



Why is the Mitzvah of Challah so Important for Women?

Most Cherished of Women's Mitzvot

Parashat Shelach Lecha leads us to the beloved, feminine mitzvah of challah, about which I have already written extensively. You can read about the many beautiful, spiritual lessons gleaned from this mitzvah in my prior blogs [The Secret of Challah & the Feminine Tikun \(Rectification\)](#); [The Power of Challah](#). Having baked challah every week on Friday, since getting married almost 40 years ago, I revel in this mitzvah. I especially treasure the opportune moment, following the taking of challah, to pray for the deepest desires of my heart. It is then customary to pray for a soulmate, since the dough symbolizes the first human being, who was Hashem's challah, created from dust like flour and water. There are several established prayers to recite after performing this cherished mitzvah, which I include below both in Hebrew and English. We may also pray in our own words for anything we or our loved ones need. In Jewish communities the world over, 40 women get together to take challah the same day and pray for one person to be healed or to find her soulmate. Although any adult Jew can bake bread and separate challah, this mitzvah is one of the three special mitzvot designated for the Jewish woman, to empower her to rectify the sin of the first woman, Chava.

Challah – One of Women's Three Opportunities for Rectification

The blessings of the tent of Sarah, our mother, reflect each of these three mitzvot, which are entrusted to women, and represent the three aspects of the rectification of Chava:

1. The Divine Cloud hanging over Sarah's tent reflects keeping the laws of family purity, which connects the physical and spiritual. Humanity is the blood of the world, as it states, *"Whoever spills the blood of man..."* (Bereishit 9:7). Blood, purified through family purity, does, in fact, bind body and soul together on a physical level.
2. The perpetual light (from the eve of Shabbat to the eve of Shabbat) exuding from Sarah's tent, reflects the lighting of Shabbat candles. This mitzvah rectifies and perfects the soul. Humanity is the candle of the world as it states, *"The candle of G-d, the soul of man"* (Mishlei 20:27).
3. The special blessing in the dough of Sarah's tent reflects the mitzvah of taking challah. It revitalizes and rectifies the body. Humanity is the bread of the world, as it states, *"Hashem formed man of the dust of the ground"* (Bereishit 2:7). This explains why the moment of separating challah is so holy. In this article, I've decided to focus on the halachic implications of separating challah. For this purpose, my husband, Rabbi Dr. Mechael Chaim Siegelbaum, the halacha teacher of B'erot, generously shared his notes on the topic.

The Mitzvah of Challah Constantly Reminds Us and Connects Us to the Land of Israel

According to the Torah, the mitzvah of taking challah applies only within the Land of Israel, when every tribe has its own land to grow produce and share with the Kohen. Although no other *terumot* and *ma'asarot* (tithes), are required to perform outside of the Land of Israel, we perform the mitzvah of challah even outside of the Land of Israel, "so that we do not forget it." Thus, the mitzvah of challah connects us to the Land of Israel:

ספר במדבר פרק טו פסוק יז וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (יח) דִּבֶּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּאָכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה: (יט) וְהָיָה בְּאָכְלֶכֶם מִלֶּחֶם הָאָרֶץ תְּרִימוּ תְרוּמָה לַה' שָׁם: (כ) רִאשִׁית עֲרֹסְתֶכֶם חֲלָה תְרִימוּ תְרוּמָה כְּתוּרִימַת גֶּרֶן כֵּן תְרִימוּ אֹתָהּ: (כא) מִרִאשִׁית עֲרֹסְתֶיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ לַה' תְרוּמָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, When you arrive in the Land to which I am bringing you, and you eat of the bread of the Land, you shall offer up a gift (*terumah*) to Hashem. [From] the first of your kneading bowl, you shall offer up a *challah* as a gift (*terumah*); like the gift of the threshing-floor, so you shall offer it up. From the first of your kneading bowl, you shall give [a gift] to Hashem an offering, throughout your generations" (*Bamidbar* 15:17-21).

Until the majority of world Jewry reside in Israel, separating challah is a Rabbinic rather than a Biblical mitzvah, both in Israel and the diaspora. However, I find it extremely exciting that this may change shortly. At the beginning of this year (5780), the number of Jews worldwide was 14.8 million. Of these, 8.1 million lived outside Israel and 6.7 million Jews lived within Israel. With less than a million more immigrants, the Jews in the Land of Israel will tip the scale to become the majority.

Baking Enough Bread to Take Challah

Hashem desired to grant us a constant mitzvah in our bread, through which the blessing could rest and give us merit for our souls. In this way, the dough would become food for both body and soul (*Sefer HaChinuch* 385). This explains why Rabbi Moshe Isserless encourages us to bake enough bread to take challah:

שו"ע אורח חיים סימן רמב הגה נהגין ללוש כדי שיעור חלה בבית לעשות מהם לחמים לבצוע עליהם בשבת ויו"ט (סמך ממרדכי ריש מסכת ר"ה) והוא מכבוד שבת ויו"ט ואין לשנות:

RAMA: We customarily knead a quantity of dough that is sufficient to become obligated in the mitzvah of challah, in the home. With this, we bake breads for the Shabbat and holiday meals. This is one of the [many ways] in which we honor Shabbat and holidays, and [this custom] should not be changed (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* Ch.242).

There are different opinions about the amount of flour required for being able to take challah with or without a bracha. In the table below we bring you the two most accepted views:

Amount of Flour Required	Without bracha (all opinions)	With Bracha Rabbi Eliezer Melamed	With Bracha The Chazon Ish
Kg	1.2	1.5	2.25
Lbs.	2.6	3.3	5

Which Kind of Dough Requires Challah to be Taken?

- Any dough baked from the five grains: *שֵׂעֶל, כֶּסֶמֶת, שִׁפּוֹן, שְׂעוֹרָה, שִׂפּוֹן*, wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt.
- Any dough for making bread, pizza, cakes, cookies etc.
- Also bagels although they are boiled before being baked.
- Two or more doughs, owned by one person, each of which weighs less than the amount requiring the separation of challah, may collectively add up to the amount requiring challah. This only applies if one does not care that the doughs are mixed with each other and the following conditions are met: 1. The doughs are in one vessel, and preferably touching, or placed together on a cloth 2. If either dough rises above the top of the vessel, the doughs are covered to combine them.
- One preparing an amount of dough requiring the separation of challah, and bakes all the dough together in several loaves, intending to eat some of the loaves now and to store some loaves away for next Shabbat. Even if the dough is divided so that some will be baked now and some will be baked next Shabbat, challah must be taken with a blessing.

Which Kind of Dough Requires Separating Challah Without a Blessing?

6. A thick dough which is boiled or fried is exempt from challah. Nevertheless, among Ashkenazim, the G-d fearing will separate challah without a blessing.
7. Donuts, deep fried in oil, are exempt from challah. Nevertheless, challah should be taken without a blessing.
8. There is a dispute of whether noodle kugel is exempt from challah. Therefore, in Israel [where the mitzvah to take challah is mentioned directly in the Torah] it is recommended to separate challah without a blessing.

Which Kind of Dough is Exempt from Taking Challah?

9. If an amount of dough requiring the separation of challah is prepared with the intention of dividing the dough into different kinds: part for bread and part for cake, or two different kinds of cake, and no part by itself is enough to require challah, then the dough is exempt from challah.
10. Pancakes fried with a moderate amount of oil are exempt from challah.
11. If the dough was divided up to give to different people to bake separately, so that no portion has an amount requiring challah, then challah is not taken.

The Procedure for Taking Challah:

12. Before separating the challah, recite the following blessing:

הַעֲסָה בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ חֻלָּה מִן:

Baruch atah Hashem Eloheinu Melech ha'olam asher kideshanu be'mitzvotav vetzivanu lehafrish challah min ha'isah.

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to separate challah.

13. Separate off a piece of dough a bit smaller than a Ping-Pong ball, (approximately one ounce), and recite: חֻלָּה זוּ הִיא/harei zo challah – “This piece is challah.”

14. Double wrap the piece in foil and burn it in the oven before throwing it out. If burning the challah cannot easily be done, it may be wrapped in two layers of a material such as aluminum foil or plastic bags and discarded.

15. If you forgot to separate challah from the dough, you must separate it after it is baked.

16. If you forgot to separate challah before Shabbat, when in Israel, you are forbidden to separate it on Shabbat.

Prayers Following Separating Challah

הָרַנִּי בָּאָה לְקַיֵּם מִצְוַת הַפְּרָשַׁת חֻלָּה לְתַקֵּן שְׂרָשָׁהּ בְּמָקוֹם עָלִיּוֹן לַעֲשׂוֹת נַחַת רוּחַ לְיוֹצְרֵנוּ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת רָצוֹן בּוֹרְאֵנוּ.

וְהִי נָעַם הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ כּוֹנֵנָה עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ כּוֹנֵנָה.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שִׁיְבִנָּה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ, וְתֵן חֵלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ, וְשֵׁם נַעֲבֹדְךָ בִּירְאָה כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וְכַשְׁנִים קִדְּמָנוּת. וְעֲרַבָה לְהָשֵׁם מִנַּחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם, כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וְכַשְׁנִים קִדְּמָנוּת.

Behold I come to fulfill the mitzvot of separating challah to rectify its root in the upper place, to give respite to my Creator and fulfill His will. And may the pleasantness of Hashem our G-d be upon us, and the work of our hands establish for us, and the work of our hands establish it. May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our ancestors, that the Temple be speedily rebuilt in our days, and grant us a portion in Your Torah. There we will serve you with awe, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto G-d, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years.

יהי רצון מלפניך, השם אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, שמצות הפרשת חלה תחשב לי כאלו קיימתיה בכל פרטיה ודקדוקיה, ותחשב הרמת החלה שאני מרימה כמו הקרבן שהקרב על גבי המזבח ותקבל ברצון. וכמו בזמן שבית המקדש היה קיים, היתה החלה נתונה לכהן והיתה זו לכפרת עוונות, כך תהיה הפרשה זו לכפרת עוונותי, ואז אהיה כאלו נולדתי מחדש נקייה מחטא ועוון ואוכל לקיים מצות שבת קדש והימים הטובים עם בעלי (וילדינו), להיות נזונים מקדשת הימים האלה. ובזכות מצות חלה יהיו ילדינו נזונים תמיד מידי של הקדוש ברוך הוא ברב רחמיו וחסדיו וברב אהבה. ותקבל מצות חלה כאלו נתתי מעשר. וכשם שהנני מקיימת מצות חלה בכל לבי, כך יתעוררו רחמיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא לשמרני מצער וממכאובים כל הימים. אמן כן יהי רצון.

May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d, that the mitzvah of separating challah be considered as if I had performed it with all its details and particulars. May my elevation of the challah be comparable to the sacrifice that was offered on the altar, which was acceptable and pleasing. Just as giving the challah to the Kohen in former times served to atone for sins, so may it atone for mine, and then I will be as if born anew, pure from sin and iniquity. May it enable me to observe the holy Shabbat and these holidays with my husband and children and become imbued with its holiness. May the spiritual influence of the mitzvah of challah enable our children to be constantly sustained by the hands of the Holy One, blessed is He, with His abundant mercy, kindness, and great love. Consider the mitzvah of challah as if I have given the tithe. And just as I am fulfilling this mitzvah with all my heart, so may Your compassion be aroused to keep me from sorrow and pain, always. Amen!

יהי רצון מלפניך השם אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שבזכות מצוה זו ובזכות הפרשת התרומה יתקן עוון חוה אם כל חי שסבבה מיתתו לאדם הראשון שהוא עסתו של עולם ובזכות מצוה זו תבטל המות מן העולם ותמחה דמעה מעל פנים ותשלח ברכה בביתנו אמן כן יהיה רצון. וכן יהי רצון מלפניך שתברך עסותינו כמו ששלחת בך ברכה בעסות אמותינו שרה, רבקה, רחל ולאה ויקים בנו הפסוק "ראשית ערסותיכם תתנו לכהן להניח ברכה אל ביתך" אמן כן יהי רצון.

May it be May it be Your will, our G-d, that the merit of this mitzvah and the merit of separating teruma will rectify the sin of Chava – Mother of all Life – who brought mortality to the first Adam, who is considered the challah of the world. May the merit of this mitzvah nullify death from the world, wipe away the tears of our faces, and send blessings to our homes, amen may it be Your will! May it also be your will to bless our dough, just as you blessed the dough of our mothers Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah. May it be established through the Scriptural verse "You shall also give to the Kohen the first of your dough that he may cause a blessing to rest on your home" (Yechezkiel 44:30). Amen may it be Your will!

Abridged Version of Prayer Following Separating Challah

תפלה אחרי הפרשת חלה - מקצר

יהי רצון מלפניך, השם אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שהמצוה של הפרשת חלה תחשב כאלו קיימתיה בכל פרטיה ודקדוקיה, ותחשב הרמת החלה שאני מרימה, כמו הקרבן שהקרב על המזבח שנתקבל ברצון!

May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that the mitzvah of separating challah be considered as if I had performed it with all its details and ramifications. May my elevation of the challah be comparable to the sacrifice that was offered on the altar, which was acceptable and pleasing.