

We would like to thank the **Spice and Spirit** for their permission to share this excerpt from their cookbook with the public.

The Mitzvah of Separating Challah

"Separate the first portion of your kneading as a dough offering. . . In future generations, give the first of your kneading as an elevated gift to G-d."

(Numbers 15:30-21)

When the Jewish people first inhabited the Land of Israel, one of the many gifts they were commanded to give to the *Kohanim* (priestly tribe), who served in the *Beit Hamikdash*, was a

The *mitzvah* of *hafrashat challah*, separating *challah*, is one of the three *mitzvot* entrusted especially to the Jewish woman. As the *akeret ha-bayit* (mainstay of the home), the woman not only prepares the physical sustenance for the family, but by observing this *mitzvah*, she imparts a spiritual message as well. The *mitzvah* of *hafrashat challah* embodies the belief that all of our sustenance truly comes to us through G-d's hand. Just as we may not use the bread dough unless we have separated *challah*, so too, a portion of our livelihood is always reserved for the giving of charity, which is given freely -- of "the first and the best."

Observing the *mitzvah* of *hafrashat challah*, our Sages tell us, "will cause a blessing to rest on your house." The woman, so influential in shaping the values and attitudes of her family members, brings blessings upon her home and family

portion of their dough -- "the first and the best." This gift of food is known as *challah*, from which the name of our Shabbat loaves is derived. Since the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, we may not give this dough to the *Kohanim* of today. However, in remembrance of this gift and in anticipation of the future Redemption and the third *Beit Hamikdash*, we still observe the *mitzvah* of separating the *challah* portion.

through this *mitzvah* and instills faith in G-d within those around her. The *mitzvah* of separating *challah* is symbolic of the entire practice of kashrut, with its emphasis on elevating the physical and mundane to the realm of holiness.

Jewish women have traditionally baked their own *challah* loaves in preparation for Shabbat and Yom Tov, treasuring the opportunity to perform this special *mitzvah*. This *mitzvah* is especially significant on *erev* Shabbat. Before separating *challah*, many women put a few coins into a *pushka* (charity box) designated for needy Jews, particularly Torah scholars in Israel.

Separating the *challah* portion is easy to do, but an understanding of the measurements and other criteria involved is necessary. Not all dough will require the separation of *challah*. The following paragraphs provide a guide to the requirements for separating *challah*.

**A Blessing
In The
Home**

FLOUR AND LIQUID REQUIREMENTS FOR SEPARATING CHALLAH

In regard to separating *challah*, there are three possibilities. One may be required: to separate *challah* with a blessing; to separate *challah* without a blessing; or not to separate *challah* at all. Whether *challah* is to be separated or not depends upon the type of and amount of flour, and liquid contents of the dough.

Type Of Flour: *Challah* is separated when the dough is made of one of, or a combination of, the following five grains: wheat, rye, barley, oat and spelt. Other types of flour such as rice, soy, corn, and buckwheat, when used without "the five grains," do not require the separation of *challah*. If they are used in combination with flour from one of the five grains, consult an Orthodox Rabbi as to the requirements for *hafrashat challah*.

The amount of flour also determines whether or not the separation of *challah* is necessary, and if so, whether a blessing is said, (see Amount of Flour, below).

Liquid Contents: To separate *challah* with a blessing, the majority of the liquid contents of the dough should be water, provided that the flour requirements are met. If the majority of the liquid content is comprised of liquids other than water (such as oil, eggs, honey, etc.), *challah* is separated without a blessing.

In order to take *challah*, even without a blessing, at least some water should be mixed into the dough before the flour and liquid are well mixed together. If the recipe does not call for water, it is *halachically* advisable to add a drop of water.

Amount Of Flour: The amount of flour used determines whether *challah* is separated a) with a blessing, b) without a blessing, or c) whether *challah* is not separated at all. This depends upon the flour's weight. The measurements below, given in grams, are those established by Horav Hagaon Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Noah, of blessed memory.

NOTE: One may not bake with less than the required quantity of flour with the intention of avoiding separation of *challah*. However, if only a small amount of flour from the five grains is available, or the recipe calls for only a small amount of flour, it is not necessary to increase the amount in order to separate *challah*.

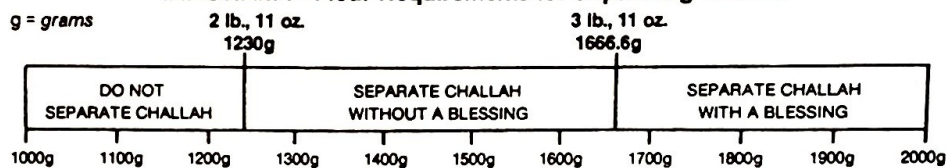
Flour Requirements in Grams/Pounds

A. Do not separate *challah* when using flour weighing *less* than: 1230 grams or 2 lbs. 11 oz.

B. Separate *challah* without a blessing for flour weighing: *between* 1230 and 1666.6 grams or *between* 2 lbs. 11 oz. and 3 lbs. 11 oz.

C. Separate *challah* with a blessing when using *more* than the following amounts of flour: 1666.6 grams or 3 lbs. 11 oz.

DIAGRAM I - Flour Requirements for Separating Challah



APPLYING THESE MEASUREMENTS WHEN BAKING

Most recipes give the amount of flour in cups, not weight. Therefore, before using a recipe, one must know how to determine whether or not to separate *challah*.

The best way to determine the amount of flour being used for baking is to weigh it (in a bag or container) on a scale (preferably one with gram measurements).

However, since most cooks find it more practical to deal with the cup equivalents of the required amounts, we have attempted to translate these amounts to cups.

Many factors can affect the results when

converting the gram or pound measurements (weight) to cups (volume). Whether or not the flour is sifted is a major factor. Different methods of sifting can produce varying cup measurements due to changes in volume. Whole-grain or high-gluten flours yield different cup equivalents. Seasonal changes, moisture content, and handling can also slightly affect the cup measurements.

Therefore, it is not possible for us to present exact cup equivalents for the flour requirements in Diagram I, but we offer the following suggested methods for applying these measurements in your kitchen.

Practical Methods For Measuring Flour

When using any of the methods, bear in mind that variables, including imprecise kitchen scales and seasonal changes in flour, make it impossible to rely completely on the resulting measurements. It is therefore advisable, when baking, to allow a "margin" by adding or subtracting some flour in order to be certain about whether or not to separate *challah* and whether or not to say the blessing.

Scale Method: If you are unsure whether or not separation of *challah* is required, place the flour being used for baking in a plastic bag, weigh it on a scale, and refer to Diagram I.

Container Method: This requires a one-time use of a scale.

Place an empty container (such as a plastic

canister or a jar) on a scale, and note the weight of the container.

Add the type of flour you use to bake *challah*, and when the flour weighs 1230 grams (2 lbs. 11 oz.) on the scale, mark a line on the container. Up to this line, do not separate *challah*.

Continue to fill the container until the flour weighs 1666.6 grams (3 lbs. 11 oz.). Mark another line. When using amounts of flour up to this line, separate *challah* without a blessing.

When using amounts of flour above the higher mark, separate *challah* with a blessing.

When you bake *challah* or large quantities of cake, you can measure the flour in this container to determine whether or not to separate *challah*, as long as you use the same type of flour and the

same method (sifted or "unsifted") each time. As mentioned above, do not rely completely on your container measurements; either add or subtract some flour so that it is well below or above the lines on the container.

"Mathematical Calculation" Method: Use a 5 lb. bag of flour, a dry cup measure and a calculator. Using the dry cup measure, count how many cups are in 5 lbs. of flour (2268 grams). Divide 2268 by the number of cups. This equals

"grams per cup."

To know the maximum number of cups of flour which can be used without separating *challah*, divide 1230 by your above "gram per cup."

To know how many cups of flour are needed to separate *challah* with a blessing, divide 1666.6 by your above "gram per cup."

When using amounts of flour between the above two figures, separate *challah* without a blessing.

The following measurements are based on repeated kitchen tested experiments with different brands of white all-purpose flour. (Whole grain flours such as whole-wheat, rye, oat, and barley will yield different results.)

Nowadays, most packaged, all-purpose white flour is presifted, as indicated on the package. For practical purposes, we use the term "unsifted" to refer to presifted flour used from the bag, and "sifted" to refer to flour which is resifted at home.

For "unsifted" flour, a dry measure cup was used to scoop flour from the bag; for "sifted" flour, flour was sifted into a large bowl and spooned lightly into the dry measure cup. In both cases, the flour in the cup was leveled. Then, the flour in the cups was weighed in gram measure.

Our experiments resulted in the discovery that the number of cups of flour varied from one 5 lb. bag of flour to another, producing a range of cup measurements rather than a single standard one. Among the many factors which cause these variables are seasonal changes, moisture content of flour, and handling. Therefore, it is not possible for us to give exact cup measurements.

5 lbs. "unsifted" flour yielded a range of 14 1/2 -16 cups.

5 lbs. sifted flour yielded a range of 18 - 20 cups.

Both a scale and mathematical calculations were used to obtain the cup measurements in the diagrams below.

The following diagrams show when A) not to separate *challah*; when B) to separate *challah* without a blessing; and when C) to separate *challah* with a blessing.

The white areas clearly indicate whether or not to separate *challah* and when a blessing should be said.

The gray areas indicate amounts which may fall into one category or another; avoid using this amount of flour if possible. If the recipe calls for that amount of flour the only way to be sure about whether or not to take *challah* is to weigh the flour used. If no scale is available one should separate *challah* without a blessing.

The striped areas indicate 1/4 cup "margins" above and below the required amounts. It is best to avoid these areas to account for slight differences in volume based on how the flour was measured.

Approximate Cup Measurements For White All-Purpose Flour

DIAGRAM II - Cup Measurements for White "Unsifted" Flour

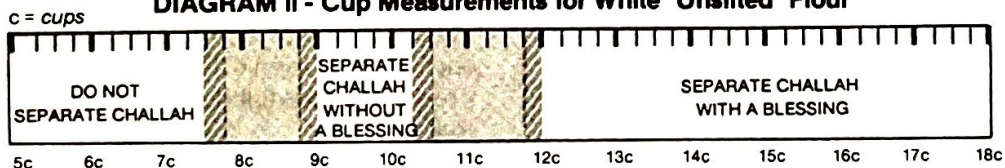
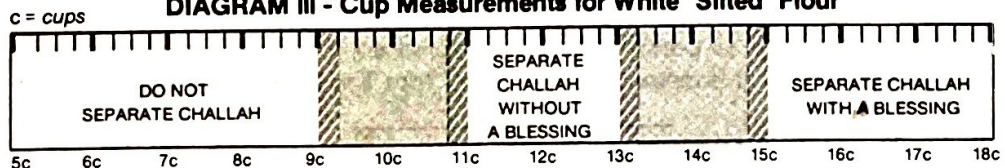


DIAGRAM III - Cup Measurements for White "Sifted" Flour



If using the approximate cup measurements as a guide, we recommend the following:

- When measuring flour, use a dry measure cup (rather than a liquid measure) cup.
- When adding extra flour to achieve the desired consistency or to flour the board, use the measuring cup to keep track of flour being added.

- Avoid using "borderline" measurements in the striped areas by allowing a margin of 1/4 cup above or below the determined amount. For example, to be sure that separating *challah* is not required, use no more than 7 1/2 cups "unsifted" flour; to be sure that you are required to separate *challah* with a blessing, use at least 12 cups "unsifted" flour.

Using The Diagrams

HOW TO SEPARATE CHALLAH

Challah is separated after the flour and liquid are well mixed together, while the dough is still whole, before it has been divided and shaped into loaves. Before the piece of dough is separated, the following blessing is said:

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU
ME-LECH HA-O-LAM A-SHER
KID-SHA-NU B'MITZ-VO-TAV
V'TZI-VA-NU L'HAF-RISH CHAL-LAH.
*Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the
Universe, Who has sanctified us with His
commandments and commanded us to separate
challah.*

Then remove a small piece, approximately one ounce, from the dough. Immediately after

separating *challah*, (whether or not a blessing is required) say, "Harai zeh *challah*," (this is *challah*).

Today, since we cannot give the *challah* to the *Kohanim* and since we may not use it ourselves, the prevailing custom is to burn this piece separately (e.g. in a piece of aluminum foil). It should be burned in the oven (preferably, in the broiler). However, if one burns the *challah* inside the oven, it should not be burned at the same time as the loaves or cakes are being baked, or for that matter, when any other food is being cooked in that oven.

NOTE: Although separating *challah* is one of the three *mitzvot* given especially to women, anyone over *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* age may also separate *challah* if necessary.

Combining Doughs

When repeating a recipe which calls for less than the required amount of flour, the doughs should be combined after they are mixed, if together they fulfill the requirements for *hafrashat challah*. For example, most mixers do not hold enough dough to require *hafrashat challah*, making it necessary to prepare the dough in two or more batches. These doughs should then be com-

bined, as described below.

All the doughs should be put into one container. Then cover it on top to make it appear as "one dough," making certain that the sides are covered by either the container or the covering. *Challah* is then taken with a blessing from one of the doughs.

Separating Challah After Baking

There are times in which *challah* is separated after baking:

□ If the batter is loose and one cannot separate *challah* prior to baking, such as with many cakes.

□ If one forgot to separate *challah* before baking.

Challah is separated by placing all of the baked loaves or cakes into a box or container, covering with a cloth, and then taking a piece from one of the loaves, saying the blessing when applicable.

This procedure should be completed before using the baked goods.

When Challah May Be Separated On Shabbat or Yom Tov: Ordinarily, one may not separate *challah* on Shabbat or Yom Tov. An exception to this is if one actually kneads and bakes the bread on Yom Tov, in which case it is permitted to separate *challah* on Yom Tov. In this instance, one

should set aside the *challah* and burn it after Yom Tov.

However, if one forgets to separate *challah* and becomes aware of the mistake on Shabbat or Yom Tov, it is still possible to use the baked loaves in the following manner: When eating the loaves, a small amount, or slice, should be left over from each loaf. The leftover pieces should be reserved until the conclusion of Shabbat or Yom Tov. A small amount is then removed from each slice of reserved bread (saying the blessing if required), thus fulfilling the *mitzvah* of separating *challah*.

NOTE: On Shabbat or Yom Tov in Israel, if one forgot to separate *challah* one may not use the above method. One must wait until after Shabbat or Yom Tov, to use the bread when *challah* can be separated. If the bread was kneaded and baked on Yom Tov, *challah* may be separated.

Dough That Is Not Used For Bread

Separating Challah When Baking Cakes, Cookies, and Pastries: When baking large amounts of dough other than for bread or *challah*, the laws of separating *challah* may apply. The types and amounts of flour and liquid are the same as those given for bread.

As water comprises the minority of liquid in most cake recipes, even if the recipe calls for over 1666.6 grams of flour, *challah* is separated without a blessing.

Separating Challah For Cooked Or Fried Dough: If one kneads a dough with the intention of cooking it or frying it (e.g. for noodles or dumplings), *challah* should be separated without a blessing. However, if the dough is kneaded with the intention of baking even part of it, and part of it is in fact baked (even a small amount), then *challah* is separated with a blessing as long as the entire dough meets the minimum requirements.