

Key Words

Shabbat	Challah	Torah	Moses	Israelites	Havdallah	Melaveh malkah
Eruv	Kiddush	Manna	Egypt	Exodus	Synagogue	

Core Practices: The challenges and benefits of observing Shabbat

- In Judaism, the home serves a central role in Jewish religious life and it remains the place where most people first experience Jewish ritual. The home is of particular importance for the weekly celebration of **Shabbat**, an observance of the Commandment which reminds Jews of when God rested on the seventh day after creating the world: 'Remember the Sabbath day (the Shabbat) by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God' (Exodus 20:8-9.)
- Many Jews believe that Shabbat is the most important festival; they see it as a gift from God and a time when they can forget the worries of the week.
- However, not all Jews observe Shabbat in the same way. For many Orthodox Jews all forms of work must cease for the duration of Shabbat, unless it is a matter of life and death. In addition, they should not carry items or objects between public and private places and so some Jews have created a special enclosed area in their town called an **eruv**, to enable Jews and their visitors to continue to do this.
- Jews make a number of preparations before Shabbat begins. The house is tidied, food is prepared and two candles are placed on the dining table to represent the two commandments received by **Moses** on Mount Sinai: to 'remember' and to 'observe' the Shabbat. There will also be two **challah** loaves to remember the food God provided for the **Israelites** when they fled from **Egypt**. Although each family will celebrate Shabbat in different ways, there are also common features. Shabbat begins a few minutes before sunset on Friday evening so this will vary depending on the time of year, earlier in winter and later in summer. The woman of the family welcomes in the Shabbat by lighting two candles, and a special Shabbat meal begins, often when the father returns home from the synagogue. Firstly, a blessing is said over the challah loaves which symbolises the double portion of **manna** which the Israelites ate during their time in the desert following the **Exodus** from Egypt. Before any food is eaten, **kiddush** is said over the wine to make Shabbat holy and blessings are said for the children. The meal usually lasts for a few hours and it is a time for families to relax and spend time together.
- On the following morning, the family will usually visit the synagogue, after which they will share another meal. Orthodox Jews will walk to the synagogue and make sure that all cooking has been completed in advance, as driving or turning on electricity would be considered work. Many will spend the afternoon studying the Torah and playing family games.
- At sunset, the family say farewell to Shabbat by lighting a plaited candle known as the **Havdallah**. Havdallah means separation and symbolises the difference between Shabbat and the working week. Each member of the family takes a sip of wine and sniff from a sweet-smelling spice box to symbolise the hope of a sweet week ahead. In some Jewish communities the end of Shabbat is delayed to allow for the **melaveh malkah** ('accompanying the (Shabbat) Queen') when Shabbat is treated as a queen and sent on its way with songs and special foods.

Key Concepts

- Why is it important for Jews to observe Shabbat?
- Why can it sometimes be difficult for Jews to observe Shabbat?
- Why is the home such an important part of the celebration of Shabbat?

Relevant past paper questions

Explain the ways in which Jews celebrate Shabbat in the home. (8 marks) 2018

