



JFS Jewish Journal

Engaging Your Jewish Residents



Shabbat

Shabbat: The Day of Rest

What is Shabbat?

Shabbat, or the Jewish Sabbath, is a weekly day of rest and spiritual renewal that **begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday**. It is considered the holiest day in the Jewish week—on par with even the most sacred holidays like Yom Kippur. More than just a break from routine, Shabbat is a time set apart for peace, reflection and connection.

Observance varies across Jewish communities: Orthodox Jews (most observant) follow strict rules, avoiding work, electronics, and money. Conservative Jews (traditionally observant) uphold tradition but allow for some flexibility. Reform Jews take the most liberal approach, focusing on personal meaning, with practices ranging from traditional to modern. Reform services are often held Friday night, while Conservative and Orthodox communities usually gather Saturday morning.

With such a wide spectrum of observance—ranging from traditional practices to no observance at all—Shabbat is a great opportunity to get to know your residents and their unique traditions.

JFS is Here & This is How We Help

Jewish Family Services (JFS) enriches lives and strengthens the community by providing compassionate support and resources to individuals and families from all backgrounds. Guided by Jewish values, JFS specializes in supporting older adults' safety and independence, assisting families with resources and guidance, providing private transportation to appointments, offering expert counseling and care management, and more. Learn about JFS and our chaplaincy program on *page 5*.



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Why is Shabbat Important to Your Jewish Residents?

- ✓ In observance of the 4th commandment to “remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy”, Jews have observed Shabbat for thousands of years. Traditionally, they take a break from their regular routine to observe the holiness of the weekly Sabbath. While some do that with simple blessings made over candlelighting, ceremonial *challah* (braided bread), and a small cup of wine, others prefer to participate a full Sabbath service, while some may not observe at all.
- ✓ Even today, when residents’ families may no longer observe a full Shabbat to Saturday night, many still have a special, traditional meal on Friday evening, including children and grandchildren.
- ✓ Watching their mothers or grandmothers lighting Shabbat candles may be one of your Jewish residents’ earliest memories.

Shabbat Memories

If your residents grew up in traditional Jewish homes, Shabbat Friday nights were likely filled with music, food, and a sense of celebration. A white tablecloth was spread on the table and set with nice china and silver. The mother lit candles to welcome Shabbat, and the family sang songs like [Shalom Aleichem](#). The father recited a blessing over sweet wine (*Kiddush*), and they shared *challah*, a sweet braided bread. The meal may have started with *gefilte fish*, an Eastern European specialty, followed by traditional chicken soup with noodles and a roast chicken. Side dishes typically included a noodle pudding (*luckshen kugel*, see recipe below), and sometimes carrot *tzimmes* (see recipe [here](#)). Even as adults, residents’ families may have shortened the rituals but still enjoy the food and time together.

Noodle Kugel (Pudding) Recipe

Here’s a simple recipe from [Kashrut.com](#)

1 lb. wide egg noodles
1/2 cup sugar
3 eggs
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup raisins
Either: 3 tablespoon melted margarine or
1/4 cup apple sauce
Optional: 1 apple cut up

1. Cook noodles according to directions on the package.
2. Beat the eggs; gradually add the sugar until thick and light in color.
3. Add the rest of the ingredients except for the noodles, mixing between items.
4. Fold eggs and sugar into the noodles.
5. Grease pans and pour into two 8”x8” or one 9”x14”.
6. Bake for 45 minutes at 350 F.

You can also use this recipe for your Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) menu!

Host Shabbat with Your Residents

Shabbat was a meaningful part of life for many Jewish residents growing up. Re-creating even a small part can spark connection and memory. Here's a step-by-step guide to hosting a meaningful Shabbat.

Step 1: Set the Table Before Residents Arrive



Prepare a nice table with the three traditional Shabbat items:

- Candles (if not real, you can use electric or LED candles for safety)
- Grape juice (or wine) in cups or a wine glass
- *Challah* bread (one or two loaves) that is fully covered with a decorative cloth or something as simple as a napkin

Step 2: Light the Candles



Once residents arrive and gather around the table, light or turn on the electric candles to symbolize the start of Shabbat. You or a resident may recite the [traditional blessing](#) or say something simple like, "We light the candles to bring peace and light into our space."

Step 3: Recite the Kiddush



Hold the cup or wine glass in the air as you or a resident recite the [blessing over the grape juice](#), known as the *Kiddush*, which sanctifies the Sabbath. You can also say something simple like, "We are thankful for this Shabbat day and for the fruit of the vine. We lift this cup to celebrate rest, renewal, and the sweetness of life."

Step 4: Uncover & Share the Challah



Uncover the *challah*, braided bread, and you or a resident can recite the following [blessing](#). You can also say something simple like, "We are thankful for this bread, which reminds us of abundance and community." If using two loaves, recite the prayer while holding the two *challah* together.

After reciting the prayer, cut the *challah* into slices and share with your residents.

Step 5: End the Evening with Reflections, Songs & an Optional Dinner



To close the evening, invite residents to share Shabbat memories or childhood traditions. You can find guiding questions on [page 5](#).



You can also play customary songs like [Shalom Aleichem](#) or [Bim Bam \(Shabbat Shalom\)](#).



Following prayers and reflections, you may host a dinner for your residents to continue the night of memories and welcoming in the Sabbath.

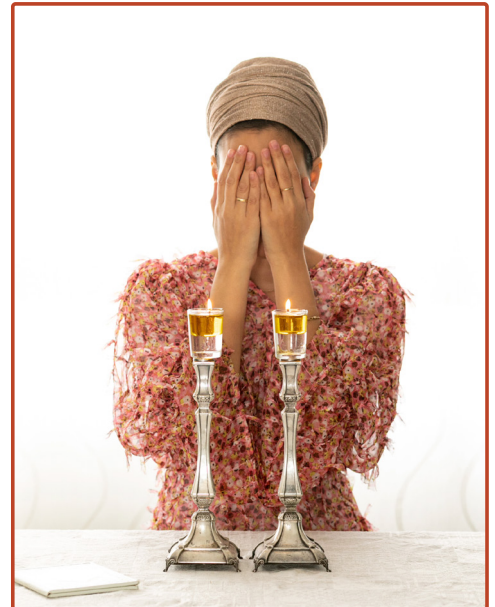
Shabbat Symbolism

Candles

The Shabbat candles are lit first—just before sunset—because they mark the official beginning of Shabbat. Women light the Shabbat candles, then cover their eyes to say the blessing—because once the blessing is said, Shabbat begins and lighting fire is no longer allowed. After the blessing, they uncover their eyes and welcome the light.

The two Shabbat candles, symbolize peace, light, and spiritual presence. They represent the dual commandments of *Zachor* (remember) and *Shamor* (observe) the Sabbath—reminding us both to honor Shabbat with joy and ritual, and to refrain from work to keep the day holy. The flames reflect harmony—between people, within oneself, and between the physical and spiritual realms—illuminating not just the room, but the soul.

You can get electric candlesticks or LED tea lights from synagogue gift shops or online.



Grape Juice

Grape juice is commonly served on Shabbat during the *Kiddush* ceremony, which sanctifies the day, because it is seen as a suitable alternative to wine, particularly for those who do not drink alcohol. The blessing recited over wine or grape juice during *Kiddush* specifically refers to the “fruit of the vine,” making grape-based beverages the preferred choice.

Challah

Challah, a braided bread, symbolizes gratitude, abundance, and the start of Shabbat. The braid can represent unity and connection. Two loaves are used to remember the double portion of manna that G-d gave in the desert. The *challah* is covered with a cloth before the blessing over the wine to show respect—since bread usually comes first in blessings, covering it lets the wine be blessed first in a thoughtful and respectful way.

Challah is available on Fridays at many area supermarkets including Market 32, such as the one at 1730 Central Ave., which has a large kosher department, Hannaford and BJ's.



Shabbat Questions for Residents

As you discover what Shabbat means to your residents, you can lead the discussion with these guiding questions:

- Did your family observe Shabbat in some way?
- Did your mother light candles? How many did she light? (Most lit two, but some lit one for each child or family member.) Did your mother have a ritual for lighting? (There are traditional rituals when doing this.)
- Did your father say *Kiddish* over the wine?
- What did your family eat? Did you eat dinner with your grandparents?
- Did you have pre-Shabbat chores?
- Did your father go to *shul* (synagogue) or temple? Did your mother? (Many women were uneducated in reading Hebrew prayers and didn't go.)
- Were there things you weren't allowed to do? Were there things you looked forward to doing?

This would be a great opportunity to ask whether the men celebrated becoming *b'nai* (singular, *bar mitzvah*). If they did, it was probably much smaller than today and might have even been mid-week. The women might have had brothers who celebrated the occasion. *Bat mitzvahs* for girls were unheard-of until the 1960's. Some women may have participated in adult *bat mitzvah* programs later in their lives.

JFS is Here & This is How We Can Help

JFS Chaplaincy Support

The Jewish Family Services Chaplaincy Program partners with Capital Region long-term care facilities to support the spiritual well-being of Jewish residents and promote cultural inclusivity.

We provide:

- **Religious Services:** Clergy led holiday and religious services to provide a sense of community.
- **Enrichment Programming:** Engaging educational discussions on Jewish history and traditions.
- **Pastoral Care:** One-on-one visits for residents, providing support during transitions or illness.
- **Staff Cultural Competency:** Guidance on Jewish traditions, holidays, and kosher practices.

Contact Rabbi Adam today to schedule a visit: alautman@jfsnyny.org | 518-246-6362

On-Site Support Groups for Residents



JFS offers on-site support groups led by our clinical team. Explore our current topics and click on the titles to learn more about each group:

- [Grief & Loss](#)
- [Coping with Change](#)
- Older Adult Mental Health Awareness

To schedule support groups for your residents, please contact JFS at info@jfsnyny.org.

Bubbe's Corner

You can always count on Bubbe (Yiddish for “grandmother”) for her wisdom and stories. Every Jewish community and family has its own Shabbat traditions unique to their lives and experiences. Be sure to ask your residents about what special things their families do to celebrate, and try to make them feel as at home as possible!



Every Shabbat, my father would bless my brothers and I, saying a special prayer for the boys, “May God bless you as He blessed Ephraim and Manasseh” and a special prayer for me, “May God bless you as He blessed Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah”.

On Fridays before Shabbat, my mom would be in the kitchen making fresh *challah*. Sometimes she would add sesame seeds or poppy seeds on top.

On Shabbat, we would put money in a *tzedakah* box to give to a charity.

As a kid, my mom and I would light the Shabbat candles together. Now I get to light the candles with my daughter and granddaughter.

Don't forget to say *Shabbat Shalom* (shuh-BOT shah-LOME) or Good *Shabbos* (SHAH-bis)!

About JFS

Jewish Family Services of Northeastern NY provides counseling, promotes independence, aging well, and access to basic needs, mitigates food insecurity and social isolation.

Our mission is to enrich the lives of individuals and families from all backgrounds and strengthen the community by providing compassionate, collaborative human services, guided by Jewish values. This is amplified by volunteers and sustained by donors to ensure support for our community is within reach.

Our staff has expertise in:

- Helping older adults maintain their safety and independence
- Providing resources and guidance to older adults and their families
- Offering private transportation to medical appointments and synagogue services
- Counseling and care management (JFS is part of major insurance networks, including Medicare)

Support Our Chaplaincy Program

JFS provides spiritual connection and support for Jewish residents in long-term and elder care in the Capital Region.

Online: jfsneny.org/donations

Call: (518) 516-1102

Thank you!

For all Jewish Journals and this year's holiday dates, visit jfsneny.org/chaplaincy-support.



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