

JEWISH DIVERSITY: TRAVELS OF JEWISH FOODS AND JEWISH FAMILIES

Lesson plan for family/congregational education

This lesson plan is part of a larger lesson entitled “Jewish Diversity and Innovation: the View from the Kitchen,” which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/nov06/>.

Notes to leader:

Bring in:

- A sketch of the world (with general contours of all the continents) on a really big sheet of butcher paper
- The recipe for “**Moroccan Pumpkin Soup with Chick-peas in Massachusetts,**” from Joan Nathan’s *Jewish Cooking in America* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) on butcher paper (You can download the recipe from the main page of this month’s edition of *Go & Learn*; see the URL listed above.)
- Colored markers
- Signs with one of the following ingredients written on each sign: pumpkin, onion, chick-peas, beef, water, cinnamon, sugar, chicken soup

Pre-assign adults (or children with adult help) to act out the parts of the different ingredients in the soup using the information provided in the **HANDOUT** at the end of this lesson. Actors hold a sign telling who they are.

- 1. Explain** to the group that you will be studying Jewish history through food, recipes, and ingredients during the lesson. You will be basing the lesson on the recipe for Moroccan pumpkin soup found in Joan Nathan's *Jewish Cooking in America*. This recipe tells a story of Jewish journeys across many countries, over many centuries.
- 2. Read together** a short excerpt from one of the first Jewish journeys, the exodus from Egypt, from the Bible. (Read in small groups – each family together, or mixed up, in groups of 4-8 adults and children)

Numbers 11:1-6

1. The people took to complaining bitterly before the LORD. The LORD heard and was incensed: a fire of the LORD broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp. 2. The people cried out to Moses. Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. 3. That place was named Taberah, because a fire of the LORD had broken out against them. 4. The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5. We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6. Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!"

(the Hebrew version can be found on the following page)

יָא וַיְהִי הָעַם כְּמִתְאַנְנִים רַע בְּאֲזֵנֵי
יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה וַיַּחַר אָפּוֹ וַתִּבְעַר-בָּם
אֵשׁ יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל בְּקֶצֶה הַמַּחֲנֶה: ² וַיִּצְעַק
הָעַם אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה
וַתִּשְׁקַע הָאֵשׁ: ³ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁם-הַמָּקוֹם
הַהוּא תִבְעָרָה כִּי-בְעָרָה בָּם אֵשׁ יְהוָה:
⁴ וְהָאֶסְפָּסָף* אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הִתְאַוּוּ תַאֲוֹה
וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי
יֹאכְלֵנוּ בָשָׂר: ⁵ וַזְכֵּרְנוּ אֶת-הַדִּגָּה אֲשֶׁר-
נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם חֲנָם אֶת הַקִּשְׁאִים וְאֶת
הָאֲבִטְחִים וְאֶת-הַחֲצִיר וְאֶת-הַבְּצָלִים
וְאֶת-הַשּׁוּמִיּוֹת: ⁶ וַעֲתָה נַפְשֵׁנוּ יִבֶּשֶׂה אִין
כֹּל בְּלִתי אֶל-הַמֶּן עֵינֵינוּ:

3. Discuss the following questions, either as a whole group, or in the small groups who have read the text together.

- What is happening in this passage?
- What foods are mentioned?
- Who is missing them, and where are they located?

This passage foreshadows much about future Jewish history after the Bible. Even while wandering in the desert as free people, the former slaves look back nostalgically at the foods they ate in Egypt. Even though their situation wasn't very good in Egypt, they miss it. How is our situation in any way similar to theirs?

- What foods make you feel at home?
- What foods do your parents/other family members make best?
- Have you ever been somewhere where you couldn't get a favorite food to eat? How did that make you feel?

4. **Narrate activity.** “Let’s turn to today’s recipe for Moroccan pumpkin chick-pea soup. Ingredients, could you please stand up and come to the front of the room? Were any of you mentioned in the biblical passage? If so, you must be very old. Could you please each share your history?” Call on them on at a time (Ingredient actors use handout):

chick-peas

pumpkin, or butternut or calabaza squash

onion

beef

water

cinnamon

chicken soup

sugar

As each ingredient speaks, **draw** on your butcher paper world map **where this ingredient comes from and a path that indicates its journey.**

5. **Invite each family** to discuss their own journeys (going back as many generations as they know) from various countries to America, and within America. First they should confer as a family, and then send a delegate up to the front to draw lines (each family in a different color) on the world map for that family’s movements from country to country, to America, and within America. While drawing, they can explain some of their family’s history to the group. Be sure to mention that adopted children’s stories, and stories about countries of origin for non-Jewish parents, are welcome to be shared.

- 6. Ask everyone:** “While traveling, we have picked up ingredients from many locations, and added them to local new ingredients to create dishes. Can you think of any Jewish or American foods that can be made with some of the ingredients standing at the front?” As people list foods, encourage the ingredient characters to move around to form the different suggestions. Here are a few examples to get the group rolling:
- pumpkin pie with pumpkin, sugar, and cinnamon
 - chicken soup with the chicken soup stock and onion
- 7. Read aloud** Batsheva Levy Salzman’s story from the recipe.

When Batsheva Levy Salzman was a child in Morocco and then in Israel, her mother would make pumpkin soup for Sukkot. As a child, she watched her mother cook and helped her. Later, when Batsheva married an American and moved to Boston, she began cooking Moroccan for her family and friends. "My American-Jewish family likes the pumpkin soup for Thanksgiving," she said. And so does Caraways, a gourmet shop in Wayland, Massachusetts, where she lives. Word spread about her Moroccan cooking. At a fund-raiser for Temple Shir Tikvah in Wayland, ten people paid about \$250,000 for a Moroccan feast of ten different hors d'oeuvres, baked fish, stuffed chicken, couscous, and dessert. "I cook exactly the way my mother taught me," she said. "I cook with my eyes and not for the measurement."

- 8. Discuss** the following questions:
- What special foods/stories/items has your family carried from one place to another? How does that help you remember your history?
 - Ask children to share what special wisdom they have learned from their parents on any topic. Ask parents to share what special wisdom they have learned from their children on any topic.

9. Conclusion. Jews have traveled all over the world, and picked up foods and other customs along the way. Today, we have looked at how our own family stories relate to the broader narrative of the Jewish people, and how food fits into this picture.

10. Additional activity possibility:

Make a recipe book out of recipes brought by participants, as a follow-up to the day.

Handout for Family Education Lesson Plan: Ingredient Histories

Pumpkins

Pumpkins are native to South America. According to Claudia Roden, author of *The Book of Jewish Food*, Conquistadors in the Americas brought pumpkins and other American native foods, such as chocolate, vanilla, chili peppers, tomatoes, corn, and potatoes, to ports in Portugal and Spain. From there they were shipped, often by Jewish merchants, to other Mediterranean ports, and next they made their way to North Africa and Europe.

Onions

Many historians believe onions are native to central Asia, while others think that onions grew wild on all the continents. Researchers believe that people began cultivating onions as early as 5000 years ago. In Egypt, people worshipped onions. People ate onions in early Greece, China, and Rome. Onions are less perishable than other vegetables and they can grow in different climates, so people grow and eat onions all over the world. Onions have been used as medicines for almost every ailment. For example, onions have been used for headaches and tooth aches, to help digestion, as a muscle strengthener and a sleep inducer, to heal mouth sores and dog bites, and to grow hair. People also used onions to pay the rent and to give as wedding gifts.

Pilgrims brought onions with them on the Mayflower. However, wild onions already grew throughout North America where Native Americans ate them raw and cooked, and used them to season their foods and dye their clothing, (See <http://www.onions-usa.org/about/history.asp>)

Chick-peas (also known as Garbanzo Beans)

Chick-peas originally came from Turkey and were first cultivated in the Neolithic Period. By 4000 years ago, they had spread to Italy and Greece. In classical Greece, they were eaten both as a staple and as a dessert. In Rome, chick-peas were cooked into a broth and roasted to make a tasty snack. There is evidence that chick-peas were grown and eaten in Germany in the 1st century CE. Chick-peas are popular throughout India, North Africa, Spain, and southern France. Recently, chick-peas are becoming more popular in the United States. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick_pea)

Beef

The domestication of cattle began in Europe and Asia during the Stone Age. Researchers have found evidence of domesticated cattle from 6,500 B.C.E in Turkey and other sites in the Near East. The cattle of today evolved from the aurochs, animals that were larger, darker, and had longer curvier horns than modern day cattle.

According to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Columbus first brought cattle to the Western Hemisphere on his second voyage to the New World in 1493. He delivered them to Hispaniola where they grew in numbers. From there Hernando Cortez transported cattle to Mexico in 1519 and started the first cattle ranches. These cattle roamed wild and later came to the United States through Texas and California and became known as Longhorns. The Longhorn cattle occupied the open range in the United States until ranchers started fencing in their lands.

Meanwhile in the colonies, a breed known as Devon cattle were brought to the Plymouth colony from Britain in 1623. There they were used as oxen. Other breeds of cattle were imported to other colonies, such as the

Shorthorns who were delivered to Virginia in 1783. (See <http://www.cyberspaceag.com/farmanimals/beefcattle/beefhistory.htm>, <http://www.cyberspaceag.com/farmanimals/beefcattle/beefhistory.htm>, <http://www.geocities.com/magicgoatman/aurochs.html>)

Water

According to Genesis, water existed even before the world was created. According to scientists, water exists even in outer space. Water covers 70% of the earth and comprises 70% of the human body. Human civilization sprung up in relation to water, since we needed water to survive, and in order to trade goods with others. That is why many cities around the world are located near rivers, lakes, and the ocean. Keeping the water safe for drinking and cooking with, and maintaining enough supply for the population is and has been a major concern throughout human history. (See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water>)

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is native to China, India, Sri Lanka and Ethiopia. Cinnamon was a treasured spice in ancient times. It was regarded as a gift for royalty. It was imported to Egypt from China as early as 2000 BC. Cinnamon is mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 30:23, where Moses is commanded to use both sweet cinnamon and cassia.

In the Middle Ages, Arab merchants carried cinnamon from India to Alexandria in Egypt where it was bought by Venetian traders who sold it throughout Europe.

In the middle ages, the peoples of Europe didn't yet have chocolate and other spices from the Western hemisphere, so cinnamon was considered quite

precious. Traders made huge amounts of money from cinnamon. Consequently, European countries fought to conquer Asian lands where cinnamon trees grew.

At the end of the fifteenth century, Portuguese traders discovered and conquered Ceylon (Sri Lanka), one of the world's main sources of cinnamon. The Portuguese used the indigenous population to step up production of cinnamon, treating them harshly. In 1638 Dutch traders took over the Portuguese fort in Sri Lanka and established their own cinnamon monopoly. The Dutch also treated the indigenous population brutally, in order to make them produce more cinnamon. The British took control of the island from the Dutch in 1796, but by that time cinnamon was being produced in other parts of the world, so people in any one country couldn't have a monopoly over it.

Today the best cinnamon comes from Sri Lanka, but the tree is also grown in southern India, Java, Sumatra, the West Indies, Brazil, Vietnam, Madagascar, Zanzibar, and Egypt.

(See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinnamon> and *A Taste of Paradise: Cinnamon* by Troy David Osborne <http://www.bell.lib.umn.edu/Products/cinnamon.html>)

Sugar

Sugar comes from the sugarcane, a tall grass with a hollow stalk filled with sap. Sugarcane probably originated in New Guinea. In prehistoric times, sugarcane was carried to the Pacific Islands and then to India. In India, around 500 BCE, people learned to evaporate its juices to make sugar. By 200 BCE, the Chinese were also producing sugar. The delicious substance quickly became popular throughout the Middle East, China, and India. Arabs and Berbers brought sugar to Western Europe when they conquered the Iberian

Peninsula in the 8th century BCE. The Crusaders also brought sugar back to Europe from the Middle East.

On one of his voyages, Columbus acquired sugarcane at the Canary Islands and he went on to introduce it to the Western Hemisphere. A few centuries later, the Dutch brought sugarcane to the Caribbean and parts of South America, while the Portuguese introduced sugarcane to Brazil. Between 1701 and 1810, nearly one million Africans were enslaved and taken to South America and the Caribbean to provide the labor for the large sugar plantations that were established there.

In the 18th century traders specializing in sugar, rum, and slaves established the “Triangular Trade” between the American colonies, Africa, and South America/The Caribbean. The traders shipped sugar from South America and the Caribbean to the colonies, where distilleries used it to make rum. The traders bought the rum, and sometimes guns as well, and shipped their cargo to Africa and traded it for slaves. The slaves were then shipped to the Caribbean and traded for sugar to complete the triangle. Each stop along the way provided a large profit for the traders.

In the 18th century, sugarcane was first planted in the United States, in New Orleans. The first sugar refinery was built in New York around 1690, but sugar production was not established as a successful industry in the US until the end of the 19th century.

(See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sugar>, <http://www.irish-sugar.ie/noframes/nf-pages/nf-hist/nf-hist.htm>, http://mimi.essortment.com/historyofsugar_rzow.htm)

Chicken soup

Throughout the world and throughout history, chicken soup has been well known for its curative powers. Ancient Egyptians prescribed it as a cure for the common cold. Many cultures figured out that cooking a chicken in water would yield a delicious soup, and that adding vegetables, seasonings, noodles, rice, or dumplings to the soup would make it even better.

Chicken soup variations are popular in Belgium, Italy, China, Korea, Russia, Brazil, Greece, Mexico, Eastern Europe, Germany, France, and Eastern Europe.

Chicken soup has come to be associated with Jewish culture and nurturing. In the shtetls of Eastern Europe, chickens were often the only meat that families could afford. Chicken soup became a traditional food to celebrate Shabbat. In poor communities, chicken soup could be stretched to feed more people. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicken_soup)