

# Traveling with Jewish Taste®

## Barley Through the Ages

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



“When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest. He shall elevate the sheaf before the Lord for acceptance on your behalf.” (Leviticus 23:10-11)

That “first sheaf” consisted of newly harvested barley, one of the seven Biblical species and one of the earliest grain crops known to humanity.

Before the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews associated Passover less with *matzah* than with barley. On the second night of Passover, Jews around the world begin to count the *omer* for a period of fifty days. This practice stems from the ritual of bringing the *omer* of-

fering to the Temple.

In ancient times, the grain harvest lasted seven weeks, beginning with the harvesting of the barley during Passover and ending with the harvesting of the wheat at Shavuot.

Before the general harvest, the Sanhedrin – the supreme religious body during the days of the Temple – would send three agents to the barley field at night. These agents would cut sheaves of barley and place them into the bins. An *omer* was actually a bound bundle of grain.

During the night, they would winnow the edible seeds from the chaff, toast the seeds, and then grind and strain them into fine flour.

They reserved a measure (one-tenth of an *ephah*) for the *omer* offering. The next morning, they mixed the ground barley flour with olive oil and frankincense, at which point the *kohen* (“the priest”) put a handful of it on the fire in the middle of the altar. The rest of the grain was distributed to the other *kohanim* to eat.

Until this entire process was done, from cutting the barley to sacrificing it, it was forbidden to eat any new grain, so any new grain harvested before Passover could not be eaten until the *omer* offering had been completed. Ironically, barley is one of the five grains prohibited to Jews during Passover.

Fifty days of counting later, a new offering of both wheat and first fruits were offered at the Festival of Shavuot. The ritual cycle that begins with the priest presenting “the first sheaf,” ends with an offering of “the first fruits.”

Barley, a cereal grain, is a member of the grass family. The wild form of the grain could be found in a wide swath from North Africa and Crete in the west, all the way to Tibet in the east, but was domesticated in a much narrower area, from the “Fertile Crescent” to Israel.

Evidence of wild barley was found in an archaeological dig, dated to 8500 BCE, at the southern end of the Lake Kinneret in the Galilee. Digs in Syria have dated the cultivation of barley from around 8,500 to 10,000 BCE.



A Biblical barley harvest



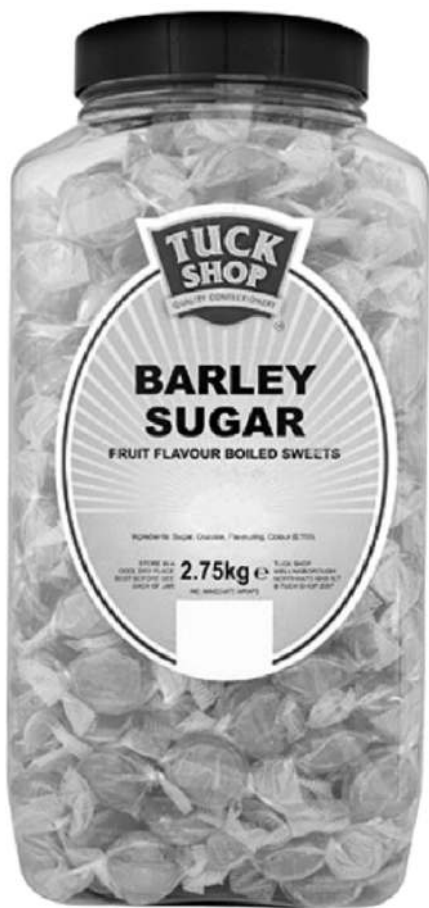
Lake Kinneret, in the Galilee, where barley was found in an archaeological dig, dated to 8500 BCE

Barley served as a foundation of our ancestors’ diet due to its resilience in the searing desert heat. Since it was the major grain of the time, it is not surprising that the Torah mentions it frequently, and all of the references make it clear that barley was a staple of the ancient diet whose preservation was critical.

The Book of Exodus tells of a pounding rain of hailstones “by which the barley was smitten,” one of the ten plagues brought on the Egyptians.

The Prophet Ezekiel paid penance to God by eating a diet relying on barley. And the Book

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Noted in *Mary Poppins*, barley sugar candy can be found in English shops



Barley grows wild in Israel’s Jordan Valley



Ruth gleaned barley from the fields of Boaz

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## 'Close Encounters' Presents: The "Degenerate" Music Hitler Hated

LENOX – At 6 p.m. on Saturday, June 2, "Close Encounters With Music" will present "The Roaring Twenties: Berlin, Paris, New York" at Tangelwood's Ozawa Hall.

The production, including lively commentary from founder, artistic director, and cellist Yehuda Hanani revisits brilliant, razor-sharp, wicked, and enduring songs – "S Wonderful," "Billbao," "Speak Low," "Makin' Whoopee," "Supply and Demand" – of the jazz era; atonal tunes that Hitler hated and his Third Reich would soon ban as "Entartete," degenerate and Jewish, rooted in Black culture, and thus, by definition, "undesirable."

The music of the time and the careers and legacies of its composers – Kurt Weill, Alexander Zemlinsky, Hanns Eisler, Francis Poulenc, Arnold Schoenberg, and Erwin Schulhoff – were interrupted and irrevocably altered by the rise of Hitler and

the forced and enforced German subscription to his rigid musical taste.

Under the new laws jazz and cabaret, which had been embraced just a few years earlier, were now viewed as decadent and posing a threat to the ideals of National Socialism and Arayan higher culture – innovative and dynamic visual art, films, and theatre were similarly censored.

Adolf Ziegler, President of the Reich Culture Chamber, sternly admonished: "Our patience with all those who have not been able to fall in line is at an end. These are crippled products, rubbish of madness, impertinence, and lack of talent to be cleared out. This will happen!"

Soon, in Germany, the works of many met Ziegler's promised fate: among them, perhaps the world's greatest musical team, George and Ira Gershwin; Eisler's music got him ejected from his homeland for subversiveness; Schulhoff, a European



Artistic Director Yehuda Hanani

apostle of jazz, would die in a concentration camp – his edgy piano movements titled "Charleston," "Blues," "Chanson," "Tango," and "Kitten on the Keys" having flown in the face of the "pure," austere, traditional melodies favored by the Fuehrer.

"The Roaring Twenties: Berlin, Paris, New York" re-introduces these more often than



Mezzo-soprano Jennifer Rivera will help bring the jazz of Jewish composers alive

not neglected composers whose works were suppressed, or fully silenced, during the Nazi Era, and places them and their music within the context of twentieth century composition.

Along with Hanani performers include mezzo-soprano Jennifer Rivera; tenor Will Ferguson; and pianist James Tocco.

Tickets are \$50 and \$40. For

information and reservations, please call (800) 843-0778 or visit [www.cewm.org](http://www.cewm.org). For audience members holding a preferred seating package at \$125 a reception following the concert at the Gateways Inn, 51 Walker Street is included.

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of Ruth, customarily read on the Festival of Shavuot, describes the barley – not the poorly-translated "corn" – harvest, during which Ruth gleaned from kinsman Boaz's fields; and, when King David's son, Absalom, ordered his servants to burn Joab's fields, it was barley that was set afire.

Barley has been such an essential component of the world's nutrition that it came to signify a standard in many areas. A barleycorn is a single grain of the cereal. Beginning in medieval times, the barleycorn came to refer to a unit of length.

This measure evolved into the familiar system of inches and feet we use to this day, whereby an inch consisted of three barleycorns. In fact, shoe sizing is still based on the barleycorn standard. In other areas of measurement, the barleycorn grain evolved into the "gram" for weighing items in the metric system.

People have found many different uses for barley other than simply as a grain in stews, soups, and breads. Barley malt, used as a sweetener, originated in China before it spread to Japan, where it was again used to sweeten.

The ancient Egyptians made beer from barley; there it was so highly valued that it was used as both an offering to the Gods and as wages to workers. Archaeologists have discovered evidence that the men building the pyramids at Giza were given beer as part of their rations.

In the beloved P.L. Travers' book *Mary Poppins*, the Banks children were adamant that any nanny of theirs should never smell of barley water. However, barley sugar candy was another matter.



The ancient Egyptians enjoyed barley beer – and also paid it out as wages and offered it to the Gods



Used as a unit of measure, the single barleycorn evolved into the system of inches and feet in use today

In one story, Mary Poppins took her charges to a sweet shop to buy gingerbread, and the proprietor, Mrs. Corry, magically snapped off a few fingers that morphed into barley sugar candy, a caramel-like confection that pleased the children.

And, barley is used not only for food. The ancients wasted nothing. After winnowing the seeds from the plant, they dried the stalks into straw for weaving into mats, baskets, and shoes. Tied into bunches, the barley stalks made excellent thatch for the roofs of their houses.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She recently launched the blog "Food for Thought," on her website at [carolgoodmankaufman.com](http://carolgoodmankaufman.com). She invites visits and comments.

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## Eggplant and Barley Salad

Even though, during the days of the Temple, the barley harvest and offering took place at Passover, it is one of the five grains Jews are prohibited from enjoying during the holiday – along with wheat, rye, oats, and spelt. So, why not combine it with the dairy that is traditionally eaten at Shavuot? This recipe, redolent of Mediterranean spices and mint, calls for both barley and cheese, making it the perfect luncheon dish for Shavuot.



### Ingredients:

1-1/2 lb. eggplant, cut into one-half inch cubes	2-1/2 cups water
3/4 lb. zucchini, cut into one-half inch cubes	2 teaspoons pareve chicken powder
10 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil	2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
Salt	1 garlic clove, minced
Black pepper	1/4 teaspoon sugar
1 cup chopped scallions	1/2 lb. cherry tomatoes, quartered
1-1/2 teaspoons ground cumin	1/3 cup kalamata olives, pitted and halved
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander	1/2 cup chopped red onion
Dash cayenne	1 chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1-1/4 cups pearl barley	1/2 cup chopped fresh mint
	1 package feta cheese, crumbled

### Directions:

#### Roast eggplant and zucchini:

- Put oven racks in upper and lower thirds of oven and preheat oven to 425 degrees F.
- Toss eggplant and zucchini with five tablespoons oil, one-half teaspoon salt, and three-quarters teaspoon pepper in a bowl, then spread on two cookie sheets that have been coated with vegetable spray.
- Roast vegetables in oven, stirring occasionally and switching position of pans halfway through baking, until vegetables are golden brown and tender, twenty to twenty-five minutes total. Remove from oven and let cool.

#### Cook barley:

- Heat two tablespoons oil in a large pan or wok over moderately high heat until hot, then cook scallion, cumin, coriander, and cayenne, stirring, about one minute. Add barley and stir, cooking two minutes more. Stir in the pareve chicken broth powder into water, and add to pan, bringing to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until all of liquid is absorbed and barley is tender, thirty to forty minutes. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, five minutes.
- Transfer to a large pan or platter to cool, about twenty minutes.

#### Make dressing:

- Whisk together lemon juice, garlic, sugar, and remaining one-quarter teaspoon salt, one-quarter teaspoon pepper, and three tablespoons of oil.

#### Assemble the salad:

- Put all the ingredients together in a large bowl and pour dressing over all.

Serves four as a main course or eight as a side dish.