**Enjoying the ‘hidden’ taste of Purim—all year**

*Unexpected culinary treats like sushi made with fruit leather, brisket-stuffed egg rolls and “Haman’s shoes” need not be limited to the holiday.*

By Robert Gluck/JNS.org

Hamantaschen, as three-cornered pastries representing the evil Haman’s ears, are most “timely” when consumed on Purim. But like other foods associated with the holiday, they can inspire year-round creativity in the kitchen.

According to Jeff Nathan, chef-host of public television’s “New Jewish Cuisine” program, Purim’s joy is all about disguises and surprises.

“Little kids dressed in costumes, the best clothes of a beauty pageant and foods to represent the holiday,” Nathan told *JNS.org*. “The food is my favorite part.”

Nathan, who has won a matzo ball soup “Throwdown” challenge against *Food Network* personality Bobby Flay, explained that he offers Purim foods with a surprise inside.

“No, not a box of Cracker Jax,” Nathan said. “Instead, I serve a Chinese style egg roll, with house smoked brisket inside. A light winter soup has quick simmered kreplach filled with pulled chicken, ginger and Asian vegetables. At home I do a savory hamantasch of grilled vegetables, olives and cheese. My favorite little sweet for the holiday is the traditional three-cornered hamantasch filled with pineapple, poppy and cherries. Not your bubbe’s style, for sure!”

Nathan said that holidays remind us of our heritage when we allow ourselves to take the time to cook the foods of our past.

“In doing so, we feed our souls and that’s why we make latkes throughout the year,” he said. “We may call them fritters or griddle pies, but they’re latkes nonetheless. Matzo brei is often a Sunday breakfast well into August, and Purim allows us the freedom to drink just one more, indulge in just another bite of something sweet and smile at why we do it. For me, I like to pull the mystery of Purim foods into my year-round cooking. The mystery of ‘what’s hidden inside,’ ‘what’s that hint of an ingredient’ is intriguing to me, and to my customers.”

Phyllis Glazer likes the humor and frivolity of Purim, and the challenge every year of creating food that encompasses the themes of “masquerading,” “foolery,” Queen Esther’s vegetarian diet, and the Persian roots of the holiday.

Famous in Israel as a guru of healthy cooking, Glazer is a celebrated chef, journalist, TV personality and cookbook author. She is the author of five best-selling health-promoting cookbooks in Hebrew, a biblical cookbook published in German and Italian, and *The Essential Book of Jewish Festival Cooking*, written with her sister Rabbi Miriyam Glazer.

Asked about new ways to make Purim favorites such as hamantaschen, kalischbrod, and poppy seed treats, Glazer focused on health.

“We are all very health conscious these days, and I think that Purim favorites should reflect that, but without going overboard, like substituting whole wheat pastry flour for anywhere from 1/4 to 1/2 the white flour when making hamantaschen or traditional challot,” Glazer told *JNS.org*. “There’s a Moroccan version that is sweet and contains anise seeds, not only kalishchbrod. Poppy seeds don’t only have to appear in hamentaschen. I use them in a salad of avocado, banana and persimmon with a sweet and sour poppy seed vinaigrette, or in vegetable curries.”

A special Purim challah, known in Russian as keylitch, is sometimes made. This challah is oversized and extensively braided. The braids on the challah are intended to remind people of the rope used to hang Haman.

Glazer said another little-known culinary custom she enjoys is “Haman’s shoes,” derived from Greece/Soloniki. There are other Sephardic versions as well, she noted, of the challah-dough shaped into shoes with an egg on top held in place by “laces” of dough.

“I’ve heard of ‘Haman’s fleas’ as well, but have never encountered any recipes,” she said.

Another Purim fun food favorite of Glazer’s is “sushi” made with fruit leather and stuffed with cream cheese and pistachios, or chocolate cakes that contain “hidden” ingredients like beets or zucchini. Glazer agreed with Nathan that people should be able to enjoy the foods of Purim all year long.

“By creating healthy vegetarian dishes for Purim, we can use them the year round, and make a major contribution to the American diet,” she said.

To some Jews, like Ruth Abusch-Magder, the foods of Purim not only reflect the nature of the holiday—joy, frivolity, generosity, community—but also the seamier side of human nature.

Abusch-Magder wrote her PhD dissertation based on old Jewish cookbooks, and is now the rabbi-in-residence at Be’chol Lashon, an organization that celebrates the ethnic and racial diversity of the Jewish world.

“Through food we literally embody the story that we are meant to recall,” Abusch-Magder told *JNS.org*. “We are obligated to have large feasts and drink plenty of alcohol. Our modern feasts recall those of ancient times. It reminds us of the celebratory feast that Jews had once the danger passed. But they also recall the feasts held by the King, feasts that led to trouble and danger. From the start, the holiday pushes us to see both the dangerous elements of ourselves as well as the powerful elements. The food is both a symbol of joy and danger. We share gifts of food with friends, mishloach manot, literally sent food, which helps to tighten bonds of community. Community is critical to surviving when danger threatens. Again food embodies the message of the holiday.”

To Abusch-Magder, the holiday of Purim is a chance to look at our darker side.

“It helps us cope with the fundamental capacity that even well intentioned people can have to be difficult or evil,” she said. “It is telling that we are meant to read the story in full and not miss one word of the story. We cannot skip over the good or the bad of the story, or of our lives. Costumes allow us to hide from ourselves and from others, but the fullness of ourselves is always there. At every turn we have to make the choice which part of ourselves to reveal to others.”