

## ABOUT FLOUR

**A**LMOST ALL THE PEOPLE who gave me recipes did not specify what kind of flour to use, but simply said "flour"—white flour always being assumed. Many also gave no quantities, saying "as much flour as it takes" or "as much water as the flour absorbs." That is how recipes are passed on in traditional societies. When I started trying the recipes and measuring and weighing flours, I became alarmed by the disparities. For instance, 500 grams of all-purpose flour varied between  $3\frac{1}{2}$  and 4 cups; 500 grams of bread flour ranged from  $3\frac{1}{4}$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  cups. The amounts of egg or water that different batches of flour absorbed also varied. This was the case not only with flours from different sources but with those from the same. I have been making pizza dough for many years, with both all-purpose and bread flours. When I tried new recipes for my Italian book, I found that the amount of water I had recorded in my Mediterranean book was not right, and I phoned the British flour board. They explained that flour from wheat grown even in the same field varies from year to year in its capacity to absorb liquid, and that indeed the difference was marked between the two periods I mentioned. So I can only say, as my informants did: When using flour, be prepared to add a little more flour or a little more water as necessary.

## Hallah

### *The Braided Sabbath Bread*

MAKES 4 LOAVES

It is made with eggs and comes out so beautiful that you do not resent the labor.

2 tablespoons dry yeast  
2¼ cups (500 ml) lukewarm water  
½ cup (100 g) sugar  
4 eggs, beaten, plus 2 yolks or 1 whole egg  
for glazing  
1 tablespoon salt  
½ cup (125 ml) vegetable oil  
About 9¼ cups (1½ kg) flour  
Poppy or sesame seeds (optional)

Dissolve the yeast in the water with 1 teaspoon of the sugar. Beat well and leave 10 minutes, until it froths.

In a very large bowl, lightly beat the eggs. Then add the salt, sugar, and oil and beat again. Add the frothy yeast mixture and beat well. Now add the flour gradually, and just enough to make a soft dough that holds together, mixing well, first with a large spoon, then working it in with your hands. Knead vigorously for about 15 minutes, until it is very smooth and elastic, adding flour if the dough is too sticky. Pour a little oil in the bowl and turn the dough, so that it is greased all over. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it in a warm place to rise for 2–3 hours, or until it has doubled in bulk. Punch the dough down and knead again, then divide into four pieces to make 4 loaves.

*To make round hallah:* Take 1 piece of dough, roll it between your palms, and pull it out into a long fat rope about 18 inches (46 cm) long and 2 inches (5 cm) thick—a little fatter at one end. Take the fatter end and put it in the middle of an oiled baking sheet, then coil the rest of the rope around it like a snail. Continue with the remaining 3 pieces.

*To make braided hallah with 3 strands:* Divide 1 piece of the dough into 3. Roll each piece between your palms and pull into long thin ropes about 18 inches (46 cm) long and 1¼ inches (3 cm) wide. Pinch 1 end of all the strands together and plait them: bring the rope on the right over the middle one, then bring the one on the left over it and continue to the end. Pinch the ends together and tuck them under the loaf. You may find it easier to begin plaiting in the middle of the 3 strands and plait towards the 2 ends. Continue with the remaining 3 pieces.

Place the 4 loaves on well-oiled baking sheets, leaving plenty of room for them to expand, then leave to rise for 1 hour, or until doubled in bulk. Now brush gently with the beaten egg yolks, or, if you want to sprinkle with poppy or sesame seeds, brush first with the whole beaten egg (the seeds stick better if the white is there too). Bake in a preheated 350° F (180°C) oven for 30–40 minutes, or until the loaves are beautifully golden brown. They are done if they sound hollow when you tap the bottoms.

#### VARIATIONS FOR SWEET HALLAHS

- Add ½ cup (125 ml) honey to the beaten eggs.
- Add ¾ cup (100 g) raisins and knead them into the dough after it has risen and been punched down.

## HALLAH

**T**HE BRAIDED HALLAH, which is made with eggs, is the Jewish Sabbath-and-holiday bread. It is surrounded by folklore and tradition and loaded with symbolism. On festive occasions a blessing is said over two loaves, symbolizing the two portions of the manna that was distributed on Fridays to the children of Israel during their Exodus from Egypt. The breads are covered on the table by a white napkin, which represents the dew that collected on the manna in the morning. Poppy and sesame

seeds sprinkled on the bread also symbolize the manna that fell from heaven: Hallah is made in various sizes and shapes, all of which have a meaning. 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. Twelve humps from two small or one large braided bread recall the miracle of the twelve loaves for the twelve tribes of Israel. Round loaves, “where there is no beginning and no end,” are baked for Rosh Hashanah to symbolize continuity. Ladder and hand shapes are served