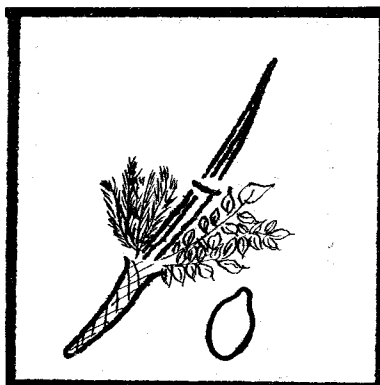


SHABBAT

The greatest of the holidays is Shabbat. It is the most familiar and the most welcome. Beginning Friday evening at sundown and lasting until Saturday evening at sundown, Shabbat is a day of rest, set aside for prayer and reflection and sharing with family. Shabbat is represented as a queen, and is looked forward to each week, as a special guest who is coming to visit. Traditionally, one saves his or her special clothes, favorite reading materials, and favorite foods for Shabbat.

The Friday evening meal is usually the most sumptuous meal of the week. It is also characterized by the best and favorite foods. The meal begins with a blessing over wine which sanctifies the day and with a blessing over two loaves of challah, the twisted egg bread. The dishes that follow depend on family tradition, but common fare is chicken soup, chopped liver, roast chicken or brisket, potato kugel, a cooked vegetables, fresh fruit and vegetables and a special dessert. On Saturday afternoon a cholent (a stew that cooks for 18-24 hours with beans, vegetables, and meat) is traditionally enjoyed. Because cooking is prohibited on Shabbat, the cholent is started Friday afternoon and cooks until the family returns from the synagogue on Saturday afternoon.

Besides the spirit and the peace of Shabbat, it is the smells of the clean house and special cooking and baking that distinguish the day as beloved in the minds of the Jewish people.

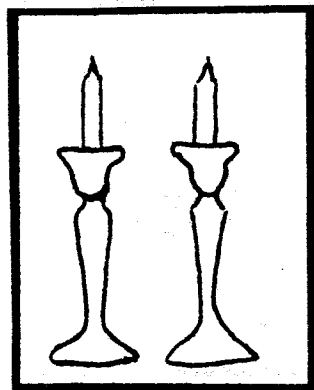


ROSH HASHANAH/ YOM KIPPUR

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, and Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, are referred to as the Days of Awe, the Yamin Noraim. These holidays are not marked by revelry, but are a time for introspection and review of one's self. It is a period for reestablishing relationships between man/woman and man/woman and between man/woman and God. The good wishes that people share with each other are for a sweet and healthy year.

The foods that are eaten on Rosh Hashanah reflect the desire for a sweet and prosperous year. Apples and challah are dipped in honey to symbolize the desire for a sweet and fruitful year. Carrot or prune tsimmes, sweet stews, are traditional delicacies. Taiglach, a honey candy, and honey cake are prepared for desserts. Round challahs like crowns are served to represent the kingship of God.

The penitential period culminates with Yom Kippur, a day of fasting and continuous prayer. The meal before the fast contains the apples and honey and round challahs like the Rosh Hashanah meals, but otherwise it is bland and unspiced. Chicken soup, kreplach, and boiled chicken are often served. The fast is broken the following evening with a dairy brunch-type dinner.



SUCCOTH & SIMCHAT TORAH

Five days after Yom Kippur comes Succoth and a change of mood from repentance to joyous celebration. In the liturgy of the eight days of Succoth and Simchat Torah, the ninth day, are referred to as "the time of our rejoicing." Succoth is called the Feast of Booths, because succahs, or huts, are built outside of our homes to commemorate our ancestors who lived in temporary dwellings during their exodus from Egypt. Meals are eaten in the succah during the holiday and it is also customary to sleep in them. Succoth is also one of the three harvest/thanksgiving festivals. (The other two are Passover and Shavuot.)

It is customary to serve fruits and vegetables as symbols of the harvest. Meals are still begun by dipping apples and challah in honey. Traditional foods are cabbage borscht, stuffed cabbage, kreplach and strudels.

HANUKKAH

A great miracle happened there. This is the story of Hanukkah, the holiday that celebrates the victory of a small group of Jews against the Syrian army and their rededication and purification of the holy temple. As we retell the story of Hanukkah, we take pride in the courageous struggle for religious freedom. On each of the eight days of Hanukkah we light an additional candle on the menorah until all the candles burn on the eighth day. This commemorates the miracle of a tiny bit of oil lasting for eight days when the Jews rededicated the holy temple.

Foods fried in oil characterize this holiday. Most famous of all are potato latkes (pancakes) served with sour cream or applesauce. In Israel it is traditional to eat sufganiyot, or jelly filled doughnuts, as well as potato latkes.

TU B' SHEVAT

Tu B' Shevat, which falls in mid-January or early February, is the new year for the trees or the Jewish Arbor day. It is celebrated by planting trees in Israel and by eating fruits grown in Israel. Carob or St. John's bread, raisins, figs, almonds, oranges, and dates are traditionally enjoyed on this day.

PURIM

Purim, like Hanukkah, is a historical holiday and does not have any of the prohibitions associated with Shabbat and the other major holidays (e.g. use of electricity, performance of work.) It is one of the most joyous holidays in Judaism, on which we are commanded to overflow with happiness. The story of Purim takes place in ancient Persia, where Haman, the prime minister of King Ahasuerus, sought to destroy the Jewish people. The Jews were saved, however, by the intervention of Queen Esther, a Jewess, and her Uncle Mordecai. The Megillat Esther, or story of Esther, is read every year on Purim, with much theatrics. Every time the name of Haman is read in the story, the congregation sounds noisemakers to drown out his name and memory.

On Purim it is customary to (1) give charity and (2) give gifts of food to friends. Hamantashen, a triangular cookie filled with fruit or poppy seeds is the traditional Purim treat. It represents Haman's hat, ear, or pocket, depending on the teller of the story.

PASSOVER

The sweet taste of freedom is what Jews savor every Passover (Pesach). The holiday celebrates the Jews' freedom from slavery and their Exodus from Egypt. Every Jew is commanded to retell the story of Passover to his or her children so that they understand its importance.

No leavened food is allowed to be eaten during the eight days of Passover to commemorate the Jews' rapid flight from Egypt --- they did not have time to let their loaves of bread rise. Leavening, or Hometz, is any substance that causes fermentation and includes cereals, baking powder and yeast. A rigorous preparation for Passover is required prior to the holiday where all the Hometz is removed from the house. Special dishes, pots, and silverware used only for Passover replace their counterparts from the rest of the year. Kosher for Passover foods are purchased, ranging from Matzah, unleavened bread, to meat, cheese, ketchup, candy and Coca-Cola.

The holiday begins with the Seder where the story of Passover is retold. The Seder meal begins with Matzah and a hard-boiled egg dipped in salt water. The egg symbolizes the Jewish person in slavery --- the longer they were cooked, the harder they got. Chicken soup with knaidlach, or matzah balls, follows. The feast usually continues with gefilte fish, turkey or chicken filled with matzah stuffing, tzimmes, potatoes, vegetables, salad, fruit, and sponge cake for dessert. The rest of the holiday is a challenge to the cook who tries to make Matzah taste like something else. Our grandmothers fried Matzah in eggs and chicken fat (Matzah brei). Our contemporaries bake Matzah pizza and lasagne.

SHAVUOT

Shavuot follows seven weeks after the second day of Passover and celebrates receiving the Ten Commandments and the Torah on Mount Sinai. It also celebrates the beginning of the summer wheat and fruit harvest. The Story of Ruth, a woman who accepted Judaism without question, is read during services on Shavuot.

The purity of the Torah is compared to the purity of milk and honey. Therefore, it is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. Delicacies such as cheese blintzes, noodle cheese kugels, beet borchst with sour cream and cheesecake are enjoyed. It is also traditional to eat fresh fruits because Shavuot is a harvest holiday.

