

Shabbat - The Jewish Holy Day

In the Jewish calendar most of the days of the week do not have names, they are simply known as the First Day (Sunday), the Second Day, and so on. The seventh day (Saturday) is different. It is called **Shabbat** (say: *shu-but*) and it is a very special day.

1. Why do Jews celebrate Shabbat?

The **Torah** begins by describing how God created the world and all the things in it. It tells how God took 6 days to make day and night, the sea and the sky, the land, the plants, the Sun and Moon, the animals and, lastly, humans. The story goes on to say that God did no work on the seventh day and said that the seventh day should be special.

Part of the 10 Commandments explains more about how the seventh day should be made special.

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. You have six days to labour and do all your work, but the seventh day shall be a Sabbath for the Lord your God: That day you shall do no work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your servant, man or woman, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who lives in your home. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, He blessed the Sabbath day, and made it Holy.

(Exodus Ch.20, verses 8 - 11)

2. What is special about Shabbat?

For Jewish people, Shabbat is a joyful day. It is a day to be spent with their families, a day to think about God and to remember how to live a good life.

Shabbat is a day when there is more time for prayer. Services are held in the synagogue on Friday evening and on Saturday morning.

As far as Shabbat is concerned, **working** means anything **creative**, like cooking, lighting fires (some Jews will not even switch on lights during Shabbat!), writing, earning a living, spending money, mending things.

Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday evening. Jews call Friday evening *Erev Shabbat* (*erev* is Hebrew for *evening*).

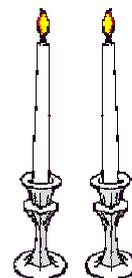
3. How do Jews celebrate Shabbat?

Shabbat is a day of rest. On Shabbat, Jews will not go to work or to the shops (Many Jews will not even touch money on Shabbat). Instead, they spend time at home or at the synagogue. On Shabbat there is time for talking and sharing meals in a more relaxed way than during the week. Many Jewish families will leave the TV and radio switched off, and not answer the phone on Shabbat.

Jews often talk about Shabbat as if the day is a special visitor. One favourite idea is that Shabbat is like a bride at a wedding (who is a very special person on that day). There is a popular Shabbat hymn, which is often sung in synagogue during the Friday night service, which says, "*Come, my beloved, to meet the bride*". When they are singing it many congregations turn towards the door to welcome "the Sabbath bride".

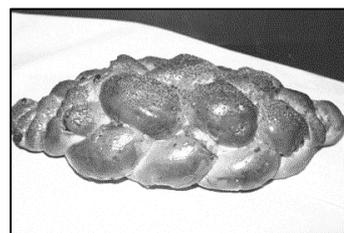
A few hours before sunset the house will be got ready. Food will be cooked for the evening meal, the house will be cleaned as if a special guest were due, the family will ready themselves - a bath, clean clothes etc. In the winter time, some Jews will leave work or school early on Friday so that they can get home and be ready in time.

A few minutes before Shabbat starts, the mother of the family will light the Shabbat candles. She will light 2 candles in the best candlesticks (This tradition began before homes had electric lights. On other days you would only light one candle, but Shabbat is special). Once the candles are lit the family will wish each other "Shabbat shalom" (*Peaceful sabbath*) and may give each other hugs and kisses.



After lighting the candles some families will go to synagogue. The Friday evening service is quite short (only about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour) and then they will come home to eat. The Shabbat meal begins with *Kiddush*, the blessing for wine. Someone (usually the father of the family) will hold a cup of wine and say a special prayer to thank God for making the grapes. Part of this prayer is the passage from the 10 Commandments about keeping the Sabbath. Everyone will take a sip of the wine and then the family will share bread (but first they will say another very short "Thank you" to God for "bringing food from the earth").

The bread for Shabbat is special. It is *challah*, a plaited bread made from a rich dough containing both sugar and egg. The Shabbat table always has 2 of these loaves (during the rest of the week you would only expect a single loaf of ordinary bread).



The Shabbat evening meal is the best of the week. There will be several courses, perhaps soup, followed by fish, followed by roast chicken and baked potatoes, with apple pie for afters. After the meal there may be a cup of lemon tea (Jewish law forbids drinking milk straight after eating meat - so no milk in the tea - and no cream or custard with the apple pie) while the family sing hymns and say grace after meals.

On Saturday morning the family will go to synagogue. Many Jews believe that driving a car is a kind of work, so they will walk to the synagogue. The walk is a good time to spend chatting with your family and any friends you meet on the way. The Shabbat morning service is quite long (It's rarely less than 1½ hours and in some synagogues it can be 3 hours!) Most synagogues have special services and activities for children.

The service ends with a community Kiddush when everyone has a sip of wine and a piece of challah. After that people go home for lunch. Because cooking is not allowed on Shabbat the food will have been prepared on Friday. A favourite is a kind of stew called *chollent* which is left cooking very slowly overnight so that it is still hot.



Shabbat finishes about an hour after sunset on Saturday evening. The family will gather round for a short ceremony called *Havdalah* (which means *ending*). A plaited candle with several wicks is lit, some blessings are said to thank God for Shabbat, a little box of sweet smelling spices is passed round for everyone to smell and a cup of wine is shared. The candle is put out by dipping it in the last of the wine.



2 Spice boxes

Questions and Activities:

Answer your choice of these questions by writing and drawing in your RE book. The learning objective is: I can think about the way Jews celebrate special days.

Jews are not allowed to work on Shabbat, what do you think a Jewish farmer would do on Saturday? (Do you think he/she could feed his/her animals or milk the cows?)

How long does Shabbat last? Why do you think it lasts more than 24 hours?

Make a list of the things a Jewish family does on Friday evening. Illustrate your list.

If you had a regular special day for resting from your everyday work, what would be your special meal?

Do you think it is a good idea for families to have special times when they share meals and conversations without being distracted by TV or the telephone?

What do you think Jewish children might like and dislike about Shabbat?

Teacher's Notes

In religious terms, Shabbat is the most important of Jewish celebrations - more important than any festivals (even than the Day of Atonement).

Lighting the candles is traditionally the mother's job, although technically it is the job of the person who prepares the Shabbat. It is perfectly acceptable for a man to light them.

There are a number of explanations for having 2 candles and 2 loaves (eg. 2 loaves to symbolize the double helping of manna given by God during the 40 years in the desert after the exodus).

Traditionally, Jews would live within walking distance of a synagogue so that they could reach the Shabbat service without *working*. (*Traditionally, a walk of more than 2 miles is considered to be work*). Orthodox Jews forbid driving on Shabbat; progressive Jews are usually happy to drive on Shabbat to get to synagogue (*but not for other purposes*).

Shabbat lasts 25 hours because it is so special that people want to keep it going a little longer.

Sweet smelling spices at Havdalah are an attempt to hang on to the sweetness of Shabbat.