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Discover the Joy
of Shabbos

Challah and Unity

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E17)

Baking Challah is a chance to experience Shabbos during the week.

The Fragrance of Fresh Challah

There is something mystical about baking Challah. The experience of baking Challah is linked with the experience of Shabbos itself. It is as if the process of making Challah cuts a piece of time out of the week and transforms it into the sense of Shabbos. The wafting aroma of the Challah gives one the impression that one can smell Shabbos!

The Challah-bake

Several years ago, the Chief Rabbi of South Africa, Rabbi Warren Goldstein, initiated a program to encourage Shabbos observance. The idea was to designate one Shabbos and to promote the observance of that Shabbos around the world. The program carried the title "Keeping it Together" as Jews all over the world would be joining in Shemiras Shabbos. Many wonderful things have come from that big idea and every year increasing numbers of people become involved.

The Challah bake grew out of this program. It seemed like a natural extension of Shemiras Shabbos. Women gather in communities all over the world to bake Challah. They bring Shabbos into their lives by baking Challah. The numbers attest to the degree that Challah baking is ingrained into the Neshama of Jewish women.

Even when they cannot gather and must join virtually, Jewish women throughout the world (I was told by Rebetzin Joanne Dove of London that recently women participated from twenty countries) responded enthusiastically to the invitation to gather and bake Challah. Baking Challah is not simply breadmaking; it unifies one's Neshama with others and with Shabbos.

The braiding and the ingredients

We can find echoes of this theme in the Challahs themselves. The braiding of the strands of the Challah are a metaphor for the joining and interweaving of Jews embracing one another.

The ingredients also contribute to the theme. The sugar, a symbol of sweetness, activates the yeast to rise. We can thus see in the Challah how a kind and sweet word can help another person to rise, grow, and mature.

Oil is also a frequently used ingredient in Challah. Oil is a symbol of nobility and the spiritual greatness to which a person can and should aspire.

The אגרת הגר"א and Nobility

The אגרת הגר"א set out to come to ארץ ישראל. And while he was not able to achieve that goal, he wrote a letter to his mother and wife as part of his parting message to them. That letter is known as

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the אגרת הגר"א. In it, he implores his mother and wife to go the extra mile to ensure that peace, שלום, reigns in their relationship.

He mentions that when our lives here are over, we will be called upon to answer for our lives. One of the questions will be המלכה את חברך, which literally translates to 'Did you crown your fellow?' Did you elevate the status of others in your eyes such that he or she was a king or queens for you? Oil is a symbol of anointing (Kings are anointed with oil) and it calls on us to treat one another like royalty. Treating someone like royalty is the key to bringing out their nobility. We are meant to relate to one another – via the ingredients of the Challah.

Two Challahs; Different Challahs

We are accustomed to reciting המוציא over two Challahs. This seems like a direct outgrowth of the double portion of מן which Klal Yisroel had in honor of Shabbos. The Posuk¹ tells us:

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי לִקְטוֹ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֵה שְׁנֵי הָעֶמֶר לְאִתְּד...
...and it was on the sixth day they gathered two measures per person...

On the Sixth day they gathered two measures per person...

The words לחם משנה are superfluous since we are told that they collected two measures per person. My son, R' Eliezer, pointed out that Rashi addresses this question citing the מכילהא. He says that the words לחם משנה allude to their being לחם משונה – they were exceptional portions in their aroma and taste. The very first Shabbos that Klal Yisroel marked together needed an ingredient; the exceptional aroma and taste of Challah.

Challah is not just a menu item on Shabbos; it carries with it a portion of Shabbos itself.

A story of Challah and Chesed

Rav Sholom Schwadron zt"l would often retell one of his favorite stories about a holy Yerushalmi Jew, Rav Yudel Holtzman. (I retold this story in my first book, "The Maggid Speaks.") Rav Yudel was a childless poor man with a big heart that would break for another man's troubles. He insisted that the גבאי צדקה not skip his home. Despite his poverty, he would try to find a way to help others in need.

The neighborhood tailor needed an operation. He could not afford the sixty pounds which the operation would cost. The גבאי צדקה made his rounds and came to the home of Rav Yudel. As he explained the plight of the tailor, Rav Yudel sat dejected, constantly interjecting "how terrible, how awful."

When he had finished, Rav Yudel sighed and said "I wish so much that I could help but I really cannot. All that I give comes from Ma'aser and I borrow against future earnings to give צדקה. But my policy is that I do not borrow against future Ma'aser when I am a full year overdrawn against that account, and I have reached that point. I feel so bad for him. All I can do is wish him a רפואה שלמה."

The גבאי צדקה fully understood and left Rav Yudel's home. He had walked only half a block when Rav Yudel came running after him. "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Come back! Hashem

¹ שמות טז:כב



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has inspired me with a great idea!" Puzzled, he returned to Rav Yudel's home.

Rav Yudel began to speak excitedly. "Go to one of the larger Gemachs in Yerushalayim and tell them to lend you twenty pounds in my name. I will pay it back בעזרה. I spend half a shilling on wine for Kiddush every week. I can recite Kiddush over Challah on Friday night and I will have the extra money to repay the loan!"

For the next fifteen years (!) Rav Yudel made Kiddush over Challah until the loan was repaid. His Challahs had been transformed into Chesed.

After one of the times that Rav Sholom related this story, he was approached by a young man. "I am Rav Yudel's nephew," reported the young man. "I was at my uncle's house many times and it always seemed strange to me that he recited Kiddush over Challah. Now I know why."

Takeaway: I will try to see Challah baking as an opportunity to unite with others and with שבת קודש.

"And," he said, adding to the *Hashgacha* of the moment, "this week is R' Yudel's Yahrzeit."

גאלדענע האנט *made with חלה*

The Gematria of חלה is 43. After consulting the ספר גמטריקון I discovered that 43 is also the Gematria of ידי הזהב, what we refer to as גאלדענע האנט – golden hands, a reference to natural, inborn talent that some people are blessed with. Challah speaks to the fact that Jewish women were blessed with גאלדענע האנט.

There is no reason to burden or guilt-trip anyone into making Challah for Shabbos. But making Challah is a very tangible connection with Shabbos itself. It adds to the anticipation and experience of Shabbos. The investment of time and energy does not only provide a delicious addition to the Shabbos table; it pays bountiful spiritual dividends, as well.