

Shabbat as Ritual

Setting the Table - Lesson 3

Around the table, in the presence of family, the Sabbath meals overflow with conversation and catching up on family matters. As the joy unfolds, song wells up naturally. A whole tradition of special Shabbat table songs (zemiroth) developed to express the delight of the day. Since no one need rush off to business, the meal is extended with talk and words of Torah. The pressures of the week dissolve, and parents find time to relate to their children, exploring issues between them at leisure. Parents become the source of wisdom, the indispensable keepers of memory...

- Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*

Blessing the Children

Jewish tradition brings us many beautiful rituals that help to create a special family atmosphere around the Shabbat table. From the special blessings that we say over the food, to singing together around the table, to just spending time together as a whole family, ritual helps us to separate Shabbat from the rest of the week.

In many homes, parents will ritually bless their children each week before Shabbat dinner. Some families say the blessing to all of their children at once, and some families say it to their children separately. Some touch their child's head while they say the blessings, and some stand in a circle holding hands. Some families recite the traditional brachot, and some families use their own special blessings.

To sons, say: May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.

To daughters, say: May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

May the Lord bless you and protect you.

May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord turn His face toward you and grant you peace