

LAWS AND CUSTOMS ABOUT CHALLAH

In the Torah, there is a mitzvah that the rosh (head) of the dough be separated and given to the priests. Since the destruction of the Temple we have fulfilled this mitzvah by removing from the dough a small piece, about the size of an olive, before baking.

This portion is burnt in the oven, both in lieu of giving it to the priests and also as a contemporary sacrifice. We diminish our joy in the memory of the destruction of the Temple. The word challah means dough, and refers specifically to the bread from which the dough has been separated.

Separation of the Challah: The first portion of your kneading, you shall separate as a dough offering (challah)... In all your generations, give the first of your kneading as an elevated gift to G-d (Numbers 15:20-21) "Challah" is the piece of dough that is traditionally separated and consecrated to G-d every time we bake bread. The Separation of challah is one of the 613 mitzvot.

As the challah is separated and thrown into the oven, the following blessing is recited:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kideshanu be-mitzvosav ve-tzivanu lehafrish challah min ha-isah.

You are blessed, Lord our God, Sovereign of the world, Who made us holy with His commandments and commanded us to separate challah from the dough.

If one has forgotten to separate the dough before the challah is baked, a piece can be broken off and burned later.

Only breads made from five specific grains need be separated: wheat, barley, maize, spelt, and oats. In Europe, where these were the grains of the rich man's bread, challah came to be eaten only on Shabbat and festivals. Even the poor are rich on Shabbat. The custom has remained of eating challah only on Shabbat and festival.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the table of the Jew has been his altar. We use two challot, which reflect the shewbreads of the Temple. These also reflect the double portion of manna that was received in the desert on Fridays to provide for Shabbat, when no manna fell.

After blessing the wine, it is customary to wash hands, and there is no talking (singing is fine or niggunim) until after this ritual is performed. To see how to do this blessing, see <http://www.aish.com/sh/ht/fn/48969461.html>

Before breaking and eating them the challot are blessed as follows:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי	Baruch ata Adonoy,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.	ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.
Blessed are you God, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.	

Knives on the table may be covered before this blessing. There is a tradition not to use a challah knife at all on Friday night as a reflection of Isaiah's prophecy: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." (Isaiah 2:4) In addition, the stone altar consecrated to God was not built of hewn stones, "for by wielding your tools upon them you have profaned them (Exodus 20:22.) Rather than cut the challah with a knife—a weapon of war—that thereby profanes the altar and the offering, the custom has developed to break the challah apart with your hands.

After the blessing and before eating the challah, one should salt the bread. This both reflects the Temple sacrifices ritual and recalls that "by the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat" (Genesis 3:19).

There is a custom not to hand the pieces of bread directly to those at the table, but rather to put them on a plate and pass the plate around, or to place each piece of bread on the person's plate. It is not from man that we receive our bread.

When the blessing is made over the wine, the challah should be kept covered. It is sensitive and may be offended by being placed second to the wine. A story is told about a famous rabbi who once visited a man for Shabbat. The man, trying to impress the rabbi, set out an elaborate meal in honor of Shabbat. He became annoyed when he noticed his wife had forgotten the challah cover, and he began to berate her. The rabbi turned to the man and rebuked him, saying, "The

purpose of covering the challah is to shield its sensitive feelings. This teaches us concern for the feeling of even inanimate objects. How much more so should we be sensitive to another human being!”

Some have the custom of sprinkling poppy or sesame seeds on the challah before it is baked. This symbolizes the manna, which fell in the desert.

Also see:

<http://torah.org/torah-portion/livinglaw-5768-shlach/>

For an excellent discussion of “Why Do Jews Eat Challah on Shabbat?”, see http://www.myjewishlearning.com/the-nosher/why-do-jews-eat-challah-on-shabbat/?utm_source=MyJewishLearning+Newsletter&utm_campaign=a5904fa7aa-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_03_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3cde7e0300-a5904fa7aa-27253769

EASY MIXER OR FOOD PROCESSOR CHALLAH

1 CUP WARM WATER	1 EGG
1 PKG. (1 TBS.) DRY YEAST	1 TSP. SALT
1/4 CUP HONEY (OR SUGAR)	4 CUPS FLOUR (unbleached bread
2 TBS BUTTER or OIL	flour works best.)

1 EGG AND A LOT OF POPPY SEEDS FOR THE TOPPING

Mix the yeast in the warm water in a separate cup (~110°.) Mix all other ingredients except flour (and topping of course) together in mixer or food processor with or mixing paddle or bread blade. Then add yeasty water. Mix briefly. Then add the flour by cupfuls, mixing briefly after each (short pulse with food processor or continuous mixing on low with bread hook in mixer.) Mix until a nice ball forms. (May need a bit more flour.) Usually about a minute in a food processor or 5 minutes in mixer. Dough should be neither sticky nor crumbly. Adjust with more flour if sticky or more water if crumbly.

(Alternatively, all the ingredients can be thrown into a bread machine and put through the first cycle.)

With floured hands, remove from mixer onto lightly floured bread board or into a large bowl. Cover with a damp cloth or saran wrap, and let it rise in a warm quiet place. The longer it rises, the lighter the bread.

Once it has nicely risen, knead again by hand. Divide into three balls, and make each into a rope about a foot long. Place side by side, pinch tips of one end together and braid; glaze with beaten egg, sprinkle with poppy seeds, and let rise again.

Then bake in 350° oven about 30 minutes until golden brown.

The recipe makes one very good size Shabbat Challah, and the recipe multiplies well. Also after the first kneading you can refrigerate it overnight and do the rest of the rising and kneading the next day.

Karen's Do-It- Ahead Challah

The cornerstone of almost every Jewish holiday and festival, challah is easy to make with a mixer and always delicious.

Karen's Do-It-Ahead Challah

Makes 2 loaves

5 cups flour

1 Tbs. salt

4 Tbs. sugar

1 Tbs. instant yeast (rapid-rise)

1/2 cup melted butter or vegetable oil

1 1/4 cups warm water

3 eggs

1/2 cup flour, as needed

1 egg, beaten

Put the flour and salt in a large bowl, or in the bowl of an electric mixer. Stir with a wooden spoon or use the dough hook of the electric mixer. Make a well in the center, and add the sugar and the yeast. Stir for 30 seconds. While continuing to stir or with the machine running, add the melted butter and the warm water. Add the 3 eggs, one at a time, making sure each one is incorporated before adding the next. Knead for 15 minutes by hand or 5 minutes by machine, adding up to 1/2 cup more flour as needed.

Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly with lightly oiled plastic wrap, and allow to rise in the refrigerator overnight. In the morning, the dough should be doubled in size.

Punch the dough down, and knead for 10 minutes by hand or 5 minutes in the mixer.

Place the dough back in the bowl, and allow to rise for a second time, again until doubled in bulk.

Punch the dough down, and knead by hand for 8 minutes or by mixer for 3 minutes. Put the dough back in the bowl, and let rise for 20 minutes before you begin to shape it.

Turn the dough out onto a work surface and divide in half. Then divide each piece into 3 even balls. Roll out the balls into 6 strands, each about 9 inches long. Make 2 braids and place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Beat the remaining egg well. Brush the loaves with the beaten egg. Let rise for 20 minutes, then bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for 30 to 40 minutes.

From Rebecca Etz-Hoken

Olive Oil Challah Recipe and Video

[http://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1018481-olive-oil-challah?em_pos=medium&emc=edit ck 20161224&nl=cooking&nid=72139435](http://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1018481-olive-oil-challah?em_pos=medium&emc=edit_ck_20161224&nl=cooking&nid=72139435)

Note: takes ~ 3 ½ hours

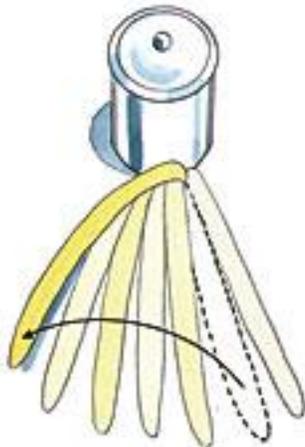
SIX-SIDED BRAIDING TECHNIQUE

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and sprinkle a little more flour over it. Spread and flatten the dough a bit, but don't worry about punching it down. Cut it into six equal pieces. Set aside the dough pieces, cover them lightly with plastic, and brush all the flour off the work surface. Have a small bowl of water handy. Using no flour, roll a piece of dough with a rolling pin into a very thin sheet, between 1/8 and 1/4 inch thick (don't worry about making a rectangle; an amoeba-type shape is fine). The dough may stick to the work surface; this is all right—just nudge it gently with a dough scraper.

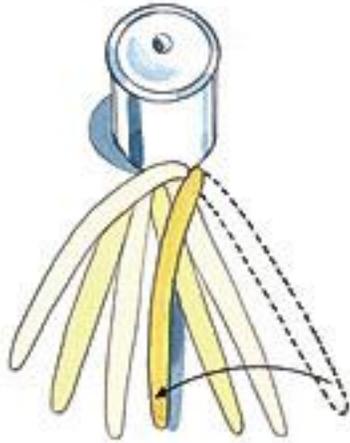
Tightly roll up the sheet like a carpet to form a strand. Roll the strand back and forth between your hands until it's thin, very even, and 12 to 15 inches long. At the ends of the strand, angle the outer edge of your hands into the work surface as you're rolling to make the ends pointy and the strand thicker in the middle (This will help you get a football-shaped loaf). The strand needs to grip the work surface slightly during this rolling; the "grab" will help as you roll. If the strand is too slick, very lightly dampen it with water to help it grip the work surface better.

Repeat the rolling out, rolling up, and elongating steps with the remaining five pieces of dough, rolling them out to the same length. Lightly sprinkle all the strands with flour to prevent them from sticking to one another during proofing. Arrange the strands parallel to one another.

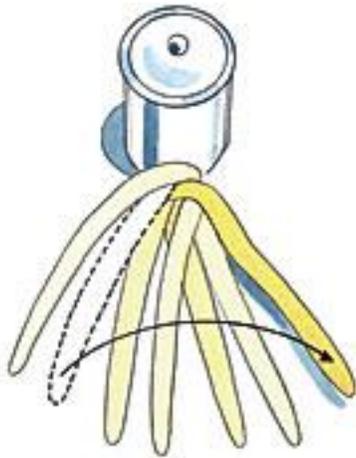
At one end, gather and pinch the strands very tightly together. Weight the end with a heavy canister to keep the braid from moving and to leave your hands free, and braid closely, following the illustrations below. Lightly tap each end of the loaf with your palms to tuck it under the loaf.



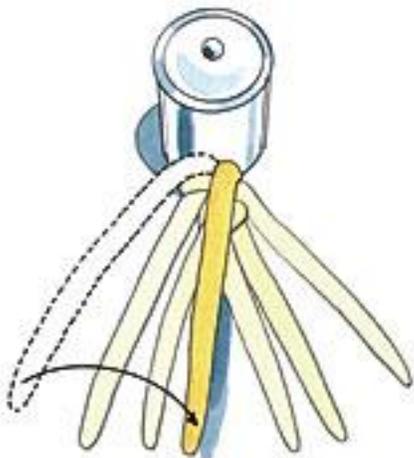
1. Move the second-to-the-right strand to the far-left position.



2. Move the far-right strand left over two strands, to the center position (spread the strands apart to make room).



3. Move the new second-to-the-left strand over to the far right position.



4. Move the far-left strand (the same strand you moved in step 1)

over two strands to the center position. Now repeat the steps.

Transfer the braid to the lined baking sheet and cover it loosely but thoroughly with plastic wrap. Let proof until doubled in bulk and the loaf remains indented when lightly pressed, about 2 hours, depending on room temperature. (If in doubt, let the dough proof more rather than less.)

For a video that is very helpful, go to:

<http://www.finecooking.com/videos/braiding-challah.aspx>

And for 3-9 strands, go to:

<http://www.thebreadkitchen.com/>