

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parasha Shlach**  
**July 2, 2016**

**פרשת שלח**  
**כ"ו בסיון תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 13:1-15:41

In this *parasha*, Moshe sends scouts to explore the Land of Israel; ten of them convince the people that it will be too difficult to conquer the land, and Hashem responds to their lack of confidence by punishing *Bnei Yisrael* with 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The people are given the commandments of meal offerings, libations, *challah*, and *tzitit* (fringes on four-cornered garments).

Everyone knows what *challah* is. It is the braided loaf that we eat on Shabbat. Actually, however, the Torah just refers to that as bread. *Challah*, in the Torah's usage, is the *mitzvah* of taking off a portion of the dough and consecrating it. The text says (15:17-21):

יז וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. יח דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ  
אֲלֵהֶם: בְּבֹאֲכֶם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם, שָׁמָּה. יט וְהָיָה,  
בְּאֲכֹלְכֶם מִלֶּחֶם הָאָרֶץ--תְּרִימוּ תְרוּמָה, לַה'. כ רֵאשִׁית, עֲרֹסְתֶכֶם--חֶלֶה,  
תְּרִימוּ תְרוּמָה: כְּתְרוּמַת גֶּרֶן, כֹּן תְּרִימוּ אֹתָהּ. כא מִרְאשִׁית, עֲרֹסְתֵיכֶם,  
תִּתְּנוּ לַה', תְּרוּמָה--לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם.

17 And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 18 Speak to the children of Yisrael, and say to them: When you come into the land where I bring you, 19 then it

shall be, that, when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set apart a portion for a gift to Hashem. 20 Of the first of your dough you shall set apart a cake for a gift; as that which is set apart of the threshing-floor, so shall you set it apart. 21 Of the first of your dough you shall give to Hashem a portion for a gift throughout your generations.

The *mitzvah* of *hafrashat challah* (separating *challah*) involves taking a small piece of dough from the rest of the dough before baking. In Biblical times, this portion of dough was set aside as a tithe for the *cohanim* (priests) who had no income of their own, whereas today, it is burned and discarded.

The Torah does not specify how much dough we are required to take for *challah*, but the Talmud, in the *Masechet* [Tractate] actually named “Challah” discusses this issue. The rabbis said that 1 part in 24 was allocated to the *cohen* in the case of private individuals and 1 part in 48 in the case of a baker. Today, a small amount about the size of a ping-pong ball is traditionally removed from the batter, baked to the point of being burned, wrapped up, and discarded.

According to the Talmud, the requirement to separate *challah* from the dough is imposed on the owner of the dough, not on the person who kneads it; hence, if the owner is not Jewish—even if the kneader is—*hafrashat challah* is not mandatory. The requirement does not apply to quantities of less than one *omer* in size (approximately 2 pounds); to bread prepared as animal feed; or to dough prepared from a flour derived from anything other than wheat, barley, oats, spelt, or rye. If the baker forgets to set aside *challah*, it is permissible to set aside the same portion of already-baked bread.

Although the Biblical expression “בְּאֲכֹלְכֶם מִלֶּחֶם הָאָרֶץ—when you eat of the bread of the land” might be understood as applying only to bread eaten in the Land of Israel, classical rabbinical sources argue that *hafrashat challah* should be observed in the diaspora as well as in Israel.

Today, the *mitzvah* of *challah* can be done as follows: If one is using more than approximately 2 pounds of flour for a recipe, a small piece of dough is removed before setting the dough to rise, and, as stated above, it is burned, wrapped up, and discarded. One only recites the following blessing immediately before removing the dough when using more than 5 pounds of flour:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ וְצִוֵּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ חֻלָּה מִן הָעִיסָה.

Blessed are You, Hashem our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who sanctified us with the commandments and commanded us to separate *challah* from the dough.

Many medieval sources state that we continue to perform the *mitzvah* of *challah*, both to remind ourselves of the True Source of all provisions, but also to be ready and familiar with the *mitzvah* when we will once again be able to give *challah* to the *cohanim* working in the *Beit HaMikdash*.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What makes something bread and not cake?
- What is your favorite kind of bread?
- What do you believe we should be thinking about when we make the blessing and separate *challah*? How would this make the *mitzvah* more meaningful?