

The Friday Night Meal:

1. Traditional foods should be served at the three Shabbos meals, for there is a spiritual reason for each individual dish. Jews have been eating the traditional Shabbos foods since time immemorial; these dishes have attained the status of a *minhag* [firmly established custom] and should not be changed or replaced.
2. It is customary to eat the Shabbos meals in the dining room, using one's finest china and silverware, all in honor of the Shabbos.[One may use decorative paper/plastic goods if one has many guests, and does not have sufficient silverware or plates.]
3. The table should remain covered with a tablecloth for the duration of the Shabbos. It should not be removed until after the Havdalah has been recited.
4. You should sit respectfully at the Shabbos table, because you are seated at the King's banquet. You should eat in your best clothes when eating the Shabbos meals and avoid wearing weekday clothes.
5. It is customary to say "I am eating this in honor of the holy Shabbos" or "You proclaim the Shabbos a delight" before partaking of each dish of the meal.
6. The first course is fish. Some people eat gefilte fish rather than the whole fish. This is to avoid removing bones from a whole fish, which would be a violation of the prohibition against *boreir*, separating the undesirable parts from the food.

7. There are those who have a custom to dip Challah into the fish sauce to unite the four elements of creation: inanimate, vegetative, animal, and human. When this is done in honor of the Shabbos, a person elevates the four elements to their heavenly roots.
8. It is customary to use pepper as a seasoning in every Shabbos dish.
9. It is customary to have a drink of liquor or wine after eating the fish course.
10. One should also wash the utensils [fork and plate] used during the fish course or use different utensils for the next course. It is advisable to remove the fish from the table at the end of the course.
11. The next course is hot soup. There is a custom to put *lockshen* [noodles] and/or chickpeas/lima beans in the soup.
12. The next course should include a good selection of chicken and meat.
13. Condiments such as horseradish and pickles should be served.
14. Kugel is a traditional side dish. So is “farfel.”
15. One should leave over from the Shabbos food. A person who leaves over a small portion of his meal clearly has eaten solely to fulfill the Mitzvah of taking delight in the Shabbos.

16. One should leave some Challah on the table from the Friday night meal. Some have a custom to eat a little of it at the daytime meal.
17. It is a mitzvah to sing *Zemiros* [songs] at the Shabbos table. These songs are composed of verses of Tanach, Halachos, and stories of the Talmud that mention Shabbos and have themes that relate to Shabbos.
18. There is also a custom to sing *Niggunim*, wordless melodies.
19. We do not begin the Shabbos meal with *Zemiros*. We wait until after the first course.
20. When the meal is completed, we sing Psalm 137 – “Shir Hama’alos.”
21. Men and women are required to wash *Mayim Acharonim* [grace after meals], washing our hands one time with water after the meal. No blessing is made on this washing. The minimum amount required is to wash the first two joints of our fingers and the first joint of the thumb, holding our hands downward before drying them. From the strict law, one doesn’t have to dry his hands. Nonetheless, it’s preferable to be strict to dry one’s hands. Some have the practice to say “Mayim Achronim Chovah (is obligatory)”. If one forgot to wash Mayim Achronim before Birchas HaMazon or didn’t have water, one must wash after Birchas HaMazon. If you do not have a special Mayim Achronim utensil at the table, you can wash

directly from the sink - no need to use a washing cup. Most opinions do not require the Mayim Acharonim water to be removed from or covered while on the table.

22. A G-d fearing individual should wear a hat when he says the *Birchas Hamazon*. Many people also put on their jackets.
23. If there are three adult males eating at the table, it is customary to say the *Birchas Hamazon* with a cup of wine.
24. One who is meticulous about doing Mitzvos should always say the *Birchas Hamazon* out of a Siddur or similar text, rather than by heart.
25. When eating together with his family, a person should say the *Birchas Hamazon* in an audible voice, which is loud and joyful.
26. Men, women, and children should learn Torah after the meal.
27. It is customary to have an Oneg Shabbos later in the evening, where friends get together and socialize, and primarily talk about great deeds and sayings of Tzaddikim. We thereby strengthen our faith in our Judaism.
28. Many have a custom to dance on Friday night after the meal.

Short Dvar Torah for the Shabbat Table

If you carefully observe the Shabbat preparations and customs that are involved with the Shabbat meals, a beautiful symbolism can be appreciated.

On Friday afternoon, we stop working and we begin our Shabbat preparations with a visit to the Mikveh or at least a shower. We then put on Shabbos clothes.

When we set the table, we first put the Challah on the table. Later, we put the wine on the table.

When we make the Kiddush, it is customary to look at the burning Shabbat candles while reciting the first paragraph.

The customary food menu looks something like this: After having a slice of Challah, fish is the appetizer, followed by chicken soup, and then the main dish, chicken. At Shabbat lunch, we eat all types of meats such as cold cuts, liver, and cholent meat.

And of course, who does not take a short nap after that kind of a lunch!

Is there a meaning behind this order? Yes! Since all of Shabbat is “*zecher l’maasai bereishis* – in remembrance of the work of creation,” the customs are therefore designed to reflect this, by taking place in chronological order of creation:

On the first day of creation, G-d created the light, which is the realm of spirituality. On Erev Shabbos, the holy energies

of Shabbos are beginning to enter into our lives, so we stop working and start focusing on the holy Shabbos.

On the second day of creation, G-d separated the higher and lower waters, and designated specific areas for the water on the third day – so we make use of water to prepare our bodies for the Shabbat on Friday afternoon. A bath or shower represents the lower water; while the Mikveh represents the higher waters.

The third day of creation continued with the vegetation sprouting forth followed by the emergence of the trees. So we first put the Challah on the table, which comes from wheat, and then we place the wine on the table, which comes from grapes.

On the fourth day of creation, the luminaries were created. So the wife lights the candles and we look at the candles during the Kiddush.

Fish were created on the fifth day, followed later that day by birds, and only on the sixth day were the animals created. Hence, even our menu on Shabbat is synchronized with the creation message of the day.

And when first man was all alone, G-d put him to sleep to fashion his soul mate for him. After the sin of first man, he felt unclothed, and G-d provided him with clothing.

All the traditional foods that we eat, all have a numerical value of 7, [when adding the numbers]:

1. Wine = Yayin =Yud [10], Yud [10], Nun [50] = 70
[7+0=7]

2. Challah = Ches [8], Lamed [30], Hei [5] = 43 [4 + 3 = 7]
3. Fish = Dag = Daled [4], Gimel [3] = 7
4. Soup = Marak = Mem [40], Reish [200]. Koof [100] = 340 [3+4+0=7]
5. Meat = Basar = Beis [2], Sin [300], Reish [200] = 502 [5+0+2=7]