



## The Goblins of Knottingham: A History of Challah

By Zoë Klein  
Illustrations by Beth Bogert  
Apples & Honey Press, an imprint  
of Behrman House and Gefen Publishing  
ISBN: 978-1-68115-526-5  
Hardcover, 32pp, \$17.95  
[www.applesandhoneypress.com](http://www.applesandhoneypress.com)  
available from Behrman House,  
B&N, Amazon

Long ago, in the town of Knottingham, there were three little goblins: Knotty was naughty, Knotsalot was no good, and Notnow was no good, no how, not then and not now!

More than anything else, these mischievous goblins liked to tangle children's hair!

Find out how the children fought back, and how their tangled hair led to the unlikely invention of a braided bread called challah.

This is the story of a classroom filled with children who are plagued daily by three goblins who love to tangle their hair. Finally, one day they come up with a way to outwit the goblins and their solution leads to the “invention” of challah. Full of funny names and alliterative text, this would work well as a read-aloud. The full-page illustrations, whimsically created in water-color pastel shades in a style characteristic of the artist’s work in Highlights for Children, have lots of subtle, amusing elements for children to discover when they look at the book on their own. At the end of this bread-centered story, a letter to the children is included by the author, Rabbi Zoe, in which she invites them to think about “what gives challah its power” providing some “food for thought” about the beauty of Shabbat.” – **Jewish Book Council**

### About the Author:



Rabbi Zoë Klein serves Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles. She is the author of *Drawing in the Dust* (Simon and Schuster, 2010, ISBN: 978-1416599135). She has written articles for many publications including *Tikkun*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Torat Hayim*. She has written chapters in a number of collections including *The Women's Torah Commentary*, *The Women's Haftarah Commentary*, *Teen Texts*, *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation*, *Making Prayer Real*, and *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*. Her poems and prayers are used in houses of prayer around the country.

### Challah Power!

The world definitely feels a little happier when you have a hunk of challah in your hand. What do you think gives challah that power?

Is it the smell? After a week of working and thinking hard, we want to unwind. The sweet smell of challah lets us know Shabbat is coming. The little things that bother us (like the goblins in this story!) disappear, and the knots in our muscles and tummies melt away. Yep, that's one powerful smell!

Is it the shape? If you had a sticky, yummy blob of dough in your hands right now, what shape would you make? Challah can be lots of different shapes. It can be a circle, a ladder, a bird, or anything! When I see a golden loaf of woven strands, the braids remind me of people holding hands and hugging, and that is powerful, too.

Is it the taste? The taste of challah fills the mouth with sweetness, the mind with memories, and the heart with happiness. Some people really like the taste of raisins in their challah. Some prefer chocolate chips. Others prefer plain. What do you like your challah to taste like? Sesame or poppy? Do you like challah drizzled with honey or for French toast?

So, what gives challah its power? Maybe its smell. Maybe its shape and taste. Or maybe its power comes from the people who gather around it, smiling, singing and sharing stories and filling the world with love.

What chance does a trio of goofy goblins have against that?

### Why did you write this book?

Rabbis are invited to tell stories every day. One day, as I was preparing to tell a story to our temple preschoolers, I realized that I had already told every story on my bookshelves many times over! I decided to write a new one for the children. Now, most Jewish stories begin with a question. My question was, "Why is challah braided?" That led to another question...what are other things that are braided? Hair! Soon, I was baking up a twisted tale of little monsters and brave children, and our hope for a tangle-free world.



## Program Ideas:

Read **Goblins of Knottingham** and...

- host a challah baking workshop
- discuss the power of challah
- teach *HaMotzi* and have challah with honey
- invent creative myths for the origin of other things, like why the tallit has stripes, why matzahs have holes, or why the Kiddush cup is silver
- have a synagogue pajama party
- invite Rabbi Zoë to share stories, lead a writing workshop, discuss the history of goblins, ghosts and golems in Judaism, or teach Torah to all ages!

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*Please enjoy The Goblins of Knottingham, baked for you with love! 😊 Thank you,*

*Zoë*

## JUDAISM, GOBLINS AND GHASTLY THINGS

The Goblins of Knottingham builds on an age-old Jewish history of story-telling and folktales filled with goblins, ghosts, and ghastly things. In fact, many of our most familiar Jewish symbols are intended to ward off and protect us from them! The *mezuzah* is like a magic shield, keeping those sinister sneaks from entering our homes. The knotted fringes of the *tzitzit* protect us against the rowdy rascals. The *hamsa*, a hand-shaped amulet which often has a blue eyeball in the center, protects us from the evil eye. Some Jews wear a special string around their wrist to deflect dastardly demons, or even hang an amulet over a baby's crib depicting three angels who are believed to guard against Lilith, Queen of the Underworld. People have been fighting off scamps like Knotty, Knotsalot and Notnow for centuries!

Talmud, the central Jewish text, is filled with stories about little devilish creatures. It is written: "Abaye says: They are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge around a field. Rav Huna says: Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand. Raba says: Fatigue in the knees comes from them. The wearing out of the clothes of the scholars is due to their rubbing against them. The bruising of the feet comes from them." (Berakhot 6a) And, as we now know, also the tangling of hair!

For the rabbis, these mini mischief-makers were not simply figments of the imagination. The Talmud even gives instructions on how to find them! "If one wants to discover them, let him take sifted ashes and sprinkle around his bed, and in the morning he will see something like the footprints of a rooster."

Sometimes the *Yetzer Hara* (our evil inclination) is depicted as a goblin. There is a famous story of a time when the rabbis trapped the *Yetzer Hara* in a barrel, just like the children of Knottingham caught the goblins in challah dough.

The rabbis suggest that on the sixth day of creation, God was busy finishing up the world's creatures when the sun began to set. It was the first Shabbat! So God stopped working, leaving a bunch of beasts half-baked. Among them were many mythical monsters like the talking serpent and all sorts of ghosts, ghouls and goblins. Knotty, Knotsalot and Notnow have been tangling things up since the beginning!

Sample Pages:

