

# Lamorinda Bakers to Elevate Their Craft to a Higher Plane

By Laurie Snyder



Challah comes in many shapes and sizes, according to the author of *"The Book of Jewish Food,"* Claudia Roden. "Braided ones, which may have three, four, or six strands, are the most common, and because they look like arms intertwined, symbolize love. Three braids symbolize truth, peace, and justice." A round loaf, with no clear beginning or end, is often baked for the Jewish New Year – Rosh Hashanah – "to symbolize continuity." Photos provided

Anyone who has ever spent any length of time in a kitchen has likely invoked the name of a higher power at some point for help in heading off a culinary catastrophe. Yet a pinch of prayer has not, as a rule, been one of the ingredients found side by side with the salt and flour in the average cookbook – until now.

Cookbooks will be getting a major rewrite at 7 p.m. tomorrow evening in Lafayette as roughly 200 bakers learn that the spirituality of good food begins not with the blessing before the meal – but with a pre-preparation prayer over their ingredients as they participate in a Mega Challah Bake sponsored by The Jewish Women's Circle of Chabad of Contra Costa (www.JewishContraCosta.com).

Challah (pronounced *khah-luh* or *hah-luh*) is a rich, leavened white bread made with oodles of eggs and sweetened with sugar or honey. Traditionally baked in advance of Shabbat (the Sabbath) and holidays, it is said to represent the manna which fell from heaven during the 40 years of desert wandering by the Children of Israel after their escape from Egypt. According to various sources including Claudia Roden, author of the James Beard Award-winning *"The Book of Jewish Food,"* the bread's name was derived from a Biblical commandment that a small part of the dough – roughly the size of an olive – be broken off and given to the Lord each Sabbath by way of the community's priests.

"Baking Challah is a time-honored Mitzvah (commandment) dating back to our matriarchs. It is taught that when a woman bakes Challah and makes the appropriate blessings on the dough, she is bringing additional blessing into her home and into the food that she lovingly prepares for family and friends. It is a time for women to pray for their personal

needs, the needs of their families and their communities," said Chaya Berkowitz, co-director of Chabad of Contra Costa. "By bringing a large group of women together to bake Challah, in addition to learning a wonderful skill and inspiring unity in our community, our hope is that our joint prayers will be so much more poignant."

Lamorinda's Mega Challah Bake will be a hands-on workshop for women of all ages, and will be guided by Sara Briman. Honored with the American Academy of Hospitality Sciences' Five-Star Diamond Award for "keeping family values and traditions strong" and "for creating the finest authentic Challah bread worldwide," she is the chef at Acapulco's Hotel Encanto. "The yeast makes the dough rise. I ask that each day be one of growth for me and my family. We should rise above any difficulty in our lives," said Briman in a 2013 Miami Herald interview. "The egg is the symbol of life. I ask for a good life



Award-winning chef, Sara Briman, has been inspiring bakers from Boston to Chile with her Challah recipe. On Jan. 15, she will reveal one of her greatest baking secrets to Lamorinda women during the Mega Challah Bake in Lafayette.

with good health for me and for all around me."

After experiencing the beauty and camaraderie of Challah baking, adds Berkowitz, it is hoped that Lamorindans will go home and share this Shabbat tradition with others. "In the true spirit of unity, all participants will create two loaves of Challah, one to keep and one to give to a friend."

Open to all women, regardless of Jewish affiliation or background, advance registration is required because space is limited. The cost is \$20 per person. To register, visit: cc.ChallahBake.com, or contact Berkowitz at (925) 351-3875 or Chaya@JewishContraCosta.com.

**What:** Mega Challah Bake  
**When:** Thursday, Jan. 15, 7 p.m.  
**Where:** Veterans Memorial Hall, 3780 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette  
**Cost:** \$20/person, pre-registration necessary:  
 cc.ChallahBake.com

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## Still Grateful for the Music

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From left: NBA Hall of Famer Bill Walton, Jorma Kaukonen, lead guitarist of the Jefferson Airplane, Tom Stack, and Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead  
 Photo courtesy Tom Stack

"The band members ... all tried to find their way [after that]," he recalled sadly. To Stack, though, Garcia was "such a loveable figure," and the very "heart and soul" of the group.

In the late 1990s Stack married and moved to Lafayette. He and his wife, a singer, have a son whom Stack says "gets" music.

"Live music is so important," he said, and his real estate career offers some of the freedom of movement and creativity he discovered during his first career. Stack continues to feed his love of all things Grateful Dead,

even by booking Grateful Dead cover band performances in the past few years at the Lafayette Town Hall Theatre where he serves as vice president on the board of directors. He has produced approximately 20 shows there to date.

"I like to share it," he said of his love for live music. You can almost hear him humming the Hunter lyrics:

*"Sometimes the light's all shinin' on me,  
 Other times I can barely see.  
 Lately it occurs to me what a long, strange trip it's been."*

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