remembering" and "keeping Shabbat holy" in their own personal way.

Women and girls usher in Shabbat by kindling candles and reciting the blessing. Just as certain conventions govern and maintain places of great natural beauty, there are laws that protect and define the sacred beauty of Shabbat. Candles should be lit well before sunset, preferably not less than 18 minutes prior. Once kindled, the candles are not to be extinguished or moved.

The actual time of lighting holds profound spiritual meaning and 18 minutes before sundown, demarcates the most powerful moment for the meeting of flame and wick. Many women and girls place a few coins in a charity box (tzedaka) they keep at home, opening their hearts with generosity in preparation for lighting up. Once the candles are lit, they spread their hands out above the candles and move them inward three times with a circular, beckoning motion, taking in the sanctity of Shabbat.

Then, gently placing their hands over their eyes, each woman and girl recites the blessing, drawing down into words the deep holiness of the moment. Before leaving this peak, she puts forward her own private prayers for all that is nearest and dearest to her heart. Opening her eyes, the first sight she sees is the candles and their glow -- Shabbat's peace and goodness illuminating what is in her heart as her household fills with divine power.



MORE ABOUT SHABBAT

It is considered a mitzvah to light Shabbat candles. The word mitzvah is often translated as a “good deed” but is actually one of 613 commandments in The Torah, which bring both individuals and the world closer to G-d and holiness. The books of the Torah are the teachings that were given to Moses at Mt. Sinai and are the source of all Jewish law.

There are many different stories that explain why only women light Shabbat candles, but one favorite suggests that women, having been the last created, are the Crown of Creation and nearest the fine line separating the spiritual from the material. It is said that in the moments before sundown on Friday, women can actually transcend the barrier between the two realms of existence, serving as a conduit between G-d’s sacred presence and our mundane world.

Jewish scholars tell us that one Friday evening, Sarah, wife of Abraham, the patriarch, lit her candles and miraculously, the flame remained for an entire week, infusing all seven days with the divine peace and light of Shabbat. It happened once again for Rivka, considered the second mother of the Jewish people, who according to tradition began lighting candles when she was only three years old.

Like Sarah and Rivka, women bring peace and light into their homes, connecting with the generations on behalf of their families, and the world. It is customary for married women to light two candles, though many add a candle for each child in the family; unmarried women light one candle. Men may only light Shabbat candles when there are no women to honor the holy day of rest.

In these times, with our world desperately in need of the power of light, not only each adult, but every child can stand up for peace, for blessing, and for goodness by lighting candles with their mother. Girls may be taught to light their own candle as soon as they are physically capable of doing so, so that they too can bring divine peace into their hearts, their homes, and our world.

Shabbat signifies the purpose of the world’s coming to be—a time of completeness and wholeness, of peace and joy. It is a time spent enjoying the world as G-d meant it to be, when we can sense the G-dliness of all things and rejoice along with G-d at the beauty and wonder of all He has brought to be. The lighting of Shabbat candles was established so that there would be peace in the home—instead of stumbling in the dark and feeling alone and upset, Jewish homes should be filled with light and peace. This light and peace is something worth sharing. It speaks for itself, filling each home with a power that is greater than any sermon a rabbi could give.