



8 THE JEWISH LEADER, FEBRUARY 27, 2015



By Edgar Asher, Ashernet

One of Eilat premier attractions has always been the Underwater Observatory Marine Park.

A few months ago a huge shark pool was opened at the observatory. The whole complex covers an area of some one thousand

## Looking sharks in the eye

square meters which has as its highlight a gigantic aquarium that houses presently some eighteen sharks. Some of these sharks when fully grown will reach about four meters in length.

The shark aquarium, which is the largest in the Middle East, is reached by going through an acrylic tunnel where visitors can see not only some of the sharks above their heads, but other sea creatures as well, including enormous rays.

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## Some great recipes for the Purim festival

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

When we American Jews, mostly Ashkenazi, think of Purim, our mouths begin to water in anticipation of hamantaschen. Whether made from cookie or yeast dough, and filled with mohn (poppy) or prune, apricot or chocolate, the three-cornered delight is an annual treat so yummy that some bakeries now feature them year-round. But there is so much more to savor at Purim time that this month, instead of chronicling my own personal travels, I offer a Purim culinary world tour, along with two recipes to enhance your holiday gustatory pleasure.

But first, a message from our all-time favorite, hamantaschen. The recipe I use is so good that, even years after my three children had "graduated" from nursery school, the school's director kept inviting me to come back to bake with the kids. (The secret is the orange rind in the dough.)

The word "hamantaschen" is actually a play on words. "Mohn" means poppy in both Yiddish and German. "Tasche" is the German word for pocket or purse. Together, the two words from "mohntaschen," the pastry's original name since the Middle Ages, and still a popular dessert in Germany. Since we Jews love to play with words, we added the "ha" to add our own twist to the delicious treat and make the pastry Haman's pockets. It was in these pockets that the evil vizier carried the lots, or Purim, designating the days for the Jews to be hanged on the gallows. (In case you don't know the story, Haman did not accomplish his goal, but ended up hanging on those same gallows.)

In Israel, the identical pastry is referred to as "oznei Haman," or Haman's ears.

Tradition has it that Queen Esther, in order to observe kashrut while living in the palace of King Ahashveros, maintained a strict vegetarian diet, relying on legumes, seeds, and nuts for protein. In honor of her reverence for Jewish law, vegetarian dishes (chickpea pizza, anyone?) are popular Purim mealtime choices around the world, as are desserts based on seeds (e.g., caraway bundt cake).

My friend and fellow congregant is an Israeli of Moroccan descent. David explained to me that

when he was growing up, and still today, all the Moroccan women in his neighborhood prepared a wonderful sweet dairy couscous with dried fruit. He lent me his Moroccan Jewish cookbook, giving me the honor of believing that I could translate the Hebrew and the metric measurements into useable English. His recipe does not include nuts, but others do. You will find one recipe in the sidebar.

The Jews of the Caucasus Mountains are proud of their origins in ancient Persia, so for them the holiday has a personal resonance. These Members of the Tribe enjoy a halva called Hadassah, after Queen Esther's Hebrew name. I have found several recipes for this delicacy, all different, but none resemble the sesame-based confection my father used to buy for me at the local delicatessen when I was a child.

By the way, Purim happens to be the holiday on which Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, was founded. Back in 1912, the group's founders chose the name Hadassah, not only because of the establishment on the holiday, but because they hoped to emulate the courage and steadfastness of its namesake.

The holiday of Purim falls on the first full moon after Tu B'Shevat, and Jews of Yemenite background prepare almond crescent cookies to eat and to share. My guess is that the Yemenites realized that nobody would get the connection between the full moon and a round cookie that looks like every other cookie on the block, so the crescent shape lets us know that it is in honor of the holiday's position in the calendar. Butter, brown sugar, and finely ground almonds make these cookies delectable alone, or with tea.

While not necessarily a Purim dish, I think bourekas should be added to the list of traditional holiday treats. They are a very popular Middle Eastern nosh and, since they are indeed triangular in shape, they make a savory hamantaschen to serve as appetizers or, as Israelis do, with salad, olives, and leben or shamenet (alternatively, plain yogurt).

### Sweet Dairy Couscous With Cinnamon and Almonds

This dish is very popular among Moroccan Jews at Purim. While you are certainly welcome to prepare

the pasta the old-fashioned way — mixing semolina flour with water, rolling the dough into tiny balls, sifting it over a sieve to remove any excess flour, then steaming the final product over boiling water or a stew — you don't have to. American supermarkets carry instant couscous in packages. Phew!

#### Ingredients:

- ½ c. butter, cut into small pieces
- 1½ c. couscous
- Pinch of salt
- 1 t. cinnamon
- 1 c. mixed dried fruits, chopped
- ¾ c. slivered almonds, toasted
- 1½ c. milk
- 1 c. hot milk or cream

#### Directions:

Cut butter in small chunks and let come to room temperature.

Combine couscous with a small pinch of salt in a medium saucepan. Shake pan to spread couscous in an even layer.

Cut the butter into small pieces and distribute half of it over the couscous.

Bring the 1½ cups of milk to a boil in a medium saucepan.

Pour milk evenly over couscous.

Immediately cover pan tightly and let stand for five minutes.

Place remaining butter pieces over top, cover and let couscous stand one minute.

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## FILM FESTIVAL OPENS MARCH 3 CONT. FROM PAGE 1

Luna Ristorante Italiano in New London and The Pita Spot in Mystic will both offer movie-goers a 15 percent discount off their dinner's bill. Please check out the **Restaurants** tab on the Film Festival web site for more information and to download your coupon for a discount on your dinner. See also page 6 of this paper for a copy of the coupon. Please remember to check back frequently as we hope to have additional restaurants participate.

We would like to give a heartfelt and sincere *Todah Rabah* to our local sponsors whose consistent generosity enables us to present the International Film Festival. These gracious sponsors

include: Angel: Copy Cats Printing and Copying, Steven and Debra Daren, Secor Subaru; Producer: Suisman Shapiro, Attorneys at Law; Olde Mistick Village, Waterford Group Charitable Foundation, LLC; Director: Block, Janney & Pascal, LLC, Attorneys at Law, Carol Curland, Chelsea Groton Bank, Kenn and Kim Fischburg.

Finally, The IFF Committee deserves our thanks for all the hard work they have done in movie selection, publicity and all the little things that go on behind the scenes to make an event successful: Co-Chairs Sherry Barnes and Fay Clymer; Committee Members: Ken Alter, Arlene Dressler, Barry & Cecile Feldman,

Rick Gipstein, Judi Glicenstein, Gail & Ron Leaser, Daniel Robinson, Justin Shafner, Matthew Shafner, Rachel Sheriff, Barry & Flo Weinbaum, and Marcia Wolman.

We are very excited about this year's International Film Festival and we hope you are, too! We look forward to seeing you at The Garde Arts Center for Opening Night on Tuesday, March 3!

## PURIM RECIPES CONT. FROM PAGE 8

Fluff mixture with a fork, tossing until mixture is blended. Spoon into individual bowls and sprinkle cinnamon, dried fruit, and toasted almonds over the couscous. Serve with heated milk or cream.

### Persian Halva

The word "halva" means "sweet" in Arabic. This Persian recipe is very different from that for the sesame candy familiar from Jewish American delicatessens. More like a slightly gelatinous pudding than a candy, this dessert is customarily included in baskets as part of the custom of sending *mishloah manot* to friends and neighbors.

#### Ingredients:

2 T. oil

2 c. grain white rice  
4 c. water  
½ c. sugar  
1 t. ground cinnamon  
1 t. ground cardamom  
2 or 3 strands of saffron  
½ c. boiling water



#### Directions:

Heat the oil in a large skillet over high heat and fry the rice until it is lightly browned.

Transfer rice to a heavy-based saucepan, add water and all

but 1 tablespoon of the sugar, and the spices except saffron.

Cook over very low heat, stirring frequently, until mixture is smooth, about 45 minutes.

In a bowl, mash the reserved sugar with the saffron and add boiling water.

Stir this mixture into the rice and continue to cook, stirring, for 10 minutes.

Let cool, then pour into individual bowls and chill.

## MENTION CONT. FROM PAGE 2

flour until it is firm enough to withstand being rolled out.

Gently roll out dough until it is 1/4 inch thick. Cut into rounds with a circular cookie cutter or the rim of a wide-mouthed glass and put on a baking sheet. Dot each circle with filling (see below). Sprinkle with grated cheddar or jack cheese, if desired. Pinch corners into triangles. Bake at 375 for 15-20 minutes until delicately browned.

### Savory Onion and Mushroom Filling

#### Ingredients

¾ pound white cap or cremini mushrooms  
1 medium onion, diced  
4 tbsp olive oil  
¼ cup red wine  
pinch salt

#### Directions

Remove mushroom stems and chop finely. Chop onion into a small dice. Heat oil in a large pan or skillet over medium heat and brown onions - 5-8 minutes. Add mushrooms and let cook until fragrant and about halved in size. Add red wine and salt and cook an additional 2-3 minutes, until liquid is dissolved. Let cool before stuffing into hamantaschen. If you have leftover filling, it also makes a great pasta topper or bruschetta.

#### Filling variations:

- feta, spinach and kalamata olives
- sun-dried tomatoes and ricotta.

Baklava Hamantaschen  
1 pkg filo dough, thawed  
1/2 cup melted butter or margarine  
2 cups chopped walnuts  
1 cup loosely packed light brown sugar  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1/2 tsp salt  
1/2 cup apricot jam  
1/2 cup water

Grease an 8 x 8" baking dish with melted butter and set aside. Add the chopped nuts, brown sugar, cinnamon and salt to a food processor or blender. Pulse the mixture until the nuts are chopped more finely (but not ground) and the mixture is combined.

Remove filo from packaging and cut sheets so that you have

18 squares the size of the baking dish (a little smaller than 8" x 8" so it fits well). Separate the filo into 3 parts with 6 square layers in each. Cover the layers with a damp cloth as they tend to dry out quickly. Starting with the first set of 6 layers, brush melted butter in between each layer, placing them in the baking dish on top of each other.

Spread half of the nut filling over the first stack of filo dough in the baking dish. Repeat with the second stack of filo dough, brushing butter in between each layer, stacking it in the baking dish, and topping it with the 2nd half of the nut filling.

Take the third stack of filo dough and brush butter in between each layer, but DO NOT layer it in the baking dish. Instead, set the buttered stack on your work surface. Using a triangular-shaped cookie cutter, gently press your knife down on the filo dough to form triangular-shaped guides that will show you where to cut the filo later. MAKE SURE NOT TO CUT THROUGH THE LAYERS OF FILO DOUGH. This is only meant as a guide to show you where to cut the baklava later, when all the layers are stacked. Once you have drawn your guide, take a smaller triangular cookie cutter and cut through the layers of filo to remove their centers, resembling hamantaschen.

Take your final stack of filo dough, with the triangular guides and hollowed out centers, and place it in the baking dish over the previously set layers. Now you can take your knife and following the guide, cut the triangular shapes all the way through the layers. Brush the top layer of filo with butter and bake the baklava at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes, until golden.

While the baklava is baking, add apricot jam and water to a pot and heat the jam until it begins to melt into a syrup. Use a whisk or spoon to break up the jam, and continue to cook until a thin syrup forms. Remove from the heat and pour into a small jug or pitcher.

Remove the baklava from the oven and pour apricot syrup over it, brushing with a pastry brush, if needed.

NOTE: For a healthier version, you may spray each layer of filo dough with butter flavored PAM instead of using real butter.

VARIATION: You may use other kinds of nuts such as pistachios or almonds, or use a combination.

TIP: If you do not have triangular shaped cookie cutters, you can prepare your own template using heavy cardstock to serve as your guide.

## Netanyahu declines Dems

By Michael Wilner,  
Jerusalem Post

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declined an invitation by Senate Democrats to meet during his visit to Washington next week, citing fears it might "compound the misperception of partisanship" surrounding the trip.

"I regret that the invitation to address the special joint session of Congress has been perceived by some to be political or partisan," reads the letter, obtained by The Jerusalem Post. "I can assure you that my sole intention in accepting it was to voice Israel's grave concerns about a potential nuclear agreement with Iran that could threaten the survival of my country."

The letter was addressed to Senators Richard Durbin (D-Illinois) and Dianne Feinstein (D-California), who invited the prime minister to discuss his concerns in detail to Democrats in a closed-door environment, in addition to the address.

Netanyahu said he considers the speech an opportunity to address the representatives of the American people, and not of one particular political party.

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