

My
Book
of Jewish
Festivals

HANNAH SHAFIROFF

For my parents,
who always fill the
home with Jewish joy

My Book of Jewish Festivals



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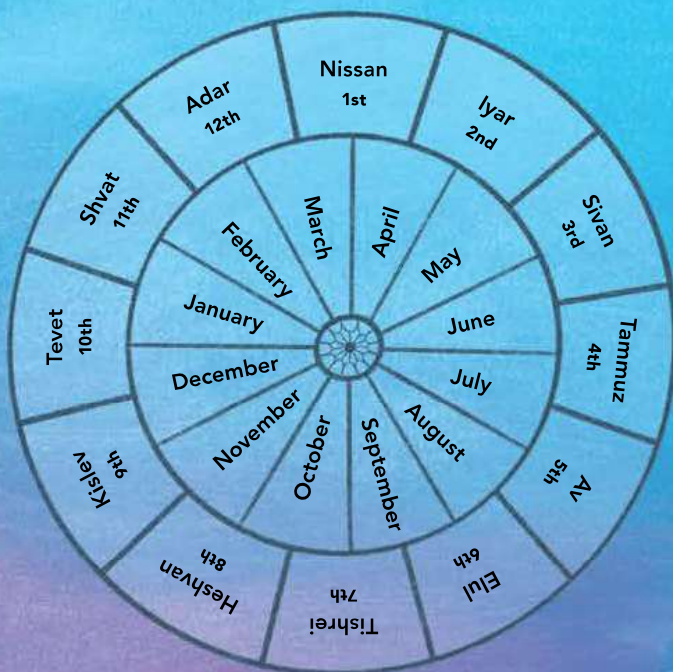
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Author's Note: This book is an introduction to ten major Jewish festivals and observances. Because it is an introduction, it would not be possible for me to cover every detail and nuance within this beautiful religion. Some people spend a lifetime studying all there is to know about Judaism! But I hope that I have covered more than enough to pique your curiosity and help you discover joy in the rich history and traditions of Judaism.

A Note on the Hebrew Calendar

The Hebrew calendar is influenced by the sun and the moon. Unlike the non-religious calendar, where days go from midnight to midnight, the days of the Hebrew calendar run from nightfall to nightfall. That's because when God created the world, He created the night and then the day: 'There was evening and there was morning, the first day' (Genesis 1:5).

We count the months by watching the cycles of the moon. The first of each month, or **Rosh Chodesh** (*rosh ho-desh*), begins when the first sliver of the new moon appears in the sky. The months of the Hebrew calendar align with the months of the non-religious calendar like this:

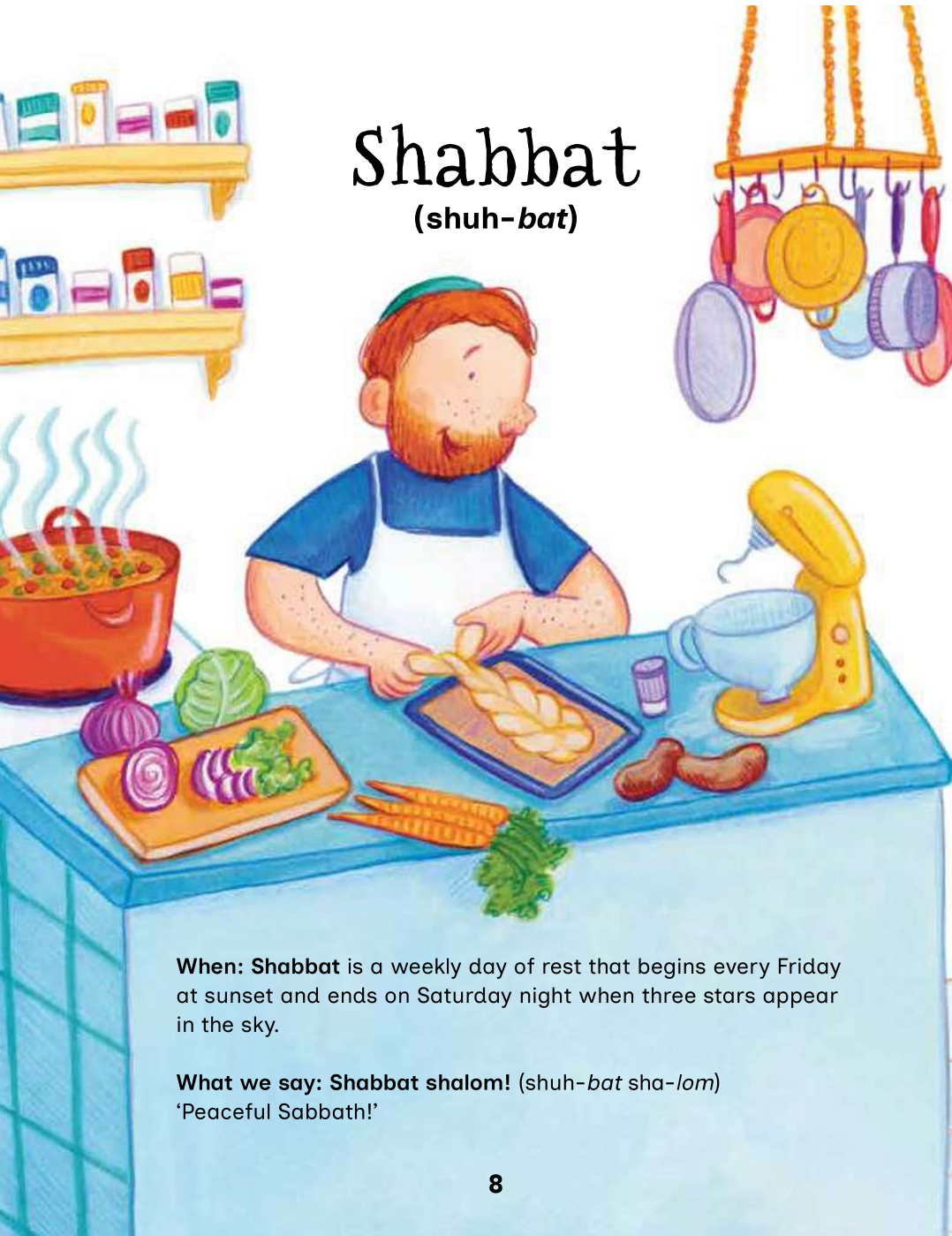


Contents

Shabbat.....	8
Rosh Hashanah	14
Yom Kippur.....	20
Sukkot.....	24
Simchat Torah	28
Hanukkah	32
Tu Bi'Shvat.....	40
Purim.....	42
Pesach.....	48
Shavuot	58
Glossary	62

Shabbat

(shuh-bat)



When: Shabbat is a weekly day of rest that begins every Friday at sunset and ends on Saturday night when three stars appear in the sky.

What we say: Shabbat shalom! (shuh-bat sha-lom)
'Peaceful Sabbath!'

Why we celebrate: Shabbat, or the Sabbath, is the day of rest for the Jewish people. When we celebrate Shabbat, we remember God's creation. After God spent six days creating the universe, He rested on the seventh day. God made the seventh day, Shabbat, a special day for all of us to rest together. It's an entire day to slow down and spend time with the people we love.

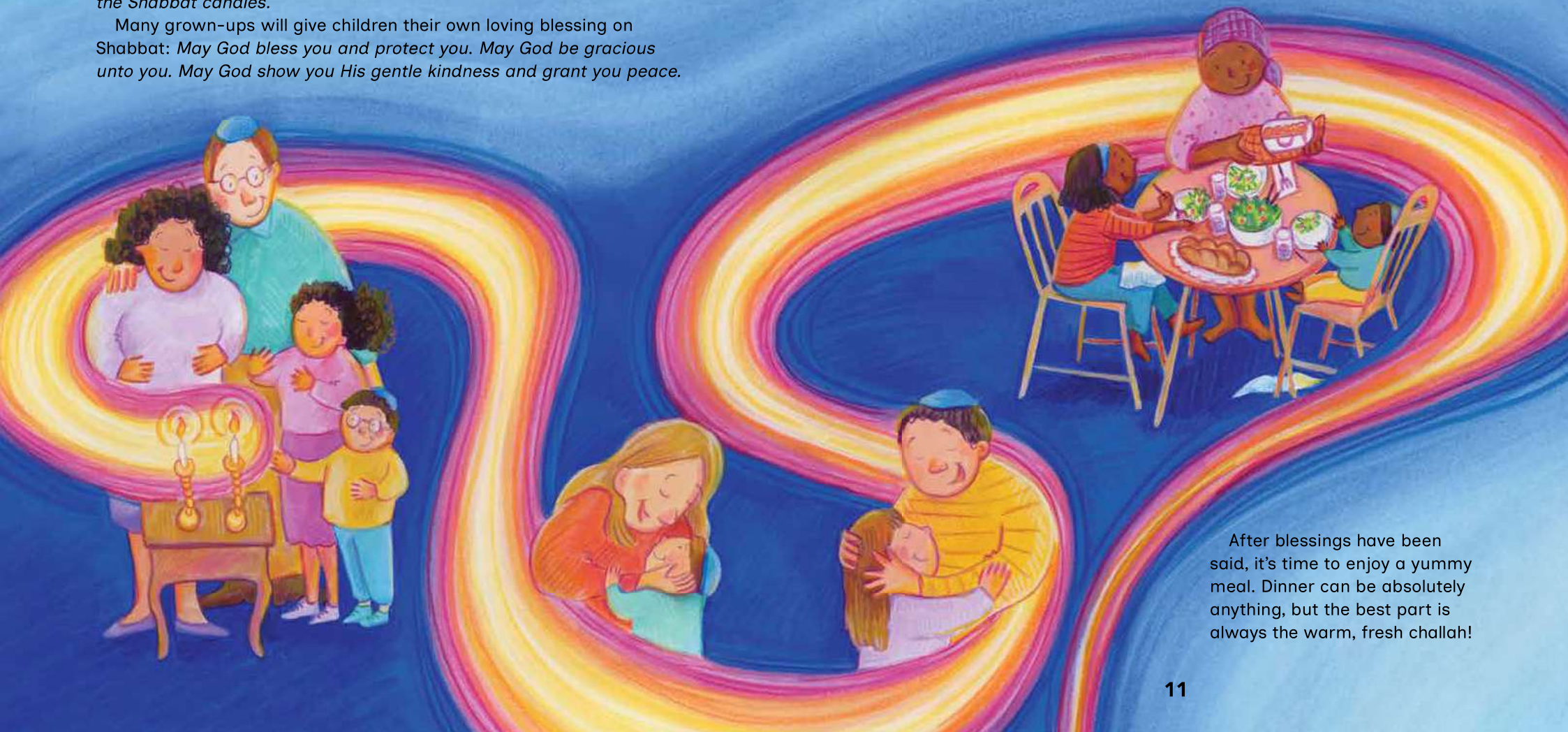
How we celebrate: Before the sun sets and Shabbat begins, there's lots to do! We cook dinner and buy or bake **challah** (ha-la), the traditional braided egg bread eaten on Shabbat. Shabbat candles are set in gleaming candleholders. We try our best to finish work before sunset so we can truly appreciate Shabbat.



The match is struck! With a crack and a hiss, a teeny flame dances on the end of the match and we carefully light the pair of Shabbat candles. We wave our arms over the candles three times to welcome Shabbat into our homes. Then, we close our eyes and recite the **blessing**: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to light the Shabbat candles.*

Many grown-ups will give children their own loving blessing on Shabbat: *May God bless you and protect you. May God be gracious unto you. May God show you His gentle kindness and grant you peace.*

Before eating, we practise gratitude and say a blessing over wine or grape juice and challah: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine. Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.*



After blessings have been said, it's time to enjoy a yummy meal. Dinner can be absolutely anything, but the best part is always the warm, fresh challah!

On Saturday morning, some families attend **synagogue** (sin-ah-gog), where Jewish people go to pray, sing and learn more about Judaism with their community. Back at home, everyone relaxes and enjoys spending time together.



Shabbat ends at nightfall, traditionally when three stars can be seen glistening in the Saturday night sky. We finish Shabbat through a ritual called **Havdalah** (hav-doll-ah), which means separation. Havdalah is the bridge between the end of Shabbat and the rest of the week. During Havdalah, we recite a blessing that reminds us that Shabbat is special and different from all the other days: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who distinguishes between the sacred and the ordinary, between light and dark, between Israel and the world, between the seventh day and the six days of the week. Blessed are You, Who distinguishes between the holy and the everyday.*

We light a long, braided candle, pour wine into a glass until it overflows and breathe in the smell of warm spices. These Havdalah rituals encourage us to carry all the joys and blessings of Shabbat through the new week... until next Friday evening, when we start the process all over again!

