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Eating Together: Planning for Meals, Kiddush, Simchas, and Holidays

When we eat together, we can connect on many different levels. We connect to the food, and if you have the chance to serve food from a local farm or a producer you know, then the stories of the people and the land that grew the food can be just as nourishing as the food itself. We connect to each other around a table, too; food gives us the chance to have longer conversations with folks we may regularly just see in passing. And we have the chance to learn and celebrate together, in a long chain of Jewish tradition.

Planning communal meals can be complicated by people's busy schedules, institutional kashrut polices, space and time challenges, and so on. The tips in this section will help you navigate some of these challenges and help you create a memorable feast—whether the occasion is simply bringing your community together, giving your weekly kiddush table a sustainable-upgrade, celebrating life-cycle events, or planning for big holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

Advance Planning

There are a number of different questions you want to ask when you're contemplating a communal meal:

- How many people am I expecting? What is the ideal number for achieving my goals (intimate conversation, bringing the whole community together, etc.)? Will this be kid-friendly or geared more towards adults (hint: a 40 min speech by a guest speaker, not so kid-friendly)? Be clear about your expectations to your guests.
- Should we use the institution's kitchen/social hall? (You may wish to explore this option if kashrut is an issue, if you're expecting a lot of guests, or if you don't wish to open up your home.) Other advantages include guests feeling comfortable in a familiar space, access to large-scale kitchen equipment, janitorial staff (though you should confirm that they will be available to help you).
- Or maybe a picnic in a park? The obvious challenge to this option is weather: a park with a covered picnic location is a great way to ensure success regardless of the elements. If you do plan an outdoor event, consider: can everyone find the location? Do you need a permit for a large gathering? Will other activities in the park contribute to or hinder the atmosphere you're trying to create?
- Hosting at home? Great for smaller gatherings and building community. Navigating kashrut concerns can be a challenge - see the note below with some suggestions for helping to make all your guests feel comfortable.

Sourcing Your Food

Use the tips in Chapter 1 to help you decide what food to serve. Remember, you may not be able to serve a 100% kosher sustainable meal. Rather, aim to choose elements that really stand out, and make sure that people notice them. Signs on tables or an announcement to point out the local flower centerpieces, the donated chocolate from a sustainable chocolate company, or the seasonal fruits on the fruit platter will start to educate your community about the available options.

Planning Moments for Connection

A good meal has a good start and a good ending. People should feel welcomed and included. They should understand that there is a focus to your meal, and know what that focus is. Here are some suggestions for bringing mindfulness to your meal:

- **Food Blessings:** Jews have been saying blessings over food for over 2000 years. Pausing before a meal to offer thanks can be a profound moment of connection--with the growers, producers, and chefs; with the people around your table; with God and with creation. Jewish food blessings offer an accessible entry point into Jewish tradition, but if the traditional wordings are a challenge, consider inviting people to articulate their own blessings, or offer a *kavanah* (intention) before the meal in addition to saying traditional blessings.
- **Opening Circle:** An opening circle lets people get a sense of who they are going to be eating with. It lets them share a piece of themselves that may not come up in ordinary dinner chit-chat, which helps deepen relationships. It helps to focus the group on a particular question that will be discussed during the evening learning, and it lets everyone be heard. People might already be chatting in small groups, so gently ask for everyone to quiet down. Introduce yourself and explain what is going to happen first, then pose the question, then indicate a person to start.
- **Learn Some Texts Together:** Later in this chapter, some texts from Food For Thought: Hazon's Sourcebook on Jews, Food and Contemporary Life have been included to help you think about your relationship to food and Jewish tradition. You may want to use these texts as a conversation starter at a communal meal.

TIPS FOR HOSTING A SUSTAINABLE MEAL AT YOUR INSTITUTION:

So we can all eat together

Communal meals pose some challenge for folks with strict dietary concerns, whether this is kashrut, allergies or anything else. Here are some tips to navigate the options with grace:

- Have labels and pens available, and encourage guests to write out ingredient lists to label their dishes.
- Set aside one table for kosher food, one table for vegetarian food, one table for everything else.
- Have a conversation with your guests ahead of time to find out about special dietary needs. Let them know what you expect to be able to accommodate, and where they may wish to simply bring their own food.

- Pick one part of your meal to source from local food producers, and tell your guests about it (i.e. your dessert course could be all local berries or fruit, or Fair Trade chocolate).
- Buy from companies listed in the Producers Guide, and highlight their company values on menu cards or in a program.
- Serve grass-fed meat. If sustainably-produced meat isn't available, make your meal vegetarian, and tell your guests why.
- Plan for thoughtfulness: hold an opening circle, set a *kavanah*, have discussion questions prepared for every table, hold a guided food meditation and/or say a grace after meals together.
- Use reusable, recycled, or compostable plates and silverware.
- **Veggie Cholent.** Serve vegetarian cholent at your kiddush. Try featuring a new grain like brown rice, barley, or millet.
- **Feature Seasonal Fruits.** Fresh fruit platters are commonly found at kiddush tables and are both beautiful and healthy. But if you live outside of California, it can be next to impossible to source these fruits locally during the winter months. Focus on fresh fruits when they're in season in your area, and when they're not, consider dried or canned (if dried and canned locally!).
- **Can the Soda.** Avoid sugary sodas and fruit punches – instead, serve seltzers, 100% real fruit juices (and scotch, of course!). A grape juice to try: if you live in the Northeast, try serving the kosher grape juice from Glendale Farms.
- **Family Style.** Try serving kiddush family style – with the food on small platters on tables, rather than vast quantities at a long buffet. This allows people to see what's available and encourages them to take healthy portions.
- **Hummus!** Hummus is relatively simple to make fresh in large batches and tastes amazing.
- **The Salatim.** Try serving pickles, dilly beans, or other value-added products from local farms. Invite the farmers to speak to the congregation about their farm during Shabbat lunch.
- **Leftovers.** "If you run out of food, or there is none left by the end of kiddush, then the amounts were perfect," Edith Stevenson comments. "The idea that we must have LOTS of food at a kiddush is a Jewish tradition that I think is just plain wrong!" If you do have leftovers, consider donating them to a local Food Bank or other food recovery organization. Another option: freeze your leftovers and deliver them to families with a new baby or someone recovering for surgery or illness.

Hosting a Sustainable Kiddush

The weekly Shabbat kiddush table is a place of blessing, schmoozing, and *simcha* (happiness). But it also has the tendency to generate a lot of waste and unhealthy eating habits. The list below offers a few resources and ideas for making your kiddush table healthy and sustainable. The same ideas can easily be transferred to your next synagogue social event, Hadassah meeting, book club, or canned food drive.

- **Start a Kiddush Committee at Your Synagogue.** Get together a group of people who like to cook and give your usual caterer a break. Try offering a "homemade kiddush" once a month where everything is cooked by volunteers and is locally-sourced and organic.
- **Go Free Range.** Egg salad is a staple of the kiddush table. Try making egg salad from cage-free eggs.

Host a Sustainable Shabbat Dinner!

For thousands of years, Shabbat has sustained the Jewish people by providing a respite from the work of the week. Creating a sustainable Shabbat dinner, a meal that uses our natural resources wisely, means that Shabbat can continue to sustain us for thousands of years to come. Hazon and Birthright Israel NEXT have partnered to create a guide on Hosting a Sustainable Shabbat Dinner. The guide will help you plan your meal, think about what to serve, how to set up and clean up, get the meal started, and bring some insightful Jewish learning to your Shabbat table. To download your own copy visit hazon.org/education

WHAT IS 'FARM TO SHUL'?

Farm to Shul connects local Jewish communities to sustainable and just food systems! We work to make Boston Jewish communities more eco-friendly, campaign for justice for farm workers, and visit farms for hands-on Jewish learning.

Farm to Shul is currently running an Institutional Purchasing Campaign to make our consumption more just and sustainable. We have audited our food consumption and established a Community Food Advisory Board (CFAAB) which will make recommendations to Moishe Kavod House membership.

WHAT DID WE LEARN IN THIS PROCESS?

We learned the full importance of relationships and knowledge held by our community members that allowed us to source tasty, ethical, and affordable food. Throughout the whole process we pushed our creativity and redefined our limits. We learned of new food resources, such as Market Mobile, which we may share with other communities looking to do similar work.

INTENTIONS

- Provide tasty, healthy vegetarian hors d'oeuvres within time and budget constraints and considering kashrut
- Create an inspiring model that may be replicated by others
- Minimize exploitative production by sourcing fair trade and from smaller, more transparent companies where possible
- Increase support for small farms and sustainable production by sourcing directly from producers

VOLUNTEERS

Prep & Cooking Volunteers

Over the course of four days and nights: Blake Heller, Elana Koffler, Danya Matos, Katie Ternes, Jessica Stein, Darla Fleming, Jill Lofthol, Jeff Levinson, Abe Miller, Gail Velez Gutman, Amy Homing

The Farm to Shul Team

Melissa Goff, Helen Bennett, Becca Weaver, Aliza Wasserman, Alex Kibrik, Hannah Levine

Menu

Delights

- Green Salad**
Mixed Greens with a Lemon Honey Vinaigrette
- Spicy Sweet Potato Wedges**
Sweet Potatoes with Coriander, Fennel & Oregon
- Doritos Eggs**
Eggs with a Mayonaisse, Feta & Mustard Sauce and Popcorn Garnish
- Butternut Squash and Caramelized Onion Galette Triangles**
Butternut Squash and Onion with Cheese in a Flour and Sour Cream Crust
- Apple Chutney on Crostini**
Tart Green Apples with Garlic, Ginger, Raisins, & Mustard

Dips

- Served with Clear Flour Bakery Lagumite
- Tri-color Vegetable Pesto**
Parsip, Potato, Sweet Potato, Carrot
- Hummus**
Chickpeas with Tahini, Lemon Juice, Garlic, & Olive Oil
- Cheese Spreads**
from Maragaret Creamery

Dessert

- Flourless Chocolate Cupcakes**
butter, sugar, eggs, Chocolate & Cocoa
- All items served on Compostable Décorware

PROCESS

We crafted a menu around seasonally available items - thus, we are featuring many root vegetables tonight - and chose light and healthy previously tested recipes. Over weekly phone conversations we finalized a menu that would respect the kashrut policies of our community and host institution and meet our team's sustainability and duplicability goals. We used online tools that we could all access to assist with date and time management.

The existing relationships that members of our team had with local producers and distributors was essential to researching purchasing options. In the end we sourced mostly from Market Mobile and local grocery stores, and took advantage of discounted and bulk options. The small number of direct sourcing channels helped to maximize our budget and time.

Choosing simple recipes enabled us to easily multiply them for the large group, and we supplemented our team's time with a crew of volunteers from our community who spent a few hours in the kitchen during the past week.

SOURCES

- Greens**
Allen Farms, Westport, MA
- McDonald's and Wajner Farms**
Produce, RI
- Packing Turkeys**
Berkley, RI
- Eggs**
Berkley's Poultry Farm, Johnston, RI
- Apples**
Hill Orchards, Johnston, RI
- Butternut Squash, Potatoes, & Farm-fresh**
Schubert Farms, Exeter, RI
- Cheese**
Maragaret Creamery, Providence, RI
- Market Mobile**
Fair trade online ordering. Fresh line of locally grown and sold produce from RI, MA, and CT. Delivered to community members in Boston, MA.
- Carrots & Sweet Potatoes**
Cagwood Farm, Hadley, MA
- Condiments**
Organic, Kosher
- Olive Oil**
- Spices**
Some Organic
- Clear Flour Bakery**
Bread, Exeter, NH
- Restaurant Depot**
One community member's family ownership to assist, Portland, ME
- Whole Food's Market**
A multitude of organic, fair trade options. Community provided by volunteers, Cambridge, MA.
- Parsley & Marjoram**
Organic
- Onions**
Local
- Garlic & Ginger**
- Sugar**
Fair Trade
- Chocolate Coffee & Tea**
Fair Trade, Organic, Kosher
- Equal Exchange**
and Beyond, MA
- Salt**
- Lemon Juice**
- Chickpeas**
- Goat Cheese**
Kosher

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All those who lent refrigerator space.

Sustainable Simchas

It seems that there is always a reason to celebrate in the Jewish community. While the Jewish calendar is packed with holidays, lifecycle events offer additional opportunities to sing, dance, and eat great food! Use the following tips to ensure that your next simcha reflects your commitment to living a sustainable life. The following suggestions can be applied for any holiday, event, or occasion!

- **Serve a Vegetarian or Vegan Meal.** Serving a vegetarian meal is often healthier and less expensive and certainly more environmentally friendly. If you are serving a dairy meal, look for recommendations on kosher, sustainable dairy products in the section above.
- **Serve Produce that is Grown Locally and in Season.** Connect to the season that your simcha falls in by serving seasonal foods that are grown locally. Often you can save money buying this produce at a farmers market. If you are catering your simcha, ask the caterer where they get their produce. If they don't source from local vendors, ask them if they would make an exception.
- **Serve Meat or Fish that is Sustainable** If you decide to serve meat at your simcha, you will find recommendations for sustainable kosher meat in the section above. Look for fish that is certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council or select "Best choice" or "Good" options from the Seafood Watch pocket guide.
- **L'Chaim!** What would a simcha be without a good L'chaim. You can find recommendations for organic, kosher wines in the Producer Guide. Consider serving beer or alcohol that are brewed or distilled in your area.
- **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Compost!** Get a clear idea of how many people you will be expecting at your simcha so that you don't purchase unnecessary food. If you have leftover food, think about freezing leftovers, giving it away to your guests, or donating it to a local shelter or emergency food provider. Try to use reusable dishes, cutlery, napkins and table cloths. Make sure that all recyclable products end up in the appropriate recycle bins. Instead of filling landfills, turn the leftover scraps from your simcha into nutrient rich soil by composting! If you don't have your own compost bin, find a friend, farm, or community garden where you can donate your compostable scraps.

For more ideas on hosting a sustainable simcha, check out the "Green and Just Celebrations" guide put out by Jews United for Justice http://www.jufj.org/green_just_celebrations. This guide focuses on simchas in the Washington DC area but has ideas that can be used anywhere.

Kosher Sustainable Caterers

The following list features caterers from communities around the country. Some of them incorporate sustainable practices into their ethos, and others are open to working with you to choose more sustainable options for your event/simcha. All of them are kosher or have kosher options. If your community is not listed, consider reaching out to one of these businesses to get suggestions on how to negotiate with caterers in your area.

Baltimore:

Bon Appetit Management Company is driven by culture, to create food that is alive with flavor and nutrition, prepared from scratch using authentic ingredients.

<http://www.cafebonappetit.com/>

Chicago:

Catering Perfection is a health minded full service catering company with kosher food. Catering Perfection has a commitment to purchase fish, meat, and poultry that is prepared in a sustainable and ethical way.

<http://cateringperfection.com/>

Colorado:

Occasions Catering has kosher menus as well as a commitment to sustainability. Occasions commitment to sustainability is based off of their effort to do business locally, avoid filling the landfill, and putting leftovers to great use.

<http://www.occasionsdenver.com/>

Sweet Pea Cuisine offers sustainable meals for a range of catering needs. All menus have kosher options and have the ability to be tailored to your dietary desires.

<http://sweetpeacuisine.com/index.html>

Los Angeles:

Hovav Catering believes in fresh, seasonal ingredients, sustainable foods, organic when possible, and fusing cuisines from all around the world. Hovav Catering is able to provide various levels of Kashrut.

<http://www.hovavcatering.com/>

Michigan:

From the Hearth Food offers creative answers to kosher, vegan, and vegetarian catering needs for large or small special events in southeast Michigan. From the Hearth Food uses local, sustainable, and organic ingredients whenever possible.

<http://fromthehearthfood.com/>

New Jersey:

Branches Catering provides Glatt Kosher catering along with their initiative of a commitment to “Green Cuisine.” Branches Catering is taking efforts to incorporate sustainability into their products and services whenever possible.

<http://www.branchescatering.com/>

New Orleans:

Audubon Nature Institute is the only green-certified caterer in the state of Louisiana, and offers Kosher catering in the Audubon Tea Room.

<http://www.auduboninstitute.org/caterers-in-new-orleans>

New York:

The **Adamah Foods** kitchen is certified kosher and their innovative chefs create farm-to-table magic. A significant amount of the produce used is grown right on campus.

<http://isabellafreedman.org>

Avril Kaye is a kosher caterer who is known for their seasonable and sustainable food with a modern twist.

<http://www.avrilkaye.com/>

Philadelphia:

Bon Appetit @ Penn is a sustainable food service company with kosher catering options. Bon Appetit is dedicated to providing food that is alive with flavor and prepared from scratch using authentic local and seasonal ingredients.

<http://www.cateringatpenn.com/aboutus/commitment.html>

Peachtree Kosher is the kosher division of Peachtree & Ward, which brings luster to the kosher marketplace. Peachtree is committed to sustainable agriculture, recycling, and a greener planet.

<http://www.peachtreecatering.com/>

San Antonio:

Green offers full service vegetarian and kosher catering for special events. Green is San Antonio's only 100% vegetarian and kosher restaurant and caterer.

<http://greensanantonio.com/menu/catering/>

San Francisco:

12 Tribes makes food that is “Seasonally delicious, happens to be kosher.” 12 Tribes cooks food from scratch using the finest, freshest ingredients that are organic and sourced from within the region whenever possible.

<http://12tribesfood.com/>

St. Louis:

Bon Appétit @ WashU has a mission of preparing food with creativity and passion. Bon Appetit uses only the highest-quality and freshest ingredients available for kosher food preparations.

<http://diningervices.wustl.edu/catering/Pages/default.aspx>

Texts on Food and Mindfulness

Seeing again, for the first time

Because we eat two, three or four times every day, it's easy to forget how wondrous that is. It's like the sunrise or the sunset. The sun rises and sets every day. If it's an especially beautiful sunrise, we may notice it. But if it's not "special" we may not even see it.

But if we can see it as if for the first time, each sunrise becomes very special and very beautiful. And so with each meal we create.

– Bernard Glassman, *Instructions to the Cook*

Radical Amazement

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see.

– Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

Gratitude means noticing

Why is eating a vegetable one of the steps to freedom? Because gratitude is liberating. And how do we get there? We focus on the details.

Close your eyes: You are holding a piece of parsley, which you are about to dip into salt water. But before that – what things needed to happen to get this parsley into our hands? Who placed the parsley seeds into the ground? What sort of conditions did it grow in? Was it a hot summer? What did the soil feel like? How was the parsley harvested? What did it look like at that perfect moment when it was mature and ready to be picked? Who picked it? Where did the parsley travel next? Was it packed into cardboard boxes? How did it travel to the store or farmer's market? Who unloaded and unpacked it? Who placed it on a scale and weighed it so it could be purchased? Think for a moment about the number of hands that played a part in getting the parsley to this table and into our hands.

Now open your eyes: Look a little more closely at the parsley in your hand – what does it look like? How many leaves does it have? What does that specific color green remind you of? What does the stem feel like? Imagine what it tastes like...

Take a piece of parsley and dip it in salt water. Then we say the blessing together, and then we eat. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who brings forth fruit from the earth.

– Leah Koenig (*Pesach 2006*)

Healthy and Sustainable Holidays

"What should I serve for Rosh Hashanah?"

"How can I make my sukkah more sustainable?"

"What might an ecologically-inspired, spiritually-tuned-in, multi-generational non-denominational Tu B'Shvat Seder look like – and how can I host one?"

We're glad you asked!

Over the years Hazon has developed a number of resources to help you celebrate the Jewish holidays in line with your values, and to use these key moments in the Jewish calendar to bring some of our most complicated struggles to light.

Visit hazon.org/education/holidays to find resources that can inspire a theme for a holiday, an activity for your family or event for your community.

And remember – Reb Shlomo Carlbach taught that the holidays come to remind us of ideas that we should really be thinking of year-round, so feel free to use these suggestions any time of year!