

*For Janice Scott, the founding Jewish mother of Bagel and Dreidel
and my own Jewish mother Dorothy Schiffman Josephson*

Tsimmis and Gefilte Fish: Debating and Celebrating Jewishness in Rural Maine

Tsimmes: A side dish of mixed cooked vegetables and fruits, slightly sweetened. The ingredients may be of carrots, prunes and sweet potatoes. Since making tsimmis took time and various mixings, the word came to mean: a prolonged procedure; an involved business..... “Don’t make a whole tsimmes out of it.”

The Joys of Yiddish

Gefilte fish: This was one of the creatures with which the Creator did not populate the earth. It was left to a Jewish cook some many years later to make up for this oversight. There is great debate as to whether the ideal gefilte fish (and with gefilte fish one always strives for an ideal) is composed entirely of ground carp; a mixture of carp and whitefish; or of carp, whitefish and perch...

The Rouge’s Guide to the Jewish Kitchen

Preface

When I first set out to write the story of the Jewish Union of Franklin County a.k.a. Bagel and Dreidel, I saw it simply as a story about a group of Jews living in rural Maine who came together to debate and celebrate their Jewishness. As I sifted through the abundant but sparsely dated archives and my imperfect memory, however, I came to realize that what I was attempting to write -*the* story of Bagel and Dreidel - was, if not impossible to do, foolish to attempt.

For, there are a myriad of stories that could be written about Bagel and Dreidel. The story I would write would be but one of them – my story, if you will. As such, it is a story of secular Jews, feminist Haggadahs, debate over the plight and rights of the Palestinians, and celebrations rooted in paganism. It is a story that reflects a twenty-five-year search for my Jewish identity - a search driven by the fact that I had neither synagogue nor Bat Mitzvah in which to ground my Jewishness, only a year on an atheistic kibbutz in the northern Negev in the 60's and a mother in New Jersey who fasted for me on Yom Kippur.

I can only hope my story or some part of it resonates with those whom I have shared so much with and learned so much from over the past 25 years. And while it is my story, it is a story written in the third person. Journalist most of my working life, I have not been able to shake off the style nor have I been able to be biased and exclude the “other” from the story. For without the “other” there would be no story.

I am indebted to Janice Scott who had the vision and thechutzpah to get Bagel and Dreidel going in the midst of one of those mythic Maine winters and to all who kept the fire going for twenty years.

As for the title *Tsimmis and Gefilte Fish* - make of it what you will.

Introduction

We were not the first Jews to park our camels and set up our tents in Maine. Those who came before us included the Levinskys of dry goods fame, Louise Nevelson of artistic claim, the baker Cohen of Bangor, and the lawyerly Isaacsons of Lewiston. But we were probably - in keeping with the tradition of two Jews and three opinions - the only Jews who came to Maine and unwittingly gathered together Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, Agnostic, Atheist, Mystic, and Feminist Jews *in the same room!* We had no choice: there were too few of us to do otherwise.

While many of the founders* of Bagel and Dreidel moved to western Maine to take up jobs at the University of Maine at Farmington and/or to live the good life of outhouses, wood burning stoves, vegetarian cooking and the self sufficiency touted by Helen and Scott Nearing, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the last thing they were seeking was a “Jewish community.” But create one they did.

In doing so, they reinvented many of the traditions they had inherited, integrating the feminist with the religious, pagan with the orthodox, mystical with the political. Oranges found a place on the *seder* plate; *Mitzriam* became a birth canal, *Shekinah* was invoked at Passover; the candles of *Chanukah* were lit for peace in the occupied territories; the lunar cycle was invoked at *Yom Kippur* on a mountain top; as befitting those living in the north woods, *Tu B’shvat* became if not a major holiday; a minor major holiday, and the breadcrumbs of *Tashlich* were mingled with the poems of Marge Piercy.

While this is essentially the story of Bagel and Dreidel, you can’t talk about Jews without talking about food i.e. for every holiday, except one, there is a food. Some “traditional” recipes have been included drawn from the kitchens and potluck gatherings over the years ...and in keeping with those who came to live the life of self sufficiency gardening tips and lore surrounding their ingredients have also been included.

** “Founding members” as referred to here include those who moved to Maine in the 70’s and early eighties and took part in the founding of Bagel and Dreidel in 1985. Jonathan Cohen dubs them “the first wave.” Some came to Maine and the Farmington area as a result of the back-to-the-land movement; some were artists and writers seeking low budget lives; and some to take up academic positions at the University of Maine at Farmington or as health care providers at Franklin Memorial Hospital. Few if any were observant; many were of mixed marriages.*

A “second wave” to which Cohen belongs occurred in the late 80’s to the mid 90’s. Like Cohen, many came to take up positions at the University of Maine at Farmington, Franklin Memorial Hospital and were observant traveling to cities in Maine for religious services. Some, like Peter and Shelia Shafer traveled to NYC for the high holy days.

A “third wave” at the end of the 20th century provided the largest influx of observant Jews, enough to consider the formation of a synagogue. The father in one of these families, commutes to New York City for work, while raising their children in the Farmington public schools.

Part I: In the Beginning

In the beginning was the *Chamukah* party in 1985 in the basement kitchen of one of the dormitories at the University of Maine at Farmington. We're doing it for the children of the mixed marriages, our first Jewish mother Janice Scott reminded us, so they will have some sense of Jewish culture and history. There were potato pancakes and menorahs. Marty Fleishman bought the potatoes, onions, eggs and oil; Mary Flint oversaw the grating and frying; and Mother Nature did the blizzard that was to become part of the tradition. In our enthusiasm, we fried up 50 pounds of potatoes.

Overcrowding moved *Chamukah* out of the basement into the nearby United Methodist Church with its well-furnished, non-Kosher kitchen. As the crowds grew, we switched from hand graters to Mary Beyer's Cuisenaire but refused to cross the line when someone dared to suggest packaged potato pancake mix.

In quick time, the major holidays of Passover, Purim, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkoth were added to the calendar. They were celebrated in living rooms, backyards, fields, alongside streams, on mountain tops, and yes, in church vestries large enough to accommodate up to 80 people dining on chicken soup with matzo balls. In time, in keeping with the back-to-the-land movement that drew many of us here and Lee Sharkey, we began to celebrate the minor holiday of *Tu B'Shvat* – a good cabin fever fixer coming as it does during the dark cold days of January with its cups of wine and pomegranates, olives, figs, date, grapes, and walnuts and references to *Asherah*, the consort of Baal, who started out as a sacred tree! But more about that later...

Lest it be thought, *Bagel and Dreidel* was only interested in feeding the body; it also tended to the soul and social justice. Not only were there questions regarding ritual and patriarchy to wrestle with, Israel was always there to debate, dissect, and divide. But more about that later too.

Part II: And God Created Them:

To say that those who gathered together were strong and diverse in their opinions, beliefs and needs would not be an overstatement.

There were the observant, the not so observant and the secular

Most of the founding members of *Bagel and Dreidel* were versed in the rituals of song, prayer and *seder*, albeit to widely varying degrees. For some, the move to rural Maine heightened their sense of themselves as Jews; for others, the move, often coupled with their interfaith marriages, was just another step in their move away from their Jewishness. So it was not surprising that from the outset *Bagel and Dreidel* wrestled with ritual, especially given that much of it was imbued with the patriarchal tradition of Judaism.

The differences and debates began with the *Havdalah*, the ceremony, which formally ends the Sabbath with its cup of wine, spice box and multi-wick candle. Since most, if

not all, of the gatherings of *Bagel and Dreidel* occurred on Saturday evening, it was natural (for some) that *Havdalah*, be performed. In the early years it was customary for observant Jews Peter Simon Shaffer and Laurie Radovsky to lead the ceremony; in later years it was Jonathan and Vicky Cohen.

By 1992 at a gathering at the home of Laurie Radovsky and Geoff Marshall entitled “Who are we; Where are we going; What do we want?” there was enough discomfort among some of the more secular Jews that it became one of the subjects the group explored.

Founding Jewish Mother Janice Scott told the group that the reason there had been more ritual in the recent past was because she had asked Peter Simon and Laurie to add that dimension to the meetings. “It was a need I personally had.” Mitch Goodman said he had “enjoyed what Peter had done; it was just that he overdid it.” While Joan Braun said the role of patriarchy in the ritual was a problem for her. (Three years later, Joan would collaborate with me in a feminist rewrite of the Haggadah). While Laurie said, “No matter how liberal we are, we expect some ritual.”

Anticipating a splintering, David Hurst said, “We must keep the mix going.” Henry Braun said we were a “fascinating group” and that he wanted to “see all the tensions come together.” While Geoff Marshall suggested that we “describe what we share in common and allow for subgroups of the religious and the radicals.” Host Ray Glass, in a centrist gesture, said, “We are learning to be comfortable with our differences,” but he warned, “We ought not to become extremists...”

“Just the right amount of ritual” at what became monthly gatherings of Bagel and Dreidel became the unstated rule, while the more observant Jews traveled to synagogues in the “southern cities” of Augusta (Temple Beth El) and Auburn (Temple Shalom). However, for those who wished to delve deeper into Judaism, there was an opportunity gain a deeper understanding of Judaism closer to home. In the early 90’s, Peter Simon conducted a small informal Torah study group in his home in Industry. In the mid 90’s, Rabbi Doug Weber of Temple Shalom in Auburn -at the bequest of Vicky and Jonathan Cohen – drove to Farmington to lead a Talmud study group.

As more observant Jews moved into the Farmington area, momentum began to build to establish a synagogue, if not in bricks and mortar, in community. In 2005, twenty years after *Bagel and Dreidel* came into being, Temple Shalom Tsafon (Temple of the North), a “satellite synagogue,” a “branch” of Temple Shalom, was established in concert with Rabbi Weber’s successor Rabbi Katzir. About twenty people attended the first gathering in an office in Wilton (pop. 4,000). Eventually, six families officially “joined.” As dues paying members, they also had access to the Auburn synagogue. As Sam Elowitch saw it, “The Temple provided Jews in Franklin County with a spiritual home ...” Monthly services were to be held, along with Torah study and Hebrew instruction.

That is not to say that those who saw themselves as secular or humanistic Jews had no need for ritual. They just didn't want, as Mitch Goodman said, "to overdo it." And so it was that just the right amount of ritual took its place alongside more secular offerings at the gatherings. And so it was that at Rosh Hashanah poems of Marge Piercy and Mary Oliver shared space with Hebrew prayers at *Taschlich*. And so it was that at *Yom Kippur*, Sam the Eldest Son of Cohen blew the *Shofar* on the ledges at Center Hill overlooking the Tumbledown Mountain Range at sunset.

It is noteworthy that the observant Cohens had their feet - so to speak - in both "camps." On the high holy days, Vicky, Jonathan, Rosie, Miriam, Sam and Eli Cohen shuttled between their synagogue to the south and the streams and mountains of the north where the secular Jews of *Bagel and Dreidel* were gathering with "just the right amount" of ritual. While Peter and Shelia Shafer preferred to return to their Jewish roots leaving the state to attend Temple *B'nai Jeshran* on New York City's west side..

In hindsight, the suggestion by Geoff Marshall in 1992 that "we should describe what we share in common and allow for subgroups of the religious and the radicals" was probably the only solution, as it was the only one that occurred...albeit over time.

There were the feminists:

The differences over ritual did not end with *Havdalah*. There was also the issue of the *Haggadah*. One of the first hints that some of the women of *Bagel and Dreidel* were not about to hold with patriarchal tradition came about in 1993 when Ellen Grunblatt added an orange to the Passover *seder* plate. It was her response to those traditionalists who, in their opposition to the ordination of women rabbis, said "A woman belongs on the *bimah* about as much as an orange belongs on the *seder* plate. While not taking credit where credit is not due, a Google search some twenty years later indicates there are now women rabbis on the *bimah* in Augusta, Bangor, Portland and Rockland!

But it didn't stop with Ellen's orange. In 1994, many of the women gathered for a "*Rosh Chodesh* service" at Jo Josephson's home in Temple (The Town, pop. 586)...The invitation for Saturday July 16, 1994 encouraged the women to bring their daughters and their musical instruments and noted:

"Rosh Chodesh is the new month which is celebrated on the new moon of the Jewish lunar calendar. Rosh Chodesh is a Jewish holiday for women; a time for spiritual development and an occasion to give thanks for being created a woman."

Among the readings was a blessing over the new moon written by Judy Chicago and the following prayer to *Shekinah*

*"Shekinah, You are within my candle
You are the flame that draws us together
At first, unignited, silent, waiting...
I must strike the match and light the wick.*

*Then out you dance;
Sputtering, joyful, and beckoning
Then calm and calming
You who waited within come to fuse us together
Candle of my people
In this dim and quiet light,
Telling tales of history as you burn in the night.
My mother and my mother's mothers
Lit you in the past
And the energy of your flame has made tradition last.
Our daughters and our daughter's daughters
Will light you everywhere
And the future and past are linked
Through our Rosh Chodesh prayer."*

Four candles were lit, one for each of our foremothers and together the following prayer was recited:

Blessed are you Shekinah, Divine Spirit, God of Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, who has sanctified us through the lighting of the Rosh Chodesh candles.

While it was empowering experience, the group did not celebrate *Rosh Chodesh* again. It may have been that a taste of *Rosh Chodesh* was enough, or that it was not enough. That there were other (more empowering and inclusive?) venues to experiment with. No one seems to remember.

Not long after, Jo and Joan Braun, perhaps inspired by the material in the *Rosh Chodesh* service, undertook a major rewrite of the traditional text of the *Haggadah*. Borrowing from material that had been circulating among feminist groups across the country, the *Haggadah* that emerged not only compared the Exodus from Egypt to a "birthing," with *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt being translated as "narrow place" suggesting the narrow birth canal and the splitting of the Reed Sea as the breaking of the birth waters.... It also transformed the song *Dayenu*, borrowing from EM Broner's *The Telling/The Woman's Haggadah*, Harper San Francisco, 1992....

*It would have been enough (or would it?)
If Eve had been created in the image of God and not as a helper to Adam..
If she had been created as Adam's equal and not considered a temptress
If as the first woman to eat from the Tree of Knowledge she had been recognized
as bringing knowledge to humanity....
If women had been among the writers of the Tanach and had interpreted our role
in history
If our mothers had been honored for their daughters as well as their sons....*

But that wasn't all. While the *Haggadah* the group was using provided for a gender-neutral *Haggadah*, thanks to the previous work of Laurie Rudovsky and Jonathan Cohen,

the 1995 rewrite radically transformed the traditional blessing *Baruch atta Adonai, Eloheimu melech ha-olam* (Blessed are you, our God, the Creator of the Universe) into the feminine blessing *N'varech Yah, Shechinah, Ruach ha-olam* (Let us bless Yah, Divine Presence, Life's Breath of the Universe.) As they explained...

"We know that God is one. Being One, the divine encompasses both female and male, is both and is neither. So it seems there is no reason not to address the Deity in a feminine voice. In fact, we believe that by doing so, we may confront and change the masculine image of the Deity which many of us perhaps unconsciously hold."

The so-called "Feminist *Haggadah*" was used to guide but one *seder*. It had gone too far too fast - or so it appeared -to serve the diverse *Bagel and Dreidel* and as such gave way the next year to yet another rewrite of the gender-neutral *Haggadah*. While the interpretation of the Exodus from Egypt as a "birthing" was retained, the feminine blessing was gone. But not forgotten. Copies of the *Haggadah* went underground, appearing at more "intimate" *seders* in the ensuing years.

Some of the women of *Bagel and Dreidel* gathered once again in 2002. . This time for "*An Evening of Jewish Women Poets.*" They read from the works of Muriel Rukeyser, Naomi Replansky, Grace Paley, Maxine Kumin, Marge Piercy, Adrienne Rich, Alicia Ostriker, Peninnah Schram, Marcia Falk, Irene Klepfisz and their own Lee Sharkey. Who knows what form if any their need to gather together in the name of *Shekinah* will take in the future... Stay tuned...

There were the Poets and Political Activists

Feminists aside, *Bagel and Dreidel* also had its share of poets and political activists to stir the pot. While not all of the political activists were poets, all of the poets were political activists. As the poet Grace Paley, a self described "cooperative anarchist and combative pacifist," once wrote*:

*It is the poet's responsibility to speak truth to the power as the Quakers say
It is the poet's responsibility to learn the truth from the powerless
It is the responsibility of the poet to say many times: there is no freedom without justice and this means economic justice and love justice*

*Excerpted from *Long Walks and Intimate Talks*. The Feminist Press. The City University of New York, 1991

Migrants to western Maine in the sixties and Sseventies from New York City, Philadelphia and Rhode Island, the poets included Mitch Goodman, Henry Braun, and Lee Sharkey. Goodman was the only poet/political activist who was a founding member

of *Bagel and Dreidel*. He had been indicted for conspiring to sponsor, and support a nationwide program of resistance to the draft during the Vietnam War (1968) along with Dr. Benjamin Spock, the Rev. William Sloan Coffin, Jr. and others. At the founding of *Bagel and Dreidel* in 1985, Goodman was married to journalist Sandy Gregor. They had a child, Matty, who was to delight us all in later years as an accomplished violin player with his concerts of *Klezmer* music.

Poet Henry Braun was a retired university professor who had been active in Philadelphia along with his wife and artist Joan Braun against the Vietnam War. Poet Lee Sharkey, a professor at the University of Maine at Farmington, was in later years a founding member of Women in Black in Farmington, resisting war and the occupation of the West Bank. Both Henry and Lee were associated with the *Beloit Poetry Journal* in Farmington. On several occasions during the 20 years, Henry and Joan hosted poetry readings at their home in Weld. On one occasion the readings were of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry in translation.

This is not to say however, that all members of *Bagel and Dreidel* were political activists. There were more than a few not comfortable with the political talk regarding Israel's occupation of the West Bank that occurred at Passover, when Goodman used the talk of freedom and liberation to turn the group's attention to the plight of the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation.

And so it was not surprising that during a meeting at Ray and Matiana's home in April 1994, a meeting devoted to the questions of "Who are we Where are we going, and What do we want?" -questions that periodically rose to the surface - some said the group should avoid the political altogether, that it was too upsetting, while others countered saying to be Jewish was to be political and still others went so far as to say we were too fragile to endure the dissension that occurs when political issues - including/meaning the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza - were discussed.

By meetings end, the consensus was that the place for political discussions was at meetings designated as such by the family hosting the meeting and not at other gathering. In fact, such meetings had been occurring for some time.

- In the late 80's Mary Flint invited Colby professor and political scientist Sandy Maisel to her home to talk about the **Future of Israel and the Middle East**.
- In 1991 Steve Bien and Ellen Grunblatt, following what some viewed as racist comments at a meeting decided to host "**An Evening Exploring Our Middle Eastern Roots With Other Middle Easterners.**" Pot luck consisted of Middle Eastern dishes. Dr. Shapour Borna, an Iranian member of the Farmington community was asked to join in the discussion in an effort to "humanize the other."
- In the summer of 1993 Mitch Goodman hosted a discussion entitled "**How do we see ourselves as Jews..In the light of the Holocaust and the current state of**

Israel.” For a warm up, Mitch had us read an article from the *Chicago Tribune* entitled “American, Israeli Jews divided by approaches to Holocaust.”

- In the fall of 1993 Jo Josephson hosted **Yvette Naal of the Non-Violent Order of the Ark**. Naal was on tour raising funds for the work of a peace center called *Beit Noah* (House of Noah) that she had established on the border between East and West Jerusalem in 1985 . The flier announcing the meeting contained the following excerpt from a letter written by Naal:

“Despite everything, we are aware of our smallness, fragility and our faults. We are like a little piece of yeast; perhaps we act as a catalyst among our Israeli friends who are struggling against the occupation and for a just solution in the Middle East, and among our Palestinian friends working for non-violent resistance. We encourage their efforts on both sides for unity in the struggle....”

Naal’s narrated slide show of the activities of the Israeli occupation forces made for some an unsettling, disturbing evening.

In the years following the ‘94 meeting, politically focused meetings were few. However, because of the fact that several members of *Bagel and Dreidel* were on the faculty of UMF, the group was able to piggyback off university sponsored events that were less polarizing.

- David Shipler, winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for his book *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* joined a pot luck supper hosted by Paula and David Morris before his public talk.
- Dr. Daphna Sharfman, a noted Israeli scholar on women’s issues and human rights and author of *Women and Politics* and *Living without a Constitution: Civil Rights in Israel* joined us at a pot luck supper at Ray and Matiana Glass’ before her public talk.
- Lee Sharkey and Al Bersbach of UMF shared their experiences with Russian Jews while working at the Ped Institute in Syktyvkar, in the Komi Republic of Russia. (UMF had an annual exchange of staff with the Institute.) *Bagel and Dreidel* followed up the meeting sending a menorah and other objects to the Jews. (see appendix for “Walking With Lena”).

It should be noted that during the ’94 meeting, Lee Sharkey, carrying out a suggestion of Geoff Marshall in 1992 that we should look for “what we share in common and that the radical and the religious should form subgroups” called for a planning meeting of a “political action arm” of *Bagel and Dreidel*. The “political arm” never came into being. Instead politically active members of Bagel and Dreidel put their energies into Western Maine Peace Action Workshop (WMPAW), pronounced “WOOMPAH.”

And Sharkey? She went on to become a founding member of Farmington’s Women in Black standing in protest of war every Friday in front of the Post Office, along with Jo and Ellen and many other women. Women in Black was founded in 1988 by Israeli and

Palestinian women opposing the occupation of the West Bank and quickly sprang up around the world, each with its own message. In 2005 Sharkey traveled to Jerusalem to attend the annual meeting of Women in Black from around the world

However, not everyone was ready to go their separate ways on Israel. Not everyone subscribed to the belief that *Bagel and Dreidel* was “too fragile a group to deal with its differences over Israel.” In the fall of 2001, at a gathering to break the Yom Kippur fast, Jo, Ellen, and Steve Bien framed the discussion by asking “How can we talk about what we need to talk about?”

Arguing passionately for *why* we needed to talk about Israel were Vicky Cohen and Lee. “You are my family; what happens in a family means you disagree; it doesn’t change the relationship... our patriarch argued with God; Israel is a hot button for all of us; we should not be afraid of the heat,” said Vicky. “Israel is at the core of what we are as Jews; if we don’t talk about it we are withdrawing what we are,” said Lee.

It was agreed that one way to talk about *it* was to focus on where we were coming from individually i.e. why we believed what we believed based on our own personal experiences. Jonathan said we needed to talk biographically and philosophically rather than politically. And Steve and Ellen, having done their homework, proposed that we use the *Public Conversation Project* and its structured mediated approach as a model for our discussion.

Ellen and Steve hosted a meeting to which they invited professional third party facilitators to walk the group through exercises that would enable them to find common ground with those they disagreed with, in the hope they could talk about their differences and not feel threatened.. To the dismay of those who did attend the meeting, those who did not want to talk about differences did not attend.

The Nature of their Jewishness

As outsiders in the Christian world of rural Maine, the Jews of *Bagel and Dreidel* had a heightened sense of themselves as Jews. As if that weren’t enough, they also had to acknowledge the fact that there were deep-rooted differences among those in *Bagel and Dreidel* regarding the “nature” of their Jewishness. Which is to say, not only were they the “other” in the wider Christian world, they were to some degree the “other” within their own Jewish community. The “other” being the religious/observant, the not very religious/observant, the non religious/observant.

There were several attempts to talk about their Jewishness. Not surprising, given the nature of their differences, few if any bore fruit. In August 1991, Joan and Henry Braun hosted a potluck supper and discussion at their farm house in Weld focusing on the article “Brandeis in the Balance” that had appeared in the Nov. Dec. 1990 issue of *Tikkun* magazine. It discussed the problems of Jewish identity and/or assimilation at Brandeis

University- oft dubbed the “Jewish University.” Joan and Henry, as well as Lee Sharkey were early graduates of Brandeis, which was founded in 1948.

Like some members of Bagel and Dreidel, Brandeis was struggling with the nature of its Jewishness. As the author of the article and faculty member Gordon Fellman noted “Many people connected with Brandeis share a common American Jewish ambivalence about being Jewish or, at least, about “how Jewish” to be. Like many of the founding members of Bagel and Dreidel, Brandeis’ early faculty was committed to the prophetic tradition of Judaism - that of social justice.

In 1992, Joan discovered *Judaism Beyond God: A Radical way to Be Jewish* by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine in the UMF library and suggested that the group might consider reading and discussing it. One of the founders of Humanistic Judaism, Wine holds that tradition has nothing to do with being a Jew; that Jews existed before Judaism; and that the Jewish nation was a political and ethnic reality long before the priestly and rabbinic religious establishments became the rulers of the Jews and invented Judaism. (*Judaism Beyond God*, page 7). For Wine, Jewish identity is not based on observance but rather on a shared ancestry, a shared memory; and a shared vulnerability (*Judaism Beyond God*, page 99-101). A chapter entitled “The Jew” was mailed out; no one responded to the suggestion that a group form to explore the ideas in the book.

Last but not least, in 1995, when Jewish educator Daniel Cohen, the father of Jonathan Cohen, the grandfather of Sam, Eli, Rosie and Miriam and the father-in-law of Vicky, while on a visit to Maine, offered to weigh in on the subject. The gathering took place at the home of Shelia and Peter Shafer. For traditionalist Cohen, it wasn’t enough for a Jew to support liberal causes, as many in *Bagel and Dreidel* did, nor was it enough to support Israel, which many in *Bagel and Dreidel* did not. For Cohen it was most important that a Jew observe the Sabbath. Needless to say, that was not something the non-observant Jews in *Bagel and Dreidel* did. Nor was it something they agreed with.

Definitions and differences aside, over the past twenty years the Jews of *Bagel and Dreidel* while struggling to find Geoff Marshall’s “Common Ground” created in the words of Jonathan Cohen a colorful “Quilt of Jewishness.”

Part III: Be Fruitful and Multiply

The Interfaith Marriages

Many of the founding members of *Bagel and Dreidel* were of “mixed” marriages. They were artists, lawyers, teachers, publishers, writers, anthropologists, entrepreneurs, doctors and included Nick and Janice Scott, Mary and Allen Flint, Ray and Maitiana Glass, Betty and Stan Jespersen, Lennie and Faith Bornstein; Diane Kruchow and Ted Gay; Mary Beyer and Leon Bresloff, Sandy Gregor and Mitch Goodman.

Many drove and shaped the direction of Bagel and Dreidel in its early years, especially Janice, the “founding mother” who said we were doing it “for the children.” By then hers were full grown. Attorney Mary and Professor Allen provided speakers, from political

scientists airing their views on the future of the Middle East to Lubavitchers from Portland reaching out. Political Activist Mitch and artist Sandy spurred political talk, centering on the plight of the Palestinians and in later years their son Matty provided live Klezmer music on his violin.. Reporter Betty served as scribe. Teacher Lennie and Faith provided traditional views and magnificent cheesecake.

Nursing home owners Leon and Mary could be counted on to staff the kitchens at Chanukah and Passover and to provide the white table “cloths” for the ten or more tables at Chanukah and Passover.. Alternative press publisher Diane could be counted on to send out notices of meetings in the first years, work with the children on plays performed at Chanukah, and provide Jewish music at Chanukah. While educators Maitiana and Ray could be counted on to host the “Where are we Going, what do we want discussions?”

While the subject of interfaith marriages was always there, it was rarely a subject for discussion. One “Conservative” rabbi when asked to lead a discussion on the subject in the early years arrived at the meeting at Ray and Matiana’s home and bluntly stated he was not particularly supportive of such marriages. So much for that discussion.

Not ready to fold up their tents, the group invited Dr. Rob Lively professor of religion at UMF to lead a discussion entitled “Does Interfaith Marriage Help or Hurt Judaism?” Notes from the 1993 discussion hosted by Fred and Marge Blonder were predictable. Many talked of personal childhood experiences, the pain and joy associated with growing up Jewish and the concerns surrounding the raising of children and how to handle religious holidays. What was new was the shared belief that through their interfaith marriages not only had they become more Jewish they now felt more comfortable with their own culture and identity. And, perhaps most interesting, was their belief that the culture of Judaism was changing , due in part, they said to the interfaith marriages.

The Children

The children... Feminist, Observant, Secular Jews aside, *Bagel and Dreidel* came into being for the children. That it was about the children that Laurie Rudovsky spoke at a planning meeting in 1992: “It’s crucial that we clarify who our audience is on the holidays and that she personally felt that the holidays should focus on the children. Ellen Grunblatt asked how we could integrate the needs of the adults with those of the children; she said it was possible to do both. “I’d like a sense that it is for all of us.”

Part IV: Beyond the Pale

The Farmington Community

For the most part, the gatherings of *Bagel and Dreidel* occurred in someone’s home. When larger spaces were needed for the celebrations of Chanukah and Passover, the local churches were perfect, offering kitchens and dining areas. In the beginning it was the United Methodist Church; then it was Old South Congregational Church; now it is the Wilton Congregational Church, which is also hosting Temple Shalom Tsafon and its

monthly services. Members of the congregations have joined the celebrations in an ecumenical spirit.

Bagel and Dreidel's relationship with the wider Farmington community was most notable during Chanukah of 1992 when a snow-covered chunk of wood was thrown at the lit menorah in the window of the Cohen's home in Farmington. Was it an act of vandalism or was it - in the terminology of the day - a crime or incidence of "bias?" There had been a smattering of the latter throughout the state in the early Nineties. We'll never know. But what we do know was that the members of the Old South Congregational Church, with Rev. Dick Waddell in the lead, responded swiftly letting whoever did it that this is not acceptable in this community. An evening of Christmas Carols sung outside the family's home was welcomed by all. Not to be outdone, members of the university faculty where Jonathan Cohen taught philosophy also came to show their support singing songs of peace in Hebrew.

For the most part, aside from the usual informative newspaper article on how the Jews in the Farmington area celebrate Chanukah or Passover, *Bagel and Dreidel* has not been eager to parade its Jewishness. Unless you count a gift subscription to *Tikkun* magazine aka "A bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture & Society" given to the Farmington Public Library by Bagel and Dreidel in 1990 .

For when asked in the early 90's to join in a parade and march through the streets of Farmington decrying violence, domestic and other, the prevailing opinion was that if "members" of *Bagel and Dreidel* wanted to participate they would do so as individuals and not as "members" of *Bagel and Dreidel*. The argument being that the group was not an established organization where decisions and actions could be made on behalf of the group. The issue came up years later when asked to sponsor George Bartenieff's stage adaptation of Victor Klemperer's Diaries (1933-38) at the Temple Stream Theater in 2005. Individuals, not *Bagel and Dreidel* lent their support.

It should be noted that "in the beginning" one had to travel to the southern part of Maine to purchase *matzoh* and all the other trappings of Passover. Sometime in the mid 90's the local supermarket chain began to sell *matzoh* and *gefilte fish* at Passover and *Jahrzeit* candles year round and the gourmet food store began to have locally baked *challah* available on Fridays. And it was good.

Part V: Seasons of Our Joy

Celebrating the Jewish holidays was the engine that drove the Jews of the Farmington area to gather together in the first place; it was the common ground that was to hold them together for the next twenty years. But not just any and all Jewish holidays. The farms and forested mountains that drew many of early members of *Bagel and Dreidel* to western Maine played a major role in the celebratory calendar. Holidays tied to trees, the changing seasons, and the waxing and waning of the moon were enthusiastically celebrated. Thanks to Vicky Cohen, Arthur Waskow's *Seasons of Our Joy*, with its

focus on the role of the lunar and solar cycles became a basic resource for setting the tone of many of the celebrations.

The Holidays of the Lunar Cycle: *Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot*

Rosh Hashanah/Tashlich: 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, October 4th, 2005

At Rollo Park, Farmington. We will gather there with Jonathan Cohen for *Tashlich* by the “pond in the stream.” Bring bread crumbs to cast upon the water. A pot luck supper in the park follows.

“Like Pesach in the sun cycle, Rosh Hashanah (in the lunar cycle) is a feast of beginning. According to tradition, it is the anniversary of the creation of Adam – the birthday of the human race. It is the moment for us to begin renewing our spiritual lives, our sense of decency. It is the moment of rebirth of the moon.”
Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy

Yom Kippur: 5:30 p.m., Thursday, October 13th

At Center Hill, Mount Blue State Park in Weld. We will gather at the parking lot and “hike” uphill (wear sturdy shoes) about ten minutes to the ledges overlooking the distant Tumbledown Mountain range for a circle of silence, readings and the sound of the *Shofar* with Sam Cohen. Break fast at 6:30 p.m. with a pot luck supper at the nearby home of Joan and Henry Braun.

“At the phase of the swelling moon, the tenth of *Tishri*, *Yom Kippur* is, like *Shavuot* in the cycle of the sun., a day of intense relationship with God. As Sinai was the moment when the whole Jewish people (actually only the men stood at Sinai) felt closest to God, so *Yom Kippur* is the moment when each Jewish individual does, when they stand face to face at an inward, not an outward mountain. *Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy.*

Sukkot: 5:30 p.m., Sunday, October 23rd

At the sukkah of Silvia and Bob Finelli on Fernald Street in Wilton. Pot luck of Dairy and Parve, please.

“As the moon of *Tishri* draws to fullness, we are ready to celebrate *Sukkot* – the Festival of Huts. – the festival of fulfillment. But *Sukkot* is not only the fulfillment of the moon. It is also the fulfillment of the yearly cycle of the sun. All the sun’s work upon the earth comes to fullness as the harvest ripens and is gathered in. *Sukkot* celebrates the glory of the earth fulfilled. As the moon has rewarded our celebration of her birth and growth by bursting into a glowing perfect circle, so the earth rewards our care of seed and stalk by bursting into ripened fruit and grain.” *Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy*

Tu B’Shvat

The “minor holiday” of *Tu B’Shvat*, aka the *New Year of the Trees*, *The Feast of the Fruits*, *The Promise of Spring* became an important *Bagel and Dreidel* tradition for some, coming as it does at the full moon in the dead of Maine’s mythic winter.

Preparing the way for the first celebration of *Tu B’Shvat*, artist Joan and poet Henry Braun in the summer of 1994, hosted an evening dedicated to “**God and Nature: A Discussion and Celebration under Mount Blue.**” Their hundred year old farmhouse, in the wilds of Weld at the end of Temple Road at the base of Mount Blue, was a perfect setting as was the wording of their invitation:

“Jewish concepts of God have had many cyclic transformations in which the significance of Nature (often identified with women and creation) has been either devalued or celebrated. Is it possible that rather than isolating ourselves from the Jewish tradition by moving to Maine, we are reconnecting with an essential lost chord of that tradition? Come share your thoughts on whether the people of the Book (intellect) has become separated from the people of art, music, nature (body) in your own life. How can they be rejoined? Bring readings from the traditions, music, food.”

Five months later, in the winter of 1995, feminist, poet and political activist Lee Sharkey unearthing a little known *Kabbalistic* service initiated what was to become an annual celebration of nature when she set a table laden with all manner of fruit including coconuts, dates, figs, grapes, olives, pomegranates and wines (grape juice for the children). It was a table rich in symbolism and sensory delight...A few excerpts from Lee’s *Haggadah* follow...

..

Tu B’Shvat, or the fifteenth day of the month of Sh’vat is the name for the festival of the New Year of the Trees. In ancient Israel, it marked the date of separation of the tithes of fruit—one year’s taxable produce from the next. This date was chosen because it is the traditional demarcation point between the winter rains and the beginning of the growing season.

The mystical sages of Safed in the 16th century saw God as a tree of life, whose roots were in the heavens, and whose branches extended toward earth, bringing us life and blessing. The New Year of the Trees was for them an opportunity to thank God for the wonder of renewed life for the earth. They organized a seder for Tu B’Shvat, in which they drank different kinds of wine and ate many different kinds of fruit

It is as this day were God’s own Rosh Hashanah. Just as we need God’s presence on Rosh HaShanah to help us renew our days, so God needs our presence on this one.

This human intervention takes the ceremonial form of eating fruit—the final product of the older generation of the tree, which bears within it the seed of the next generation. Fruit is thus the symbol of the moment when the flow of life is

renewed; if we eat it with the proper blessing and directed intention, the flow is maintained and encouraged...

More recently, Tu B'Shvat has become for many North American Jews a day of celebration and reaffirmation of the necessity of protecting God's creation. For us, it comes as the most precarious moment in the cycle of nature, when the cold sets most deeply into the ground. Deep winter, when trees and other vegetation must struggle to begin again, is an appropriate moment to commit ourselves to protecting the environment and to renewing the flow of nature's life in our own generation, when it is in most danger...

In Chesterville the hardy dozen that manage each year to navigate their way through the snow laden back roads of Chesterville to the home Lee shares with her husband Al Bersbach, bring poems, stories and photographs of trees to compliment the *seder* that Lee crafted and that has now endured for more than ten years.... During the *seder* they drink four symbolic cups of wine and three symbolic kinds of fruit be it fruit with pits, rinds or seeds.

The celebration of *Tu B'Shvat* was particularly welcomed by the feminists of Bagel and Dreidel when it was learned that the holiday with its roots in pagan times was initially associated with goddess *Asherah*, the consort of Baal, the rival of the Jewish God.. *Asherah*, started out life as a sacred tree. Like the Druids, the follower of *Ashera* worshipped trees and the day became one of planting new trees. While Priestly Judaism did not acknowledge the holiday, Rabbinic Judaism which cultivated many of the folk practices of the Jewish masses neglected by the priests, purified the holiday and as the *New Year of the Trees* became a minor holiday.

Chanukah:

Chanukah - the festival of the lights - was a ready made celebration for those living close to the land coming as it does at the time of the winter solstice, when the sun and moon are, as Waskow describes them "in exile," when the day is at its shortest and the night at its longest, before the sunlight begins to return.

With deep roots in the pagan ritual of lighting fires to encourage the return of the light, Chanukah was complementary, if you will, in keeping with the solstice celebrations the back-to-the-landers took part in as they shared with neighbors and friends gathering around a pile of burning brush to celebrate the Solstice. It was also complementary to the solstice celebrations the peace activists engaged in as they gathered round the bon fires of the solstice to call for peace midst dark times.

Bonfires- pagan or political aside – the highlight of the well-attended *Chanukah* party each year in a local church was a table full of *menorahs* that were lit by the young people of *Bagel and Dreidel* in a "communal lighting" ceremony. When held on the seventh or

eighth day of *Chanukah*, the blaze was to say the least- impressive, if not worrisome. While the plates stacked with potatoe pancakes that followed, cooked in the metaphorical oil of *Chanukah*, were also impressive, the result of five to six kitchen crew participating in the annual fry-off.

But the growing of the light wasn't the only thing that appealed to the early members of *Bagel and Dreidel*. The story of the Macabees and their guerilla warfare against their foreign occupiers was equally appealing to the political activists in the group who saw it as a celebration of the world's first recorded national liberation struggle.

Ever evolving, the holiday has lately become for some an opportunity to increase awareness of peace work being done in the face of the occupation by the Israelis of the West Bank and Gaza and the loss of civil and human rights of the Palestinians. . Lee Sharkey of Women in Black has shared with the Jewish members of Women in Black material entitled " A new light on lighting the menorah" from *Brit Tzedek v'Shalom*, The Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace of Chicago (See appendix for full text).

As you light the candles of your menorah for Chanukah, we ask that each night you devote one of the eight flames to honoring Israelis and Palestinians whose bold actions inspire us as American Jews to work for a peaceful Israel and Palestine living side by side....And finally, please light one candle for all of the Israelis and Palestinians who struggle valiantly each day to keep the light of peace burning, and to yourself, for your personal dedication to work for peace.

While the ceremony hasn't made its way into *Bagel and Dreidel's* Chanukah celebration now attended to by some 50 to 60 people at the Wilton Congregational Church, it has potential. Though given the history of bagel and Dreidel, it is unlikely.

Passover

If *Chanukah* is about diversity and tolerance, Passover is about freedom and justice. . . Not only freedom for the Jews from the Pharaoh, but freedom for the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation. And for those tied to the yearly cycles of nature the origins of Passover as told by Arthur Waskow in his *Seasons of Our Joy*, was especially welcome.

According to Waskow, many scholars believe that Passover is a fusion of two early festivals - one of shepherds, one of farmers – that welcomed spring in two quite different ways. One celebrating the fertility of their flocks may have sacrificed a sheep and smeared its blood on the door posts of their tents. The other, in preparation for the harvest of spring barley and wheat, they may have cleared out from their homes the starter dough they used to make the bread rise. It may have felt right to them to celebrate the new crop, but starting over in their history by eating the most ancient bread of all, the flat unleavened bread that was the beginning of the farmers' food.

Passover, like *Chanukah*, was celebrated with a sit down pot luck dinner, attracting upwards of 80, a number far greater than the Jews that comprised *Bagel and Dreidel*.

Members of the local church at which the Passover *seder* was held were there. Parents living in the cities to the south were there. Quaker Libby Darlington was there as was Emilia Pershena, the Russian exchange teacher from the Ped Institute in Sytivkar in the Komi Republic of Russia, when she “was in town” teaching at UMF .

It was important that the members of this eclectic, extended “family” be identified and introduced at the beginning of the *seder*. Drawing from the E.M. Broner’s *The Telling/The Women’s Haggadah* , individuals were asked to say their name, where they were from and who they were the daughter/son and granddaughter/son and great granddaughter/son of and where they were from.

As such, I am Jo Josephson of Temple, Maine, the daughter of Dora Schiffman Josephson of Newark/Rutherford, New Jersey, the granddaughter of Esther Hammer Schiffman of Tarnople, Galacia/Ukraine and Newark New Jersey, the great granddaughter of Raisa Hammer of Tarnople/Galacia/Ukraine. That’s as far back as I can go. The ritual led some to find their grandparents came from neighboring towns in Galacia. Where else could they have come from? Steve Bien’s grandfather came from Tarnople; Lee Sharkey’s grandparent’s came from nearby Brody.

As noted above the *Haggadah* was transformed at least four times, transitioning from a gender neutral to a feminist *Haggadah* and back to a gender neutral *Haggadah* with some feminist underpinnings. For some the *seder*, usually led by Jonathan Cohen was the draw, for others it was the wide ranging potluck, and for those preparing the *matzoh* balls and heating up the chicken soup and washing the dishes, the spirit of the kitchen crew was the draw.

Part VI: Take One Raw Potato...

Published by the Hadassah of Rockland, Maine, the *Downeast Jewish Cookbook* might have been the first Maine Jewish cookbook. It included a recipe for imitation/mock lobster and suggested that the cook “take a piece of Haddock and cook it with tomatoes to impart a red color...”

For every holiday there is a food. If it is Rosh Hashanah, it’s apples and honey; if it’s Chanukah it’s potato pancakes and sour cream; if it’s Purim it’s Hamantaschen and of course, if it’s Passover, it’s matzoh ball soup and Gefilte Fish with horseradish..... There is only one holiday, *Yom Kippur*, not identified with food but rather by its absence until the fast is broken with *Challah*.

HORSERADISH

For some, Passover is the only time of year they “partake” of this bitter herb. This member of the mustard family (sharing lineage with its gentler cousins, kale, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts and the common radish) is cultivated not for its seed - as is mustard - or its leaf as is kale - but for its fleshy white root that is “prepared” and sold in little jars at the supermarket. Logging onto www.horseradish.org one learns that “the bite and aroma of the horseradish root are almost absent until it is grated or ground. During this process,

as the root cells are crushed, volatile oils known as Isothiocyanates are released. Vinegar stops this reaction and stabilizes the flavor. For milder horseradish, vinegar is added immediately.” ...But we are getting ahead of ourselves...

Growing Horseradish (Amoracia rusticana)

One need not tend this hardy perennial. It grows wild in your garden thriving in soils that are well drained and rich in potash and can be harvested both in fall(after a hard frost) and in spring (before regrowth). Get cuttings from a neighbor and if that is not possible, Johnny’s Selected Seeds sells them at five for \$11.30 or 10 for \$14.30 and advises you to spade the soil about a foot deep and work in compost, manure or fertilizer. Then hoe a 5-6 inch deep furrow and plant the root cuttings about 12-18 inches apart on a slant, wit the flat cut end up covering about 2-3 inches. Irrigate if the soil is dry and throughout the season.

Preparing Horseradish

Tradition calls for horseradish sauce over Gefilte “fish” at Passover . But you need not stop there. It’s terrific in combination with yogurt over salmon or brown rice or potatoes or as a relish in combination with raw cranberries, onions, yogurt and sugar.

Horseradish Sauce (Ratners Meatless Cookbook)

1 horseradish root (about one pound) pared and finely grated
1 cup white vinegar
½ cup sugar

Don’t breath while grating the horseradish. Best to do it outdoors
Mix well and chill

Mama Stamberg’s Cranberry Relish from MPBN’s Susan Stamberg

2 cups whole raw cranberries(Ricker Orchards, Turner)
1 small onion
¾ cup yogurt (Stony Fields Organic)
½ cup of sugar
2 tablespoons of horseradish sauce

Grind raw berries and onions together (do not puree).

Add everything else and mix. Refrigerate before using.

Excellent alone, on potato pancakes instead of applesauce, or with turkey (Bob Neal’s Turkey Farm, New Sharon)

PARSNIPS

Another root crop, this member of the carrot and parsley family – known as the “yellow carrot” (it’s tan with white flesh) can be found in Ellen Grunblatts’s chicken soup at Passover , along with matzoh balls and carrots, providing a sublime sweetness. Passover, coming in April, is the perfect time of year to harvest parsnips. They become sweet as a result of wintering over (the starch converts to sugar between 40 and 34 degrees F) and are ready to be dug from the mud of early spring. If you wait too long to dig, they will

become woody, so remember where you planted them..if the tops start sprouting, it's too late, almost. Though you can also harvest it in the fall after a few light frosts (they will be sweet but not as sweet as in the spring)

Growing Parsnips (Pastinaca sativa)

Unlike horseradish, parsnips are grown from seed. FEDCO (Andover and Harris) is a good source of seed; so is Johnny's. Parsnips should be planted early in the spring, as they take a long time to germinate (about three weeks) and the soil should be kept moist until the seedlings emerge. Thin seedling 3-4 inches apart when they are 3-4 inches tall. This is a slow-growing, long season crop (120 days).

Preparing Jo's Curried Parsnips

Take six good-sized parsnips, peeled, cut into matchsticks and sauté in butter along with ¼ tsp cayenne, ½ tsp curry powder and ¼ cup chopped peanuts in a cast iron skillet. When the parsnips turn "golden", add a little water and cover. Don't cook too long as they will turn to mush. Excellent over brown rice or as a side dish..

Preparing Parsnips Galette with Greens

This is good in the fall, when you have both parsnips and hardy greens in the garden. Flying Pond Farm in MountVernon is a good source of greens year-round. Their "Mixed Cooking Greens" can be purchased at Farmington's Better Living Center. It's good for lunch or as a side dish for dinner. Take two cups of peeled, grated parsnips add to about four cups of blanched and drained mixed cooking greens (tatsoi, red mustard, green mustard). Beat two eggs, whisk in 1 tablespoon of flour and 1 teaspoon of salt. Stir in parsnips, greens and ¼ cup of grated cheese (Parmesan or Romano) Melt 2 tablespoons of butter in skillet, add ½ cup of sage and ½ cup of finely chopped walnuts. Stir frequently and add to parsnip mixture. Cook like an omelet. Cut into pieces and serve.

Local Flavors: Cooking and Eating from America's Farmers' Markets ...by Deborah Madison.

CARROT

Carrots. The main ingredient of Tsimmes asa Tsimmis asa Tzimmis. It's said to be a traditional Passover dish - records show that at the Passover ppotluck in 1994, Tsimmes was if not the only dish, the main dish (Thank goodness there are many ways to prepare it) - but is great anytime of year. ReA Google search tells us carrots are native to Afghanistan/Middle East. FEDCO tells us that the original carrots were yellow, red, black or purple; the more familiar orange ones are parvenus.

Growing Carrots (Daucus carota)

Will Bonsall of the Scatterseed Project in Industry told me early on not to plant carrots until the oak leaves were the size of mouse ears. When you plant all depends on whether you plan to store them over the winter (mid to late June). But

planting too early means slow germination. My friend Gary plants enough carrots in June to feed the town of Starks (pop. 570), harvesting up to 800 pounds a year for his friends. His favorite variety is *Rumba* a tapered Nantes; the blunt roots are deep orange and the taste is sweet sweet. Carrots are simple to grow, the only thing you really need to know is the importance of thinning.....thin mercilessly at least twice till carrots are about one inch apart.

Preparing Tsimmis

Tsimmis There are just as many ways to prepare Tsimmis as there are to spell the word. The following recipe is derived from *The Enchanted Broccoli Forest* by Mollie Katzen. This version forgoes her topping. In a deep dish casserole, combine sweet potatoes (two pounds) , with two large carrots, one large tart apple, sliced., one heaping cup of chopped onions, twenty large pitted prunes, juice of one large lemon., one tsp salt, ¼ to ½ tsp cinnamon, 2/3 cup fresh squeezed orange juice. Cover tightly and bake for two hours

BEET

Think Borscht and you think cold beet soup with a dollop of sour cream. However, like Tsimmis, there are as many versions of this soup as there are Jews. In Russian cuisine, all borscht has beets and cabbage and optionally potatoes. In Ukrainian and Polish cuisine, the potatoes and cabbage are both optional. In Mennonite cuisine, borscht refers generically to soup and may not have beets at all. In Rumanian cuisine borscht does not necessarily include beetroot, but often refers to any soup which is sour. According to The Joy of Yiddish, Borscht was a great staple among Jews because beets were so cheap. “You don’t need teeth to eat borscht. Another saying goes, “Billig vie borscht,” “Cheap as borscht.” Beets are a good source of potassium , which helps keep blood pressure down

Growing Beets (Beta vulgaris)

Plant early for sweetness. Thin for use as greens. Lutz beets also known as Winter Keeper (60 days) are my standard. They are said to be an heirloom variety from Europe. FEDCO suggests “You’ll have Lutz of luck if you provide these beets with mellow compost, sow the seed further apart than with other beet varieties and thin the roots to 4 inches apart.” Do know that each “seed” is actually a dried fruit containing several seeds enclosed in a tough coat. That’s why moisture, humus, and thinning are critical. Beets are shallow rooted, so in a dry summer you should mulch heavily.

Preparing Jo’s Borscht

Eight medium sized beets peeled and grated/cuisinart. Combine with two to three quarts of water (depends on size of beets), juice of lemon, handful of raisins, salt and sugar to taste. Bring to a boil and simmer until beets are tender/not soft. Adjust seasoning. Chill and serve topped with a boiled potato or sour cream.

Preparing Jo’s Beets with Goat Cheese

Steam beets until firm tender, cool, pare and prepare thick slices. Drizzle your favorite oil/vinegar dressing. Top with goat cheese.

POTATOES

Potatoes mean potato pancakes, fried in the symbolic oil of Chanukah. Potatoes, a member of the same family as tomatoes, peppers and eggplant, started out in Peru with dark purple skin and yellow flesh, according to Will Bonsall of the Scatterseed project in Industry. He ought to know as he grows some 600 varieties, including several purple ones (Cowhorn, Purple Peruvian and Caribe) . There is something fitting in the fact that Maine is a major producer of potatoes for the world

Growing Potatoes (Solanum tuberosum)

We eat the stem of potatoes, a specialized underground storehouse of starch, commonly known as a “tuber.” You grow potatoes by planting potatoes; cut up pieces of so-called “seed “ potatoes that include at least two “eyes.” And you keep hilling up the plant, covering up the stem, as the season progresses, so as to allow for the growth of the stem/tubers. Potatoes not only mean potato pancakes, they also mean potato bugs, which one must pick off every day as their cruise the rows of growing potatoes.

B & D's Potato pancakes (contact Barbara Leopold for her recipe)

Russet, a dry mealy potato is often used in making potato pancakes. Hand grate six potatoes (with their skin on) and one large onion. Beat one large egg, add one tsp salt, three tbsps flour and one-half tsp baking powder.