

The Mitzvah of Challah

Excerpt from "Challah Role"

When we consciously sanctify mundane activity, when baking bread becomes a way to remember G-d's unity, then the entire home has been illuminated. We are taking notice that all we own is not just there for us to enjoy. Our "things" we claim ownership of belong to G-d, who bestows blessing upon us by allowing us to enjoy these things. We create unity in creation by acknowledging that there is a higher purpose to eating a good piece of challah.

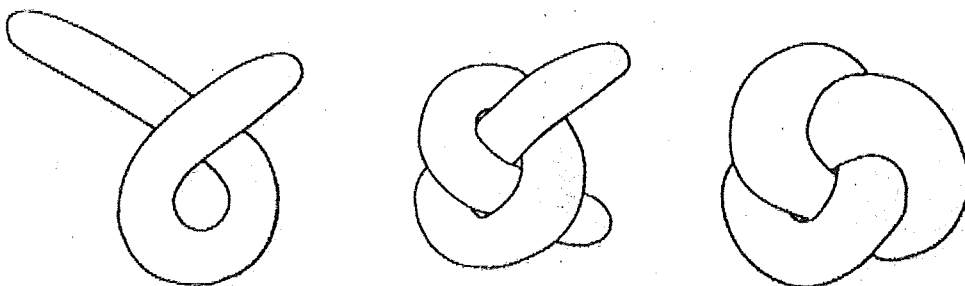
In a culture that endorses ownership and material accumulation, in a time when satisfaction is said to come from physical pursuits, we try to teach our children to value spirit over matter, and selflessness over instant gratification. We try to imbue them with proper morals and ethics, and prepare them to make the right choices. When we remember G-d with the small act of separating challah, when we show that in all our work, in all we attain in life, we share what we have with something greater than ourselves, then we are not only talking values, we are acting on them.

During the times of the Temple, bakers would fulfill the mitzvah of separating an olive-sized piece of dough and giving it to the Kohen as a tithe (10% tax). Since the destruction of the temple, this practice has continued through separating the dough and burning it in the stove prior to baking the remainder.

BRAIDING

****You can always use a typical three-stranded braid!**

1. Form a ball of dough and roll it into a long, ropelike strand, about 12 inches (30 cm) long and 1 inch (about 2 cm) in diameter.
2. Form a loop with one long end and one short end, as shown.
3. Thread the long end through the loop.
4. Pinch the two ends together on the bottom of the roll.



Why Kiddush?

Shabbat enters with words of wonder poured upon rich wine, to fulfill the verse:

"Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it." We call it *kiddush*, a ritual of words and drink, a magical bridge from the harried weekday to the day of rest. So enchanted we are by the *kiddush* that we repeat it again in different form by day. The *kiddush* serves as the kickoff for the evening and daytime Shabbat meals.

The night *kiddush* consists of three parts: 1) Three verses from Genesis that recount how G-d rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. 2) The blessing for wine. 3) A blessing thanking G-d for giving us the Shabbat.

Why wine (or grape juice)?

The uniqueness of wine can also be seen in the separate blessing it has among all other drinks ("... the creator of the fruit of the vine" instead of "... that everything results from his words"). Also wine has been given a special status in Halacha (Jewish law) which required it to be drunk in various contexts through the week, year and as part of a person's lifecycle. In this way, wine is used for the Kiddush (sanctification) of the Sabbath and festivals (at their commencement in the evening and again in the morning), because "whoever blesses and sanctifies with wine on Sabbath nights, his days will be lengthened in this world and in the world to come" (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 19). We also bless over and drink wine in the Havdala (separation) ceremony at the termination of the Sabbath. To this we must add the four cups of wine of Pessach (Passover), the obligation to drink "until one does not know" on Purim, drinking of wine in the marriage ceremony and the "Sheva-Brachot" (Seven Blessings) meals in the week thereafter, in the circumcision ceremony and in the home of mourners (see Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 86). It seems that the sages channeled the desire for wine into obligatory frameworks, and by this it may be that they lessened the enthusiasm for drinking it. Monasticism and asceticism are not favored by Judaism.

Despite the above, the requirement of Jewish law to drink wine on special occasions and the words of the sages in praise of this beverage, there are also strong words of censure. For example:

"And Hashem said to Aaron, saying do not drink wine and intoxicating drink" (Vayikra 10:8-9). Why is he [=the priest] commanded regarding wine? Because whoever drinks wine, bruises and sores and shame and disgrace will come upon him [...] he drinks and is soiled with feces and urine ... and in the end he makes his mouth vile and says evil things out of drunkenness and is not embarrassed as his is not in control of his faculties and does not know what he says and does.

The Rabbis decreed that one must kindle a lamp before the Sabbath in order that he conduct his Sabbath meal in a lighted room. They based this enactment on the prophet's proclamation (*Isaiah* 58:13): *וְקִרְאתָ לְשַׁבָּת עֵינֶיךָ לְקָדוֹשׁ ה' מְבֻדָּד*, And if you proclaim the Sabbath 'a delight,' the holy of Hashem 'honored one.' From here the Rabbis derived two requirements: (a) to enjoy the Sabbath, and (b) to honor it. The mitzvah of enjoying the Sabbath is called *עֵינֵי שַׁבָּת* [oneg Shabbos], *delight in the Sabbath*. Some maintain that kindling lights for the Sabbath meal is a fulfillment of *oneg Shabbos*. It is difficult for someone to enjoy the Sabbath when his house is dark and he cannot see where he is going or what he is eating (*Tosafos* below, 25b). [It is a common experience that one has more enjoyment from food he can see than from food he cannot. Additionally, one who eats in the dark worries about insects falling into his food (*Shibbolei HaLeket*).]

Others link the kindling obligation to *שְׂבַח*, *honor of the Sabbath*. A feast is always served in a brightly illuminated room. Kindling lights for the Sabbath, therefore, is a mark of honor (*Rashi* below, 25b). [In *Hil. Shabbos* 5:1 *Rambam* writes that kindling is performed for *oneg* (delight), while elsewhere (*ibid.* 30:5) he writes that it honors the Sabbath. See *Beis HaLevi* vol. I:11]

The Gemara adds that illuminating the home creates a peaceful atmosphere, since it prevents injury from unseen obstacles (see *Rashi* *ibid.*).

Chapter Two discusses the Sabbath lights. It begins by instructing as to which materials are qualified for use as wicks and fuels.

2. Lighting the Sabbath Candles

"When all work is brought to a standstill, the candles are lit. Just as creation began with the word, 'Let there be light!' so does the celebration of creation begin with the kindling of lights. It is the woman who ushers in the

joy and sets up the most exquisite symbol, light, to dominate the atmosphere of the home" (*Heschel, The Sabbath*, p. 66).

It is a mitzvah to light candles on the eve of the Sabbath, before sunset, at home in the room where the meal is taken.

The commandment applies to men as well as to women, but it devolves more upon women because women are more associated with the home (*B. Shab.* 31b; *Maimonides, Hil. Shabbat* 5:3; *O.H.* 263:2, 3). The candles should be lit no later than eighteen minutes before sunset.

Customs vary as to the number of candles to be lit. Some light two candles, one for *נְכוּר* and one for *שְׂמור*, the words with which the fourth commandment begins in the two versions of the Decalogue (*Exod.* 20:8, *Deut.* 5:12). Some light seven, a favorite number in religious symbolism; some start with two and add one each time there is an addition to the family. The prevalent custom is to light two at all times (*O.H.* 263:1).

Upon lighting the candles the woman covers her eyes with her hands and recites the benediction *אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שַׁבָּת*. It is customary to add a silent prayer for the health and welfare of the family (*O.H.* 263:5 in *B.H.*).

Shabbat Beautification

Shamai, unlike Hillel his rival, would save up any lovely fruit found in the market during the week and dedicate it to be enjoyed only on Shabbat using the phrase "in honor of Shabbat" - Li'chvod Shabbat. Some Afghani Jews have a shelf set aside to store special foodstuffs to be saved for the seventh day. Delayed gratification increases the honor and expectation. Shamai would also count off the days leading up to Shabbat and thereafter with the Shabbat as the centerpiece of his temporal consciousness (Mekhita d'Shimon bar Yochai 20,8)..

What does it mean "delayed gratification increases the honor and expectation? What would happen to Shabbat if it occurred twice or three times a week?

This revolutionary concept of Shabbat as personified guest transformed the home into a sanctuary but left the family as the hosts. Instead of approaching with awe the sanctity embodied in space in the Temple, God's home, the Jew became the host of the Divine whose own home became holy. The emotional quality of holiness was no longer fear and trembling as when we go to visit the head of state in the presidential mansion, but it involved welcoming and making God feel at home in our home. Our table was now an altar and we had bread, salt and candles as they do in God's Temple, but there are no restrictions, no places that could not be entered, no need for purification, no fear of Divine outbursts. God was domesticated and holiness became a comforting presence welcomed into our home. That is the metaphor of honoring Shabbat as guest that the Rabbis originated.

This notion of preparation became part of Eastern European Yiddish and then English. As Ron Wolfson points out:

In Jewish English, the common phrase is make Shabbes. It seems logical enough: one person asks another, "Who's making Shabbes this week, you or your in-laws?" Immediately, it conjures up images of cooking, cleaning, shopping, organizing, etc. A whole progression of labor is involved in the creation of the day of rest. The idea of making Shabbes is a practical concept. It reflects a pragmatic social reality: in order to celebrate a day of rest, someone has to do a lot of work.

The making as an active process also creates bonds. Shabbat is something we make. Hallot are bought. Meals are prepared. Tables are set. Children are herded to the table. We stand. We sit. Prayers are said. Rituals are performed. The execution of a Shabbat is the coordination of a myriad of small details and the application of a series of diverse skills. Yet the physical making of Shabbes is only the foundation on which we create Shabbat. The connection between a white tablecloth, the moisture collecting on the outside of a silver Kiddush cup filled with cold wine, the buildup of wax drippings on the candlesticks-- and the "seed of eternity"--is at once both profoundly tangible and wonderfully mythic. The real world of Shabbat is made up of tablecloths stained with repeated use, family jokes that are so well-known that just a look triggers a laugh, hugs, and the feel and taste of warm hallah. It is this real-world Shabbat that bonds couples closer together, that creates significant family moments, that roots Jewish identity.

Questions:

1. The concept of "hidur mitzvah" means going above and beyond in the performance of a mitzvah. Why do we make try to go above and beyond on Shabbat? What physical embellishments accomplish this task? Spiritual?
2. What is the importance of "hachanah l'Shabbat"—preparation for Shabbat?
3. Why are "the myriad of small details" integral in the celebration of Shabbat?