

Challah and Salt

Why do we call the bread we eat on Shabbat Challah?

It gets its name from the mitzvah of separating challah. When making dough, it is a mitzvah to separate a piece of it for Hashem. In Temple times, we would give it to a Kohen, but now we burn it. This mitzvah is a statement, bread is symbolic of our sustenance, by separating challah we recognize that the sustenance we have is from Hashem.

This mitzvah is done in the home as well as in bakeries.

Although this mitzvah is for both men and women, it has become near and dear to women. They use the time of separating challah to pray, pouring out their tender hearts to Hashem.

To learn more about the mitzvah of separating challah goto www.chabad.org/363323

Why do we braid them?

I don't know. But I would guess that women who wanted to make Shabbat special and beautiful started this custom. If anyone knows the reason for this, please comment below.

Why do we have two challahs? And why do we cover them?

As mentioned before, bread is symbolic of our sustenance. During the forty years that the Jewish people were in the desert, their sustenance came in the form of manna from heaven, and it was clear that their sustenance was from Hashem. On Shabbat the manna would not fall, instead, on Friday enough would fall for them to collect a double portion, for Friday and Shabbat. We have two challahs, to remember the double portion we received in the desert.

When the manna would fall, it would be packaged between two layers of dew, one below it and one

above it. To commemorate that, we have two covers, one below the challah, which is the tablecloth, and the other above it, traditionally a beautiful challah cover that makes the table look beautiful.

Another reason we cover the challah, has to do with the order of blessings before eating food. The normal order is that when you have a meal with bread and wine, the blessing over the bread goes first, only after that, do we say the blessing over wine. However, by the Shabbat meal, we are obligated to make Kiddush, which is to sanctify the day of Shabbat over a cup of wine. This has to be done at the beginning of the meal, before anything else. In order that the bread does not feel bad that it is being put into second place, we have it covered during Kiddush, so it doesn't see that we are saying the blessing over the wine first.

This is a lesson in sensitivity. If we have to be careful with the feelings of things like challah, which doesn't have feelings, how much more so, do we have to be careful not to hurt the feelings of others.

8. Why do we have salt at the Shabbat table?

The closest thing that we have to an altar, is the table we eat at. The food we eat can be offered to Hashem.

How does this work? If we use the energy of the food we eat to do what Hashem wants, that food is an offering to Him.

This doesn't necessarily mean prayer, Torah study, and mitzvahs, but everything that Hashem wants from us, including being a mentch, honest, kind, giving, as well as Torah, prayer and mitzvahs.

If we have it in mind when we are eating it is even better. And of course when we give an offering to Hashem, we would do it like he wants, meaning, first that it is kosher food, and that we say the blessings before and after we eat it.

On Shabbat, eating food is a mitzvah in itself, because it is a mitzvah to take pleasure in the

Shabbat. One of the ways to take pleasure in the Shabbat is by having good food.

The altar in the Temple always had salt on it, and every offering was brought with salt. To commemorate that we have salt on our Shabbat table, our altar.

It is our tradition to dip the challah into the salt after we say the blessing over it, except for during the time of the holidays from Rosh Hashanah until Hoshana Raba, during which time we dip the challah into honey, so that we are granted a sweet year. Rosh Hashanah is when the books are opened, and on Hoshana Raba the final books are sealed. Even though we don't dip our challah into salt at that time, it is still a tradition to have the salt at the table.