

# Blessings

A Shabbat Dinner Companion



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# Candle-lighting

At precisely 18 minutes before sunset, observant Jewish women stop what they are doing and light candles in honor of the beginning of Shabbat. In Jerusalem, out of respect for the holiness of the city, we welcome Shabbat a little earlier, and light the candles 40 minutes before sunset.

Some women light two candles. Others, like Chana Jenny, light one for each member of the household. Shabbat candle-lighting is an opportunity to welcome the holiest day of the week. It is also a special time for personal prayers for those in need. Chana Jenny is part of a group of women from around the world who pray for one another and donate charity as they light candles.

According to the Talmud, as the candles are lit and the peace of Shabbat descends upon the Jewish home, God blesses us with "extra soul," an extra dimension of spiritual depth.

"Those who taste [Shabbat], taste life."

- *Shabbat prayer*

# Blessings for the candles

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh  
ha'olam, asher kideshanu bamitzvotav  
vatsivanu lehadlik ner shel shabbat

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,  
אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק  
נר של שבת.

ברוך Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the candle of Shabbat.



## The siren's call

I once met a non-Jewish journalist for a major European newspaper who had been assigned to Jerusalem. He liked to point out that, in addition to the many things he learned to love about the city, there were several things that drove him crazy. One was that every Friday, at 40 minutes before sunset, a siren would blast from the rooftops to remind women to light Shabbat candles.

The journalist never got used to the siren and was frustrated that just as he started his weekend, public transportation stopped, stores closed, and everyone retreated into their homes for family dinners. Why, in God's name, he asked, does the beginning of Shabbat have to go by the sunset? Can't you Jews finally fix a

single time to start the Sabbath once and for all!?

After his assignment ended, the correspondent relocated to Paris. Late one Friday afternoon, he messaged me: "I am standing in Place de la Concorde. Everything is bustle and noise. A gorgeous city. But, just now, I looked up and noticed the sunset, and it occurred to me that in Jerusalem the siren is sounding and you are about to light Shabbat candles. I just wanted to tell you how much I miss it, and that the thought of you lighting candles right now fills me with a combination of yearning and inner peace."

Shabbat Shalom!





# Blessing the children

Before *kiddush*, many Jewish parents bless their children.

The blessing has two parts, one for boys and girls respectively, and one for all children. The blessing for sons is a recitation of Jacob's blessing of his grandsons, Ephraim, and Menashe. The blessing for daughters expresses the hope that they will develop the strength and faith of the foremothers of the Jewish people: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. The second blessing, which is for both boys and girls, is an ancient prayer from the book of Numbers. Once recited by priests in the Holy Temple it is still recited today in the Jewish prayer service.

More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people.

— *Achad Ha'am*

*For sons, say:*

בראשית מח **יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה:**

*For daughters, say:*

**יְשִׁימְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּסָרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה.**

במדבר ו

**יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ: יְאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֲלִיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ:  
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֲלִיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:**

*For sons, say:*

**יְשִׁמְךָ** Yesimcha Elohim k'Ephraim v'chMenashe:

*For daughters, say:*

**יְשִׁמְךָ** Y'simech Elohim k'Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel v'Le'ah.

**יְבָרְכֶךָ** Yeverechecha Adonai ve'yishmerecha:

Ya'er Adonai panav eleicha vichuneka:

Yissa Adonai panav eleicha veyasem lecha shalom:

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*For sons, say:*

בראשית מח **יְשִׁמְךָ** May God make you as Ephraim and Menasheh.

*For daughters, say:*

**יְשִׁמְךָ** May God make you as Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca and Leah.

במדבר ו

**יְבָרְכֶךָ** May God Bless you & guard you.

May God shine His Countenance upon you and bestow grace upon you.

May God lift His Countenance to you and give you peace.

## A boy's discovery

In 1979, overlooking Jerusalem's Old City, archeologist Gabriel Barkay was beginning to regret having accepted volunteers on his expedition. A thirteen-year-old boy had joined the dig and he simply wouldn't stop asking questions. At one point, his patience running thin, Barkay pointed at a rock and suggested the boy go hammer on it to see what he could find. The boy returned a few minutes later with the improbable claim that he had broken the rock. Barkay discovered, to his astonishment, that the boy had indeed cracked the rock, uncovering a hidden, undisturbed grave from the time of Isaiah, some 2600-years old.

Among the bones and jewelry scattered on the floor of the grave, Barkay spotted a rolled-up ball of silver unlike anything he had ever seen. He handed it over to the Israeli Antiquities Society, where they soaked the silver in various chemicals for three years to prevent it from disintegrating.

Eventually, scholars unraveled the ball to reveal a silver parchment several centimeters long, as thin as a piece of paper. On the parchment, etched by a careful hand, was the text of the very same priestly blessing that parents recite today in Jewish homes on Friday nights. Scholars assume that the silver parchment was rolled into a ball, wrapped in leather, and worn as an amulet.

I heard this story one rainy Friday morning as I walked outside the Old City in the early 2000's. I imagined parents in Isaiah's time asking a priest from the First Temple to inscribe the blessing in the silver parchment for their child. Later that evening, I returned home and blessed my own children, suddenly aware of how connected I was to those ancient Jewish parents who recited that same blessing, in the same language, with the same feelings of love and concern for my own children as they had for theirs 2600 years ago.



# Chicken Soup

AKA Jewish penicillin, nothing says “Shabbat” more than steaming hot chicken soup and matzah balls on a Friday night. One Friday afternoon we ran out of carrots, and Jenny discovered that when it’s cooked long enough, Israeli pumpkin (*d’laat*) dissolves into the broth, giving it a beautiful golden color and an even richer flavor. She has added both carrots and pumpkin ever since.

In the past, we have tried experimenting with soups from other Jewish traditions on Friday night: Yemenite Beef soup with Hawaii, Moroccan sweet-and-sour beet kubbeh soup. But our 11-year-old son, Yaakov, was unimpressed. “We can eat beet soup on Sunday. On Shabbat, I need chicken soup!”

## Ingredients

### SERVES 15

- 1 whole chicken
- 3 peeled carrots sliced thick
- 2 celery stalks sliced thick
- 1 peeled onion
- 1 kg (2.2 lbs) pumpkin/sweet potato/butternut squash
- 4 medium potatoes, quartered
- ½ cup chopped fresh dill

# Instructions

- 1) Place all the ingredients (except dill) in a large soup pot.
- 2) Add water to cover, bring to a simmer for at least 2 hours.
- 3) Flavor with chicken-soup mix and salt (optional) to taste.



# Matzah Balls

- 4 eggs, slightly beaten
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil (or if you want to go all out Ashkenazi: rendered chicken fat)
  - 4 tbsp cold water
  - 1 cup matzah meal
  - 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

## Instructions

- 1) In a large mixing bowl, mix matzah meal, salt and pepper.
- 2) Add eggs, water and oil. Mix well.
- 3) Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes in a covered bowl.
- 4) Wet your hands and form the mixture into balls.
- 5) Drop each ball into simmering chicken soup or into a large wide pot of boiling salted water.
- 6) Cook in a covered pot for 30 minutes.

# שלום Shalom

