

Shabbos - Sabbath

By Howie Flomberg

Today's assignment is: Describe a person, place, or thing so that we can imagine it exactly as you experienced it. One thing that comes to mind is the Jewish Sabbath. To my knowledge there is no equivalent of it in any other faith.

With the exception of the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jewish holidays celebrate the senses. We eat, we drink, we sing and occasionally even dance. The holiest of Jewish Holidays, The Sabbath – the only one mentioned in the Ten Commandments – is centered on the families gathering around for the Sabbath dinner. A typical Shabbos dinner will start with gefilte fish – chopped and cooked fish balls, then the Jewish penicillin – Chicken Soup. The main course is a roast chicken served with veggies and potatoes. Desert is usually little “Danish” pastry. Thick sweet kosher wine is poured liberally. The food is sumptuous and heavy. The food appeals to all of the senses. The smells fill the air and waft down the hallways. They are earthy and rich and tempt the taste buds. The flavors are indescribable. The gefilte fish is a palate for spice horseradish. Just a taste of the horseradish clears out the sinuses superbly.

And the chicken soup; imagine being bathed in rich broth with pieces of cooked carrots and other vegetables floating in it. The rich chicken flavor permeates the senses. After the fish and soup we sit and belch, enjoying the tastes again.

The chicken is then presented to our gasps. The crinkly skin is intact. The man of the house does the honors, carving it for presentation at the table. The Kinder (children) fight over the skin. My favorite piece is the breast meat, white and flavorful. My Mother saved a leg for herself. The potatoes are small and rich. They absorb the chicken gravy and are a separate feast in themselves.

And the bread – Ahh the bread is Challah. Rich bread made with plenty of egg. At the start of the meal we each pull off a chunk of challah and say the traditional blessing. The man will pour us wine – full glasses for the adults and a bit less for the children and we say the blessing over the wine. If the home is orthodox, prayers and songs fill the room while we eat. But even in a less observant home, the room is full of gaiety and good-natured ribbing. The atmosphere is reverent but happy. We fight over the wishbone until the father decides who will get it. Two of us are chosen. We each take hold of the wishbone. We make a wish and pull. The one who gets the larger piece after it snaps is assured that their wish comes true.

After this meal, coffee and tea come out and a tray of pastry. We look at the pastry, grab a small piece, just for the flavor, and appreciate it.

The gathering of the family around a Sabbath dinner table is one of the secrets that have insured our survival as a people. To us our faith is joyful and enriching. It is also fattening?