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THE DELIGHT OF AN EXQUISITE DAY

“If you . . . call the sabbath a *delight* . . . then shall you take *delight* in the Lord” (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

Sabbath delights many of us, and it has long delighted me. But last year, when my family and I spent nearly six months studying in Israel, we discovered the exquisite delight of the Sabbath: *oneg Shabbat*.

The Old Testament uses many different words for joy, happiness, pleasure, and delight. But *oneg*, the special Hebrew root behind Isaiah 58's “delight,” occurs only one other time as a noun—referring to palaces of royalty—and only ten times as a verb. In Scripture this word denotes not just that which brings delight, but that which delights by its surpassing quality, that which satisfies and pleases because of its delicate beauty of regal charm. In short, *exquisite delight*. The kind of delight we found to be part of Sabbath in Israel.

Just the thought of a whole nation observing the Sabbath was impressive in itself. Every Friday we felt an air of excitement and expectancy all around—shops closing early; people buying Sabbath *hallah* bread,



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special wine, and flowers from sidewalk stands to beautify their Sabbath table; everyone hastening home to prepare for their “queen,” the Sabbath; families walking together to the synagogue or the western Wailing Wall on Friday evening. Even the many nonreligious Jews embraced the Sabbath as a special day.

I had often thought that Jewish Sabbath observance entailed a multitude of negative prohibitions. And indeed, a host of rabbinic regulations has made Sabbathkeeping burdensome, formal, and legalistic for many modern Jews.

But I discovered in Israel, and through subsequent reading, that this is not the whole picture.

There is also the dominant theme of joy and delight—*exquisite delight*!

Adventists have pursued exquisite delight in Sabbathkeeping for only one and one-half centuries, whereas faithful Jews have developed this delicate artistry for three and one-half millennia! As relative “newcomers” to Sabbathkeeping, we have much to learn of Judaism's positive contributions toward the fulfillment of Isaiah 58.

Many a traditional Jewish family's Sabbath customs might be adopted to make our Sabbaths more of an “exquisite delight.” Come with me for a few moments and visit a Jewish home in Israel as the family members welcome the Sabbath.

Welcoming the Queen

The table is covered with a white cloth and set for the Sabbath meal. On it are placed two loaves of braided (*hallah*) bread, a bottle of wine and a goblet (we would use grape juice), silver candlesticks and

BY RICHARD M. DAVIDSON



candles, and Sabbath flowers. The family members are dressed in their best clothes. All are ready to receive royalty—"Queen Sabbath."

Long before the sun actually sets, in their eager expectation the family begins its Sabbath celebration. The mother has the honor of officially receiving the Sabbath by kindling the Sabbath lights. The children watch with wonder as she lights at least two candles. Then we hear her offering a prayer of blessing upon the family:

O God of Your people Israel:
 You are holy
 And You have made the Sabbath
 and the people of Israel holy.
 You have called upon us to honor
 the Sabbath with light,
 With joy
 And with peace—
 As a king and queen give love to
 one another;
 As a bride and her bridegroom—
 So have we kindled these two
 lights for love of your daughter,
 The Sabbath day.
 Almighty God,
 Grant me and all my loved ones
 A chance to truly rest on this
 Sabbath day.

May the light of the candles drive
 out from among us
 The spirit of anger, the spirit of
 harm,
 Send your blessings to my chil-
 dren,
 That they may walk in the ways of
 Your Torah, Your light.
 May You ever be their God
 And mine, O Lord,
 My Creator and my Redeemer.
 Amen.

Then the father tenderly takes his children in his arms or places his hands on their bowed heads and recites a blessing for each. For the sons he says:

"May God make you like unto
 Ephraim and Manasseh!"
 And for the daughters,
 "May God make you like Sarah,
 Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah!"

Then for all comes the priestly dedication:

"May the Lord bless you and keep
 you:
 May the Lord cause His counte-
 nance to shine upon you,

Lifestyle—a new section

With 1986 comes a new REVIEW section called Lifestyle. Dedicated to the proposition that REVIEW subscribers would like more articles on victorious Christian living, this weekly feature will address a broad range of life issues and people groups. In coming months look for articles on handling verbal abuse, the importance of relationships, the meaning of work, and keeping your faith once you've got your degree. And much, much more.

What about Single Life and Family Living? While you won't be seeing those department names anymore, you will find more articles than ever before addressing the concerns of singles and families as well as senior citizens and young adults. In addition, Dear Miriam will appear monthly within Lifestyle's pages, and Children's Corner will continue on a weekly basis.

and be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you
and give you peace."

The woman's place of honor on the Sabbath and her exalted position in the home are then again emphasized. The husband sings to his wife from Proverbs 31, extolling her virtues:

"A woman of valor who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.

...
Many women have done virtuously,

but thou excellest them all!"

Next comes the Sabbath meal. It is begun with the sanctification of the Sabbath over a cup of wine (symbolizing joy and cheer), the blessing over the hallah bread, and the special Sabbath courses. On Sabbath the choicest food of all the week is eaten. Before each course, someone says, "For the honor of the

Sabbath vespers called 'Oneg Shabbat—"the Joy of the Sabbath." Others have a home service to usher out the Sabbath, with blessings over candlelight, wine, and special fragrances from spices or flowers. There is no hurry. Reluctant to let their special "guest" go for another week, the family often prolongs its departure till long after the sun actually sets. The family cherishes Sabbath's exquisite delight as transcending all earthly bliss.

Capturing the Joy

How well have Adventists captured this same sense of Sabbath's "exquisite delight"? Perhaps it would be well for us to adapt some of the delightful customs of our Jewish Sabbathkeeping brothers and sisters. Could we, for example, create a festive family candlelighting ceremony at the commencement and conclusion of the

appropriate traditional Jewish hymns have been included in the new SDA hymnal (see numbers 387, 395, and 674). Could we introduce a special Sabbath greeting? We say "Amen" and "Hallelujah"—two good Hebrew words. Perhaps we could add to our vocabulary *Shabbat shalom*—"Sabbath peace"—to greet each other on Sabbath, as our Jewish friends do.

Even our Sabbath vespers might seem more distinctly Sabbath-oriented if we changed the name from "vespers" (derived from high church liturgy) and substituted the phrase from Isaiah 58, as used in the synagogue, 'Oneg Shabbat: "Joy of the Sabbath." And on and on we could go with countless other suggestions for Sabbath traditions found in Jewish customs.

The Difference It Makes

I can give personal testimony to the difference introducing these joyful Sabbath traditions has made in our home. It makes this father's heart sing to hear his little girl and boy pray many times during the week, "Dear Jesus, please make it to be Sabbath again soon." The Sabbath joy and holiness, so precious in our home while we are celebrating it, also seems to spill over into the other days, imbuing them, too, with an extra measure of exquisite delight.

Isaiah 58 makes a tremendous promise to those who seek to make the Sabbath an exquisite delight: if we call the Sabbath a delight, then (verse 14) we "shall take delight in the Lord!" And as we increase the quality of our Sabbath experience, so shall our delight in the Lord of the Sabbath grow. □

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■ Next week: Christians don't have to be cheerful all the time, writes Judy Rittenhouse, as she tries to help us cope with the after-Christmas blues.

Reluctant to let their special "guest" go, the family often prolongs Sabbath's departure till long after the sun sets.

Sabbath!" During the meal the family heartily sings joyous table hymns reflecting the feeling and mood of the Sabbath. In the singing, eating, and fellowship the family can forget their weekday burdens, worries, and sorrows.

And so the Sabbath progresses. Friday evening is a time of family fellowship, and a time of special intimacy between husband and wife. On Sabbath morning the central theme is revelation. As the Torah is read in the synagogue the mood is quiet and more intellectual. Then comes another meal with more table hymns and sumptuous dishes.

The evening meal carries the theme of redemption and Messiah, with the mood of yearning, longing, and beauty. Many go to the synagogue or to the Western Wall for a

Sabbath? In Israel these services so overjoyed us that we bought a menorah (candelabra) so we could incorporate this custom into our Sabbath celebration. The eyes of our son and daughter sparkle as they watch the flickering Sabbath candles.

Why not a festively decorated table, with candlelight and flowers? And why not Sabbath "wine"?—perhaps the unfermented "sparkling" variety. Why not toast the joy of the Sabbath? Why not eat "Sabbath bread"? Until very recently our children did not use the word *dessert*—the chose the term *Sabbath bread!* Why not tie these culinary delicacies to the joy of the Sabbath?

Could we initiate the singing of joyous Sabbath table songs throughout each meal? Several