

Jewish Holiday Desserts

By Mike Harris

"Holiday Desserts" as a subject was just too narrow, so I am covering that with an e-mail from my daughter, and am adding some special dishes that made holidays more festive.

My mother used to make a stuffed brisket for special occasions that never survived beyond the meal. There were never any leftovers, we just kept nibbling till it was all gone. It did not seem to matter how big it was at the start, it never made it to a second meal. My brother who became a gourmet cook when he retired to Florida, would make a fish dinner that had everyone asking for seconds and thirds. These special events were always talked about for days after they had taken place.

Now to address today's topic I will enter my daughter's e-mail verbatim:

"Hi Dad – Holiday Desserts

If you define 'dessert' as something sweet with the meal instead of something sweet at the end of the meal then there is conversation to be had. Judaism puts the sweet stuff at the center of the exercise. At Rosh-Ha-Shona the sweet stuff is apples and honey and are featured at the very beginning of the festive meal. There is even a special blessing that gets said. For Hanukah it is jelly doughnuts and potato latkes and they are the main course. For 'Shavuot' it is cheese blintzes and they are also the main course. The only designated dessert is the 'Afikoman' at Passover, a piece of matzo the size of an olive is mandated as the last thing eaten at the Seder, it is no one's idea of a sweet dessert." 'Afikoman' is a Greek word for dessert. This of course begs the question 'What is a Greek word doing in the middle of a Jewish Seder celebrating freedom from slavery?' It turns out that the 'Seder' is a Greek meal. There is an interlocutor that manages the meal. There are questions and answers and discussion while everyone reclines and plays with their food [dips twice].

I hope this is a helpful missive.

Lots of Love EDIE"

The above e-mail attests to her scholarship and knowledge. I never knew that the "Seder" was a Greek meal or that "Afikoman" was a Greek word for dessert.