



Reciting blessing over  
Shabbat candles

*This page is about the Jewish day of rest. For the Christian day of rest, see [Sabbath](#).*

**Shabbat** is the name of the day of rest in [Judaism](#). Shabbat happens on the seventh day ([Saturday](#)) of every week. In Judaism, the day is defined with the cycle of the sun: The day begins and ends at [sunset](#), not [midnight](#). So the seventh day of the week, Shabbat, begins [Friday](#) when the sun goes down, and ends Saturday night after it gets dark. The idea of Shabbat comes from the [Bible](#)'s story of Creation. In that story, [God](#) creates the [Universe](#) and everything on [Earth](#) for six days. On the seventh day, He stops work. In the same way, [Jews](#) work on the first six days of the week and rest on the seventh day, Shabbat.

The word *Shabbat* began as a [Hebrew](#) word (שַׁבָּת). The [English](#) word "Sabbath" comes from the word "Shabbat". The English word can also be used to refer to Shabbat. The [Christian](#) idea of [Sabbath](#) came from the Jewish idea of Shabbat. Now, there are many differences between them.

The first part of the [Jewish Bible](#), the [Torah](#), says that [work](#) is not allowed on Shabbat. It is a day to [rest](#) and [study](#) the Torah.

In [Jewish law](#), Shabbat is the most important [Jewish holiday](#). It is even more important than [Passover](#), [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#). [Jewish mystics](#) say that the Shabbat day is meant to be like a perfect world. In this world, everyone knows about God and loves him. They believe that kind of world has not been seen since the [Garden of Eden](#), and will not be seen again until the [Messiah](#) comes.

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## Two parts of Shabbat: celebrating and guarding

There are two [versions](#) of the [Ten Commandments](#) in the Bible. These versions use different words. The version in [Exodus](#) says "**Remember** Shabbat to keep it [holy](#)." The version in [Deuteronomy](#) says "**Guard** Shabbat to keep it holy." Jewish [custom](#) says that "remember" means to [celebrate](#) Shabbat. "Guard" means *resting*—not working or doing [business](#).

## Celebrating Shabbat



Shabbat candles, Kiddush cup and Challah (bread)

Shabbat is a happy day. There are many [ceremonies](#) of Shabbat that help people celebrate the [happiness](#) of the day.

- **Shabbat candles.** It is a Jewish law that no one may light a fire after Shabbat starts. Because of this, someone in every home lights candles just before Shabbat. The woman of the house usually lights the candles, but not always. The candles should last until the people in the house finish [dinner](#). By lighting candles when Shabbat begins, Jews make certain they will have lights in the home when they celebrate. This adds to the [joy](#) of the celebration. Having candles on Shabbat is a very old Jewish custom.

- **Blessings on wine.** A verse in the Bible's Book of [Psalms](#) says, "Wine makes the heart of a person happy." Because of this verse, Jews usually celebrate happy occasions with wine. The two main Shabbat meals start with a blessing over a cup of wine. Most of the time, the cup that people use for this blessing—called [Kiddush](#)—is [fancy](#). (See picture at right.)
- **Three Shabbat meals.** On every Shabbat, Jews have three meals. The first is at night, after the Friday night [prayer](#) service. The second is at noon, after the Saturday morning prayer service. The third is late Saturday afternoon, just before Shabbat ends.

Each of the first two meals begins with a blessing over wine. Next, there is a blessing on [bread](#). In the Bible, God gave the [Israelites](#) two [portions](#) of [manna](#) every Friday so they would not need to collect it on Shabbat. At each of the first two Shabbat meals, there are two [loaves](#) of bread. This is to remind them of the double portion of manna. At these meals, Jews serve the best food they have [money](#) to buy. They use their best plates and [silverware](#). At each meal, they sing special [songs](#), called *zemirot*, to honor Shabbat. The first two Shabbat meals are large and [formal](#). The third Shabbat meal is often smaller and less formal. Some Jews include bread in this meal, while others do not. Many people call this meal *Shalosh Seudot* ("three meals") because eating this meal completes the full set of three meals for Shabbat. This meal is often accompanied by *zemirot* and Torah study.

- **Shabbat prayer services.** Shabbat [prayer services](#) are [organized](#) much like weekday prayer services. There are some changes from the weekday order. The most noticeable changes are:
  1. A special service, *Kabbalat Shabbat* ("[Receiving](#) Shabbat") is added between Friday's afternoon and evening prayers.
  2. The [Amidah](#) prayer is changed on Shabbat. During the week, the *Amidah* includes thirteen blessings asking for God's help with everyday life. On Shabbat, those are [replaced](#) by a single blessing thanking God for the rest day of Shabbat.
  3. The set of Psalms which is read at the start of the morning prayers is made longer on Shabbat.
  4. The entire weekly Torah portion is read out loud from a handwritten [parchment scroll](#).
  5. An [additional](#) *Amidah*, called *Musaf* ("additional service"), is added near the end of morning prayers. This prayer is said in place of the additional [offering](#)<sup>def. n2</sup> that was brought to the [Temple in Jerusalem](#) each Shabbat.
  6. During the Saturday afternoon prayers, the beginning of the Torah portion for the *next* week is read out loud.

- **Other kinds of celebrating.** *Oneg Shabbat*, which means "enjoying Shabbat", is an important part of the day. Some of the ways Jews enjoy Shabbat were already described above. Other ways include wearing nice clothing, socializing with friends and family, physically resting or sleeping, and studying Torah and other religious books

## Guarding Shabbat—rest and work on Shabbat



Hirszenberg: *The Sabbath Rest*, 1894

Enjoying Shabbat is very important, but Shabbat is a holy day. There are laws and rules in the Torah, the [Mishnah](#) and the [Talmud](#) about what Jews may and may not do on Shabbat. These laws help Jews keep Shabbat as a holy day.

- **39 prohibited categories of work.** The Mishnah lists 39 categories of work (Hebrew: *melachah*) that Jews should not do on Shabbat. The laws about what actions are in each category are [complicated](#). All the categories are about making new things or repairing or cleaning old things to make them useful again.

Here is a partial list of work categories not allowed on Shabbat:

1. Lighting a fire
2. Carrying anything outdoors in a public space
3. Cooking
4. Cleaning, except some washing for [hygiene](#) (like washing your hands before eating, or cleaning a fresh cut in the skin)
5. Traveling more than about 3 km (2 miles) from your city or home
6. Writing
7. [Farming](#) work

## 8. Sewing and weaving

## 9. Building or tearing down

- **Preventions.** A *prevention* (Hebrew: *shevut*) is an action that does not fall into one of the 39 categories of work, but is still prohibited. Rabbis prohibited these activities so that Jews would not do work in one of the 39 categories (even by [accident](#) or [carelessness](#)).
  - Buying and selling things with money is a prohibited *prevention*. It is *not* in of the 39 categories of work. But someone who buys or sells things might do something in the 39 categories of work because of it. For example, she might write a receipt or carry what she buys in a public space.
- **Electricity on Shabbat.** Useful electricity is much newer than the laws of Shabbat. Rabbis have worked hard to try to understand how electricity fits into the laws of Shabbat. They have written whole books on the subject. Most [Orthodox Jewish](#) rabbis—but not all—have decided that:
  1. Using electricity to make something very hot (like an oven or a light bulb) is the same as lighting a fire or cooking. Using electricity this way is in the 39 categories of prohibited work.
  2. Using electricity to do anything in the 39 categories of prohibited work is not allowed.
  3. Using electricity for most other things is a prohibited *prevention*. This includes talking on a [telephone](#) or using a [computer](#).
  4. Some electrical devices (like lights) can remain on if started before Shabbat.
- **Saving a human life.** Jews learn from [Leviticus 18:5](#) that one *must* [violate](#) the laws of Shabbat to save a human life. Sometimes, there are two different ways to save a life. Then the person should try to pick the way that violates Shabbat least. But that is not always possible. And saving a life always comes first. Even if someone is not sure he will be successful to save a life, *trying* to save life on Shabbat always comes first.

# Shabbat in non-Orthodox Judaism

[Conservative Judaism](#) also teaches Jews not to do [activities](#) in the 39 prohibited categories of work (*melacha*). Conservative [rabbis](#) are often less [strict](#) about what is *melacha* than Orthodox rabbis are. Conservative rabbis are almost always less strict about what is a prevention (*shevut*) than Orthodox rabbis. For example, Conservative rabbis allow Jews to use [electricity](#) on Shabbat for many purposes. They do not allow Jews to use electricity to do any of the 39 prohibited categories of work.

Many, if not most, *lay members* (not rabbis or prayer leaders) of Conservative [synagogues](#) in [North America](#) do not follow these laws. [Progressive Judaism](#), including [Reform Judaism](#), does not accept Jewish law as [binding](#). These Jews may rest on Shabbat, but are not usually strict about not doing *melacha* or *shevut*. They may even add practices not allowed under Orthodox Jewish law that they think improves their celebration of Shabbat. For example, they may drive to synagogue on Shabbat, or may use [musical instruments](#) on Shabbat. Orthodox Judaism does not allow either of those actions on Shabbat.

## Havdalah: Ending Shabbat



Havdalah candle with many wicks,  
kiddush cup and spice box

Shabbat ends after dark on Saturday night. The end of Shabbat is marked by a ceremony called *Havdalah* (הַבְּדִילָה). This is a Hebrew word meaning "division" or "[separation](#)". The ceremony "divides" or "separates" the holy day of Shabbat from the new week. The *Havdalah* blessings are spoken over a cup of wine. The *Havdalah* ceremony also uses [spices](#) with a nice smell and a candle with many *wicks* (cloth strings for lighting). After *Havdalah*, people start doing regular weekday things again.

## Images for kids

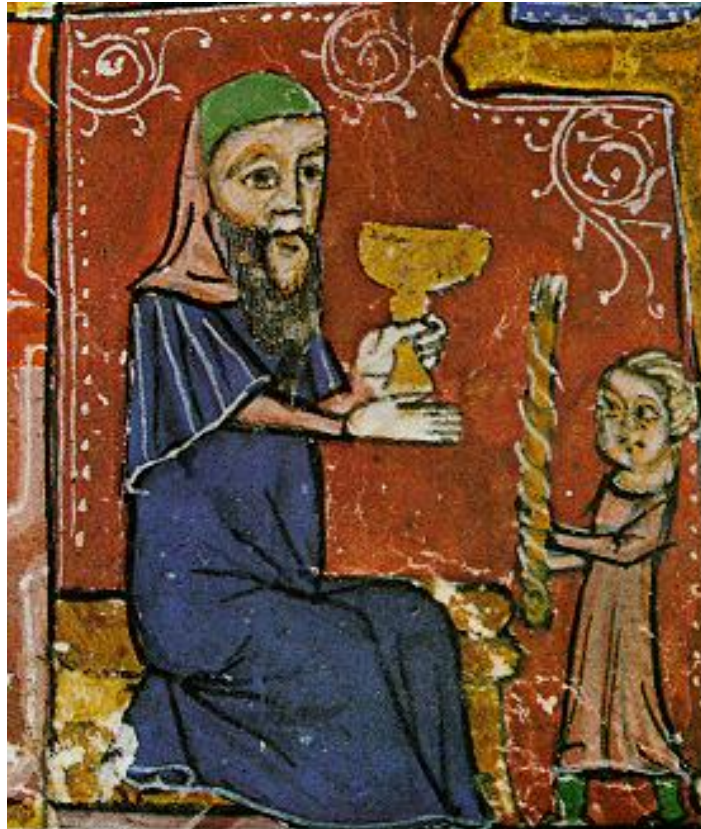




A silver matchbox holder for Shabbat from the [Republic of Macedonia](#)



A challah cover with Hebrew inscription



Observing the closing *havdalah* ritual in 14th-century Spain