



Nov/Dec 2009 Issue

CHA HA NUK KAH



THE FEAST: Deep-Fried Hanukkah** By Christa Glennie Seychew

Hanukkah is chock-full of traditions, and at eight days in length, it's no surprise that a few of those traditions involve food. The most popular pays homage to the miracle of the holy oil, which earned its place in Jewish history by burning for eight days, despite the fact that it was a mere single day's ration. Thus, the tradition of preparing food by cooking it in hot oil has become part of the Hanukkah celebration.

Though most are familiar with cooking latkes (potato pancakes) in hot oil to honor this significant aspect of Hanukkah, jelly doughnuts (called sufganiyot) find equal footing in some parts of the U.S., and even more so in Israel. There, these sweet treats have become so popular that street vendors have begun selling them to eager citizens weeks before Hanukkah even begins. The most common version is filled with sweet red jelly and dusted with sugar, but those filled with custard or dulce de leche are also popular.

Doughnuts in all manners of shape and size have been around for ages according to archaeologists, who found petrified rings of dough during an exploration of prehistoric ruins in the Southwestern United States. Whether or not those doughnuts were cooked in hot oil to create sweet, lip-smacking concoctions is unknown, but mankind's fondness for sugary, warm dough spans centuries, cultures and even continents.

Take for example the Iranian zoolbia, the Italian zeppole, the Ethiopian lagaymat, or the Icelandic kleinuhringur. Coated in cinnamon, filled with red bean paste, or dunked in hot honey, doughnuts can be found all over our planet—sweet or savory, dense or airy,

with hole or without--in fact, doughnuts could very well be considered a part of the human experience.

Americans are well-acquainted with the classic glazed, ring doughnut (which despite local rumors, did not originate up north at a Tim Hortons location), but other cultural examples are available to fried dough fanatics. In Buffalo you'll find Greek loukoumades--hot, tantalizing honey-sodden donut holes--at Kosta's on Hertel Avenue or at the annual Hellenic Festival. Local Chinese buffets tempt even the most sated patrons with their sugar sprinkled interpretation (called yóutiáo), while New Orleans-inspired restaurants, like Shango in the University Heights, and French joints serving brunch occasionally offer up the delicate pâte à choux-based beignet--which is best served with a steamy latte.

So whether you are Jewish and honoring the miracle of the Temple oil as part of your traditional Hanukkah celebration, or not Jewish, and looking for ways to celebrate a holiday in a significant way, consider gathering family and friends to prepare your own variation of festive fried dough.

***This piece was one of a series of five stories commissioned from Christa Glennie Seychew for Block Club's annual holiday issue. Four other pieces--covering food traditions for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's--also appeared.*