



Nourish



THE RITUAL

Bless (then eat) the challah.

The Goods

BREAD

Preferably challah because it's delicious in every conceivable way. But don't stress — any bread will do. Two full loaves is ideal. Small crowd? Waste not! Serve up two pitas or two dinner rolls. Whatever kind of bread you use, take it out of its packaging and place it on its own plate on the table.

CHALLAH COVER

Any kind of cover to place over your bread, from a napkin on short notice to an ornate embroidered cloth.

SALT or HONEY

Celebrating something special like a birthday or a wedding? Skip the salt and add honey to your challah instead.

BLESS

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצֵיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam
ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.*

Blessed is the Oneness that brings forth bread from the earth.

or

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

Reflection

Challah is one of the three things for which
God created the world.

— *Bamidbar Rabbah 15*

On Shabbat, challah represents a taste of *tikkun olam*, the
possibility of the world restored.

— *The Maharal of Prague*



CHALLAH MEDITATION

This is an open-eye mindful eating meditation that can be done after motzi, the blessing over the challah or whatever bread you use to nourish your table, or in its place. Make sure everyone at the table has a piece of challah or bread before beginning.

Find a comfortable position in your seat. Come into the present of this Shabbat gathering by taking a few breaths, noticing how you feel physically. Take a piece of challah your hand. Notice the impulse you might have to pop it in your mouth right away. Look at the challah, examining it with curiosity as if you've never seen bread before. Notice how it feels in your hand – the texture, shape and weight. You may want to close your eyes while doing this. Notice the color of the challah and if it has any unique features. Imagine where the challah came from before arriving at this Shabbat dinner table, how it started as ripe stalks of wheat in a field. Picture the workers on the farm harvesting the wheat and another set of workers transporting the wheat to a mill. Imagine the process of grinding the wheat into flour, and that flour being mixed with water, oil, and eggs, and baked into bread. Slowly bring the challah to your nose to learn what it smells like. Notice the natural motion of your arm as it moves to do this. Continue to notice any thoughts of like or dislike you might have as you observe the bread. Notice whether you're anticipating what it will taste like. Perhaps you're starting to salivate or feeling an impulse to eat it. Now, place the challah in your mouth without biting into it. Keep it in your mouth without chewing for at least 10 seconds and explore what it feels like. Notice what it's like to take this time before eating the bread. When you are ready, slowly and softly bite into the challah. Notice what it tastes like, how its flavor and texture changes as you chew. Notice your natural impulse to swallow it. Let it nourish your body as you enter Shabbat. Sit quietly and notice what you are feeling.

And now, let's eat.

By Jon Kabat-Zinn, modified for Shabbat by Rabbi Jessica Minnen

THE BREAKDOWN

In the ancient Near East, if there wasn't bread on the table, it wasn't a meal. As a result, the Jewish sages viewed bread as the primary source of nourishment, both literally and spiritually. Challah, the slightly sweet, braided bread many enjoy at modern Shabbat dinners, comes from a commandment in the Torah requiring the Israelites to set aside a portion of dough every week as an offering; that donation was called challah. The practice of braiding the bread evolved over time, some with three strands, others six, each with their own referential symbolism to Temple times.

On many tables, you will find two loaves of challah. On Shabbat, we revel in possibility and abundance. We have a double portion of everything, just as the Israelites received a double portion of manna on Shabbat during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Also, challah French toast is the best, so don't feel pressure to make it through both loaves in one sitting.

Why cover the bread? In general, when faced with more than one food, Jewish tradition dictates that the first blessing offered should be on the species that comes first in the list of the Seven Species (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates) mentioned in the Torah. As such, you would say the blessing on the bread (wheat) before wine (grapes). But since you definitely say *kiddush* to sanctify Shabbat before blessing the bread, there is a dilemma of precedence. So, the sages (in the Jerusalem Talmud, redacted around ca. 400 CE) suggest covering the challah to hide it while we drink the wine first.

No one wants a jealous challah.

Once we uncover the challah, the blessing over the bread connects us to the work that brought the challah to our table. The possibility and abundance of Shabbat come with the responsibility to work to make a better world the other six days of the week.

Pass it, rip it, cut it, tear into it like you mean it. There's no right or wrong as long as the bread makes its way around the table.

Lastly, it is common to add some salt to the pieces of challah before sharing. While this practice has its roots in, you guessed it, Temple times, it also has a more mystical explanation. According to Isaac Luria, the great 16th-century Kabbalist, both bread (לחם) and salt (מלח) are representations of the divine; salt is divine severity, and bread is divine kindness. We seek to overpower the severity of the salt with the kindness of the bread. Therefore, when you salt your challah, do not sprinkle the salt on top of the bread, but instead touch the bread to the salt — kindness over severity.

And with that, we head mouth-first into dinner.