

CULTURE & ARTS

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

All Ears or Hats Off?

Either way, Purim's in the pocket

By Carol Goodman Kaufman / Special to the BJV

It's that time of year again, when we start to use up all our chametz in the great pre-Passover purge. And what better way to make use of the flour in our cabinets than with a nice big batch of hamantaschen?

The tradition of eating hamantaschen on Purim didn't actually take hold until the late 18th century, quite a bit after the story in the *megillah* takes place. It probably came about because the German branch of the extended Diaspora family enjoyed a particular pastry called "mohntaschen," or "poppy seed pockets." Our Jewish forebears, always fans of wordplay, decided to turn the pockets into triangles, stick Haman's name on them, and call them "hamantaschen."

The choice of the triangular shape for *hamantaschen* has several explanations. The first is that the triangular shape of the cookie reminds us of Haman's three-cornered hat. I find this a bit laughable. How do we even know what kind of hat Haman wore back in ancient Persia? Given the very hot desert sun of the place, he probably did wear something to cover his head, but a three-corner hat? Wasn't that the fashionable headgear in Europe in the late 18th century, precisely when *hamantaschen* became a popular Purim treat?



Haman's hat or Haman's ears?

As for the term "pockets," themselves, some say that the pastries represent the greedy Haman's pockets filled with ill-gotten gains.

But in Israel, of course, these tasty treats go by the name "oznei Haman," or Haman's ears. Some culinary historians believe that this term refers to the custom of cutting off the ears of condemned men before execution. Again, we may have a little problem with that interpretation. The *megillah* tells us that Haman and his sons were hanged, their ears presumably intact.

But why would we ever want to eat anything with Haman's name attached to it? Perhaps we do it for the same reason that we make lots of noise to block out his name while listening to the *megillah*. We eat the thing with his name on it to demolish it.

Or maybe the reason goes even further back. Haman is said to be a descendant of Amalek, the perfidious people who attacked the most vulnerable Israelites in the desert.

Which brings me to the three commandments related to that dastardly tribe. The Book of Devarim (25:17) tells us first to "Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, as you left Egypt" and then not to forget. Finally, the third commandment requires an action: "...you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Hence, every time a scribe begins writing a new Torah scroll, he or she will write the name Amalek on a strip of parchment, then strike it out three times with black ink.

Again, we eat the thing with his name on it to demolish it – then send it into the sewer.

The traditional filling for hamantaschen is poppy seed, but other choices include prune, apricot, and even chocolate. And while the most common *hamantaschen* found in this country are based on a cookie dough (and we all know that Adele Goldblum's (z"l) recipe is tops), the Eastern European version my Bubbie made was based on a yeast dough, finished with a sweet glaze.

Having said all that, I got this new hamantaschen recipe from my friend Benita Ross, who got it from her sister-in-law. I think it's divine.



Gingerbread Hamantaschen

INGREDIENTS:

2½ cups flour
2 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp cocoa powder
½ tsp baking soda
½ tsp allspice
¼ tsp kosher salt

¼ tsp black pepper (freshly ground if possible)
1 egg
2 sticks butter
⅓ cup molasses
⅓ cup sugar
1 jar lemon curd

DIRECTIONS:

Beat everything except the lemon curd together until dough forms.

Roll dough out onto floured board and cut into circles, using a large glass.

Fill with 1 teaspoon lemon curd.

Bake at 375 degrees for 12-15 minutes, rotating trays halfway through.

Cool on racks.

Enjoy! (Betcha can't eat just one!)



Under the name Carolinda Goodman, **Carol Goodman Kaufman** has just published her third picture book for young children. *Detective Bears and Friends* introduces readers to the whimsical names that various animal groups are called. In addition to her work for children, Kaufman also writes under her "real" name about food history (including for the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*). Her first novel, *The First Murder*, is set in the Berkshires.



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