

Challah is a Tradition Transmitted from Generation to Generation

For this edition dedicated to education, I began to think of one of the most symbolic and representative culinary elements of my people, the Jews. This is called challah, which is the bread that we eat every Friday night and Saturday during Shabbat. Without fail in almost every Jewish home, the blessing of the bread, the challah, is said. Also, it is used in many Jewish festivals during the year and is prepared in different forms. It is surrounded in symbolism, folklore and tradition, and it has some explanations for these symbolisms.

On the Sabbath, you pronounce the blessing of the bread, which allows you to be able to eat the food, all of which comes from giving thanks for the bread. The blessing is made with two whole breads, which symbolize the two portions of mana that the Jews received during their wanderings for 40 years after departing from Egypt. These two portions of mana were received only on Shabbat, as opposed to all the other days when they received only one each. If the person took more than he was supposed to, the excess would disappear, but on the Sabbath, they were given a double portion because it is said that a soul visits each person of the Jews on Shabbat. It is because of this that they received a double portion of mana, and the blessing of the two challahs is recited this day.

The challah is always topped with a decorative cover or some white material, which represents the dew that fell during the night and covered the mana. Also it is said that the challah should be covered so that it “doesn’t feel bad” that the first blessing is for the wine, and in that way not to “hurt” the bread’s feelings. Also sesame seeds or poppy seeds are used to cover the challah, which again represents the mana.

Challah is made in a lot of different forms and sizes, of which all have meaning. At the time of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashana, round challahs are made to symbolize the year being continuous without a beginning or an ending and is made this way to represent continuity. The bread is prepared with more sugar than normal, which represents the wish that people should have a good and sweet year.

The braided challah looks like arms that are embracing, which symbolizes love and are made with three, four or six pieces. Three-pieced braids signify justice, truth and peace. The challah normally, which has 12 curves in the braid that represent the miracle of the 12 breads of the 12 tribes.

The name challah comes from the Hebrew word used for “portion.” In the biblical commands, it is said that you should give a portion of the dough to the high priests, one portion as a gift from generation to generation. A grand temple existed during biblical times, and the Jews were required to give a

portion of 1/24 of their dough to the high priests each Shabbat. At present times, the grand temple does not exist, so it is symbolic to take a very small piece of the dough and burn it in the oven in order to say the blessing of the challah.

I decided to write about this subject because education is something that is transmitted, be it parents to children, teachers to students, etc. All of us of are educating and being educated at the same time.

For me, the subject of food is always very essential because there is a huge relationship between transmission and education. The most valuable thing in food for me is that it can be transmitted and spread because culinary customs can disappear. It is because of this that books about food have existed for many years. These will guaranty that the culinary customs of every culture will not disappear.

There is a challah recipe in my family coming from the beginning of the 20th century that belonged to my grandmother’s aunt. This aunt entered a contest with this recipe and won. This recipe has been transmitted from generation to generation, from my great grandmother to my grandmother to my mother. When I was little, my mother used to wait for me on some Fridays when I got home from school, and we formed the challah in the kitchen. My mother let me make whatever form I wanted, and I try to do the same for my children to enjoy the tradition. My beautiful grandmother has been in charge of guarding this recipe of which is shared with all my love because it represents years of tradition and transmission, not only on a family level, but also as a Jewish people.

Thanks BIBI – this is for you.



Step 1 – Mix following ingredients and let stand.

1/2 cup warm tap water
1 tsp salt
1 tsp flour
2 pkgs. dry yeast

Step 2 – Put 8 cups flour (do not sift) in a large mixing bowl and make a well. In the well, put the following:

3 eggs
3/4 cup sugar (or a little less)
1/2 cup oil
2 cups warm water
1 tbs salt
1/2 cup raisins (optional)

Add the items in step 1 to those of step 2. Mix together with a wooden spoon until it’s a sticky blob. Set aside for 3 hours. Every half hour mix a couple of times with wooden spoon. Do not cover.

Step 3 – Flour counter top. Divide dough into 3 sections. Grease 3 pans with oil. Roll dough and make braids it makes 3 braids. Let rise 1 hour.

Step 4 – Brush top of challahs with mixture of 1 egg (beaten), 1 tsp water plus a dash of sugar. Mix and brush loaves and sprinkle sesame seeds on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until golden. 🇺🇸

