

FOOD SYMBOLS AND RITUALS

Raya Brody

The food at home was very much Sephardic. I've just taken a book- a recipe book, that was given when I got married, that was tradition, the way they did it, with food, and I was going through it and remembering all the food. My grandmother didn't work, she raised us and she obviously cooked. My mother was very happy with that arrangement. So, all the food we ate at home, and she passed away, was mainly Sephardic food- Bulgarian: stuffed pepper, bourekas. And some of the food that I saw here, that is in this book, I recognise it from the food I eat. Mainly Passover, that was traditional food that was eaten at Passover. I think the food would have been definitely different. First of all, gefilte fish. There is no way whatever we would have eaten gefilte fish, sweet. I mean I had a bit of a shock when I came to other families and realised they were eating gefilte fish, sweet gefilte fish. We ate rice in Passover which I understand Ashkenazi don't. I think, I mean this is my experience, I might be wrong, but, the people I was raised with were religious but not to the extreme. I mean I heard stories, not myself, of playing football on Saturday, that was allowed. In Yakovtzi which is a very Bulgarian city or used to be, that was allowed. There was a tradition of religious adherence, but with a bit of common sense and very much open to other people and not so restricted.

Maisie Meyer

And for Pesach instead of having haroset, which is I think they dip haroset, they dip the honey and whatever. We have the most wonderful thing called halaec., which is made from the extracts of dates. And even my Ashkenazi, like my daughters-in-law and my son in law, they absolutely love it. I mean it's very, very delicious. I think the Baghdadi food, Baghdadi cuisine, is just unbelievably delicious.

Haim Algranati

I learned all my cooking from my mum. Our cuisine was mainly vegetarian. I mean, they had fish, and some meat, occasionally, but my childhood, Israel in the '50s, was extremely poor. It was like third ... We didn't have electricity, we didn't have running water, so everything was by hand. And that obviously affected your food supply as well. So, we didn't have - I remember when chickens, I mean, I'm vegetarian from birth probably but when meat came out it was quite a---, because in those days you would queue up with a book, and you would get oil supply and flour supply, cos they weren't self-sufficient yet. And the money, some of the money, was a bit of paper with the Star of David on, [laughs] that was like a penny, all these kinds of tricks. Then they had a penny that wasn't whole, there was just a hole in the middle to save on the metal.

Raya Brody

But my grandmother was the biggest superstitious. So, my oldest daughter when she was born, you couldn't hang, you know you do the washing in Israel, the weather is very nice, warm, you hang it out, you know, the washing to dry. You couldn't do that at night. You're not allowed to do that. I had to take it down, damp or not. I had to take it down because the devil would take a child if he sees their clothes hanging out there, before her teeth came out. After the teeth came out you can do that.

My grandmother, she might have been very loving, but even though I was already married with a child, right, my own person, independent, my own career, she still ruled the roost and from Jerusalem, where she lived to Besheva, where I lived, she could see me hanging the laundry at night. So, you can ask my husband, I had to take it down. The other one is you need to hang – I think there's a colour, the colour of your- turquoise - the colour of your shirt. This is again against evil eye and you have to hang something with that colour near the bed where the baby sleeps, and she gave us that which we had to do, hang it near the cot of the baby where the head is, again, evil eye.

And you did?

Of course, I did. I always listened to my grandmother. There was no question.

Haim Algranati

As I was a child, my dad used to use all sorts of, now I would call them kind of spells, to ward off evil. Let's say, if I had a nightmare. I mean he would draw a circle of water around the bed, and repeat a certain sentence three times, and every time he'd put a grain of sugar on the tongue, and say, 'Go to sleep now.' It was quite magic. 'Este que no hizo mal, mal que no lo toque y todo el mal que se vaiga a la mar.' What it means: 'This one, that hasn't done any evil, evil shall not touch it'. That's the power of symmetry, because only if you do evil, evil can touch you. If you don't do evil, he won't touch you, he's got no power over you. A child, they don't do evil. And all the evil should go to the sea cos water has the capacity to cleanse.

First of all, he would do a circle of water around the bed, of water, and repeat it three times and they both, the elements of three, it's the first instability in the mystical world, it's one plus one gives you three immediately. Like in chords, in music. You play two notes together you get a chord.

Haim

Where I grew up, in the 50's, was very very primitive. We didn't have many services and at the end of the street there was a woman that we called Regina, and everybody knew her as the

witch. And she would have all these herbs growing in the garden and if you had any problems you would go to Regina. My cousin and I were kind of playing around and there was a plum tree in the garden of one of the houses, the plums weren't ready, but we still, you know, went for them. And the next thing I see my cousin going blue. I realise that he's got a plum stuck in his throat went and he can't breathe. So, I quickly ran to his mum, his mum and my mum used to share the same yard. And they came running and he's going bluer by the minute, and they come to Regina and Regina as cold as a fish just drops his trousers down, puts some lubricant on her finger and shoves it up his ass. And as she does that, the plum just flies out of his mouth.

Ronen Kozokardo

But the childhood memories I know, especially from the Mizrahi side, is there, so all the holidays all the singing, special ceremonies, they all relate to festivals. Passover you have a plate and have different kinds of food. And each food resembles something that relates to the story that you are telling in the Hagaddah. One of them is an egg. Normally in an Ashkenazi family, you have one egg in a bowl. But with the Mizrahi, where I come from, you had like a whole basket with all the stuff of the food. So, you have a lot of eggs, a bowl with a lot of eggs. As kids, we used to kind of have a fight like who cracks first. So, that was a game. And then we open the eggs and we eat them. The other one was in Purim, which is a bit like Halloween, you dress up. They do a mixture of cinnamon, sugar, crushed almonds, so you have that, and they bring, all the little kids bring their little fingers and they pour oil on top of the finger for luck and then you drop the finger into the bowl and you mix all the stuff and it's kind of this fragrant sweet, very tasty, kind of very healthy, and you eat it. All the songs that we used to sing in all the celebrations all come from the Mizrahi culture. North African and you know from Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt. In Passover, Ashkenazi are very strict in what they eat. They wouldn't eat rice or pulses or something Ashkenazi. Mizrahi will eat rice with pulses in Passover.