Preparing for the Sabbath

Thursday afternoon was the beginning of the preparation for the Sabbath. The morning of that day was confined to the baking of about 20 large, round loaves of rye bread. While these loaves were still in the oven, mother prepared the dough for “Challeh” (white bread), for goodies such as strudel and cookies, and for “lukshen” (noodles).

The dough for Challeh required much kneading and waiting for the dough to “raise” until it was almost double its original size. In due course, the dough was shaped into a smooth ball. My mother tore off a portion of this ball, instinctively knowing just how much was necessary for one Challeh. She patted this smaller portion and shaped it until it was oval in form – wide in the center and narrow at both ends. Using the point of a knife she pinned one end of the dough to the breadboard or table. She then would cut the dough lengthwise into three or more part and proceeded to braid the sections as she would my sisters’ hair. She then turn under some of the dough at the widest part and pinched and tapered both ends. Invariably each Challeh had the same even shape. The finishing touch to preparing the bread was my brushing the top of the Challeh with a chicken’s quill dipped in a beaten egg yolk.

The procedure for shoving the loaves into the oven, and for taking them out after they had been baked, was as described in the last sketch for the week-day bread. I would place each baked loaf upon the kitchen table for cooling. Thereafter, I would place them in neat rows on the lower shelves built into one of the kitchen walls for this purpose.

The dough for the strudel my mother threw up in the air several times and then flattened as thin as possible on a flour-dusted tablecloth. She then stretched it slowly and carefully (a tear in the dough would have been a calamity) to a tissue-paper thinness. When she reached this degree of thinness, she placed rows of ingredients (consisting of nuts, fruits, oil, jams, etc.) on appropriate parts of the dough. Then, in skillful motions and quick lifts of the tablecloth, she had strudel rolls.

The dough for cookies was not so thin as for strudel, and I used a cookie cutter to form designs. Mother rolled together the small pieces of dough remaining around the cookie forms so that more cookies could be made. From this I would cut more cookies until all the dough was used, leaving no waste.

The baking of the strudel and cookies differed from the baking of bread in that they were placed in large tin pans. These pans were oiled before the strudel or cookie dough was placed in them. The whole pan was shoved into the oven with the same long-handled tool and each pan was pulled out the same way. After the strudel and cookies were baked and properly cooled they were stored away in a special place which was locked, and these goodies were handed out only on special occasions. They were sometimes baked on Friday morning instead of Thursday if the latter day was too full.

The dough for the “lukshen” (noodles) was similar to strudel dough, except that it wasn’t rolled quite so thin. Mother cut the dough long ways into strips about three inches wide and stacked each strip on top of the other (each being dusted with flour to prevent sticking). She then cut the whole stack with a sharp knife into thin strips about ¼ inch wide with a quick, chopping motion of the knife in her right hand pursuing the movement of the fingers of her left hand which moved backward on the top of the stack. The cut ¼ inch strips were then separated and became “lukshen”. I expressed concern over the possible cutting of the fingers on the left hand with the fast moving sharp knife in her right hand, but mother laughed unconcernedly.

Mother would generally serve noodle soup on Friday evenings. When she wanted to vary the menu she cut the three-inch noodle strips into ¼ inch squares. This was called “fahrfel. Each was served with chicken soup, usually on alternate Fridays.

For the last preparations for the Sabbath, I used a quart bottle with a cork for the making of wine for the Friday Kiddish. I placed about half-a-pound of crushed raisins in the bottle which I then filled with water and closed tightly with the cork. Between Thursday and late Friday afternoon enough fermentation occurred so that wine for the Kiddish was available. Also on Friday my mother prepared the gefilte fish, the lukshen or fahrfel soup for the Friday evening meal and the chicken or meat dishes, the “tzimmis” (desert) and “chulent” for the Saturday meals. After making the wine it was my job to grate the horseradish to be eaten with the gefilte fish. “Fish without horseradish is like herring without onions”, mother said. The horseradish was so strong I could not keep the tears from streaming down my face. Mother would say that I should shed only those kind of tears if I had to cry at all.

By David B. Schreiber

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