

## Rabbi Jonathan's/Dad's/Uncle Jonny's Challah

(makes 3 or 4 loaves)

*This vegan recipe uses as an egg substitute 2 Tbs. ground flax seed soaked in ¼ cup water per egg. For egg challah: reduce the water to 2¼ c. Omit flax seed. Beat 3 room temperature eggs and add to the dough mixture. (If eggs are cold, you can put them in a bowl of warm water for a few minutes.)*

*Care should be taken to use organic and local ingredients and humanely produced eggs.*



### Ingredients

3 cups warm water

6 Tbs. finely ground golden flax seed

2 packages (4½ teaspoons bulk) yeast

⅓ cup sugar

⅓ cup good oil (safflower, sunflower, olive)

1 tablespoon salt

about 8 cups unbleached bread flour or all-purpose flour

sesame or poppy seeds for topping

*For whole wheat challah: substitute some of the white flour with whole wheat, according to your taste. For our whole wheat version, we use about 5-6 cups whole wheat flour and 2-3 cups white, and I use locally produced maple syrup instead of sugar. If using maple syrup, reduce the amount of water by ¼ c.*

*For raisin challah: add 1 c. raisins to dough while it is still somewhat sticky but not liquid, before adding the last of the flour. You can also knead in raisins to a portion of the dough after it is mixed.*

### Mixing

Add flax seed to water and stir. Let stand at least ½ hour or overnight. Heat water & flax seed mixture until warm, but not hot. If using *active dry yeast*, add yeast, let stand for a few minutes. Add the rest of the ingredients, and then start adding flour. If using *instant yeast*, mix it with some of the flour and add to the liquid mixture.

### Kneading

When the dough is too stiff to mix in the bowl, spread some flour on the countertop, turn dough onto counter, and start kneading. Continue kneading and adding flour until the dough is not sticky but not too dry.

You may perform the ritual of separating the challah at this point (see p. 4): Separate an olive size piece of dough and say the blessing for separating the challah (see next page); wrap this piece in a paper towel and burn it to ash on a gas or electric burner.

### First Rising

Very lightly grease a bowl with oil, form the dough into a smooth ball, put the dough in the bowl smooth side down and flip over so dough is coated with oil top and bottom. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp dishtowel. Let the dough rise about an hour, until doubled in size.

### Shaping the braided loaves

Note: You can find videos for many different kinds of braids at our website:

[www.BreadandTorah.org/bakery-videos](http://www.BreadandTorah.org/bakery-videos)

Deflate the dough and gently form into a smooth ball again. Divide the dough into four parts for large loaves or six parts for smaller ones. Braid each loaf; there are many methods; here are two:

For a “**double triple**:” Separate a third of the piece of dough. You now have two pieces, one larger, for a bottom braid, and one smaller, for a top braid. Divide each of the pieces into three; roll out the three larger ones into strands, pinch them together at one end, and braid together, then do the same with the smaller pieces. With the edge of your hand make a trough in the larger braid; stretch the small braid over the large one and pinch the pieces together at both ends. Pinch hard so they so not come apart during rising or baking.

For a **quadruple** braid. Instead of dividing a section of the dough into a larger and smaller part for a top and bottom braid, divide it into four equal parts. Roll them out into strands, (using a little flour on your hands if the dough is sticky), pinch together firmly at one end. Take the right outside strand, bring it over two middle strands, then bring the strand immediately to its right back over the one you started with. Repeat with the left outside strand: bring it over the (now) two middle strands, then bring the one immediately to its left back over it. Repeat from right again, then left, until completely braided. Pinch firmly at the end.



### Second Rising

Put your loaves on a greased baking sheet with plenty of room between them for rising. Cover with plastic wrap or a damp dishtowel. Let rise until doubled in size, 30-40 minutes. Preheat oven to 350° F. If you are planning to put seeds on the loaves, mix a tablespoon of flax seed with ¼ c. water. (See next step.)

### Glazing and Baking

For vegan challah, brush the loaves with the flax seed and water mixture using a pastry brush. (For egg challah, use one egg beaten with 1 Tbs. water.) Sprinkle the loaves with poppy or sesame seeds or leave plain. Bake the loaves for 30 to 35 minutes until golden brown, and the bottom of the loaves sound hollow when tapped.

### Blessing for “separating” the challah (see p. 4 for explanation).

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוֵּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ חֶלֶה  
מִן הָעֶסָה.

Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai, E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, a-sher kid-shanu be-mitz-vo-tav, vi-tzi-va-nu le-haf-rish cha-lah min ha-isah.

Blessed are You, Eternal One, God who governs the universe, who makes us holy through mitzvot and has given us the mitzvah of separating the challah from the dough.



## Challah dough

*This vegan recipe uses as an egg substitute 2 Tbs. ground flax seed soaked in ¼ cup water per egg. For egg challah: reduce the water by ¾ c. Omit flax seed. Beat 3 eggs and add to the dough mixture.*

### White

1. Measure 3 c. warm water into a bowl. Whisk or stir in ¾ c. ground golden flax seed. Let stand at least ½ hour or overnight. (If using eggs, reduce the water by ½ c., skip this step and add 3 beaten eggs after step 6.)
2. If using active dry yeast, add 2 packets (4½ tsp. – 1 ½ Tbs.) yeast to water and let it dissolve for a few minutes. Skip the yeast in step 6.
3. Add ⅓ c. sugar.
4. Add ⅓ c. canola or other oil.
5. Add 1 Tbs. salt.
6. If using instant yeast, mix 4½ tsp. (1 ½ Tbs.; 2 packets “Rapid Rise” yeast ) with 2 c. flour; add to dough and mix well.
7. Keep adding white flour until dough is too stiff to mix in bowl (up to around 8 cups).
8. Turn onto counter and knead with sufficient flour until dough is no longer sticky.

### Whole Wheat

1. Measure 2¾ c. warm water into a bowl. Whisk or stir in ¾ c. ground golden flax seed. Let stand at least ½ hour or overnight. (If using eggs, reduce the water by ½ c., skip this step and add 3 beaten eggs after step 6.)
2. If using active dry yeast, add 2 packets (4½ tsp. – 1 ½ Tbs.) yeast to water and let it dissolve for a few minutes. Skip the yeast in step 6.
3. Add ⅓ c. maple syrup or other sweetener (if using sugar or brown sugar, add .
4. Add ⅓ c. canola, olive, or other good oil.
5. Add 1 Tbs. salt.
6. If using instant yeast, mix 4½ tsp. (1 ½ Tbs.) with 2 c. whole wheat flour; add to dough and mix well.
7. Keep adding whole wheat and/or white flour until dough is too stiff to mix in bowl (up to around 8 cups).
8. Turn onto counter and knead with sufficient flour until dough is no longer sticky.

## The Mitzvah of Challah

Challah is a braided or decorative bread used by many Jews on the Sabbath, holidays, and special occasions. Its function is connected to the universal importance of bread in ancient cultures; the origin of the word comes from the Torah:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר : דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה : וְהָיָה בְּאֹכְלֶכֶם מִלֶּחֶם הָאָרֶץ תָּרִימוּ תְרוּמָה לַיהוָה : רֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסֹתֵיכֶם חֲלֶה תָרִימוּ תְרוּמָה כְּתְרוּמַת גֶּרֶן כֹּן תָרִימוּ אֹתָהּ : מִרֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ לַיהוָה תְרוּמָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם :

The ETERNAL spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land to which I am taking you and you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set some aside as a gift to the ETERNAL: as the first yield of your baking, you shall set aside a loaf [*challah*] – as a gift; you shall set it aside as a gift like the gift from the threshing floor. You shall make a gift to the ETERNAL from the first yield of your baking, throughout the ages.

*Numbers 15:17-21*

In ancient times the separated portion of the dough was given to the *kohanim*—the priests who administered the sacrificial rites. Today *challah* bakers separate and set aside a small piece of the dough in symbolic observance of this practice and the passage from Numbers, reciting the blessing below. The piece is burned and the ashes discarded because, although we can no longer give the portion to the priests, it no longer belongs to us.

Our interpretation of this practice is that by sharing the fruits of our labor—making an offering of the *challah* to God—we are acknowledging that the food we eat, and all that we create, ultimately comes from a source outside of ourselves. It is intended to instill in us the consciousness that all of creation is a precious gift from God, that the work of preparing food for ourselves and others—indeed all labor—is done in the spirit of service and thankfulness.

The offering of *challah* is also symbolic of our intention to share what we have with all those who are in need, thereby serving God and emulating the divine attributes of kindness, compassion, and generosity.

In our home we throw the separated, burned *challah* outdoors when we begin our Shabbat meal, returning to the earth a portion of what we have received, signaling our intention not only to take from the earth, but to give back. For details on laws and traditions concerning the *mitzvah* of *challah*, see *A Blessing of Bread*, by Maggie Glezer, *The Challah Book*, by Freda Reider, or *Rising, the Book of Challah*, by Rochi Pinson.

### Blessing for separating the challah

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ חֲלֶה מִן הָעֶסָה.  
Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu bemitzvotav, vitzivanu le-ha-frish cha-lah min ha-i-sah.

Blessed are You, Eternal One, God who governs the universe, who makes us holy through mitzvot and has given us the mitzvah of separating the challah from the dough.

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*Slice of Heaven Breads* is a non-profit, cooperative, volunteer, charitable bakery operated out of Temple Sinai in Saratoga Springs, New York. We produce *challot* and other baked goods, donate proceeds to food programs and other charitable causes, donate loaves to residents of various facilities, teach baking and "spirituality & food" in our kitchen, and do baking demonstrations at schools and facilities. For information send an e-mail to [sliceofheavensaratoga@gmail.com](mailto:sliceofheavensaratoga@gmail.com).