

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.

You can read poems selected as runners-up this year at Lilith.org

2nd PLACE

EXODUS

by ONA GRITZ

A woman has painted her doorpost
with blood so that now, in gray half light,
she shakes a small shoulder,
pats a curved back, and her children
startle awake, allow themselves
to be rushed into clothes.
Trusting the hush, they quietly follow
as she walks with their father,
as they join a river of families
coursing from home. They walk and walk,
a block of bread dough on her back.
She is used to waking early, used to
hefting, carrying, hurrying tasks.
Such is the life they steal away from;
and she could almost feel light,
listening to the sound of her children's
feet beside her, breathing the baby's
sour milk head resting on her chest.
But she hears the cries of those
other mothers, the ones waking now
to the stiff unblinking bodies of their boys.
Joined by a thousand voices,
the wail rises, thicker than the dust
they kick up as they walk.
Can we let ourselves be loved by such a god?
She'd ask this of her husband
but she knows what he would say.
Adonai Echad. What choice do we have?

*Ona Gritz is a poet, children's author,
and a columnist for the online journal
Literary Mama.*

3rd PLACE

TAILOR TO THE KING

by EMILY SCHNEIDER

Great-great grandfather
Was tailor to the King of Sweden
The king kept his power
in seams and pleats and
Empty linings
waiting for his words.
The tailor invented, it seems,
a phrase with thread,
"By the cuffs of their trousers,
You will know them."

By the cuffs of their trousers
You will know which coins will
touch in the bottoms
of their pockets,
And which pockets are linen,
Which wool, which silk.

By the colors on their lapels,
The signals sent by their buttons,
Which leather, which copper,
Which ageing gold.

Grandfather worked in the evening,
Then gathered his needles in books
And stacked his earth colored bolts of
fabrics waiting for a soul to wear them.

His suits, everyone knew,
Would walk with creases
as even as the equator.
As flat and honest
as his fatherly iron.

When the king wore grandfather's suits,
Even his majesty's shoes praised them,
And his felt brimmed hats
Sang down on them with joy.

*Emily Schneider is a poet and teacher who
lives on Long Island.*