



# TOWARDS MEANINGFUL SHABBOS

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## From Chicken Soup to Potato Kugel: The Special Tastes of Shabbat

When we think of Shabbat, a lot of images and ideas may come to mind, but definitely chicken soup, gefilte fish, cholent, and potato kugel are up there on the list. Why is our Shabbat experience so intrinsically wrapped up with these (and other traditional) foods? Is there any deeper meaning to these delicacies?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik once explained (*Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne*) that there are two different types of Mesorah (tradition). We often focus on what he calls the “*Mussar Avicha*”, the passing down of the details of Halacha from one generation to the next. But he says that there is another type of Mesorah (what he calls the “*Torat Imecha*”), which is equally as important. This is the passing down of the scents and tastes of the mitzvot, teaching our children to connect with and experience the mitzvot. He writes about his own mother – “*Most of all, I learned [from her] that Judaism expresses itself not only in*

*formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent, and warmth to mitzvot*”.

This, then, is the secret to our Shabbos cuisine. While we want to pass on all of the positive and negative detailed mitzvot of Shabbat to our children, we also want to give over the beauty and excitement of Shabbat. One of the ways we do this is through our gefilte fish and cholent.

The Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 30:7) writes that the Chachamim teach us that we must eat and drink special foods on Shabbat in order to fulfill the command of Oneg Shabbat (enjoying the Shabbat). *וכל המרבה בהוצאת שבת ובתיקון מאכלים רבים וטובים הרי זה משובח. The more one spends financially on Shabbat expenses and puts effort into the preparation of many good foods, the more praiseworthy it is.*

Over the generations, many foods have become traditional Shabbat dishes, and these recipes have been passed down for generations. Interestingly, many of these foods became standard Shabbat food based on Halachic and Hashkafic considerations. We will explore a few of these Shabbat foods here:

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**Chicken Soup** – What would a Friday night meal be without chicken soup? The **Gemara Berachot 44a** states that “a meal without soup cannot be called a meal”. Based on this statement, Chassidic Rebbes insist that there be soup at any fancy meal like a Brit Milah, Bar Mitzvah, or wedding. Since our Shabbat meals are meant to be very special occasions, there is a tradition to include soup in our Shabbat menu.

**Gefilte fish** – When eating salmon or fillet, one will often encounter bones. Removing these bones (if done incorrectly) can be a violation of the prohibition of Borer (sorting). Gefilte fish was invented in order to circumvent this problem. Fish would be deboned and chopped up before Shabbat and formed into Gefilte fish balls, thereby creating a boneless and *borer-less* innovation. (Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 3:15)

**Cholent** - The Rama writes (257:8) ומצוה להטמין לשבת כדי שיאכל חמין בשבת, כי זהו מכבוד (חמין) - There is a mitzvah to insulate on Shabbos so that you can eat hot food (חמין) on Shabbat and this is considered to be a fulfillment of both Kavod and Oneg Shabbat. He adds that if someone doesn't do so, there is a suspicion that he might be a Karaite. The Piskei Teshuvot explains that the Karaim took the pasuk “ולא תבערו אש” literally and believed that one could not keep a fire burning or insulate from before Shabbat and therefore ate only cold food on Shabbat. One might have thought that it would make sense to take this position and follow the lead of the Karaim. After all, the laws of *bishul* are very complicated. It would be a lot simpler to just avoid all potential issues and simply eat cold food on Shabbat. But we see that we in fact take the opposite position. There is actually

a special mitzvah to eat hot food on Shabbat (prepared in a permitted manner), testifying to the importance of the Mitzvot of Kavod and Oneg Shabbat. The Piskei Teshuvot concludes – ולכן נהגו אבותינו מעולם לאכל מאכל החמין (טשאלנט) בסעודת צפרא דשבתא, ואין לסור ממנהג ישראל...

*and therefore our ancestors have always eaten cholent on Shabbat morning, and one should not deviate from this Minhag Yisrael.*

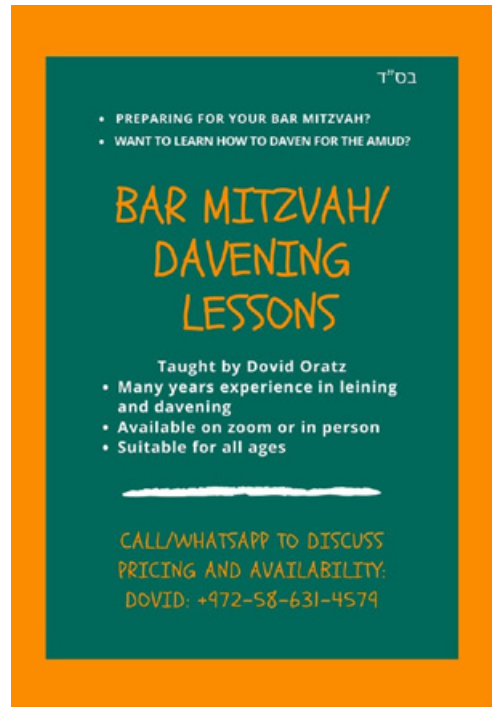
**Kugel** - The Maharil explains that dating back to the times of the Gemara, Jews used to traditionally eat what was known as פשטידה, a kugel-like food which was made out of two layers of dough with some sort of filling inside (usually meat). This was a traditional Shabbat food because it resembles the *man*, which was covered on both sides with dew. (as mentioned in a previous article, this is also the reason we cover our Challa on top and bottom). Shabbat is connected to *man* because both illustrate our dependence on Hashem for *parnassah* (sustenance). Nowadays, our lokshen and potato kugels don't usually have crusts but we keep the tradition nonetheless (and some say that the crusty outer layer can still be considered a crust).

These are just a few examples of the many Ashkenzic traditional Shabbat foods. Go to any Moroccan, Syrian, Yemenite, or Ethiopian Shabbat meal and you will encounter many other Shabbat favorites. It is worthwhile to look into what these traditions are based on and gain a deeper understanding of these special customs that have been passed down for generations.

One last super-important ingredient that would be worthwhile to mention in this article is what is known as the “Shabbat spice”. In **Bereishit Rabbah 11:4**, the following story is recounted. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi hosted the

emperor Antoninus for a Shabbat meal and Antoninus enjoyed every bite. He then hosted the Antoninus again for a weekday meal and Antoninus complained that the food did not taste nearly as good as the food at the Shabbat meal. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi explained that this was because the weekday food was missing a special ingredient – the Shabbat spice.

The Shabbat spice is obviously not an actual spice one can purchase at the local grocery store. But it hints to the idea that as we cook our Shabbat food, we should constantly be ‘spicing up’ our pots with Tefillot that the food should truly enhance the Shabbat atmosphere in our homes, bring kedusha and simcha to our Shabbat meals, and connect our children and guests to the warmth and beauty of tradition, of Torah, and of Yiddishkeit. ■



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