

For both boys and girls, parents continue with the priestly benediction found at Numbers 6:24-26: "May the Eternal bless you and protect you! May the Eternal deal kindly and graciously with you! May the Eternal grant divine favor upon you and thus grant you peace!"

Although the Bible presents these words as a special blessing transmitted by the priests of old to the people, it is customary for others to recite it in certain contexts. By using these words to bless their sons and daughters, parents acknowledge that they are the agents, not the source, of God's blessing in their children's lives, just the *kohanim* in Temple times were the transmitters, not the originators, of the blessings they offered the people.

Many use this opportunity to add personal prayers or meditations for their children. The following, taken from the second edition of *Siddur Sim Shalom*, are worthy examples. For boys, one could say: "May you be blessed by God as were Ephraim and Manasseh, who understood that wherever they lived, their Jewishness was the essence of their lives; who loved and honored their elders and teachers; and who cherished one another without pettiness or envy, accepting in humility the blessings that were theirs." For girls, the following would be highly appropriate: "May God bless you with the strength and vision of Sarah, with the wisdom and foresight of Rebecca, with the courage and compassion of Rachel, with the gentleness and graciousness of Leah, and their faith in the promise of our people's heritage."

As the diners take their places around the table, the hymn *Shalom Aleikhem* is sung aloud. Based on a teaching preserved in the Talmud at *BT Shabbat* 119b, the song supposes that two ministering angels accompany worshippers home from the synagogue each Friday night. "If they find candles lit and the Shabbat table set," the text in the Talmud reads, "the good angel says: 'May it be God's will that there be another Shabbat like this one,' and the wicked angel is forced against his will to say 'Amen.'" The inverse, however, is also true: if there are no signs of a traditional Shabbat in the home, the wicked angel prays that it ever be thus and the good angel is obliged to respond with an abegrudging amen. It is to these angels that diners seated at the Shabbat table sing the hymn *Shalom Aleikhem*.

After *Shalom Aleikhem*, husbands traditionally sing or recite the Eishet *Hayil* passage (taken directly from Proverbs 31:10-31) to their wives. It is a way of acknowledging and praising the women who work so hard to prepare Shabbat, to run the household, and to raise their children. Popularly translated as "A Woman of Valor," some take the Eishet *Hayil* as an allegory about Shabbat and the nurturing role "she" plays in a traditional Jewish home even though the simpler way to understand the text is as a husband's ode to his wife's virtues. In the spirit of egalitarianism, the second edition of *Siddur*

*Sim Shalom* suggests Psalm 112:1-9 as a parallel passage women might wish to recite to their husbands.

Shabbat dinner begins formally with the recitation of the Kiddush over a full cup of wine. Popularly called "making Kiddush," the act of sanctifying Shabbat by blessing God as the Creator of "the fruit of the vine" is rooted in the biblical conception of wine as an agent of joy. The psalmist (at Psalm 104:15) wrote that "wine . . . cheers the human heart" and so a cup filled to the brim with sweet wine has come to suggest the abundance of God's blessings in a family's life. The text may be found in any edition of the prayerbook.

One may recite Kiddush over grape juice instead of wine. In the absence of either, however, one makes Kiddush over the *ballot* instead (*SA Orah Hayyim* 289). If doing so, however, the blessing over bread should be used to begin the prayer instead of the blessing over wine.

As noted above, in traditional homes women light the candles and men recite the Kiddush. Since, as noted above, the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the onset of Shabbat with wine devolves upon both men and women, women may recite the Kiddush for others at the table. Some people stand for Kiddush, but others sit as it is recited. Either is considered an acceptable practice (gloss of the Rema to *SA Orah Hayyim* 271:10).

At home, Kiddush begins with an introductory paragraph, Genesis 2:1-3. There is, however, a widespread custom to begin not with the opening words of that first verse, but with the last words of the previous chapter of Genesis. By doing so, the worshiper begins with four words, the initial letters of which spell out the four-letter name of God. In this subtle way, God's blessings on a Jewish home are invoked.

Prior to reciting the blessing for bread, we perform the ritual washing of the hands known as *n'tilat yadayim*. Rings are removed so that the water comes in contact with all parts of the hands, then a vessel is filled with water. The water is poured over the right hand and then over the left hand at least twice, although some follow the custom of pouring water three times over each hand. The following blessing is recited: *barukh attah adonai, eloheinu, melekh ha-olam, asher kidd'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu al n'tilat yadayim* ("Praised are You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the universe, who, sanctifying us with divine commandments, has commanded us concerning the washing of the hands"). The hands are then dried.

The purpose of washing our hands in this peculiar way is not specifically hygienic. (Indeed, people should certainly wash their hands with soap and water before *n'tilat yadayim* if their hands are dirty.) After the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish house took the place of the ancient sanctuary and, in many ways, the Shabbat and festival table became latter-day substitutes for the altar. We

prayer, the second blessing that follows the Sh'ma. In this version of the blessing, the worshiper speaks of God spreading a *sukkah* of peace over all Israel and over Jerusalem. As in the L'khah Dodi hymn, people, place, and time all come together in a dream-like vision of future redemption.

A special passage referring specifically to Shabbat, Exodus 31:16-17 (often called V'sham'ru after its first word), is added just after Haskhivenu. In the Haskhivenu prayer, the worshiper asks God to guard and watch over Israel, and this passage from Exodus uses similar language to describe Israel's observance of Shabbat—suggesting that, just as the Jewish people guard and watch over Shabbat, so does God care for and watch over the Jewish people.

There are also some major omissions from the weekday service, such as the long miscellany of verses recited on weekdays just before the Kaddish that leads into the Amidah. Also, the entire middle portion of the Amidah, which consists on weekdays of thirteen different petitionary prayers, is replaced by a single paragraph referring to Shabbat itself. (The petitions in the middle section of the weekday Amidah are eliminated because it is considered inappropriate to express concern for material needs on Shabbat.)

The Amidah on Friday evening, therefore, has only seven blessings, as do the morning and afternoon versions of the Amidah on Shabbat. The specific theme of this central section changes for each of the three services of the day, however. On Friday night, the central passage cites Genesis 2:1-3 and is primarily about Shabbat today as a memorial to the first Shabbat, the one that followed the week of creation. On Saturday morning, the central prayer speaks more about revelation, and depicts Shabbat as a central pillar of the commandments revealed to Israel at Mount Sinai. On Saturday afternoon, the central paragraph focuses on redemption and points to Shabbat as kind of weekly herald of the kind of peaceful world that all will enjoy when the world finally is redeemed. Creation, revelation, and redemption are the three great themes of Jewish theology and each has its moment in the liturgy of Shabbat.

Following the Amidah, the congregation remains standing to recite Genesis 2:1-3, popularly called Va-y'khullu. This is followed by a special, highly abbreviated version of the Amidah called the "Blessing Reminiscent of the Seven [Blessings of the Amidah]," the *b'rakhah mei-ein sheva*. This in turn is followed by the Magein Avot prayer, and then by the prayer leader's repetition of a key passage from the Amidah. All these additions were intended simply to delay the service sufficiently for latecomers to catch up so that they would not be forced to walk home alone.

There is also a very old custom of reciting Kiddush, the prayer of sanctification over the wine normally recited at dinner, in the synagogue as well (*SA Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 269). This custom goes back to a time when Jewish travelers

lodged in the synagogue and had their meals there, and it thus created an opportunity for the regular worshipers to join with the community's guests before parting company. Today, it is rare for worshipers to dine in the synagogue after the service, but the custom remains as a pleasant reminder of ancient times when a community's hospitality could be measured easily in terms of how it treated strangers, travelers, and the indigent on Shabbat by providing for their needs in a gracious and friendly way. The service then concludes with Aleinu and the Mourner's Kaddish, followed in most congregations by the Yigdal hymn.

### Friday Night at Home

Shabbat meals are about much more than just food. Prayers, rituals, songs, and words of Torah combine to create a unique experience rich in symbolism and meaning. Although far less structured than, say, a Passover *seeder*, the three Shabbat meals—Friday night dinner, Saturday lunch, and the third meal (called either *se'udah sh'lishit* or, far more colloquially, *shalashudis* or *shalshudis*)—have their own programmatic order.

On Friday evenings, we begin with the blessing of children. Traditionally, the parent places his or her hands on the child's head, then proceeds with a different opening prayer for boys and girls, then with a common prayer for all children.

For boys, the parent begins with the prayer that God make the boy "like Ephraim and Manasseh." This was Jacob's blessing for his grandsons, Joseph's two boys, as recorded at Genesis 48:20. Even though Ephraim and Manasseh are not well-known biblical figures, we refer to them as the model sons we hope our boys grow up to be because of Jacob's specific remark in their regard, "By you [i.e., by using your names] shall Israel invoke God's blessing, saying, '[May] God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" One commentary explains the significance of Ephraim and Manasseh as role models for us by noting that, though they grew up as members of a tiny minority in a much larger culture, they managed nevertheless to remain faithful to their family's religious traditions. So may we, we pray, by invoking their names, and so may our sons.

For girls, the parent begins, "May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah." These four women, the matriarchs of the Jewish people, raised the first generations of the Jewish people. Although this blessing does not correspond to a specific scriptural injunction like the blessing for boys does, it has its own roots in the Bible, as at Ruth 4:11, where Ruth herself is blessed that she be like Rachel and Leah, who together "built up the House of Israel."

Shabbat.' Rabbi Yannai would get dressed on the eve of Shabbat and say: 'Come, O bride! Come, O bride!'

Why did Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Yannai conceive of Shabbat as a female figure, a bride or a queen? Perhaps they saw the other days of the week, devoted all to hard work, as corresponding to the role of men in their world, while Shabbat was about the home, the family, and peace, which they considered the domain of the feminine. Their specific approaches are not exactly the same, however. Rabbi Hanina, imagining someone regal and powerful who commands respect and obedience, speaks of a queen. On the other hand, Rabbi Yannai, conjuring up the image of a beautiful and tender woman who primarily symbolizes love, talks of a bride. The two combine to draw a picture of Shabbat as a set of complex laws that must be obeyed, yet that somehow also create the context in which Jewish individuals can come to know and love God with ever greater levels of intimacy.

Kabbalat Shabbat begins with the recitation of Psalms 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, and 29, which are considered representative of the six days of the week. All six psalms refer to God as *melekh* (king), and speak of God as Creator and Ruler of the world. Thus, in the context of the Kabbalat Shabbat liturgy, the Jew at prayer is attending the mystic wedding of King God and Queen Shabbat.

The six psalms lead into L'khaḥ Dodi, a long liturgical poem written in 1529 by Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz (whose name is spelled out by the initial letters of the first eight stanzas). The chorus, based on the talmudic passage cited just above, is "Come, my beloved, to greet the bride / let us welcome Shabbat." Several of the verses refer to the city of Jerusalem, to its desolation and destruction in past times, and to its renewal in the context of the future redemption of humanity. Jerusalem, in this context, is understood as a symbol of the Jewish people. As Jerusalem will be revived, the poet says, so will the Jews. In L'khaḥ Dodi, therefore, people, place, and time all come together in the complex concept of salvation through God.

During the final stanza of L'khaḥ Dodi, the congregation rises and turns around symbolically to greet Shabbat. As the final line of the hymn is sung, the congregation bows twice, once to the left and once to the right. This act of subservience can be interpreted both according to the opinion of Rabbi Hanina and that of Rabbi Yannai. By bowing to Queen Shabbat, the congregation at once pledges its allegiance and demonstrates its subservience to its laws and precepts. If, however, it is to Bride Shabbat that the congregation bows, then it is to show its devotion and love for Shabbat in its guise as the welcome harbinger of redemption.

It is also at this moment in the service, at the conclusion of L'khaḥ Dodi, that mourners still in their first week of mourning (the *shivah* week) enter the

synagogue. The congregation, which has just risen to welcome Queen Shabbat and Bride Shabbat, remains standing to greet the mourners with the traditional words of consolation: *ha-makom y'naḥem etkhem b'tokh she-ar aveilei tziyyon virushalayim* ("May God comfort you together with the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem"). By singing L'khaḥ Dodi, the congregation has just proclaimed that the destruction of Jerusalem will be followed ultimately by its redemption. As the mourners enter, the worshippers pray that, though the mourners have recently experienced personal devastation, they too will find comfort and redemption. For Jews, the national and the personal always are intertwined.

L'khaḥ Dodi is followed by Psalms 92 and 93. Psalm 92, the only poem in the Psalter connected to a specific day of the week, was imagined by the ancients to have been uttered originally by Adam as an ode of thanksgiving on the very first Shabbat. Also, the Mishnah (at M Tamid 7:4) teaches that the Levites used to sing this psalm every Shabbat in the Temple and that it will be the hymn of choice in the messianic era as well. Psalm 93 also hints at the messianic theme, looking forward to a time when God, "crowned in splendor," will rule directly over the world.

Kabbalat Shabbat concludes with the Mourner's Kaddish.

It is the custom of some to recite the second chapter of the mishnaic tractate Shabbat between Kabbalat Shabbat and the Evening Service (SA Orah Hayyim 270:2). These seven *mishnayot* are an example of the use of the study of traditional texts as a kind of intense spiritual preparation. The practice also had a very practical aspect: it delayed the beginning of the Evening Service so that latecomers would not be forced to make their way home alone in the dark after finishing their prayers after the departure of the other worshippers.

The liturgy of contemporary Conservative Judaism preserves this tradition, while changing some of the texts. The traditional chapter from tractate Shabbat (often called *Ba-meh Madlikim*, after its first words) focuses on the technical question of which materials may be used for lighting oil lamps on Shabbat, an issue rendered irrelevant by the almost universal use of wax candles in modern times. Conservative prayerbooks, therefore, often offer other *mishnayot* and rabbinic texts thought to be both instructive and inspirational. Any of these texts should be followed by Kaddish D'rabbanan.

The Ma'ariv service for Friday night is similar to the weekday service, but with a few changes. The opening line that precedes the Bar'khu call to prayer, for example, is eliminated because its subjects (sin and punishment) are not considered to be in the spirit of Shabbat. Also, an additional line and a slightly expanded benediction are added to the end of the Hashkiveinu

bat 2:6) is very clear that women need to be especially scrupulous in lighting Shabbat candles, as well as taking a special pinch of dough while baking bread and burning it (in recollection of the ancient practice of giving gifts to the *kohanim* when baking bread in large enough quantities, as described elsewhere in this volume by Rabbi Martin S. Cohen in his chapter on Israel), and observing of the laws of family purity.

First, the candles are lit. If a woman is lighting the candles, she closes her eyes and draws her hands to her face in a circular motion three times. (The gesture itself is purely optional. Women may simply cover their eyes with their hands if they wish, but the more traditional procedure represents the woman's wish to invite Shabbat into her home and her family's life.) With her hands covering her eyes, she then recites the traditional blessing, *barukh attah adonai, elobeinu, melekh ha-olam, asher kidd'shamu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu l'hadlik neur shel shabbat* ("Praised are You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the universe, who, sanctifying us with divine commandments, has commanded us to kindle the Shabbat lamp"). The reason for this ritual is complicated. The basic concept is that blessings are generally recited before performing the acts that they sanctify. However, since the blessing over the candles, when recited by a woman, is deemed to inaugurate Shabbat, the woman would then be forbidden to light the candles subsequent to her own blessing because kindling a flame is prohibited on Shabbat. Consequently, she lights the candles first, then covers her eyes so that she can recite the blessing before enjoying and benefiting from the light of the candles.

It is also customary to recite a personal meditation at this moment. An example, by Navah Harlow, is as follows:

As I light these Shabbat candles, I feel the frenzied momentum of the week slowly draining from my body. I thank You, Creator, for the peace and relaxation of Shabbat, for moments to redirect my energies toward those treasures in my life which I hold most dear. Had You not in Your infinite wisdom created the Shabbat day, I may not have stopped in time. May the peace of Shabbat fill our hearts, fill our home, fill the world. Amen. (*Siddur Sim Shalom I*, p. 720)

### Friday Evening Services

Traditionally, Shabbat services on Friday were held around sunset, whatever time that happened to be. Dinner then followed, and the family remained at home for the rest of the evening.

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, it became apparent that many people were unable to make it home on Fridays in time for a traditional

Shabbat service at sundown, especially during the fall and winter months when Shabbat can sometimes begin very early. In response, synagogues began offering late Friday evening services that usually began at 8:00 or 8:30 P.M. year-round. This enabled people to attend a Friday night Shabbat service at synagogue (though it also meant that the Friday night meal at home had to end in time to enable the family to get there).

For decades, late Friday night worship was the more attended Shabbat service in many Conservative synagogues. In recent years, another trend has developed as large numbers of congregations have gone back to the practice of having Friday evening services at sundown. This return to tradition may stem from several factors, foremost among them the influence of Camp Ramah, the realization that the home (not the synagogue) should be the primary focus of Jewish observance, the disappearance of Friday night bat mitzvah ceremonies in Conservative synagogues, and the preference of many clergy and laity for more authentic modes of Shabbat observance. Most of all, however, the shift back to a more traditional framework has been prompted by the sense that there is something inimical to the spirit of Shabbat about having to go out again after a traditional Friday night dinner at home in the company of one's family and one's guests.

In preparation for the formal worship service on Friday evenings, some have the custom of reading the Song of Songs, and this worthy custom should be encouraged. Though ostensibly a series of secular love poems, the rabbis of classical antiquity understood the Song of Songs to be an allegory about God's love for the Jewish people. The poet refers to his beloved as his bride, the very term used to describe Shabbat. Reciting the Song of Songs, or parts of it, helps us to view Shabbat as a day devoted to the celebration of God's love for Israel, as well as Israel's love for God and for Shabbat itself. It is also appropriate as a subtle reminder to married couples that Friday night is the traditional time for marital intimacy.

Another custom is to sing the hymn *Y'did Nefesh*, composed in sixteenth-century Safed by Rabbi Eleazar Azikri, whose theme is also the Jew's longing for communion with the Divine.

Formally speaking, there are two major parts to the Friday evening service: Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma-ariv. Kabbalat Shabbat (literally, "Welcoming Shabbat") was created by the mystics of Safed among whom Rabbi Azikri lived, who believed that Shabbat functions as a foretaste of the ultimate redemption even more than it serves as a day of rest from labor.

The concept of Kabbalat Shabbat itself was based on a talmudic teaching (preserved at *BT Shabbat 119a*): "Rabbi Hanina would wrap himself in a robe on the eve of Shabbat and say: 'Come, let us go out to greet Queen

times foods became staples because they were plentiful and affordable to the poor, but other foods were expensive delicacies that people scrimped and saved all week to be able to purchase. Other times, foods were chosen for the way they could be prepared and kept warm when ordinary cooking was prohibited.)

All cooking must be completed prior to the onset of Shabbat, and a way must be found to keep already cooked foods warm (SA Oraḥ Ḥayyim 250). Some leave the oven on throughout Shabbat, but others use an electric warming drawer or tray, or else a *blech* (a piece of metal that covers the stovetop so that the burners can be kept on low, thereby creating a kind of simple warming tray). A *kumkum* (an urn, usually electric, sometimes called a "Shabbos pot") is filled and turned on and allowed to heat up before the onset of Shabbat. In very observant homes, packages and bottles are opened before Shabbat to avoid the inevitable ripping and tearing of modern packaging.

In terms of personal preparation, it is not merely our homes that we must make ready for Shabbat, but our bodies as well: bathing and personal grooming, setting aside and ironing appropriate clothes, going for a pre-Shabbos haircut, or even a pre-Shabbat trip to the gym to work off the tension of a long week of work before returning home to begin Shabbat—all of these are ways of preparing for Shabbat and, although not all will occur every week, the basic idea behind all of them is the same: the Shabbat faithful must ready themselves in the anteroom before entering the palace.

Clothing is especially important. If clothes make the man (or the woman), then how we dress contributes mightily to our effort to make Shabbat a delight. Wearing weekday clothing puts us in a weekday frame of mind. Having special clothes for Shabbat and laundering or ironing those clothes in preparation for Shabbat are ancient customs that assist us in approaching the onset of Shabbat in a positive, pleasant way (SA Oraḥ Ḥayyim 262:2-3).

On Shabbat, we are not only what we eat and what we wear; we are also what we handle or even touch. Before the onset of Shabbat, we put aside our wallets and our purses, our money, our pens, our electronic devices, and all other articles that are deemed *muktzeh* and that we are therefore not permitted to handle. (The term *muktzeh* refers to things that, because they have no licit use on Shabbat, may not be moved or even touched throughout the day. Thus, although there are forbidden activities one could undertake with a kitchen knife, it is not considered *muktzeh* because there are many licit uses to which such an implement may be put. Coins, on the other hand, which have no licit purpose on Shabbat, are considered *muktzeh* and should not be handled even casually.) The concept is discussed below in its own sub-section of this chapter.

In addition to physical preparations, we must make spiritual preparations as well. In some circles, it is common for men to go to the *mikveh* every week on the eve of Shabbat. Others put aside money for *tz'dakah* (charity). And many people review the weekly Torah portion on Friday afternoon as a way of preparing for the onset of Shabbat intellectually and spiritually.

### Shabbat Candles

We usher in Shabbat with the lighting of candles (SA Oraḥ Ḥayyim 261, 263-265). In ancient times, this was a part of making the home physically ready, as the flames from the lamps or candles were an essential source of light in the house. In our day, homes are generally lit by electric lights, but the Shabbat candles retain their importance because they are deemed powerfully symbolic of the spiritual light that Shabbat can bring into our lives.

Shabbat technically should begin at sunset. However, because it is prohibited to kindle a flame once Shabbat begins, the *halakhah* sets a barrier in time between the last moment to light the Shabbat candles and the actual onset of Shabbat, thereby guaranteeing that no errors will be made. Therefore, we light Shabbat candles no later than eighteen minutes prior to sunset. This is an example of "making a fence around the Torah" mentioned in *Pirkei Avot* (M Avot 1:1). For similar reasons, we delay the ceremony that concludes Shabbat on Saturday evening, and this makes Shabbat last twenty-five, not twenty-four hours, each week. Jewish calendars list candle-lighting times for every Friday evening of the year.

The candles should be lit in the room in which we intend to eat Shabbat dinner so that we can see the candles and enjoy their light during dinner.

At Exodus 20:8, the Torah commands Israel to remember the Shabbat day, while at Deuteronomy 5:12, the commandment is specifically to observe Shabbat, not merely to remember it. In a nod to these two versions of the fourth commandment, it is customary to light a minimum of two Shabbat candles (SA Oraḥ Ḥayyim 263:1). Some, however, light one candle for each member of the family, or seven candles, one for each day of the week. There are also those who kindle ten candles, corresponding to the Ten Commandments.

Traditionally, women light the Shabbat candles. If, however, no woman is present, then a man must light his own Shabbat candles. Similarly, it is more traditional for a man to recite Kiddush, although the obligation to recite Kiddush falls on women as well (SA Oraḥ Ḥayyim 271:2). For those who take a more egalitarian approach to ritual, however, we stress that both these *mitzvoṭ* may be performed by either men or women, even in the presence of members of the opposite sex. Still, the tradition (as recorded, e.g., at M Shab-

to keep water warm for tea or coffee, and turning off cellular phones. The level of preparation will, of course, mirror the level of observance in a given home: in homes in which the normal use of solid soap is considered sufficiently transformational to be forbidden on Shabbat, preparing for Shabbat will include filling liquid soap dispensers; similarly, preparing pre-cut toilet tissue and paper toweling will be undertaken in homes in which the prohibition of tearing something even as inconsequential as a square of tissue is considered a forbidden activity.

Some of the Shabbat restrictions listed above are not features of Shabbat in most Conservative homes—it is the rare Conservative Jew who pre-cuts squares of toilet tissue—yet we mention practices like that in the same breath as more widely observed aspects of observance specifically to make a point that all readers should take to heart: the common effort behind all Shabbat observance, from its most stringent guise to its most lenient, should always be the same: to seek to know God the Creator through allegiance to the laws of Shabbat, however interpreted.

Regarding Shabbat—and every other realm of Jewish observance—there will be multiple, sometimes even conflicting, interpretations and approaches. (A more lenient ruling is often referred to as a *kulla*; a more stringent one as a *huma*). There are some Jews who believe that stricter is always the more authentic approach, and a sure sign of one's seriousness and piety. Other Jews will search for the least restrictive rulings, holding that easier is always better. Conservative Judaism teaches that there are times when it is appropriate to be lenient, and times when it prudent to be strict. Tradition should always be regarded seriously, yet at the same time we do not want it to be seen as onerous and burdensome. As we say when we place the Torah in the Ark, "All its ways are pleasantness" (Proverbs 3:17).

It is also customary to decorate the home and the table with fresh flowers on the eve of Shabbat. In so doing, we are reminded that Shabbat is not just a day for the spirit and the intellect—it is a day of sensory pleasure as well. A good deal of Shabbat preparation involves shopping. We must make sure we have enough candles. We must purchase wine and *hallah*, as well as special Shabbat treats, such as cakes, desserts, and snacks.

Inviting guests into our home is a major part of making Shabbat special and this too, obviously, must be undertaken in advance. Similarly, menus for the Shabbat meals need to be planned out in advance and the shopping and food preparation must be completed before the Shabbat candles are kindled—that is, no later than eighteen minutes before sunset. (Foods that Ashkenazic Jews most often associate with Shabbat, like gefilte fish, chicken soup, and *cholent*, often have cultural, socioeconomic, or halakhic significance. Some-

# Shabbat

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## Preparing for Shabbat

The school of Shammai said: "From the first day of the week, prepare for Shabbat" (*BT* Beitzah 16a), and, as observant moderns know all too well, their lesson is well taken. Shabbat doesn't happen spontaneously as the sun sets on Friday, or as we light Shabbat candles. Abraham Joshua Heschel referred to Shabbat as "a palace in time." That can hardly be denied, but what he left unsaid was just how much work it takes to design, build, and furnish that palace.

There are three major categories of Shabbat preparation that must be attended to: physical setting, food preparation, and personal grooming.

To the best of our ability, and given the limits of time, we prepare for Shabbat by cleaning our homes, or the houses (or motel rooms or campsites) in which we are planning to spend Shabbat. The reason for this is self-evident: it is difficult to enjoy Shabbat if we are surrounded by a physical mess. In addition, the very act of cleaning helps us to prepare ourselves for Shabbat spiritually as we transform ordinary space into an arena for sacred activity.

We take care of those things that we cannot, may not, or choose not to deal with on Shabbat: setting timers (called "Shabbos clocks" in some circles) so that we do not have to turn electric lights on or off, setting up electric urns