



Menu Madness

Parshat VaYera

It feels like cheating a little when I have to plan a Shabbat meal around a parashah that prominently features food. Recipes take the back burner, so to speak, and the challenge is to incorporate the food from the parashah into an atmosphere that brings the Torah reading to life in a different way.

Our dining room will undergo a transformation this week. It will become Abraham and Sarah's tent; I have a few tension rods that I will hang in the doorways to the dining room with tab curtains attached. We also have multiple tablecloths that can serve as interesting fabrics that might have adorned Abraham's tent. On the floor I will place big pillows for seating and low tables for the meal. All will be covered with more cloths in deep, rich, exotic colors.

The Torah maps out the meal pretty well based on what Abraham and Sarah served the angels/guests. I think I can translate their cakes, breads, spreads, and meats into modern fare. When Abraham orders that a young, tender calf (which sounds to me like veal) be cooked for his guests, Rashi explains that Abraham was really preparing "leshonot v'chardal," tongues and mustard, which must have been delicacy either in Abraham's day or Rashi's. I have no desire (nor do I have the knowledge of how) to make tongue (or veal for that matter), but we will have a chardal/mustard taste test with a variety of mustards available for the event. As for the meat, we will nod to an event later in the parashah—the fate of Lot's wife as she peered back at the burning S'dom—by eating salt beef (the Brits' name for corned beef). The rest of the meal will include wine (an allusion to Lot's daughters) and Middle Eastern cuisine, the types of lavish salads, dips, pita, and whole grain delicacies that Abraham and Sarah may have served their guests.

Tammie Zaks Rapps creates menu plans that reflect each week's Torah reading. Tammie feels that "Themed Shabbat meals allow us to focus on the Parashat HaShavua in an engaging and dynamic way." Check out Tammie's blog at parashahmom.blogspot.com and follow her here on ChallahCrumbs!