

In Hilchos Shabbos

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The Great Challah Bake

Halachos of Separating Challah

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by **Rabbi Shmuel Stein** at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

Baking Challos for Shabbos

The mitzvah of separating challah has a special connection to the day of Shabbos. The Rema¹ writes “The minhag (custom) is to bake bread in one’s home for Shabbos and Yom Tov. This is done in order to ensure that one will have fresh and special bread for Shabbos [and Yom Tov], as this adds honor to the holidays.” The Darchei Moshe² writes that this custom dates back to the times of Ezra haSofer (2,500 years ago). The Mishnah Berurah³ condemns the fact that instead of baking challah for Shabbos in their homes, many women have become accustomed to purchasing challah from a bakery. He writes, “As of late, due to our many sins, there are some women who have begun to discontinue this custom, as they buy their bread for Shabbos from a bakery. This is not a correct thing to do, as doing so lessens the honor of Shabbos.” Some poskim⁴ suggest that since nowadays, bakeries bake bread specifically in honor of Shabbos, one does not need to be careful to bake challah for Shabbos, because these bakeries, too, are fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring Shabbos. According to these poskim, only in earlier times, when people would purchase ordinary bread from the bakery for Shabbos, it was necessary to bake challah at home in honor of Shabbos. The Mishnah Berurah⁵ writes that there is an additional reason for a woman to bake her own challah for Shabbos: by doing so she can perform the mitzvah of separating challah. On the first Erev Shabbos of creation, Chava sinned by giving Adam haRishon a fruit to eat from the *eitz hada’as*, a sin that ultimately led to man’s mortality. Adam is referred to as “the challah (the separated loaf) of the world,” as he was chosen to be the most special being in the universe. By performing the mitzvah of separating challah, a woman brings a tikun (rectification) for Chava’s sin. Accordingly, challah should be made on Erev Shabbos, as this is when Chava’s sin occurred.⁶

When to Bake the Challos

The Darchei Moshe⁷ states, “Ezra haSofer instituted that a woman should wake up early on Erev Shabbos to bake challos.” According to both reasons mentioned above, Erev Shabbos is the opportune time to bake challos:

1. **Baking challos in honor of Shabbos.** All preparations made in honor of Shabbos should preferably be done on Erev Shabbos.⁸ The Shulchan Aruch⁹ writes, “It is a mitzvah to wake up early on Erev Shabbos in order to prepare for Shabbos.” This is hinted to in the verse¹⁰ that discusses the falling of the manna in the Midbar (wilderness): “It shall be on the sixth day (Friday) that one will prepare [for Shabbos].” Just as preparations for Shabbos should be made specifically on Erev Shabbos (because it is obvious that they are done at that time to honor the Shabbos),¹¹ so too, challos made to honor the Shabbos should be baked on Erev Shabbos.¹²
2. **Chava sinned on Erev Shabbos.** The Machatzis haShekel¹³ explains that since Chava sinned on Erev Shabbos a woman should perform the mitzvah of separating challah specifically on Erev Shabbos as a tikun.

A woman may make a large batch of dough (e.g., using 5 lb. of flour) on Erev Shabbos in order to make many challos to be used for many weeks.¹⁴ Some poskim¹⁵ suggest that each week the challos should be heated up in the oven before Shabbos in order to add to the honor of Shabbos.

If a woman finds it difficult to bake challos on Erev Shabbos she may bake them on Thursday, as we find that Thursday is also a day for Shabbos preparation.¹⁶ If she cannot make the challah on Thursday she may already begin preparing for Shabbos at the beginning of the week.¹⁷

In the following paragraphs we will discuss the mitzvah of separating challah and how to fulfill it properly.

The Mitzvah of Separating Challah

When making dough, the Torah commands that one must separate challah (a portion of the dough) and give it to the Kohen.¹⁸ The Torah¹⁹ writes, “When you come into the land [of Eretz Yisrael] and eat from the bread of the land, you shall set aside a portion for Hashem. Challah must be set aside from the first of your

dough.” The dough that is separated must be given to a Kohen.²⁰ [Although only the portion of bread that is given to the Kohen is called challah, the Jewish people have customarily referred to the entire loaf of bread eaten on Shabbos as “challah,” as if to say that the focus and most integral purpose of eating bread are to perform the mitzvos of Hashem.²¹]

A deeper understanding of the mitzvah of separating challah

The mitzvah of separating challah is unique, as the Midrash²² writes, “Hashem created the world for three things; one of them is the mitzvah of separating challah.” The mitzvah of challah transforms our bread from a food that merely nourishes our bodies into a food that is used for a mitzvah. The Sefer haChinuch²³ explains, “A person’s nourishment is dependent on the food he eats, and the majority of people get their nourishment from bread. Therefore, Hashem gave us a mitzvah that we can constantly perform when baking our bread. Through the mitzvah of separating challah we can bring berachah to our homes, and receive a merit for our neshamos, as the bread we eat is now able to nourish our body and nourish our neshamos.” Indeed, the prophet Yechezkel²⁴ clearly states, “You should give the first portion of your dough to the Kohen — so that blessing will rest in your homes.”

Does the mitzvah of separating challah apply even outside of Eretz Yisrael?

The mitzvah d’Oraisa of separating challah applies only in Eretz Yisrael,²⁵ as the Torah²⁶ states, “When you come into the land [of Eretz Yisrael] and you eat from the bread of the land you must separate a portion.” Furthermore, the mitzvah of challah applies d’Oraisa only when the majority of the Jewish people are living in Eretz Yisrael,²⁷ as the Torah²⁸ states, “When you come to the land,” meaning when all (i.e., the majority²⁹) of the Jewish people come to Eretz Yisrael. Accordingly, the Shulchan Aruch³⁰ writes that the mitzvah of challah nowadays is not d’Oraisa, even in Eretz Yisrael, as the majority of the Jewish people do not reside in Eretz Yisrael.³¹ Chazal, however, mandated that the mitzvah of separating challah should be performed even nowadays, both in Eretz Yisrael³² and in chutz la-aretz (the diaspora), in order to ensure that this special mitzvah should not be forgotten.³³ Accordingly, there is a mitzvah mid’Rabbanan nowadays to separate challah from one’s dough, both in Eretz Yisrael and in chutz la-aretz.

How much dough must one separate

The Torah does not require a specific amount to be taken in order to fulfill the mitzvah of challah;³⁴ one can fulfill this mitzvah by removing even a small amount of dough.³⁵ However, the Rema³⁶ writes that nowadays the custom is to separate a *k’zayis* of dough (approximately 1 oz.,³⁷ i.e., the size of a ping-pong ball) when performing the mitzvah. (B’dieved, one can fulfill the mitzvah by separating even a small amount of dough.³⁸)

What to do with the separated challah

In the times of the Beis haMikdash, the challah (i.e., the separated part of the dough) was given to a Kohen. The Torah³⁹ refers to the challah as “terumah”; just as terumah must be given to a Kohen, so too, the challah that one separates must be given to a Kohen.⁴⁰ The Gemara⁴¹ states that twenty-four gifts were given to the Kohanim, one of them being challah. The separated part of the dough is holy and may be eaten only by someone who is *tahor* (ritually pure). Nowadays, when all Jews are assumed to be *tamei* (ritually impure), challah may not be given to a Kohen.⁴² The challah must be destroyed instead.⁴³

Burning the challah

The Rema⁴⁴ writes that we burn the challah that has been separated (to the point that it is no longer edible⁴⁵). There are two reasons why the challah must be burned:

1. Just as the Torah⁴⁶ states that there is a mitzvah to burn the flesh of *kodshim* (a sacrifice) that became impure, so too, there is a mitzvah to burn challah that is impure.⁴⁷
2. The challah must be destroyed in order to prevent the possibility of someone eating it inadvertently.⁴⁸

1 End of siman 242. 2 503:1. See also Elyah Rabbah, end of siman 242. 3 Bei’ur Halachah, end of 242, d’h vehu. 4 Ohr leTzion 2:47:1. Hilchos Shabbos. 5 242:6. 6 Ben Ish Chai, vol. 2, Lech Lecha 6 (see also Even Chai, note 5). 7 503:1. 8 See Chapter One for an elaboration on this subject. 9 250:1. 10 Shemos 16:5. 11 Aruch haShulchan 250:1; Elyah Rabbah 250:1. 12 The Satmar Rebbe once remarked to his wife, “If women would know the tremendous importance of preparing for Shabbos they would fulfill this mitzvah with even greater excitement, as we cannot fathom the greatness of this mitzvah” (Nishmas Shabbos 1:101). 13 End of siman 242; Ben Ish Chai, vol. 2, Lech Lecha 6. 14 Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky (Kovetz Halachos, Shabbos 1:1:22, note 37). See also Shraga haMeir (8:16) and Chut Shani, vol. 1, 4:1, d’h vehinei. 15 Nishmas Shabbos 1:102-1. 16 Nishmas Shabbos 1:102-1. It may be preferable to bake the challah on Thursday night, since it is already considered Friday (ibid.). See Chapter One. 17 Kovetz Halachos, Shabbos 1:1:22. See also Nishmas Shabbos 1:102-1 from the Satmar Rebbe. 18 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:1. 19 Bamidbar 15:17-21. 20 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:1. 21 See the ArtScroll Stone Chumash, Bamidbar 15:20. 22 Bereishis Rabbah 1:4. 23 Mitzvah 385. 24 Yechezkel 44:30. 25 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:2. 26 Bamidbar 15:18-21. 27 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:2. 28 Bamidbar 15:18. 29 Sefer haChinuch (mitzvah 385) explains that when the Gemara (Kesubos 25a) says that all of the Jewish people are needed it means the majority of the Jewish people. This is based on the principle of *rubo k’kulo* — the majority can be considered as the whole (She’elas David, chiddushim 7). 30 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:2. 31 See The Aura of Shabbos, p. 46. 32 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:3. 33 Ibid. 34 See Rashi, Bamidbar 15:20, d’h k’kulo — where he writes that the Torah compares challah to terumah, the latter of which the Torah does not require a certain amount to be given. 35 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:1. 36 Ibid., 322:5 (Shemiras Shabbos k’Hilchasah 42:12).

In order to accelerate the burning of the challah some women roll it out before placing it in the oven, as this will decrease the time that it normally takes to burn it.

Being careful not to transfer the holiness of the challah

The separated challah is holy and one may not benefit from it. One must therefore be careful to avoid transferring its holiness to other objects, as doing so may proscribe benefiting from them as well. The status of the challah is transferred through bli'ah (absorption) when it is hot, and therefore any object it touches when hot receives the status of the challah.⁴⁹ Accordingly, one must be careful when burning the challah:

- not to place it directly on the oven rack or tray⁵⁰
- not to use a fork or utensil to handle the hot challah dough.

Rather, one should wrap the challah in aluminum foil before placing it on the rack of the oven.⁵¹ This way, the hot challah does not directly touch the oven rack. Once the challah is burned it may be removed from the oven and put in the garbage. (Once the challah is completely burned it does not need to be double wrapped before being disposed of).⁵²

Throwing the separated challah into the garbage

If it is not possible to burn the challah, one should double wrap it (in aluminum foil or plastic bags)⁵³ and throw it into the garbage.⁵⁴ Although this does not accomplish the mitzvah of burning the challah, it still prevents the possibility of someone inadvertently eating it. In such a situation, less than a k'zayis of dough should be separated.⁵⁵

What type of dough is subject to the mitzvah of separating challah?

Challah must be separated from any bread-like product that is made from the five grains (wheat, barley, spelt, oat, and rye).⁵⁶ When these grains are made into dough through any of the primary liquids (water, wine, olive oil, bee honey, or milk),⁵⁷ the dough is subject to the mitzvah of separating challah. Thus, the obligation to separate challah applies not only to bread but to any dough made from the five grains (e.g., pizza, cake, rugelach) as well.⁵⁸

How much dough must be made in order to be subject to the mitzvah of challah?

The Shulchan Aruch⁵⁹ writes that in order for bread to be obligated in the mitzvah of challah the flour used in the dough must equal the volume of 43.2 eggs (k'beitzos). The Shach⁶⁰ notes that the numerical value of the word challah is 43. There is, however, halachic uncertainty as to how to calculate the volume of 43.2 eggs in modern-day terms. Therefore, nowadays, one may separate challah and recite a berachah only if the amount of flour that was used to make the product fulfills the measurement of 43.2 eggs according to all opinions. Accordingly,

- **5 lb. of flour:** If 5 lb. or more of flour is used to bake bread (or other foods made from the five grains), challah is separated and a berachah is recited.⁶¹ Since according to all opinions, 5 lb. of flour fulfills the requirement of 43.2 eggs, there is an obligation to separate challah with a berachah according to all opinions.
- **2.5 lb. of flour:** If 2.5 lb. or more of flour is used to bake bread (or other baked foods made from the five grains), challah is separated but a berachah is not recited.⁶² Since according to some opinions 2.5 lb. of flour satisfies the requirement of 43.2 eggs, one must separate challah. However, since according to other opinions 2.5 lb. does not fulfill this requirement, a berachah is not made.
- **Less than 2.5 lb of flour:** If less than 2.5 lb. of flour is used to bake bread (or other foods made from the five grains), challah is not separated.⁶³ Since according to all opinions, less than 2.5 lb. of flour does not fulfill the requirement of 43.2 eggs, there is no obligation to separate challah.

Who Performs the Mitzvah of Separating Challah?

Although the mitzvah of separating challah is obligatory for both men and women, it was given to women to perform. Chazal tell us that three mitzvos were given specifically to women to perform: challah, niddah, and hadlakas neiros.⁶⁴ The acronym of these three mitzvos is Chanah, the mother of Shmuel haNavi.⁶⁵ After many years of not having children, Chanah merited to have a son who grew up to become a prophet because she was careful to fulfill these three mitzvos.⁶⁶

1. There are two reasons given by Rashi⁶⁷ as to why women were given these mitzvos: Since women are generally in charge of taking care of the household, they are charged with the obligation to separate challah from the dough which is baked.

2. As mentioned above, since Chava caused Adam haRishon, who is referred to as "the challah of the world," to sin and become mortal, the mitzvah of challah was given to women in order to rectify Chava's sin.

Reciting the Berachah

When one separates challah, the following berachah is recited (when at least 5 lb. of flour is used):⁶⁸

"Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us to separate the challah (from the dough⁶⁹)."

There are different opinions and customs with regard to when one should recite the berachah of separating challah. There are two basic customs:

1. **Before separating the challah:** The general rule regarding berachos is that one recites a berachah before performing the mitzvah. Accordingly, some⁷⁰ recite the berachah immediately before separating the dough.⁷¹
2. **After separating the dough and then declaring, "This is challah":** Other opinions⁷² rule that one should first separate a piece of dough, and while holding the separated dough in one's hand (next to the remaining dough), one recites the berachah. After the berachah is made one should say, "This [piece of dough that was separated] is [now] challah"; the declaration is necessary so that the recitation of the berachah precedes turning the separated dough into challah.

Although both of these methods are acceptable, the prevailing custom seems to follow the first opinion, and the berachah is recited before the challah is separated.⁷³

Special Customs

There are a number of customs mentioned in the poskim that pertain to separating challah:

1. An auspicious time to daven.

When a woman separates challah it is a special time to daven for one's needs, especially for righteous children.⁷⁴ The Hagahos Maimoniyos⁷⁵ writes that "the acronym of the three mitzvos given to women (challah, niddah, hadlakas neiros) spells Chanah, since Chanah's prayers for a son were heard because she fulfilled these three mitzvos properly. Therefore, all women should pray for their needs at the time that they perform these mitzvos."

2. Giving tzedakah.

The Ben Ish Chai⁷⁶ writes that some women have the custom to give money to charity before separating the challah dough.

If one forgot to separate challah

Before challah is separated it is forbidden to eat the rest of the bread or baked goods from the batch. Therefore, the Shulchan Aruch⁷⁷ writes that if one forgot to separate challah while it was still dough, he must do so from the bread or baked goods after it is baked.

Separating challah on Shabbos

If one forgot to separate challah from the dough and only remembered on Shabbos, separating challah on Shabbos presents an issue.⁷⁸ The Shulchan Aruch⁷⁹ writes that separating challah on Shabbos involves the melachah of Makeh b'patish, "the final hammer-blow" (i.e., readying something to be used), as separating it now permits the rest of the bread to be eaten giving the appearance of "fixing" the bread, as it now becomes usable.⁸⁰ The Mishnah Berurah⁸¹ suggests a solution for one who forgot to separate challah based on the following ruling of the Shulchan Aruch⁸²: One may eat bread without separating challah as long as he is careful to leave some over, so that [after Shabbos] a k'zayis can be separated from the remaining bread.⁸³ However, the Shulchan Aruch writes that this solution applies only in chutz la-aretz, where the mitzvah of challah can never be a mitzvah d'Oraisa. In Eretz Yisrael, where separating challah is sometimes d'Oraisa (when the majority of the Jewish people reside there), the halachos are more stringent and this leniency does not apply.⁸⁴

37 The 39 Melochos, p. 1181. 38 The Aura of Shabbos, p. 60. 39 Bamidbar 15:20 40 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 322:1. 41 Chullin 133b (Rambam, beginning of Hilchos Bikkurim). 42 See Shulchan Aruch and Rema, Y.D. 322:5; Taz 322:5. 43 Ibid. 44 Ibid. 45 The Aura of Shabbos, p.48. 46 Vayikra 7:19. 47 Rashi (Shabbos 25a, d"h mitzvah lisrof) gives two explanations as to why terumah that is tamei is burned. His first explanation is that it is compared to kodshim which are tamei and must be burned. Rav Yonason Shteif (Shut Mahari Shteif 276) writes that this reason is extended to challah that is tamei as well. 48 Rashi (Shabbos 25a, d"h mitzvah lisrof), in his second explanation regarding why terumah that is tamei is burned. 49 See Shach, Y.D. 323:4. 50 Challah k'Hilchasa 1:14; see Mishnah Berurah 461:22. 51 Leket ha'Omer (14:3). However, Avnei Yashfe (3:72) writes that since the silver foil is very thin it cannot be considered a separate vessel unless it is wrapped twice in the foil. 52 Rav Yonason Shteif (Shut Mahari Shteif 276) [The 39 Melochos, p. 1187]. 53 Rav Shteif, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa 42, note 53. 54 Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa 42, note 53. 55 Ibid. 56 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 324:1. 57 See ibid., 329:9, who rules that even dough made with fruit juice (or eggs) requires challah to be taken. However, see the Shach there, who cites others who disagree; therefore, the Shach rules that when dough is made using fruit juice (or eggs) one should separate challah without reciting a berachah. (See also Pischei Teshuvah 329:4; Aruch haShulchan 329:3; B'Tzel haChochmah 4, siman 12, regarding a case in which one of the primary liquids is also mixed into the dough.) The Shulchan Aruch (329:10) writes that (based on other considerations) one should be careful not to make dough from fruit juice (or eggs) alone. 58 See Shulchan Aruch 329:2 (The 39 Melochos, p. 1182). The mitzvah of challah applies to any bread-like product that is baked. However, if the product is cooked or fried it is questionable whether one must separate challah or not (see Shulchan Aruch 329:3 who rules that one need not separate challah; however, the Shach [329:4] writes that one should separate challah without reciting a berachah). 59 324:1. 60 Shach, Y.D. 324:2. The Shach adds that the extra one-fifth is represented by the fact that the word challah ends with the Hebrew letter hei, whose numerical value is 5. 61 See Pischei Teshuvah 324:1 (and The 39 Melochos, p. 1181). 62 Shach, Y.D. 324:3. See Shiurei Torah, p.169; Aruch haShulchan, Y.D. 324:10 (and The 39 Melochos, p. 1181). 63 Ibid. 64 See Shabbos 31b; Rashi, Shabbos 32a, d"h hareini; Ohr Zarua, Hilchos Challah 225. 65 Ben Ish Chai, vol. 2, Lech Lecha 6. 66 Hagahos Maimoniyos, end of Seder Zera'im. Others explain (Avudraham, Tefillas Shabbos, p. 537) that the acronym of these three mitzvos spell Chava: challah, vest shel niddah, hadlakas neiros, as these mitzvos were given to women in order to rectify the sin of Chava. 67 Rashi, Shabbos 32a, d"h hareini. 68 Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 5:11. 69 Drishah, quoted in Magen Avraham 457:1. 70 Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 5:11; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 35:1 (The 39 Melochos, p. 1181). 71 See B'Tzel haChochmah 3, siman 73, where he writes that even according to this opinion one should designate a piece of dough (while it is still attached to the rest of the dough) that will be separated for challah and then recite the berachah and afterward separate it. He adds that according to this opinion, if one forgot to recite the berachah before separating the challah he may not recite it after the challah was separated. 72 Ramban, end of Hilchos Challah. See Rav Akiva Eiger, Y.D. 328:1 (Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa 42:12). 73 Netziv, Sefer Ha'amek She'eilah, Tzav 73:3. 74 Rebbeztzin Batsheva Kanievisky a"h frequently said that davening during the mitzvah of separating challah is a special segulah. When Rav Chaim Kanievisky was asked for a source that a woman should daven during the mitzvah of separating challah, he answered, "We find that Chanah's prayers were answered in the merit of these three mitzvos." Therefore, it is an auspicious time for one's prayers to be answered. (Cited by Natfali and Naomi Weinberger, with Nina Indig, Rebbeztzin Kanievisky: A Legendary Mother to All [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2012], pp. 188-189.) 75 End of Seder Zera'im. 76 Lech Lecha 2:6. 77 Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 327:5. 78 Due to this issue the Shulchan Aruch (260:2) writes that "Before Shabbos one should ask his wife gently whether she took off challah from the dough." The Mishnah Berurah (260:13) writes that the custom seems to be not to necessitate asking this to one's wife. The Eishel Avraham (Burchasha) explains that since it is customary to call the bread used for Shabbos - "Challah," it is a clear reminder for women to separate challah and thus do not need to be reminded. 79 261:1; Mishnah Berurah 261:4. 80 Mishnah Berurah 261:4. 81 Ibid. 82 Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 323:1. 83 With regard to making a berachah after Shabbos, the Aruch haShulchan, Y.D. 323:3, writes that one should recite a berachah when separating challah after Shabbos. However, Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa 42, note 57, cites Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach as saying that one should not recite a berachah when separating challah after Shabbos. 84 Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 323:1