

Shabbat: Remember & Observe

Source Sheet

What inspiration can we take from our weekly Shabbat rituals to remind us of the hostages? As we celebrate Shabbat, what might we do to remember those who cannot celebrate it fully?

LIGHTING SHABBAT CANDLES

According to Jewish tradition, one should light two candles in each home, right as Shabbat is about to begin. In fact, the lighting of the Shabbat candles marks the entrance of Shabbat, and after that, according to Jewish law, no fire may be kindled until the end of Shabbat. The exact time when candles are lit varies each week depending on the time the sun sets in your location. (You can find this week's Shabbat candle lighting times [here](#).)

How Many Candles Do We Light?

At least two candles should be lit. These represent “*shamor*” [“observe”] and “*zakhor*” [“remember”], the first words of the commandments [in the two Ten Commandments passages in the Torah] concerning Shabbat (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12). They also symbolize the unity underlying all apparent duality, such as man and woman, body and soul, speech and silence, creation and revelation.

It is permissible to light more than two candles. In fact, it is considered particularly meritorious to do so. This is implied in an interpretation of “And God blessed the seventh day” (Genesis 2:3). “With what did he bless it? Light.”¹

Some have the custom to light more than two candles. For example, in many families, an additional candle is lit for each child in the family. In that vein, since October 7th, some people have taken on an initiative to light an extra pair (or more) of candles in honor of specific people who are held in captivity in Gaza, and cannot light candles themselves. This is a way of honoring them and remembering them. You can join this initiative, titled: **You Be Their Light**, [here](#).

Additional Candle Lighting Prayers

In addition to the traditional blessing over lighting Shabbat candles, many people see this time as a unique time for prayer and approaching God on behalf of others; asking for special requests of blessing. While there are some traditional texts for these additional prayers, many create their own personally worded prayers, which they recite quietly. Some people recite psalms at this point. Shabbat candle-lighting also serves as an opportunity to pray on behalf of the hostages.

Discuss:

- *Does your family light Shabbat candles?*
- *Who lights them?*
- *How many candles are lit and why?*
- *Has something changed in your candle lighting traditions since October 7th?*
- *If you were to add an additional prayer this coming Shabbat, what would you ask for?*

¹ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-candles/>

BLESSING THE CHILDREN

On Friday night, one of the customary rituals around the Shabbat dinner table is for the parents to bless the children. There are different versions of the openings of these blessings, and some have a different opening for boys and girls. But they all conclude with the priestly blessing which appears in the Torah (Numbers 6:22-27):

Yivarechecha Adonai v'yishmerecha

Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka

Visa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem lecha shalom

בְּרַכֵּךְ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ
יְאֵר ה' פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֹךְ
יִשָּׂא ה' פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

May God bless you and protect you. May God show you favor and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

The traditional introductory line of the blessing for girls is:

Yesimech Elohim k'Sarah Rivka Rachel v'Leah

יְשִׁימֶךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּסָרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה

May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.

And the traditional introductory line of the blessing for boys is:

Yisimecha Elohim k'Ephraim v'chi-Menashe

יְשִׁימֶךָ אֱ-לֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכִמְנַשֶּׁה

May God bless you like Ephraim and like Menashe

Rachel Goldberg, mother of Hersh Goldberg Polin, who is captive in Gaza, references this blessing of the children on Friday night in her monumental speech at the United Nations in Geneva in December, 2023:

"On Friday night, October 6th, right before Hersh left to go to that fateful music festival that would change our lives forever, one of the last things I did was I blessed him.

See, on Sabbath evenings Jewish parents for millennia have traditionally blessed their children to be like specific Biblical characters. Jewish boys are blessed to be like the sons of Joseph who were named Ephraim and Menashe. It's an intriguing choice, given that there are so many more well-known Biblical characters: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon. So why do we bless our boys to be like these two not so well-known brothers? Up until Ephraim and Menashe, all biblical brothers suffered from destructive hatred and poisonous rivalry. Cain and Abel; Isaac and Ishmael; Jacob and Esau. And then there was Joseph and his brothers, those brothers who hated Joseph so intensely they threw him deep into the ground. But Joseph ends up in Egypt and he goes on to get married and have two children named Ephraim and Menashe. And those brothers, they loved each other. It sounds so simple, but suddenly, for the first time in history we have biblical siblings who broke the pattern of hatred between brothers. And every Friday night, Jewish parents all over the world, bless their sons to aspire to be like them, the brothers who didn't fight, the brothers who didn't have jealousy, the brothers who didn't manifest violence toward one another.

We are at a crossroads. And when I say we, I don't mean we Jews, Muslims or Christians, Americans, Palestinians, Europeans, Israelis, Ukrainians, Russians. I mean we humans. We can keep dividing the world into the paradigm of them versus us. Or, we can start thinking about those who are willing and those who are not willing. And there are people everywhere who fall into each category. The whole premise of compromise is being willing to do something I don't want to do but I am willing to do it, to give up on something I hold so dear, for something I hold even more dear. There are people all over the world who are willing- not because they're naive or foolish. It's because they want their children to live in a world that doesn't exist right now and so they have the courage to be willing to do things that are terrifying and uncomfortable. They're willing to do things that are scary. I also know that on both sides of any conflict there are those not willing, no matter what the price will be for their lack of willingness. There is anguish so deep, suffering so profound, and rage so ingrained, that there are people ready to lean over, take everyone with them and fall into the abyss. And I don't mean the metaphorical abyss, I mean the actual abyss.

In the bible, in the book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 30, there's a curious exchange where God gives the people a choice and says: "I am putting before you today life and death, and I am telling you: Choose life."

In our world right now there is nothing more frightening than choosing life. It's an idea that will require the most brave, creative, heroic efforts and strengths imaginable for those who are willing, amidst ongoing trauma, angst and suspicion, to build an idea of a future. In most conflicts there are two sides and neither side is going anywhere. So all over the world, we have got to learn to live together. Or all over the world, we are going to die together."

Discuss:

- *Do your parents bless you on Friday night? If so, do they use the traditional blessing or a different one?*
- *If you have children, do you bless them?*
- *What does Rachel Goldberg learn from the choice of brothers that inspire the traditional weekly blessing of our sons?*
- *What is the demand she makes of us, all humans, to do and to choose?*
- *What might her speech inspire you to do and how might you share it with others?*

For further reference, you can listen to the entire speech [here](#).

