

A
STORY FOR PARENTS
AND GRANDPARENTS TO
READ
ALOUD

The Sabbath Spice

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Once there was a Roman emperor who loved good food more than anything in his empire. At night, he dreamed about food. In the morning, as soon as he opened his eyes, he thought about food.

Then, he would summon his three royal cooks to his royal bedroom to hear their plans for the day.

By 9 o'clock every morning the emperor was seated in the great dining hall ready to begin his breakfast. The Royal Breakfast Cook waited nervously as the emperor tasted each dish. The emperor said, "Quite good. But tomorrow I hope you'll make even tastier dishes for me." The Royal Breakfast Cook bowed before the emperor and hurried to the kitchen to search for new recipes and spices.

At 12 o'clock noon, the emperor was again seated in the great dining hall ready to begin his lunch. The Royal Lunch Cook waited nervously behind the emperor's chair. As the emperor tasted each dish, he said, "Quite good. But tomorrow I hope you will prepare something even tastier for me." And soon the Royal Lunch Cook joined the Royal Breakfast Cook in the royal kitchen, and he too searched for new recipes and spices.

At 6 o'clock, the emperor was once again seated in the great dining hall ready for his dinner. The Royal Dinner Cook waited patiently as the emperor ate each course, one by one. Sometimes, the emperor fell asleep in his chair before he reached the final course. On those evenings, the Royal Dinner Cook would return to the kitchen and fix himself a cup of tea. What a pleasure it was not to have to spend the eve-

ning searching for new recipes and spices to please the emperor.

Now one day the emperor's good friend, Rabbi Judah, invited him to come for Shabbat dinner.

On Friday, the rabbi's cook was in the kitchen getting everything ready for Shabbat. Because of God's commandment to rest on the Sabbath, she could not work in the evening. So she had prepared the food earlier in the afternoon. Now she polished the candlesticks and the wine cups. As she worked, she hummed a lovely Sabbath melody. This was her favorite time of the week. She loved preparing for the Sabbath. She loved the feeling of peace that seemed to settle over the entire house on Shabbat.





Rabbi Judah came into the room. He was wearing his best Sabbath clothes, and he was humming the same Sabbath melody. The rabbi smiled at the cook and said, "Shabbat Shalom! A peaceful Sabbath to you!"

The cook smiled back, "Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi. Look! The sun is beginning to set. It is time to welcome the Sabbath!"

When the emperor arrived, he walked right into the dining room and looked at the food on the table. He did not notice the gleaming candlesticks, or the snowy white tablecloth. He did not notice the lovely flowers so carefully arranged for the centerpiece. He did not notice the beautiful wine cups or the colorful embroidered hallah cover. The emperor saw only the food. And what he saw did not please him. The emperor frowned. Certainly, he thought, this was not food fit for an emperor!

The great emperor finally settled himself in a chair and began to taste the food. He rubbed his stomach happily and exclaimed, "This food is extraordinary! Tell me, Rabbi, what secret spices does your cook use to make these simple dishes taste so delicious!"

"It is a spice called the Sabbath," replied Judah.

"I must have some for my three royal cooks," said emperor. He turned to Rabbi Judah's cook and said, "Please, give me a pinch of the Sabbath spice, and I shall teach my cooks to use it."

The cook smiled, and the rabbi said, "I am sorry, but this spice cannot be given away or even bought in a shop. Whether you have it depends on you."

The emperor looked puzzled. "How is that possible?" he asked. "I have enough gold to buy anything I want! Surely, if I give you a bag of gold, you will let me have a little of the Sabbath spice."

"No, your majesty, I'm afraid not," Rabbi Judah said. "For you see, the delicious flavor of this meal comes from the peaceful feeling in our home on the Sabbath. It comes from the delight we take in keeping Shabbat."

The emperor thought for a long time. Then he spoke. "I once thought that I could buy anything I desired with gold from the royal treasury. But now I see that the beauty and joy of Shabbat is a priceless treasure which can neither be bought nor sold for all the gold in the world. Thank you, dear friend, for sharing your Sabbath with me."

Color this Shabbat scene!



*The Sabbath
(continued)*

A Jewish legend tells about a good and a bad angel who come down from heaven together each Friday evening to peek into Jewish homes. They want to see how the Sabbath is being kept. When they see a messy house with yelling children and angry parents, the bad angel laughs and says, "May it be God's will that next Sabbath shall be like this one." The good angel sighs sadly and whispers "Amen." But when the angels find a clean, peaceful house with bright Sabbath candles, the good angel smiles and says, "May it be God's will that next Sabbath shall be like this one." Then the bad angel must scowl and mutter "Amen."