



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

At our Shabbat tables, the moment when motzi is made is perhaps one of our most powerful. Everyone is silently (and eagerly!) awaiting the breaking of bread and the delicious taste of challah.

It's all familiar: We hold two loaves of bread in our hands-- one on top of the other-- and the leader recites the bracha, *המוציא לחם מן הארץ*, "Who brings out bread from the ground".

But why is this the way we break bread?

Our answer must address two points:

1. The meaning behind our physical ritual
2. Why these words form our bracha

We will answer the first part of our question today and the second part in our next Shabbat Short!

The Mishnah Berurah explains that on Shabbat we use two challot in remembrance of the manna, which came in a double portion on Friday for Shabbat. Both men and women are equally obligated in lechem mishneh and making motzi as both men and women were included in the miracle of the manna (274:1:1).

We see our physical ritual described in detail in the Shuchan Aruch: בוצע על שתי ככרות שאוחז שתיהן בידי ובוצע התחתוננה over two loaves, holding them in his hand and breaking open the lower loaf". This is as we practice-- we hold one loaf on top of the other. The Rema clarifies here that on Friday night, we break the lower loaf for esoteric Kabbalistic reasons (as the Shulchan Aruch says), but on Shabbat day and on Yom Tov (night and

day), we break the top loaf (274:1). Ordinarily, it is preferable to hold the loaf that we plan to break on top. This is because our Sages tell us that we should never pass over one mitzvah object in order to get to another. And so on Friday night-- to make sure we maintain both this value and the Kabbalistic opinion of using the lower challah-- we hold the bottom loaf closer to ourselves while making the bracha so that we technically do not 'pass over' the upper challah (MB 274:1:5). At all other times, we break the top challah as it is closest to us (Chabad has the practice of holding the challot side by side to represent unity-- which you may see some people do).

But the meaning does not end with this choreography: Even the way we put our hands on the challot has special meaning! According to the Shulchan Aruch: *'יתן שתי ידיים על הפת בשעת ברכה שיש בהן "מצוות התלויות בפתח"* "She should put both hands on the bread at the time of the blessing for her ten fingers reflect the ten mitzvot that are dependent on bread" (167:4). The Shulchan Aruch goes on to say that in addition to the ten mitzvot related to bread, there are ten words in the bracha of 'HaMotzi', and he even quotes various pesukim which refer to God providing us with sustenance which also have ten words in them. The Kabbalists add that our ten fingers represent the ten sefirot, the ten attributes of God.

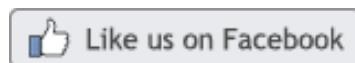
As we see, every physical act in motzi has meaning. The next time we make motzi on Shabbat, I encourage us to reflect on the image of our ten fingers on the challot, one loaf on top of the other. When we make motzi, we are supposed to be filled with gratitude that God not only provides food for us, but that God created our fingers--our hands-- ourselves! The ability to sense-- to touch, taste, and smell the challah-- are gifts from God, and we cannot begin our holy meal without ritualizing this reality.

We will explore the second part of our answer-- the words we use to praise God in 'HaMotzi'-- in our next Shabbat Shorts!

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