

## CHALLAH: THE GOLDBERG VARIATION 1.4

Challah is more than a rich, flavorful bread. It's a vehicle of memory, a shaper of experience, and creator of culture. The Synagogue is eager to support a skilled and committed group of challah bakers, who organize their week around the spiritual practice of challah baking. We hope that the pleasure of the experience will permeate every part of life, and that new ideas and commitments will grow out of this experiment. Our members and friends are invited to reserve a place in the kitchen each Wednesday evening to perfect their skills under the guidance of Rabbi Marc Fitzerman, whose practice is rooted in the original techniques developed by Karen Goldberg. Every step of the process will be done by hand, with simple tools and ingredients. Our approach calls for the mixing of dough in the Synagogue Kitchen, with rising and baking at home. Our base recipe is adapted from *The Spice and Spirit of Kosher Jewish Cooking*, edited by Blau, Deitsh, and Light. This variation makes two small loaves, one large one, or twelve beautiful soft challah rolls.



### INGREDIENTS BY GROUP

1 package active dry yeast

1 cup warm water

1/3 cup sugar

3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, divided (first 1 cup, then the remaining 2 1/2)

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1 egg, beaten

4 Tablespoons oil (1/4 cup)

### GETTING STARTED

Mix the sugar and the yeast together and then add the water. The water temperature should be 95-105 degrees. That's hot enough to feel hot, right at the point where you are tempted to draw your hand away from the faucet. No need to stir. When the yeast and sugar are dissolved and little islands have formed above the surface of the water, you are ready to continue.

In a separate bowl, combine the egg, salt, and oil and mix well. Add this to the yeast mixture. Then add the first cup of flour. Mix thoroughly until you have a lumpless, uniform pancake batter. Then add 2 1/2 more cups of flour and continue to mix. The dough will likely become quite thick.

When the dough becomes a shaggy mass or too difficult to mix, turn it out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for approximately 10 minutes. Add only enough

## NOTES

This is the fourth draft of the B'nai Emunah master recipe for challah (September 2011). As our experiment continues, we will be refining the recipe and adding helpful tips. Each edit will take a new number in the 1.x sequence. As we move on to experiment with other recipes, they will be marked 2.x, 3.x, etc.

### TAKING CHALLAH

Baking challah involves an echo sacrifice. A small piece is set aside as an offering by each baker. When the dough is ready to be shaped into loaves, say the following:

Baruch atah Adonai  
Elohaynu melech ha-olam  
asher kidshanu  
be-mitzvotav  
ve-tzivanu lehafrish challah.

Blessed are You,  
Adonai our God,  
ruler of the universe,  
who has made us holy  
by means of mitzvot,  
and commanded us to  
separate challah.

Immediately after saying the blessing, pinch off a piece of dough, approximately the size of an olive, and say: "Haray zeh challah" ("This is challah").

Then wrap the separated piece of dough in foil and burn it in the oven. The separated piece of challah should be burned so that it is no longer usable. It may also be simply discarded, in the normal way, as long as it is first wrapped in foil.

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## GETTING STARTED (CONTINUED)

additional flour to make the dough manageable. (This will take practice, experience, and trial and error.) Knead until the dough has acquired a life of its own. It should be smooth and elastic, springing back when pressed lightly with fingertip.

Stretch the surface of the dough so that it assumes the shape of a ball contained within a thin film. Place the dough in a large container which you have prepared with a thin film of vegetable oil. Turn the dough over so that the top will be oiled as well. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and let it rise in a warm, draftless place until it is close to double in bulk. As an alternative to a covered bowl, you may do your first rise in a self-sealing plastic bag. Coat the interior with a small amount of oil and remove the extra air when you seal the bag. The time for first rising will vary, but may take an hour or more. (You may choose to accomplish this step at home or wait until the dough has doubled at the Synagogue.)

Some people decide whether the dough has risen sufficiently and is ready to be deflated and shaped by performing a first "ripe test." Gently stick two fingers in the risen dough up to the second knuckle and take them out. If the indentations remain, the dough is ripe and ready for deflating. If not, cover and let rise longer. This technique works well with doughs that are not very sticky.

When the dough is ready, gently poke and press it down to deflate its mass. At this point, you would normally turn out the dough, shape it into challot, and set the loaves aside for a second rise. Based on the fact that dough can be refrigerated with very good results, we are going to place the process on hold at this point. Chilling dough slows the activity of the yeast, but it does not stop it completely. This means that a process that begins on Wednesday evening can be divided into easily accomplished parts, with baking at home on Friday afternoon.

## FINISHING AND BAKING

When you have deflated the dough, shape it again into a ball again and return it to the tightly sealed bowl or self-sealing plastic bag and refrigerate for up to 48 hours.

When you are ready to bake your challahs, remove the dough from the refrigerator, unwrap it and gently press down the dough ball to release large air pockets. Re-cover the dough and let it come up to room temperature. (See "Shaping" in the Notes column for an alternative.) To accelerate this process, we have experimented with a warm oven method. Set your oven for 200 degrees and turn it off when it reaches that temperature. Wait ten minutes and then put your dough in the slightly warm oven for up to two hours. We have called this technique "Two-Ten-Two."

When the dough is ready (at room temperature and full of life), shape the loaves in whatever way you find pleasing (braided, coiled, etc..) and place them on a greased or parchment-lined cookie sheet. You may also use a Silpat or similar mat. Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees.

## NOTES (CONTINUED)

The law is specific when it comes to the amount of dough required to "trigger" the taking of challah. Since the quantity is quite large, we recommend taking challah even for the amount required for two loaves.

### AN ALTERNATIVE

After the dough is kneaded, you may forego the first rise in a warm place and place it in a tightly covered, large bowl or self-sealing plastic bag before refrigerating. This refrigeration time is considered the first rise.

Since the dough is actually rising (very slowly), punch the dough down one or two hours after it has been placed in the refrigerator. Once the dough has completely cooled, it needs to be punched only once every twenty-four hours. Dough will last approximately three days in the refrigerator; however, it is best to use it earlier.

To use the dough you have prepared, remove it from the refrigerator, punch it down, and allow it to rest briefly. Then shape it in whatever way you find pleasing. The final rising will be longer than indicated in the recipe because the dough will still be cool. Bake according to the recipe directions.

### YEAST

The product called for in this recipe is Active Dry Yeast. Purchase any brand that appeals to you. Remember that this yeast should not be confused with Instant Yeast, Bread Machine Yeast, or Rapid Rise Yeast.

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### **FINISHING AND BAKING (CONTINUED)**

The dough will continue to rise. Some people proceed at this point without waiting. Some people wait until the dough doubles. One expert recommends waiting until it is a third larger. Some people use a second “ripe test” to determine readiness: a light fingertip touch to the side of the risen bread. If the indentation remains, the bread is sufficiently risen and ready for the oven.

Just before baking, prepare the egg wash. In a small bowl, beat 1 egg and 1 Tablespoon water. Brush the tops of the loaves with the egg wash and sprinkle them with poppy seeds or sesame seeds (light, dark, or both), or leave them plain.

Bake for approximately 20 minutes or until golden brown. This may take up to 30 minutes, depending on the oven. Cool the challahs before covering them in plastic wrap. Exult in your success!

### **NOTES (CONTINUED)**

#### **SHAPING**

One good way to accelerate the finishing is to shape the loaves as soon as the dough is removed from the fridge. This warms the dough and you get to room temperature faster!