



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

By popular request (yes, you can request!!), we'll talk about the ritual of salting the challah (or dipping the challah in salt; there doesn't appear to be a Halachic preference, but the [Kabbalistic tradition](#) prefers dipping.)

So would it surprise you if I told you that this practice has no specific connection to Shabbat per se, and that it's not even mentioned at all in the laws of breaking bread on Shabbat? Well, whether you are surprised or not, the fact is that the practice of salting our bread is mentioned by the Shulchan Aruch only within the *general Halachot* of eating meals, and even there, only en passant .

In Siman 167, as part of the larger discussion of avoiding any interruption between reciting "Hamotzi" and eating the bread, the Shulchan Aruch advises that before we cut or tear our bread, we should make sure that the salt or seasoning is already on the table, so that we don't have to go searching for the salt or seasoning after we've already recited the bracha. Interestingly, he goes on to say that salting is actually *not necessary at all* if the bread is made from fine flour or if it already contains salt or other seasonings / flavorings. With this additional comment, the Shulchan Aruch promptly exempts virtually all of the challah that we regularly encounter on Shabbat from the entire practice of salting!

What function does salting play in the Shulchan Aruch's understanding? It plays the role of honoring the "HaMotzi" by insuring that the bread over which it is being recited is not tasteless

and unappealing. This is why it is recommended exclusively for bland, poor-tasting bread. Whence then, our universal custom of salting our challah on Shabbat?

The answer lies in the gloss of Rama, who offers an entirely different reason for salting our bread. He cites the Talmud (Brachot 55a): "Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Elazar both say: As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel's transgressions. Now that it is destroyed, a person's table atones for his transgressions." Later sages concretized this association between the altar and the table by declaring it "a mitzvah" to salt our bread just as the offerings on the altar were Biblically required to be salted. Mishna Brurah cites sources which explain *how* our table atones for our transgressions: through our sharing of our bread with those in need, and through our dedicating part of the mealtime to sharing words of Torah (I would imagine that these can be extended to sharing our *company* with those in need of company, and to speaking words of kindness, encouragement, empathy, and love.) For Rama then, the mitzvah of salting applies even to the most flavorful of breads.

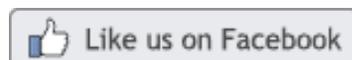
It is worth noting again, that neither the Shulchan Aruch's nor the Rama's understanding of salting bread is Shabbat-specific, though I think it's common that it's only practiced on Shabbat. This being the case, our salting of our Shabbat challah brings an even heightened attention to the table-as-altar idea, and the way that we aspire for our Shabbat tables in particular to be places of kindness and of Torah.

Of course we're still free to aspire to make our Tuesday night tables as altars too :)

I love feedback!
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