

REASONING BEHIND SCHLISSEL CHALLAH

There is a *minhag* to bake *shlissel challah* (*shlissel* means key in Yiddish) for the Shabbos after Pesach. *Shlissel challo*s are best known as a *segula* for *parnasa*, though there are other reasons for it, as we will soon see. Some bake the *challah* with an actual key inside, some make the *challah* in the shape of a key and some put sesame seeds on top in the form of a key. There are those who make the *challah* flat to look like matzos. We will discuss this later on. The Ohev Yisroel says about *shlissel challah* that “*the minhagim of our fathers are most definitely Torah*”. There are many reasons given for this minhag of baking *shlissel challah*; we will go through some of them. (Some of the items written below can also be found in *Taamei Minhagim*, *Nitei Gavriel*, *Sefer Hatoda’a* and *Minhag Yisroel Torah*)

First of all, the second *mishna* in *Rosh Hashanah* says on Pesach we are judged on the grains, *parnasa*. Rabbeinu Nissim asks if we are judged on Rosh Hashana then how are we judged on Pesach? He answers that on Pesach it is determined how much grain there will be in the coming year for the world, but on Rosh Hashana it is decided how much of that grain each individual receives. The Meiri, however, says that on Rosh Hashana it is decided if one will live or die, suffer or not and other such things, but on Pesach is when we are judged on the grains. Based on this there are customs in Sephardic communities to do things *Motzei Pesach* as a sign that we want Hashem to give us livelihood. In Aram Soba (Syria) and Turkey they put wheat kernels in all four corners of the house on *Motzei Pesach* as a sign of prosperity for the coming year. (*Moed L’kol Chai* -R’ Chaim Palagi, *Beis Habichira*). From a *mishna* we already see that there is a connection between Pesach and *parnasa*.

Reasons for *Shlissel Challa*

1). In *Shir Hashirim* (which we read on Pesach) it says לִי-פֶתַח־יָחַד - “*Open for Me, My sister, My beloved*”. Chazal say that Hashem asks us to open up for Him a small whole like the tip

of a needle and He will open up a huge hole for us. Also, *Klal Yisroel* is called a bride and they are called the *bechina* (aspect) of bread. During Pesach all the upper gates and minds are open and after Pesach they close and we need to open them. Therefore, we put a key in the *challah* after Pesach to hint at us opening a small "hole", through the mitzvah of Shabbos (and, if I might add, the mitzvah of *challah*) and now Hashem should open up all His good from his storehouses and the heavens like He gave the *mon* to our fathers in the month of Iyar, and this Shabbos we bless the month of Iyar.

2) After Pesach is when the *mon* stopped falling and we brought the Omer. From then on we needed to eat from the produce of the ground; we needed *parnasa*, since until now we had the *mon*. It is known that everything has a gate. Therefore just as we daven to Hashem to open up the gates of *parnasa* we have a minhag to put the form of a key on the *challos* to allude that Hashem should open up the gates of *parnasa* for us.

3) During sefira we count 49 days till Shavuot, the 50th day, which is the *shaarei bina*. We go from gate to gate, and each gate has a key. That is why we make an image of a key on the *challah*.

4) It says in *Shir Hashirim* 1:11 הַכֶּסֶף נִקְדוֹת עִם לָךְ נַעֲשֶׂה זָהָב תּוֹרִי - "We will make for you circlets of gold with spots of silver." By the *Mishkan* it says תִּשְׁחַנּוּ כֶסֶף בְּהֵז, putting *zahav* (gold) before *kesef* (silver). In *Bereishis*, by the creation of the world, the first day it says *Yehi ohr* which is *chesed* (which is represented by silver) and the second day represents *gevurah*, which in turn represents gold. The reason is that by the creation of the world it was pure *chesed*, as it says "the world was built on *chesed*" (*Tehilim* 89,3), therefore *chesed*, which is representative of *kesef*, precedes *gevurah*, which is representative of *zahav*. By the *Mishkan*, however, Hashem had to, so-to-speak, contract (*tzimtzum*) the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) to dwell in it, and *tzimtzum* is from the aspect of *gevurah*, therefore *zahav* precedes *kesef* by the *Mishkan*. However, the *zahav* written there has the *nekudah* (vowel sound) of a פִּתּוּחַ (it has a *patach* instead of the usual *kometz*), it says זָהָב

הַתְּנוּפָה (Shemos 38,24), and that is the *nekuda* of *chesed* –the *nekuda* of *chochma*. And חתפ (the vowel) also means opening like רעשו חתפ - from there comes all the kindness. Putting it all together, this that we say in *Shir Hashirim* תוֹרֵי זָהָב עִם לֶךְ נַעֲשֶׂה means the *Mishkan* was made with *zahav*, the aspect of *tzimtzum*, but with the *nekuda* of *kesef*, meaning the (word “*zahav*”, instead of having the usual vowel, *kometz*, is written with the) *nekuda* of *patach*, which is *chesed*. And the Shabbos after Pesach is always in the second week of sefira which is *gevurah*, the aspect of *zahav*, except that it is *menukad* with *kesef*, *nekudas patach*. Through this we say that we will open up all the gates of blessing and since every gate has a חתפּ (key) we make the image of a key on the *challah*.

5) The previous four reasons are all brought by the Ohev Yisroel in *Shabbos Acher Pesach* and *Likutim Parshas Shmini*. There is a fifth reason brought by the Ohev Yisroel, also based on the posuk תוֹרֵי זָהָב עִם לֶךְ נַעֲשֶׂה, connecting the written and oral Torah to *challah*. (See *Ohev Yisroel, Shabbos Acher Pesach*)

6) The matza we ate on Pesach is supposed to instill in us *Yiras Hashem*. And *Yirah* is compared to a key as we see from the following Gemara in *Mesechta Shabbos* 31a-b: “*Rabbah bar Rav Huna said: Any person that has Torah but doesn’t have Yiras Shomayim is comparable to a treasurer who has the keys to the inner parts (of the treasure house) but the keys to the outer area was not handed to him. How can he get to the inner parts (if he can’t first get into the outer parts)?*” Therefore we put a key in the *challah* the Shabbos after Pesach to show we want the *Yirah* obtained from the matzos to stay with us, because if one has *Yirah* then the Torah will stay attached to him. (Yismach Yisroel)

7) The Rambam lists out at the beginning of *Hilchos Chometz U’Matza* that there are 8 mitzvos (3 positive & 5 negative) involved there. The key we put in the *challah* alludes to this Rambam: the letters of חתפּ (key) spell ת”פ ח’ ת”פ is bread, representing the “*chometz*” and מ’ is for *matza*- these allude to *Hilchos Chometz U’Matza*, and then ח’ is the 8 mitzvos

involved) (*Tzvi LaTzadik*)

8) The Shabbos after Pesach we make *challos* that look like matzos, as an allusion to the matzos that were eaten on Pesach Sheini. And we put a key in it to allude to the “gates” being open untill Pesach Sheini. (*Imrei Pinchos*)

9) The minhag is to put keys in the *challah* and make them in the form of matzos. The reason is that in these seven weeks of sefira we are supposed to work on our *Avodas Hashem* until we reach the the level of the first night of Pesach. The way to do this is to put the “left into the right”, meaning mix the trait of *ahava* (right side) with *yirah* (left side). In this second week of *sefira* we have these two traits in our hands, since the first week of *sefira* is *chesed- ahava*, and the second week is *gevura - yirah*. That is why we make the *challah* look like matza. Matza is representative of the *yetzer tov*, the right, and *chometz* is representative of the *yetzer horah*, the left. Now, we have *challos* which are true *chometz*, in the form of matza; “the left is in the right”, *chometz* in *matza*. (*Shearis L’Pinchos*)

10) There are many reasons given for the *shlissel challah*, and I say that the *shlissel challos* are the keys to *parnasa*. (*Segulas HaBeShT V’Talmidov* quoting *Nachlas Yaakov*)

Different ways of making *Shlissel Challah*

As mentioned above (reasons 8 and 9) there are those that make the *challah* round and flattish for this Shabbos, in the image of matza.

Some make the *challah* in the shape of a key.

Some attach a piece of dough in the shape of a key. [Breslov Customs for Pesach](#) (page 57) says this is the *minhag* of the family of Reb Elazar Kenig shlita and of Manistritch.

Sefer Hatoda’ah mentions making the image of a key with sesame

seeds on top of the *challah*. These first three customs can, perhaps, be seen from the wording of the Ohev Yisroel in one place where he says we put the image of a key on the *challah*.

Some place an actual key in the *challah*. Perhaps this is done because of the wording in many places of indenting the *challah* with a key.

Either way it is done the key or image of the key is usually on top. An interesting observation about this. The Gemara quoted by the Yismach Yisroel (reason 6), about the key, is at the top of daf 31b. At the bottom of the daf is the mishna mentioning the women's mitzvah of *challah*. Here the key is on top and the *challah* on the bottom.

Conclusion

The Gemara in *Taanis* says there are three keys that Hashem controls directly, without the assistance of Malachim. They are rain, which the Gemara explains is *parnasa*, childbirth (or conception) and *techias hameisim*. If I may humbly add, when we are making the *challah* to have in mind the *parnasa* of others also, and also those who don't have children and most importantly daven for *techias hamaeism*.

Either way one performs this *minhag* they are all correct and all have holy sources. When I started writing this I did not realize how much information there was on this *minhag* which is done only once a year. I learnt a valuable lesson. Every *minhag* and of course every mitzvah has many holy reasons behind it and it's not done just because someone decided this is a nice thing to do, as some say. The more I looked into *shlissel challah* the more I found in seforim written by Rabbonim who were geonim in every part of Torah, *nistar* and *nigleh*, and tzadikim in every aspect, between "man and God" and "between man and man". They were able to understand reasons for every little action we do as a way of serving Hashem. May we all be blessed with *parnasa berevach* together with all of *Klal Yisroel*.