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Round Rosh Hashanah challah symbolizes circle of life

By Susie Iventosch



Lafayette native and Campolindo alum Dania Lubliner Massey with her son, Jordan Massey, 7.
Photo Susie Iventosch

One day last summer while my sister-in-law, Shira Lubliner, was visiting we decided to make a loaf of challah. Since she'd made many of them before and I'd never made one, she was the perfect person to teach me. Challah is a leavened white bread, typically braided and served to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath and special holidays. Not only is challah delicious, but it also is a beautiful loaf of bread!

Shira didn't have a recipe with her at the time, but she found one online for Famous Challah that had been posted on Food.com by "Tante B." According to Tante B, this recipe originally came from The Spice and Spirit of Kosher-Jewish Cooking, a compilation of recipes published in 1977 by the Lubavitch Women's Organization Junior Division. Apparently Tante B made a few minor changes to the original recipe, but other than changing the shape, we didn't change Tante B's version, which we found to be just perfect.

This year my niece, Dania (Lubliner) Massey, came to visit and we made a round challah with the sous-chef help of her adorable 7-year-old son, Jordan. Usually challah is formed in an oval shape, but for the Jewish New Year festival of Rosh Hashanah, tradition calls for the bread to be made into a round loaf.

"I really enjoyed making the challah and my favorite part was braiding it," Jordan said. "It was

delicious and I definitely loved eating it. I want to make it again!"

Jordan believes the Rosh Hashanah challah is round like the year that goes round.

While Jewish cuisine varies by region, the tradition of baking round challah for Rosh Hashanah is universal among Jews. According to Shira, the round challah symbolizes the circle of life, and also may relate to the round-shaped bread used some 2,000 years ago in the Temple in Jerusalem.

"Rosh Hashanah commemorates the birthday of the world, the part of the endless cycle of time," she noted. "Additionally, round challah looks like a crown - a mystical symbol in Judaism, representing God's kingship over the world."

Shira said that Rosh Hashanah challah is a treat especially enjoyed by children. Sometimes the bread is made with raisins and dipped in honey to assure the blessing of a sweet new year.

This year, Rosh Hashanah begins in the evening on Wednesday, Sept. 20 and ends the evening of Friday, Sept. 22.

Cooking Term of the Week

Mirepoix

Mirepoix (pronounced mir'pwä) is a mixture of finely diced vegetables such as carrots, onions and celery, sautéed in butter along with herbs and sometimes meat, ham or bacon. The mirepoix is then used as a flavoring for soups, stews or sauces, or as a base for braised meat or fish. It can also be used as a garnish.

Rosh Hashanah Challah

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(Makes two 8-inch round challah)

*This bread looks like it has a million directions, but if you follow each step, you will see that it all flows smoothly and quickly. There is also a link to a YouTube video illustrating how to shape the loaf.

INGREDIENTS

7 cups all-purpose flour, split in half
2 packages dry yeast, 1/4 ounce each
1 egg, beaten
1/2 cup vegetable oil (I used olive oil)
1 Tbsp. salt
1/2 cup granulated sugar
2 cups warm water (90-100 degrees)
(2 cups raisins-optional)
Egg wash glaze



Lafayette native and Campolindo alum Dania Lubliner Massey with her son, Jordan Massey, 7. Photo Susie Iventosch

1 egg, beaten

2 Tbsp. sesame seeds or poppy seeds

DIRECTIONS

Making the Dough

Measure all ingredients, so they are ready and

handy.

In the metal bowl of your mixer, add 1tablespoon sugar from the 1/2 cup and combine it with the yeast and warm water. Let sit for about 10 minutes, until yeast dissolves and becomes foamy.

Add the rest of the sugar, the salt and half of the flour (3 1/2 cups) to the yeast mixture. Mix well using the bread hook of the mixer.

Add the beaten egg and oil and beat until integrated.

Slowly, add most of the remaining flour, holding out about 1/2 cup flour until you know if the dough needs it. The dough will become very thick. Note: Add raisins now, if you are using them so they will mix into the dough.

Kneading the Dough

When the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl, turn it onto a floured work surface and knead for about eight minutes, using some extra flour as needed to make a workable dough and to keep it from being too sticky. The dough will be ready when it is smooth and elastic, and springs back when pressed with the fingertips.

Place dough in a large greased bowl, turning the dough once so it's oiled on all sides.

Cover the top of the bowl with a damp towel and let rise in a warm place for two hours, until doubled-plus in size. (Do not place in a heated oven for this step!)

Punch down dough. (Tante B punches the dough down in four or five places every 20 minutes during this two-hour rising, but I only punched it down once at the very end of the rising.)

Shaping the Challah

Prepare pans. Spray two 8-inch cake pans with cooking spray or oil well.

Turn dough out onto a floured work surface for shaping.

Divide dough in half. Set one half aside and cover with plastic wrap while making the first loaf.

Divide each half into six equal pieces.

Roll pieces between palms of hands and stretch until you have six fairly equal length tubes of dough, like a bread stick shape, approximately 10 to 12 inches long.

Lay three pieces out on the work surface.

Overlay the remaining three logs of dough alternating over and under each piece already on the work surface, into a lattice pattern. Tighten the woven pieces toward the center.

Now, braid the three ends that are sticking out on all four sides and carefully tuck the braids under the latticed dough.

(Here is the link to a quick video tutorial on how to make both a six and four-braid challah, plus challah rolls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52-GK2pFIQM>)

Gently lay the latticed, braided, round loaf into your prepared pan.

Repeat with the second half of dough.

Allow challah to rise at room temperature for another 20 minutes or so.

Baking the Challah

Preheat oven to 375 F.

Brush all of the exposed dough on the shaped and risen challah rounds with egg wash and sprinkle with sesame seeds or poppy seeds.

Bake for 25 minutes. Tops of challah should be a dark golden-brown color.

Turn off oven and leave in oven for another 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven and serve now or later, it reheats beautifully and is also delicious at room temperature as well. This bread also makes a delicious toast for breakfast!

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