

5 Reasons to Celebrate Shabbat

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More and more people are discovering the power of this weekly Jewish holiday.

It seems that Shabbat, the weekly Jewish day of rest, is having a moment, as more and more people are discovering the restorative powers of taking a day to unplug, relax and connect with others and our higher selves.

OneTable, an organization that helps fund Shabbat dinners for people between the ages of 21 and 39, reports a huge uptick in the number of people using their services. In 2019, it funded 9,000 dinners; by 2022, that number had soared to over 20,000. Even The New York Times recently observed that “Shabbat is a Salve - and a Scene,” noting that “more young people - Jewish and not - seem to be observing the Sabbath”.

“People want to show that they are proud of being Jewish and they believe in the spirit of Judaism,” Susan Korn, a Manhattan fashion designer, explained to *The New York Times*. She recently hosted a “Shabbat dinner” on a Thursday night for over 100 people in Manhattan.

What’s drawing so many people to celebrating Shabbat? Here are five reasons why Shabbat might just be the hippest holiday:

1. We all need time to unplug.

Taking time off from our devices, a hallmark of a traditional Shabbat, is crucial to our wellbeing. Researchers have found that having our smartphones nearby, even when we aren't actively using them, can make us less empathetic and less engaged with the world around us. Going device-free for 25 hours liberates us to be more creative and focus more on the real world and on other people.

"I think Shabbat, a day of rest, is the best idea from Judaism," explains Emmy-nominated filmmaker Tiffany Shlain. A self-described "cultural Jew," Ms. Shlain is so enamored with the benefits she and her kids accrue from taking a break from electronic devices, she wrote a bestseller, *24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week* (Gallery Books: 2019).

2. Eating with family and friends is good for our health.

Meals with family and friends are a big part of Shabbat. It turns out that breaking bread together isn't only a lot of fun, it's associated with all sorts of health benefits as well. Studies show that children who take part in family meals are more resilient and have better mental health. One University of Oxford study found that "the more people eat with others, the more likely they are to feel happy and satisfied with their lives."

3. Shabbat connects us with something higher than ourselves.

Shabbat is a time to connect with other people, but it's also something much more. Shabbat can be a time to feel the Divine in our lives.

Celebrating Shabbat is a powerful way to tap into a spiritual mindset. All week we work hard; Shabbat, the pinnacle of the week, gives us a chance to take a break and live on a different plane, recalibrating our busy lives and connecting to a higher power.

4. Shabbat reminds us we're part of a long chain of Jewish history.

There's something comforting and deeply satisfying about knowing that we're celebrating Shabbat in the footsteps of generations of our ancestors who came before. Whether you use Shabbat candlesticks that belonged to your grandmother, cook your mom's chicken soup recipe, or enjoy some other family heirloom or tradition, Shabbat gives us the opportunity to engage in timeless Jewish traditions that have been passed down for generations.

5. Shabbat is a great time to stand with the Jewish people.

With record-high levels of antisemitism, many of us are looking for ways to assert our proud Jewish identity. Celebrating Shabbat is a powerful way to do that. Over a hundred years ago the great Hebrew writer Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (known by his pen-name "Ahad

Ha'Am") famously observed the centrality of Shabbat in Jewish identity: "More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews."

Ginsberg wasn't religiously observant but he realized that Shabbat is the central Jewish activity that has kept our people going throughout the millennia. When you celebrate Shabbat, you are declaring that you are part of the Jewish people.

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