

Friday Night *Ha-Motzi* הַמוֹצִיאַ

Blessing Over *Challah* חֲלָה

1. In the middle of the table, place two whole loaves of bread and some salt.
2. To beautify this practice, people use a special plate for the bread, and also a special covering draped over both loaves.
3. Remove the cover and hold the two loaves together.
4. Say the blessing, and others answer *amen* אָמֵן.

Blessed are You, Adonai
our God, Supreme
throughout time and space
Who brings forth bread
from the earth.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַמוֹצִיא לָהֶם
מִן הָאָרֶץ

Baruch Atah Adonai
Elohaynu Melech Ha-olam
Hamotzi Le-chem
Min Ha-aretz

5. Slice or break the bread into enough pieces for everyone, and lightly salt. Take one piece for yourself, then give some bread to everyone.

Why do we have two loaves?

Two represents bounty. In the Torah, when the Israelites traveled through the desert for forty years, each day they received manna from God to collect for that day's food. On Friday, they would receive a double portion so that they would not have to work to gather food on Shabbat.

Why is the challah traditionally a braided bread?

We don't know the precise origins of braiding. One suggestion is that the braids represent the unity of the Jewish people, woven together out of many strands. Another interpretation of the braids is based on the statement of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel in *Pirkei Avot*, a wisdom book from the third century: "The world stands on three things: on justice, on truth, and on peace."

Why is the bread covered?

According to *halacha* (Jewish law), one should not pass over one item to say a blessing on another. At a typical meal, we would begin by saying a blessing over bread. Since on Shabbat we first bless the wine or grape juice, we hide the bread, and then uncover it when we are ready to notice it. Some have suggested that the *challah* cover symbolizes the dew that covered the manna in the desert.

What is the significance of the salt?

When we eat a Shabbat meal, our table takes on the symbolism of the altar in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Jews used to worship in the Temple by preparing and eating a meal, an offering of meat, breads, or cakes. These offerings were often salted.

Should I give bread to others before eating it myself?

This too originates in a point of Jewish law -- your blessing should be linked right away to your action. Some communities have the custom of tossing the bread, to imitate the manna from heaven!