

A Secret of Shabbat Dinner

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

How to get a family to sit down for a Shabbat dinner? I used to wonder how my parents did it. They didn't use threats or coercion. One day I ran across a passage in Patrick O'Brien's *Master and Commander*, his first novel of the British navy, that explained it to me:

"A commander is obeyed by his officers because he is himself obeying; the thing is not in essence personal; and so down. If he does not obey, the chain weakens."

My parents asked nothing of us that they did not practice themselves. We were bound by rules not invented by my parents, but part of the same "chain of command" that bound them. We were at sea together and so the vessel made its swift way through the waters.

Is this a guarantee of fidelity to tradition? Surely not, there are no guarantees. But dropping off your child at synagogue and leaving to play tennis is breaking the chain of command. It is teaching that Judaism is something one outgrows, when in fact, it is something one grows into. Even if our children choose other than what we wish, if we present a model they can remember, in later years, we may discover they have clambered back on board and raised the sail.