

## Young Judaism

### "A Jew": Look

By Talia Weisberg



Educator, Finegold



Advocate, McCoy



Singer, Shore



Poet, Hidery



Entrepreneur, Handler



Doll, Barbie

They all look Jewish

When you Google Image "Jew" and "Orthodox Jews," skimming the results, almost all of the pictures are of white Ashkenazic-looking males – and, as they make up a very small minority of photos, it's like 'women and non-Ashkenazics 'need not apply.'

One exception, the much-loved "Tefillin Barbie" – yet there's no quickly seen photo of Ruth Mosko Handler, the inventor of Barbie and co-founder of Mattel, Inc.

I suppose these results just mirror the reality of the world's thinking. When asked to picture a Jew, most people will immediately think of a bearded rabbi, or a male with a big nose – even if they don't personally know one. Few will envision a female, a non-white, or a non-Ashkenazic.

Well, at least it's an improvement from when people really thought that Jews had horns, right? That myth might've taken a few centuries to dispel, but I really do think that in a generation or two from now, the Google Image results for "Jew" and "Orthodox Jews" will be different.

Nowdays, there are so many more women role models within the religious and secular Jewish communities and their number will only increase.

In synagogues, there are women like Rabba Sara Hurwitz of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale (New York), Rachel Kohl Finegold, the Education & Ritual Director at Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation in Chicago, and Dina Najman, the "Head of the Congregation" at Kehilat Orach Eliezer in Manhattan.

Female *mashgihot* (kosher certifiers) are also increasing; while such as Yavilah McCoy, an African-American Jewish woman, is active in advocacy for Jews of color and Idit Klein, the Executive Director of Keshet, proves that Jews can be included in the community no matter what their sexual orientation.

In addition, more and more, Jewish women in the entertainment industry let their Jewish identities be known and are proud to be Jewishly engaged. Today, everybody knows that actress Natalie Portman is a Jew, but let's face it, back in the Fifties how many knew that singer Dinah Shore was Jewish.

I think that poet Vanessa Hidary really embodies the point of this article. Hidary is a Sephardic woman who's trying to tell the world that anyone can be a Jew –

regardless of what they look like.

I had the honor of interviewing her a while ago, having fallen in love with her work when I first heard this poem:

#### The Hebrew Mamita

I'm thinking, I'm saying  
What does Jewish look like to you?  
Should I fiddle on a (expletive) roof for you?  
Should I humor you with oy veys and refuse to pay?  
Oh, 'cause you know how we like to Jew you down  
Jew you down, I'd like to throw you down!

I'm the Hebrew mamita

Long-lost daughter of Abraham and Sarah

The sexy oy-veying chutzpah-having non-cheaping non-conspiracizing always-questioning hip hop-listening Torah scroll-reading all people-loving Pride-filled Jewish girl.

Bigging up all people who are a little miffed  
'Cause someone tells you you don't look like  
Or act like your people.  
Impossible because you are your people.

You just tell them they don't look,  
Period.

Talia Weisberg is a junior at Manhattan High School for Girls. She is the co-creator of *Maidelle* (maidelle.com), a writing website for Jewish teenage girls.

## Traveling with Jewish Taste®

### Dates – Soft, Sensuous, and Seriously Sweet

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



If there is one food that conjures up images of camel caravans, desert oases, fragrant spices, and Turkish coffee boiling over an open fire – it's the date. Soft, sensuous, and seriously sweet, the fruit of the date palm is God's gift to humanity.

One of the trees specifically mentioned in the Torah is the date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera*. We first encounter this tree in the Torah when the Israelites flee Egypt. Having just experienced the bitter waters at Marah, they were thrilled to find the wooded, freshwater oasis at Elim. "Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they encamped beside the water." (Exodus 15:27)

Forty years later in the Biblical narrative, we read about "a land flowing with milk and honey." However, archaeologists believe that the honey is not the clover variety we can purchase at Stop and Shop, but, rather, syrup made from dates.

The Book of Psalms likened the tree, with its towering, straight-as-a-ruler trunk as a metaphor for righteousness in the verse: "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar on Lebanon." (Psalm 92:12).

King Solomon described his beloved by writing, "Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit." (Song of Songs 7:7-8) By coincidence, Solomon's sister was named Tamar, a reflection on her beauty and grace.

The date palm was also a prominent decorative feature in the Temple in Jeru-

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PHOTO: ALFRED MOLON



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#### DEADLINES

The next *Berkshire Jewish Voice* (Vol. 20, No. 9) will cover the period August 10, 2012 through September 9, 2012. The following edition (Vol. 20, No. 10) covers September 10, 2012 through November 25, 2012. **The deadline for press releases and other written submissions, all of which are subject to being edited, is August 10, 2012. Because of limitations of space and time, please be so kind as to not submit lengthy articles without first contacting the editor. Advertising deadline is August 20, 2012.** For a complete *Berkshire Jewish Voice* schedule, contact (413) 442-4360, ext. 11, or e-mail jfb.berkshirevoice@verizon.net.

## TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE,

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salem. First Kings describes palm trees, as well as cherubim and open flowers, carved "... in both the inner and outer rooms... on the two olive-wood doors, overlaid with hammered gold," and "on two doors of juniper wood," also overlaid with hammered gold." (Verses 29,32, and 35) In Second Chronicles, we read that King Solomon "... paneled the main hall with juniper and covered it with fine gold and decorated it with palm tree and chain designs." (Verse 5)

The Prophet Ezekiel had a vision during the Babylonian Exile in which he foresaw a third Temple being built. Chapter 40 describes its architecture in great detail, with palm trees inscribed upon the posts of the chambers, courtyards, and gateways.

It is not hard to understand why the date palm is such an important decorative feature in early Jewish life. Wanderers in the desert knew that if they came to an oasis on which palms grew that they would find water, that most precious of life-saving commodities. In addition, the delicious fruit of the date palm could provide necessary, and delicious, nutrition. While the ancients might not have known about vitamins and minerals, they did know that they would be refreshed and energized by the fruit – the date is an excellent source of dietary fiber, Vitamins A and K, antioxidants, iron, potassium, calcium, manganese, copper, and magnesium, among other nutrients.

The date palm is believed to have originated in the Middle East about 6,000 years ago, in the area between the Persian Gulf and the Nile River. Date seeds were often planted in desert oases, where a supply of water would be ensured.

Iraq is the world leader in date production, with an estimated twenty-two million date palms in that country producing nearly 600,000 tons of dates annually. Other countries where dates grow include Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, the Sudan, Arabia and Iran.

Arab traders transported dates to Spain, and from there the fruit traveled to France. Today, over 1,500 date palm varieties are found in places as diverse as Jamaica, Mexico, Arizona, and California.

The largest and perhaps the best-known variety of the Moroccan dates is the Medjool. Often referred to as "the king of dates," it was once reserved only for Moroccan royalty.

The Medjool is now grown in California and marketed as a deluxe confection.

The date palm was a major component of the Judean economy, and dense thick forests grew in the desert around the Dead Sea in the south, helping Jericho to become a major population center, as well as around Lakes Kinneret and Hula in the north.

The palm was such an important source of food, shelter, and shade for thousands of years that its likeness was engraved on ancient Hebrew shekel. It is today featured on the NIS ten-shekel coin.

When the Romans captured ancient Judaea, the Emperor Vespasian ordered the minting of a bronze coin that depicted the Jewish state as a weeping woman sitting under a palm tree. The legend on the coin reads, "Upon the capture of Judaea."

The Judean date is even mentioned in the Koran, and Muslims break their fasts during Ramadan by eating dates.

The Judean date palm was thought to have become extinct about 2,000 years ago, but in 2005, a preserved 2,000-year-old seed sprouted and was named Methuselah for the long-lived Biblical figure. Some of the found seeds were then planted at Kibbutz Ketura in the Arava desert.

Research is now being conducted to determine if any medicinal properties can be found. Apparently, there is evidence that the Judean date was historically used for fertility, as aphrodisiacs, against infections, and against tumors.

The eeriest story about the date takes place in World War I, when the Jewish spy group, NILI, hoped to aid the British throw off the yolk of Turkish oppression and advance the Zionist cause. Aaron Aaronson, the NILI's leader, tried to convince the British that he and his colleagues would be a valuable source of intelligence in fighting the Turks. One of his selling points was his ability to move freely around the country under the guise of his agricultural research.

Although the British initially rebuffed his advances, they ultimately realized that he and his colleagues, including his sister Sarah, could prove valuable sources of intelligence.

Most of the members of the NILI core group were captured or killed. Among them was Avshalom Feinberg, who was shot while trying to cross through Sinai to Egypt. Decades later, after Israel had conquered the Sinai during the Six Day War, an elderly Bedouin led an Israel Defense Forces officer to a spot known locally as Kabir Yehudi (the Jew's grave), where a single date palm grew.

Skeletal remains under the tree were exhumed and identified as belonging to Feinberg. The tree had sprouted from a date that had been in his pocket.

Nearly fifty years after his lonely death, Feinberg was laid to rest in the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

*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. She invites visits and comments.*

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## Moroccan Braised Chicken With Dates

For out-of-hand eating, nothing can beat a fresh Medjool date, a large and luscious caramel-and-honey flavored delight. But, the fruit has also played an important part in Moroccan cuisine for centuries, and it is perfect for this recipe that conjures up an atmosphere of exotic Middle Eastern nights.



### Ingredients:

6 chicken breasts	3 cups chicken broth
1 Tablespoon of flour	5 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, divided
1 Tablespoon of extra-virgin olive oil	12 dates, pitted and halved, preferably Medjool
10 large garlic cloves, peeled	1/4 cup almonds, toasted and chopped
3 cinnamon sticks	1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
1-1/2 teaspoons ground ginger	
1 teaspoon ground cumin	
1/2 teaspoon turmeric	
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper	

### Directions:

- Sprinkle chicken breasts with salt, pepper, and flour.
- Heat olive oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat.
- Add half the chicken to pot and cook until browned on all sides, turning occasionally, about fifteen minutes.
- Transfer chicken to baking sheet or platter and repeat with the remaining chicken.
- Pour off all but two tablespoons of the fat from the pot and discard.
- Reduce heat to medium.
- Add garlic cloves to the pot and sauté until golden, about six minutes.
- Add cinnamon sticks, ginger, cumin, turmeric, and cayenne.
- Stir until fragrant for about one minute.
- Increase heat to high and add broth and three tablespoons of the lemon juice.
- Bring to boil, then reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer until the garlic begins to soften, about fifteen minutes.
- Place chicken on top of garlic in the pot and bring to boil over medium heat.
- Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for about 25 minutes.
- Transfer chicken and garlic to platter; cover with foil. Place in cold oven and set to 250 degrees to keep warm while sauce is cooking.
- Boil juices in pot until slightly thickened, about ten minutes. Stir in dates and the remaining two tablespoons lemon juice.
- Reduce heat and simmer gently until dates are heated through, about two minutes.
- Pour sauce and dates over chicken. Sprinkle with almonds and parsley, and serve on a bed of couscous.

**Serves 6**