JEWISH CONCEPTS

Challah, special braided bread, is one of the foods most central to Jewish life. It is present at each of the three meals on Shabbat (weekly Sabbath) and at almost every festive holiday meal throughout the year. When you see challah on the table, it is a clear sign that it is no ordinary day.

In Little Red Rosie, Rosie sets about making challah for the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. As you’ll notice in the pictures, one of the loaves she bakes for the meal is round. The tradition of using round challot (plural of challah) at Rosh Hashanah has several possible meanings. One idea behind this custom is that the loaf is similar to the shape of a crown; on Rosh Hashanah, God is crowned as Ruler of the world. The shape may also symbolize the cyclical nature of time; we move through all the seasons and holidays of the year and always come back around to where we started.

Rosh Hashanah is a time for reflection and introspection about the past year. It is an opportunity to evaluate what went well and where improvements need to be made. The round challah is formed by arranging the dough in a spiral, which may speak to the inner work that goes on at this time of year. Hopefully, the choices we make in the new year will serve to elevate our lives and help us climb the "spiral" toward becoming our best selves.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Anyone who has ever watched a small child "cook" something with play kitchenware knows that little ones love to imitate daily household activities. Indulge their enthusiasm for the kitchen with a family challah bake! Choose a recipe online or from a cookbook, and work on each step together, just like Rosie and her friends in this story. It will most likely be messy; make that part of the fun! Your children will love mixing the ingredients and kneading the gooey dough. Experiment together with braided or round challah, or let children design their own shapes.

You might choose to make your challah part of a special Shabbat or holiday meal. Encourage your children to create handmade invitations and send them to family and friends. Your little ones will be proud of the part they played in making the challah for the meal and will enjoy sharing it with others.

Some communities have programs that provide Shabbat meals for families who are struggling financially. You might find out if there is such a program in your area and if there is an opportunity to contribute your homemade challah or other foods. Talk with your children about the importance of taking care of community members who are in need, and celebrate the opportunity to do this mitzvah (good deed)!

LITTLE RED ROSIE

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With Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, just around the corner, Little Red Rosie wants to make a round challah to celebrate the holiday. Who will help her make the challah — and then eat it? You might be surprised!