



One Thing that Adventists can Learn from the Jews about Sabbath Keeping: Celebrate!¹

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In *Making Sabbath Special*, Céleste Perrino Walker paints a word picture of an announcer counting down on Sabbath evening as sundown approaches. . . . “10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1! We have lift-off! And you shoot out of the bonds of tiresome inactivity to do something fun before the whole weekend is shot.”²

God says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” but He does not say, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it *gloomy!*” There are plenty of reasons to joyfully celebrate on Sabbath.

When I think of celebrating, the first thing that comes to my mind is birthdays. The Sabbath is the birthday of the world. It is set in a framework of celebration, joy, and delight. In *A Day to Remember*,

George Vandeman linked the spirit of celebration to the Sabbath by referring to God’s powerful question to Job: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” Job 38:4-7. The majestic, thundering voice of the Creator. Worlds flung into space. Suns set aflame. Electrons set to dancing. And back of it all the stars singing. The music of the spheres. The sons of God shouting praise to their Creator!.”³ That is celebration!

A marriage is another event that calls for celebration, joy, and delight. The Sabbath also fits into that theme. The first wedding was recorded in Gen 2:18-24. On the sixth day, the first wedding between a man and woman was celebrated.

Then a few hours later on that first Sabbath, God celebrated another wedding—His wedding with humankind! All the Sabbaths since that first Sabbath have been a weekly “wedding anniversary” of that wedding between God and humankind. God knows the human tendency to forget anniversaries, so He gave a commandment to “remember” to celebrate! Some have suggested that the celebration of the Sabbath is a forerunner of “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7-9).

Psalm 92, the Sabbath Psalm, is resplendent with celebration, joy, and delight. Sabbath is portrayed as a time of exultation. Not a trace of gloom can be found. It is clear that God wants our Sabbaths to have an atmosphere of celebration.

In Isaiah, God said we should

“call the Sabbath a delight” (58:13). The Hebrew *oneg* (“delight”) literally means “exquisite delight.” Old Testament scholar Richard Davidson explained that this word describes palaces of royalty in the one other place it is found in the Old Testament. It is as if the King of the universe is inviting His people to His “Sabbath palace” for a regal all-day spiritual feast and fellowship. This is no ordinary “delight”! Why? Psalm 16:11 (KJV) replies: “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” “Delight yourself in the LORD . . .” (Ps 37:4, NIV).

Some children sing the song, “Sabbath is a happy day.” Other children say, “Sabbath is NOT a happy day!” When Dwight Moody was a boy, he and his brothers used to shout for joy when the Sabbath was over because it was the worst day in the week for them. Learning from the negative Sabbath experiences of his childhood, he advocated his belief that Sabbath “can be made the brightest day in the week. Every child ought to be reared so that he shall be able to say that he would rather have the other six days weeded out of his memory than the Sabbath of his childhood.”⁴

According to noted Jewish scholar, Abraham Joshua Heschel, it is a sin to be sad on the Sabbath day. After Sabbath meals, the Jews recite a prayer that “there be no sadness or trouble in the day of our rest.”⁵ In *Family Sabbath Traditions*, John and Millie Youngberg remind us that “if Sabbaths are not a happy day, our children may choose to outgrow the fourth commandment as they outgrow childhood.”⁶ May God help us to make our Sabbaths a delightful celebration “so interesting to our families that its weekly return will be hailed with joy.”⁷

How can we promote celebra-

tion on Sabbath? The Sabbath is a day for holy celebration, joy, and delight, but this does not mean that it is to be celebrated like a regular party. After a pastor and his wife presented a Jewish-style Sabbath celebration in the Cayman Islands, a boy there called the experience “like having a sacred party” to celebrate the birthday of the world.

Briefly, what does a “Jewish-style Sabbath celebration” look like? Because Jews consider the Sabbath to be the queen of the week, a wife, the queen of the home, proclaims the beginning of the Sabbath by lighting special Sabbath candles. Then she prays a special Sabbath prayer. The father blesses the children and his wife. There is special Sabbath wine and braided challah bread. This special celebration is followed by the Sabbath meal. The choicest food of all the week is eaten. Before each course, someone says, “For the honor of the Sabbath!” During the meal the family sings joyful table hymns which reflect the celebration mood of the Sabbath.

This celebration can tickle our imagination and illustrate the atmosphere of celebration that characterizes the Sabbath. In a way that fits our individual situations and cultures, we can make Friday evenings special, with an atmosphere of celebration. That might mean having a special Friday night meal served on special dishes. Perhaps it will include special features, such as flowers, candles, special music, and a special worship activity, such as charades. A Friday night worship activity that my family has been doing for years is adding something to our “Blessing Book.” We write down something that has happened in our lives during the week that we consider a blessing, along with the date that it occurred. Then we celebrate by praising God in prayer

for this blessing. It is a celebration in itself to reread these blessings later on.

For my family, Sabbath morning breakfast was a time to capture this celebration. As our children were growing up, we always had sweet rolls as part of Sabbath breakfast. To avoid having to wash many dishes before leaving for church, we used paper plates and cups. On each paper plate, our daughter would make drawings and write happy messages such as, “Happy Sabbath, Dad!” “God loves you, Ivan!”

This spirit of celebration can continue into the Sabbath services, Sabbath dinner, afternoon activities, and the closing of Sabbath. The main idea is that Sabbath should be in a class by itself—more special, joyful, and delightful than any other day of the week: a holy holiday!

¹This article is adapted from a forthcoming book on the Sabbath.

²Céleste Perrino Walker, *Making Sabbath Special: Simple Traditions to Make the Sabbath a Delight* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 18.

³George Vandeman, *A Day to Remember* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1965), 15.

⁴Dwight L. Moody, *Weighed and Wanting: Addresses on the Ten Commandments* (Chicago, IL: Fleming H. Revell, 1898), 54.

⁵Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: H. Wolff, 1951), 30-31.

⁶John and Millie Youngberg, *Family Sabbath Traditions: Filling the Sabbath Hours with Joy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2001), 59.

⁷Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 536.