

## Challah and Fertility

There are three times specifically associated with saying prayers for children, one of which is when making Challah. The tradition of Challah comes from the book of Numbers/Bamidbar and connects the tradition to the land of Israel, its harvest and gifts to God



*When you enter the land to which I am taking you*

בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם לְשָׂמָּה

*and you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set some aside as a gift to God:*

וְהָיָה בְּאֲכֹלְכֶם מִלֶּחֶם הָאָרֶץ תְּרִימוּ תְרוּמָה לַיהוָה

*Of the first of your baking, you will set aside dough/a loaf as a gift; you will set it aside as a gift like the gift from the threshing floor.*

רֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסְתֶכֶם חֲלָה תְרִימוּ תְרוּמָה כְּתְרוּמַת גֶּזֶר כֶּן תְּרִימוּ אֹתָהּ:

*From the first of your baking, you will give to God, a gift throughout the ages.*

מֵרֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסְתֶיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ לַיהוָה תְרוּמָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

Every time we make bread, we remember the land God gave to us and the bread that comes forth from it. Challah has specifically become associated with Shabbat, but it truly can part of all bread making. Challah itself comes from separating a piece of the bread (usually before baking) and setting it aside. The setting aside is done either by wrapping it up before it is disposed or by burning it. Traditionally, the separation of challah is made from five pounds or more of wheat, barley, spelt, oat or rye flour.

Why is this related to fertility? One reason is the connection to the land and its abundance. Bread is the “fruit” of the land, only with a help from people. The other reason comes from a rabbinic teaching that directly ties challah to childbirth. To be clear, this is not to say this is some magic trick secret back door to get wishes granted. Rather challah making connects each of us to God. It opens us up to God’s support and compassion.

There are other mentions besides fertility that link prayers said during Challah baking with being an opportune time to gain God’s favor. Challah creates a physical ritual that can express our desire to have children. Kneading the challah, we can release any stress and focus our energies on something creative. Just as with God’s land that gives us flour for bread, so too in having children, we work in partnership with God to create.

If you are experiencing challenges building your family or have friends who are, before you say the blessing for Challah below, add some of your own prayers for your own care or for that of others.

## Making Challah and Saying the Blessings

After making and dough and before shaping and baking, separate out about an ounce and say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ חֻלָּה מִן הָעֶסָה

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu l'hafrish challah*

Blessed are You, Hashem our God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with commandments and commanded us to separate challah.

Hold the dough and say: “*harei zo challah*” (This is challah)  
Add any prayers or meditations at this time or while you are shaping the dough. Bake and enjoy.



### הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

**Who brings forth bread from the earth)**

God has not brought forth  
bread from the earth  
Yet we praise God  
for this miracle  
of bread  
before we eat  
A baby is not coming forth  
from my womb  
Yet I praise my body  
for all the other miracles  
it performs  
daily  
We make bread  
with what God provides  
We care for our bodies  
that God helped to create  
I hold within me  
miraculous abilities to create  
I do not pray for  
miracles  
I pray to bring forth

### Braiding

Yeast eats, chemicals react, gluten expands and dough rises. An egg keeps in moisture and makes the dough golden. The dough is braided signifying its special role on Shabbat. It is not like bread on other days of the week. Its strong threefold cord recalls how Shabbat has kept the Jewish people over time.

A threefold cord is not easily broken (Eccl 4.12)

God, my body too is eating, managing hormone or chemicals, and moving through the months expanding and contracting. I pray that somehow I can be part of creation. I want to be part of keeping the Jewish people for all time. You are the third cord in the creative process. Please be with me. Help me to stay whole. Make me stronger.

A threefold cord is not easily broken.