

# HOW TO BRAID CHALLAH

by CLAUDIA REDER

**i. Ingredients**

You will be baking  
with languages.  
Russian, German,  
and Yiddish  
will suffice—  
they contain  
a large amount  
of gluten—

**ii. Mixing the Dough**

While you  
knead the concoction,  
gathering strength  
in your arms  
and volume  
in your voice—  
such heated  
discussions  
until the children  
scream, Stop arguing!  
and you retort  
we are not arguing  
we are discussing  
Aunt Ruthie  
and your lost tooth  
and Rachel's  
report card  
and Zena's last  
doctor's appointment  
for TMJ  
slap slapping it down  
turn turning it over  
in the dough—  
your conversations  
rise, like special yeast—

and because  
your temper  
has risen  
just a bit—  
you might be in danger  
of braiding  
the challah  
too tightly—  
never mind.

**iii. Cutting and Braiding**

When cutting  
the dough  
into three, four, six  
braids, they may be  
too long for the  
counter space.  
Feel free to use the old-  
fashioned mahogany  
dining room table—  
or linoleum—  
whatever you've got  
will do, Stretch  
out the lengthy  
ropes—  
take up room—  
English sentences  
are famished  
for intonation,  
complexity,  
and desire—

Using generous hand  
motions, braid  
the pogroms.

Don't forget to flour  
the board every so often—  
sweeping your hand  
across the marble,  
a clean slate.

**iv. Optional**

Brush with egg  
white twice  
so the loaves glisten—  
once after  
braiding  
and again after baking

in honor  
of your  
Russian  
grandmother  
who threw two  
kisses, one  
for each cheek;

or sprinkle  
a Yinglish  
of raisins  
or poppy seeds.

**v. Serving the Challah**

Invite oodles of people.  
Tear off chunks.

Dance with your bread.

Let the crumbs  
fall on the good table  
cloth,  
so be it.

*Claudia M. Reder is the author of My Father & Miro and Other Poems.*

**ABOUT THE JUDGE**

*Poet Alicia Ostriker was the judge for the 2007 Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize at Lilith. She is the author of 11 books of poetry, her work has been translated into seven languages, and she has been nominated twice for the National Book Award.*

**ABOUT THE PRIZE**

*The poetry prize is named for Charlotte Newberger, whose support for Lilith makes possible the publication of new poems in every issue, reviews of books by established and emerging poets, and this annual poetry competition. Newberger has had a longstanding interest in poetry and the arts, and has served for many years on the boards of such institutions as Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater and The Poetry Center, as well as serving as president of the Foundation for the Jewish Culture.*

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