

BALAGAN

A Magazine of Art, Poetry, and Perspective



FOOD

OCTOBER 2025, ISSUE NO. 3

*Stories in Food:
Who We are Now*

BALAGAN

OCTOBER 2025, ISSUE NO. 3

*A Writing on the Wall publication -
giving voice to the complex and
layered realities of Israel today.*

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registered 501-3c non-profit.*

BALAGAN

Menu

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ACROSS CULTURES

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COVER Asaf Karela

EDITORS' NOTE

Food can mean many things.

It comforts, sustains, and heals. But more than that, food gives us the occasion to reflect, to question, and to confront who we are now. Each issue of BALAGAN revolves around a different theme. With this our third issue, **Food**, we open up a conversation about what it means to eat, to cook, to share, and to nurture ourselves in times of fracture.

Inside, you'll find the reflections of a personal chef whose husband is serving his fifth round of reserve duty; an ancient fermentation expert on the forgotten Levantine condiment Muri (with a recipe!); and an elegy for an earlier food culture of Tel Aviv, transformed in the aftermath of October 7th. **Food** also includes Tel Aviv chefs reflecting on cooking in Israel now, and images from Israel's best food photographers and illustrators. These pieces remind us that food is never only about taste, but about memory, identity, and community.

At a moment when our voices are silenced and pushed to the margins, we offer perspectives for a complex palate: poetry, fiction, paintings, and photography.

Pull up a chair. Immerse yourself. Join the conversation.

Bill and Ronit

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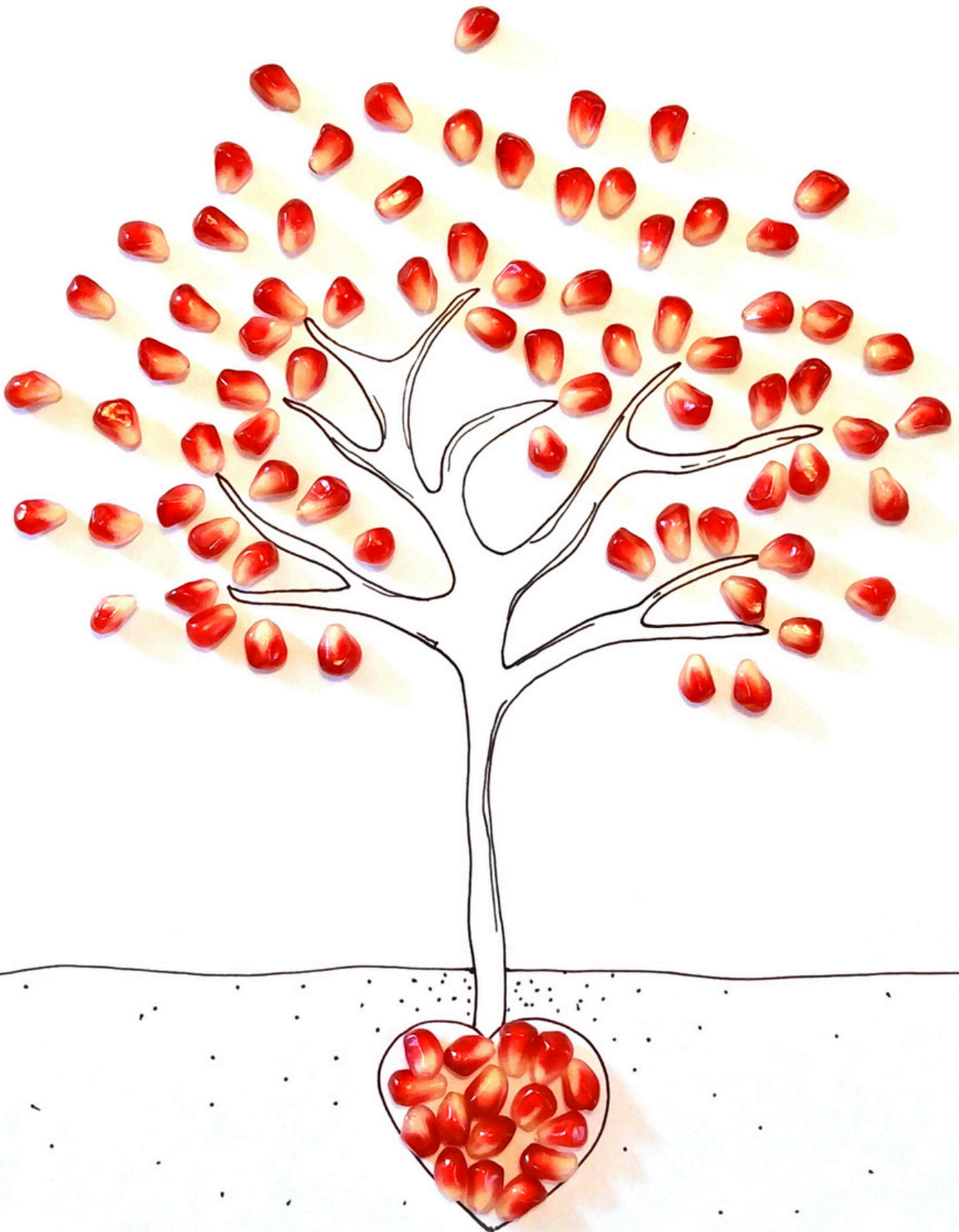
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BALAGAN
*is a quarterly literary
magazine – through
poetry, art, and
storytelling, we offer fresh
perspectives on identity,
culture and the stories
that connect them.*



WHIRLPOOL

Racheli Errera

I'm six months pregnant, drinking coffee in a quiet Tel Aviv café to the sound of Mozart, thinking about a new menu. I gaze at the Florentin streets that were my home until COVID. The music carries me to my grandparents, Etienne and Jacqueline, of blessed memory, who regularly listened to classical music. As a child, I found the stillness in the music unsettling; the drama and tension hidden in the notes felt heavy, frightening. I grew up with those sounds, and with Holocaust stories, between walls hung with my grandfather Etienne's photographs.

Next to me is a small print of my favorite photo of Grandpa Etienne, which I later hung in my living room. As a child, the picture stood in the entrance hall; and at its base I spread out my toys and passed the time in the requisite silence of the French afternoon. My grandfather, an artist-photographer, captured movement with remarkable skill, developing a method that photographed vibrating iron wires in varied light to create abstract masterpieces. During long hours of play and boredom, I would stare at the photo's geometric spirals, trying to understand the vortex before me.

On the first of Elul, 2023, my husband, Ariel, called me crying, and asked me to come home. Beneath that same spiral picture, he told me that Elisheva, my best friend, had died suddenly. And in my shock, I stared at the picture, a dark, black gate opening before me.

Less than two months later, on October 6, I prepared a Bat Mitzvah feast in Ein Hod, bringing flowers as Elisheva always did. The celebration was vibrant: I mixed salads with Rosh Hashanah fruits; pomegranate, figs, and dates, adorning the plates and table. At its center sat a large spiral pumpkin pastry, called "*kra*", meaning "to tear" in Tunisian; on Rosh Hashanah we bless over it, asking "that the evil of our decree will be torn."

Afterwards, exhausted, I slipped out to the sukkah. Shmueli, the host, told me

there's a gate through which souls pass, one we notice only in loss. The next day, wrapped in mourning, that gate unfolded fully.

Ariel was called to the reserves.

And I was left swirling beneath my grandfather's spirals.

War Kitchen

I woke on October 8th to an empty bed. Pacing my halls with all events cancelled, I asked myself: what now? I stress-cleaned the house, photographed the space, and posted on social media: "Opening our kitchen for anyone who needs. If you know where we can send food, want to cook with me, or need a home, write privately." On the stove, a giant pot of red beet *kubbeh* simmered as I scrolled through missing persons and obituaries.

The messages started arriving, and with them, the community of colleagues and neighbors. By day's end, over 100 volunteers had shown up, and from my small kitchen, 1,500 meals were sent to evacuees, soldiers, and anyone in need. In those first days of the war, the sense of togetherness was real, a shared struggle. We united toward a common goal, responded to urgent needs, and sought ways to recover from the shock. Personally, it was survival; I had to act to keep from sinking.

What began in our home kitchen quickly expanded to the institutional kitchen of a local catering service—the Culinary Women's Network I founded. The "War Kitchen" in Pardes Hana, and similar kitchens nationwide, followed rapidly. Hundreds of volunteers arrived daily, driven by helplessness, while donations and trucks of supplies flowed in each morning.

The cooperation was extraordinary. Amid urgency and pain, strangers worked together, preparing giant pots of homemade food, in quiet sync. The aroma filled the air; the labor pushed back gloom; and everyone nurtured their fragments of hope. From the depths of fear, loss, and the emptiness of my own bed, there was still life, hope.

By the eighth day, after organizing 25,000 meals and coordinating over 1,000 volunteers, our energies were spent. Missing persons notices became obituaries, and the initial shock gave way to grim understanding. We had to return home, tend our wounds, provide for our livelihoods, attend funerals, sit shiva, and support friends who had lost homes and loved ones.

Package

About a month after the war began, Ariel called from deep in Gaza, my first chance to

send him a package. I had only a few hours to choose items that would comfort and remind him of home – what to send? I remembered my great-grandmother Jean’s letters to my great-grandfather Raphael during World War I, asking him what he ate. In that moment, it felt as if something in our souls acknowledged that we already understood war.

What should he eat? He likes olives, and he certainly needs good coffee. Nuts of all kinds. Seeds. Nutritious snacks for between tasks. Good coffee. Mainly coffee. I wrote him a letter and placed it in an envelope with one photo of me and one of us together. Even then, I began to feel that he was forgetting me a little – that the war had become like a second wife, cruel and domineering. A venomous, deadly lover.

Spaghetti

At “Café Otef” in South Tel Aviv, a café named after the Gaza Envelope, I bought a double espresso on ice and an ashtray shaped like a *kalanit* – the iconic red flower of the region. Scrolling through Instagram, I saw two more captives had been murdered. I cooled off in a shady electronics store near the central station, buying a cheap charger that barely held my battery. I’d been running at 1% for nine months, connected to a faulty charger that only occasionally gave off pulses of electricity.

At home, Ariel opened the door for me. I hugged him, shaken and sweaty, then stripped into a cold shower, and realized there was nowhere to escape the heat and suffocation of these days. I put on a T-shirt I’d bought earlier, also embroidered with a *kalanit*. And only then noticed the sleeve read: “We will bloom again.” Strange to come home with war merch.

Still wrapped in anxiety, I remembered the salami method my friend Efrat suggested: Live in *thin slices*, focus only on the next task, not what comes after.

Only now do I understand that my husband’s reserve duty

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begins before he leaves and ends after he returns. I wanted to make us dinner, to forget that on Sunday he would no longer eat with me, to ignore the heat, danger, worry, and longing... thin slices. Dinner. Think dinner. I opened the fridge: thawed ground meat. But no appetite.

My niece sent a photo of her making meatballs. Meatballs are cozy, homey food. I felt their absence. But what should I make? It didn't matter; just make it. Thin slices. I took out the ground meat, put it back, took it out again. I chopped and fried onions, remembering Grandma's advice for a good marriage was to fill the house with aromas of food. I wanted to tempt him, to make him stay, cooking as if the smells could keep him here with me.

In the background, Jose Gonzalez sang "Heartbeats," my own heart pounding in time. The music and the sound of frying accompanied my wandering thoughts, as I transformed the meatballs into a dish, spaghetti and meatballs. We sat in the air-conditioned living room, bowls of comforting pasta before us, and for a few moments, our batteries were full.

Whirlpool

The image came to me in the Baniyas, on the slopes of Mount Hermon. The water was frozen, the air still. While everyone stayed home, I fled Tel Aviv the day the country locked down, the pandemic an excuse to chase a growing dream: to leave the city. I arrived in the Upper Galilee in the most beautiful spring I can remember – breathing freedom among the orchards of the Kadesh Valley, the blooming lupines and marigolds, gathering sage, and rejoicing in the silence, as if the world had stopped.

On one trip, a small, perfect scene stopped me: a beam of light timed with pink river gillyflowers falling onto a smooth rock marked with a white, heart-shaped patch, like snow. The blue, frozen water swirled around it – thin threads dancing in a quiet whirlpool, an island of calm within the storm. In it, I saw my grandfather Etienne's spirals and Grandpa Eli's legendary dish – spaghetti with tomato and harissa – our post-sea ritual on Netanya's cliff beach in the golden summers of my childhood. I remembered his lesson before every swim: "How do you get out of a whirlpool?" Only after we answered, "surrender," would he let us run into the waves.



Photo by Sarit Goffen

GRIBENES

Elizabeth Edelglass

How come Grandma never flinched when she reached her hand deep in a chicken, wrenched free the slippery globule of fat, wet and bubbly like something the cat spit up after eating a rat, though Grandma always told me it was a mouse? Then she'd fry up the fat in her iron skillet and feed the crispy remnants to Grandpa, saving the drippings in a *yahrzeit* glass (after the *yahrzeit* candle had burned, of course, in memory of some faraway relative I'd never met) to be used on Shabbos to moisten her matzah balls.

My mother used to spit on her food, a long, viscous drip of saliva, in the years between the wars, so her brother wouldn't steal her portion off her plate – a repeated refrain in my picky-eater youth, while she fried up fat in her electric skillet on her mottled mica counter, crispy bits to remind my father, I realize now, of Brooklyn and his own dead mother. My mother's fat had arrived in our kitchen, not in a chicken, but tied up in tidy butcher-paper packets. She poured her drippings into a Maxwell House can for the trash, not to clog the drain, relying on Mazola to moisten her matzah balls.

air crackles and smokes

woman cooks, man eats

gribenes, Yiddish for scraps



CHEF'S SPECIAL

Gil Dahan

Photo by Asaf Karela



When you think of Israeli cuisine, how would you describe it? And how, if at all, has it changed for you since October 7th?

In my eyes, it is hard to say “Israeli cuisine.” In our time as a state, I think that an “Israeli chef” has been created; the audacity, the combination of flavors, the fusion of cultures into a single plate, memories from home alongside innovations and ingredients that are not necessarily local. In my view, thinking about food has not changed since the seventh of October, but its consumption has; the place we come from is more emotional than before, a search for a comforting dish or even a general experience (if one goes to a restaurant) that is more comforting and enveloping than in the past.

What role does food play in our identity as Israelis? How do you feel it reflects who we are today?

Food has always had a place of honor in Israeli identity. After all, in my eyes, the State of Israel is a melting pot of various cultures and people who migrated here from different countries and wanted to express their culture through food. The culture of hospitality, Israeli warmth, is what manifests in a magical way through food. Through it, we can see Israelis’ diverse combination of interconnections, like a microcosm for the blending and connecting of different cultures.

If you had to choose one dish that tells our story as Israelis right now – what dish would it be and why?

A pot of meatballs. On the one hand, there is the density and compactness that under pressure and flame, enrich the flavors and complexity. On the other, the position of each meatball secured in its place, (and sometimes) not allowing the other meatballs to come through. Yet they are all under the same simmering sauce, a blanket covering all of them, each individual.

DESIRE IN THE FOOTNOTES

William Kolbrener

Call me Ezekiel.

Hungry for poetry like the prophet, I went from graduate school at Columbia in the 1980s to an ultra-orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem in the 1990s. Still in Israel, I have never stopped searching for poetry to sustain me.

Not kugel and kishke, gravlax and gefilte fish served at the hundreds of meals to which I was a guest, the Hebrew prophets served up a different kind of meal: a feast of poetry.

Isaiah, the poet of consolation, sous-chef to God, serves up prophecy as food and wine; Jeremiah, the prophet of doom, eats God's words raw. While to Ezekiel, the ecstatic visionary of the sublime, God serves a full meal.

But at first, the prophet has no appetite.

In Babylon, a refugee among strange gods, Ezekiel sees, from afar, Jerusalem collapsing under its own civil strife.

God presses a mission upon him: warn a people sunk in denial of the coming catastrophe.

Before he can speak, though, God insists, he must eat. The prophet hesitates, and responds, "no thanks."

God, adamant, feeds Ezekiel one of the most astonishing meals in the Bible. Not lentils, nor a tender calf, nor a savory stew, but a *sefer-megillah*, a scroll: part Torah, eternal and divine; part megillah, like Esther's tale, personal, earthy, human, *digestible*.

To the hesitant prophet, God commands: “Open your mouth, feed your stomach, fill your belly.” Ezekiel obeys. He swallows a miniature of the Torah given at Sinai, with words on both sides. God’s words, spiced with dirges and lamentation, course through his digestive tract.

Only after passing from stomach to belly does Ezekiel taste, and then speak. “The scroll,” he says, tastes like “honey to me.” With God’s words internalized, Ezekiel becomes a poet, *his lips* making the honey sweet. He speaks because he eats, digests, and tastes. God’s words become Ezekiel’s poetry.

“*Taste and know*,” says David of Psalms, because reading is like eating, and knowledge not mere thought, but nourishment; both processes are deeply, viscerally physical. To know God is to savor His words.

A Tale of Two Translations

As I expanded my diet to include not just Milton and Shakespeare, Homer and Sophocles, but the sacred works of my own tradition, I relied on translations. Two different translations, separated by time and place and sensibility, showed me that in the Jewish world, we have lost the art of reading poetry. Complementary forms of misreading: the scholar dissecting Ezekiel’s scroll in a lab, and a religious publishing, serving up ‘ideas’ instead of a meal of sacred poetry.

I love Robert Alter’s translation of the Holy Scriptures. Alter, a scholar and poet, offers the most lavish feasts in the Bible, each sumptuous and inviting. But the English professor in me can’t resist the footnotes – where I lose my appetite.

When I get to the note where Alter shares an exchange with a Berkeley colleague about the atomic make-up of Ezekiel’s meal, I push away from the spread before me. The scholarly question: was it parchment or the more eco-friendly plant-based papyrus? The note drags me from Ezekiel’s table into a laboratory. I long to taste the honey, but instead I crunch on

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myrrh, milk and
honey and wine.*

the prophet's scroll.

I want to read Ezekiel as I do any great literary work. The recipe I have always followed: become the book's ideal reader, whether Hamlet, Isaiah, or Paradise Lost. Pull up a chair; prepare to eat.

I wanted to read the book sanctified and savored in time by generations of readers who found the prophet's words meaningful, beautiful, and delicious. A translator who dismisses Ezekiel as "psychologically aberrant" does not make me want to sit down at his table.

The academic chews on papyrus; I wanted to taste the honey. So I went to Jerusalem.

Desire in the Footnotes

In Jerusalem *yeshivot*, where I spent four hours every morning studying Talmud for a decade, we never stopped for the poetry. The prophets are simply not studied; the rabbinic poetry of midrash, either ignored or misread as mystical abstraction. Yeshiva students proudly proclaim, "I don't like poetry," unaware that they are rejecting most, if not all, of their tradition's sacred texts, including the Talmud, the latter closer to poetry, a poem unlimited, than genres of philosophy or theology.

The Artscroll English translation of the Song of Songs, the most sensual work in the sacred canon, is a testimony to a religious perspective that has lost its taste for poetry. Since 1976, the publishers have shaped the minds of Jewish readers, mostly the newly orthodox like myself. On a Passover shabbat in synagogue, I turned the pages of the Song translation, searching for the words chanted by the reader. But they were not there: the commentary takes the place of the main text, demoting the words of Solomon, the inspired king, into the footnotes.

From the translation, you'd never know that Solomon is a poetic Caravaggio, envisioning the relationship between God and Israel as that between lover and beloved. The flesh and blood lover imagines the body of his beloved as edible – likened to figs, pomegranates, apples and dates, saffron, cinnamon and myrrh, milk and honey and wine.

The food, along with the desire and the appetite, are pushed below into footnotes.

You won't find the following verse – the lover's proclaimed adoration for his beloved – "Your temple behind your veil, like a pomegranate split open" – in Artscroll's G-rated translation. Instead of the fecund feminine, fertile and open, the translators disfigure

the main text into morality: “As many as a pomegranate’s seeds are merits of your unworthiness within your modest veil.” Not just bad poetry, but showing a misunderstanding of how poems work, like a meal meant to be savored.

The bad poetry may stay faithful to rabbinic sources, but the translation delivers a pre-packaged meal, not a process in time of tasting and digestion. In the Song, as in Ezekiel’s scroll, meaning emerges through savoring, in the ongoing meal, not in swallowing it whole.

In the culture wars brewing for half a century, partial mis-readings complement and reinforce one another. The scholar, busy with papyrus and parchment, warns readers away from a sacred diet; the Artscroll editors serve a restricted diet, already pre-digested, airy and unsatisfying. To find poetry, I went back to Milton, and to the meal Eve prepares for a visiting dinner guest.

Poetry in the Kitchen

Years before I started keeping kosher, I was an unseen guest at Milton’s table, the spread the Edenic pair serves to the angel Raphael in imitation of Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality to their angelic guests.

Eve, tasked with making a meal, is a poet in the kitchen. As chef-poet, she does not “mix tastes” – mixed metaphors give indigestion – and avoids the “inelegant” contrasts of bad poets. But like Milton, Eve is an innovator, creating poetic paradox with food, combinations of harmoniously dissonant flavors, constantly intermixing, “taste after taste” – dishes changing over time.

Eve may serve dainties, crudités, but her food is not intended for the dainty. Her recipe is designed to “please true appetite,” and not “disrelish thirst.” Eve’s cooking both satisfies and creates longing for more, nourishing desire and thirst even as gratifying them. Like good poems, the more you get, the more you want.

But Adam is confused – why should spiritual beings need sustenance at all? Milton knew Descartes had said, “I think therefore I am.” Milton’s Raphael, in response to both Adam and Descartes says, “I eat therefore I am.”

Angels, like humans, “hear, see, smell, touch, taste,” Raphael explains, using all their senses. With the taste of Eve’s culinary creation on their lips, like the honey to Ezekiel, the angels “concoct, digest, assimilate.” Angelic internalization performs alchemy,

concocting culinary base metals into gourmet gold.

The poet-chef Eve, inspired, invests her creations with mind, soul, and herself, creating edible knowledge. Adam wants to talk after the meal, while Eve slips into the background, but it is her poetic cooking that gets the conversation started.

Before I tasted the thin gruel of literalism, or sat hungry at empty feasts of religious abstraction, I had already tasted the sacred poetry, dining in Paradise, the food of the prophets.

From meals with Milton, Eve, I learned the humility to sit and eat. But also from Milton, I learned the courage to read, to partake in the meals the prophets served – to taste the honey, their poetry on my lips.



Art by Zeev Engelmayer



THE FEMINIST AND NATIONAL HISTORY OF ISRAELI SALAD

Erela Taharlev Ben-Shachar

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the vegetable salad emerged in Jewish settlements of what would become Israel, as far more than a simple dish. What seems today an ordinary accompaniment – tomatoes, cucumbers, onions finely chopped and dressed – was, in fact, a profound symbol of health, ideology, and social transformation. The story of the salad reveals how food, gender, and nationalism intertwined in the early *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Israel before the establishment of the State), and why the act of chopping vegetables carried both personal and political significance.

To understand this story, one must first grasp the eating habits of the early Zionists. For the immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, vegetables were foreign, strange, and often met with skepticism. Miriam Gerzon, a Dutch home economics expert, recalled the incredulity of workers' restaurant patrons: "What are you giving us – cattle feed?!" In the kibbutz of Kiryat Anavim, fresh vegetables were sometimes literally sent to the cowshed, while in Merhavia, settlers longed for the tastes of home, bewildered by the tomatoes, eggplants, and okra sold in local Arab markets. Even when Tel Aviv women cultivated sandy garden plots under Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO), they often discarded the harvest, hesitant to integrate unfamiliar produce into daily meals. The diet of these immigrants remained heavily reliant on meat, canned goods, and the familiar fried dishes of Eastern Europe.

Yet the transformation of vegetables from overlooked fodder to a centerpiece of Israeli cuisine was already underway. One factor that contributed to this change was the cutting-edge science of the era. The early twentieth century witnessed the identification

of vitamins and the realization that deficiencies could cause serious diseases – scurvy, rickets, and beriberi, to name a few. Housewives all around the western world were taught to administer these tiny compounds through fresh vegetables and fruits, transforming salads into a kind of edible medicine.

However, science alone does not explain the rise of the salad. Its story is equally social and political, as women determined to change their fate and status in Zionist society stood at its core. Hanna Meisel, a charismatic agronomist from Odessa, stands out as a pioneer of this movement. In 1910, she persuaded two fellow pioneers at Sejera to plant carrots on a hill near the settlement. These green shoots were not merely an act of agriculture – they symbolized the potential for women to assert themselves in a domain historically dominated by men. Armed with a PhD in agronomy from France, practical training at experimental stations, and education at a Swiss gardening school, Meisel envisioned vegetable cultivation as a path to empowerment.

Meisel's vision extended beyond the fields into education. She established the Young Women's Farm at Kinneret, a training ground where dozens of new immigrants learned to plant, weed, irrigate, and tend fruit trees and vegetable plots. Even in its modest beginnings – a single room with makeshift furniture and a small plot by the Jordan River – the farm's impact was profound. Women gained not only practical agricultural skills but also a sense of agency, independence, and belonging within the *Yishuv*. Vegetable plots became arenas of empowerment, where the boundaries between domestic labor and public contribution blurred. These gardens were not merely tools of sustenance; they were laboratories for

“The salad blurred the boundaries between domestic and public, private and national, nourishment and ideology. It proved that the land could provide, that bodies could be strengthened, and that women were central to the work of nation-building.”



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social transformation, proving that women could stake a legitimate claim in the agricultural and ideological project of nation-building.

World War I and its aftermath intensified the urgency of these initiatives. Economic hardship, military conflict, and displacement left many young women vulnerable, hungry, and isolated. Some survived by taking odd jobs in kitchens, cleaning, or laundry; others faced harassment and exploitation. Vegetable growing shaped a solution for them. At first a small group of women – called the “Group of Twenty” – was allocated uncultivated plot near the Kinneret to grow vegetables. Despite floods, pests, and harsh weather, this plot thrived, allowing women to sell their produce to neighbors and settlers and transform themselves from dependents to active participants in the agricultural economy.

The success of these early vegetable groups created a ripple effect across the early *Yishuv*. Meisel's students founded women-only communes in Jerusalem, Tiberias, Petah Tikva, and Merhavia, teaching girls and young women that vegetables could be both sustenance and a form of agency. Initially skeptical girls – even those wandering the streets in rags – learned to sow, weed, and harvest. Over time, women became integral to agricultural settlements, previously male-dominated spaces, and new dishes – eggplant spreads, zucchini stews, and, most emblematic, chopped vegetable salad – appeared on dining tables.

Indeed, this was no accident. Vegetables secured their place on the table as Women's organizations promoted their consumption and preparation in nutrition courses, cookbooks, pamphlets and public demonstrations. Alongside recipes, serving suggestions, and health advice, the women enlisted Zionist ideology in that goal. Eating local vegetables was presented as a statement of alignment with the land and its ideals. In this way, a humble bowl of chopped produce became a symbol of inclusion, adaptation, and social transformation.

Although few recognized the growing dominance of women in the settlements, there were those who wondered what had transformed the fate of the vegetables. Dr. Sarah Bavly Bromberg, chief nutritionist of the *Yishuv*, observed with astonishment that chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, radishes, and green onions had become a common dish at workers' dinners. However, the promise this transformation held for women was of no less significance. Through shaping the menu and feeding the public salads and ratatouilles, women, once relegated to marginal labor, claimed authority in the agricultural fields, asserting a social and economic stake in the success of

settlements. As vegetables gained value – both nutritionally and monetarily – women’s contributions were recognized and respected.

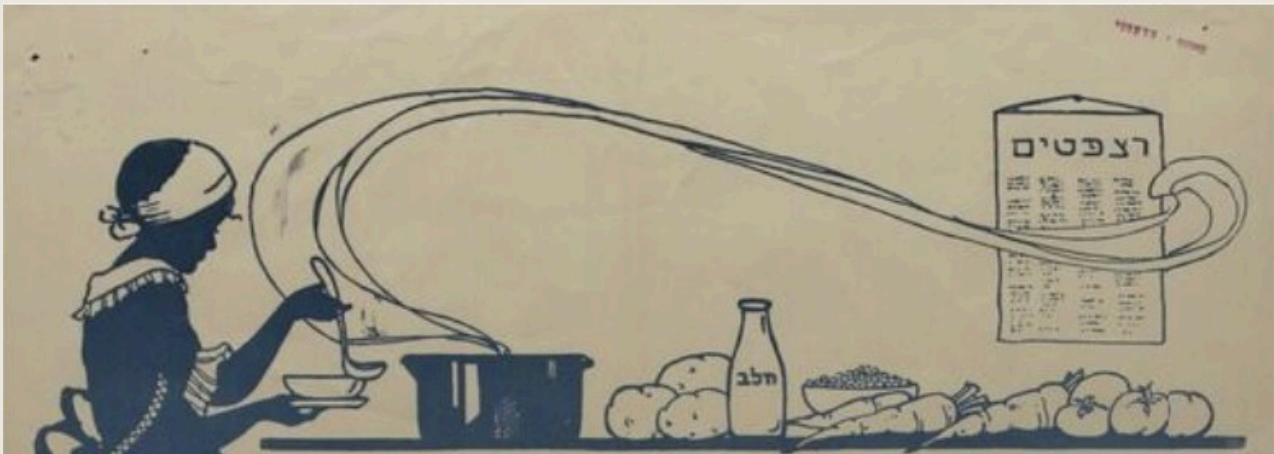
Yet, no social transformation occurs without tension. Early settlers often resisted the salad, preferring traditional European foods over local produce. Complaints of “watery, tasteless vegetables” were common, reflecting nostalgia for familiar flavors. But the women were adamant: European culinary traditions were displaced, and the salad became so ubiquitous that it earned the fame of a national dish.

The Israeli salad was simultaneously quotidian and revolutionary. It demanded that women turn ideology into lunch, labor into identity, and soil into nationhood. Every cucumber diced, every tomato chopped, carried the vision and work of women who had fought for recognition in fields, kitchens, settlements, and society. The salad blurred the boundaries between domestic and public, private and national, nourishment and ideology. It proved that the land could provide, that bodies could be strengthened, and that women were central to the work of nation-building.

By the eve of World War II, the salad was ubiquitous: on kibbutz breakfasts, in workers’ restaurants, and in private homes. Its simplicity belied a history of struggle – against scarcity, prejudice, and inherited culinary habits. The salad carried with it the aspirations of a generation. It represented renewal, health, equality, and modernity, a daily reminder that the ordinary could be revolutionary, and that food could carry the weight of a nation’s dreams.

Today, Israeli salad is taken for granted. Cafés, buffets, and homes serve it with casual familiarity, yet each diced cucumber or tomato is a testament to a complex past. Its history embodies immigrant skepticism, visionary ambition, wartime hardship, and the quiet revolution of women asserting their place in the nation – one vegetable plot at a time. From the first carrots planted by Hanna Meisel to the ubiquitous bowls of chopped salad, this humble dish tells a story of empowerment, adaptation, and the intertwined fates of food, gender, and Zionist identity.

More than a recipe, the Israeli salad is an idea: that renewal could be tasted in vegetables, that identity could be diced and mixed, and that the future could be eaten at the breakfast table. In every kitchen, every meal, the salad remains a living monument to the women who shaped the *Yishuv*, the settlers who embraced the land, and the ideals that sustained a nation.



עקרת הבית!

היודעת את לבשל
תבשילים מגוונים?

היודעת את להכין עשרות
מאכלים מירקות העונה?

אם לא תדעי לך כל אלה...

לכי אל תערוכת הירקות ואל הדמונסטרציה של
הכנת מאכלים מגוונים מירקות שתערך מטעם
הועדה לתזונה שע"י המכון לחקר הכלכלה,

בבית הבריאות, רחוב בלפור,

ביום ראשון, ג' אב [11 ביולי], בשעות 5-9 אחה"צ.



CHEF'S SPECIAL

Avivit Priel
Avichai



Photo by Asaf Karela

When you think of Israeli cuisine, how would you describe it? And how, if at all, has it changed for you since October 7th?

Israeli cuisine resists the generic—breaking conventions and traditions with bold flavors, shaped by a meeting of global food cultures and the local Palestinian kitchen. I don't feel that anything changed for me in my cooking on 7/10; what did strengthen for me, however, is the understanding that food cannot be a tool of war.

If you had to choose one dish that tells our story as Israelis right now – what dish would it be and why?

It must be a dish that is home food. There has been so much detachment in the Israeli story over the past two years; a pot of meatballs gives me more than anything else that feeling of home, family, a hug through food.

The TLV restaurant scene has always been about so much more than food; it's energy, connection, and a sense of vitality. After the past two years, do you feel that spirit has changed? When you cook or host, do you offer people an escape from reality, or hold up a mirror to who we've become?

Ha-Ozeria is an oasis of joy. I hold onto this feeling, because I have hosted families of kidnapped people, families of soldiers, and soldiers themselves. Again and again, they tell me how much disconnecting from daily life helped them – how important it was to have a place where, for a moment, they could step away from the harsh reality outside. I admit the dissonance is sometimes hard for me. But I believe we have a mission: to keep creating joy for those who need this break most, and to continue offering them a space of ease when everything else is so difficult.

THE TABLE

Benjamin Balint

I.

My grandmother's fingers dipped in sumac,
then touched her tongue – she closed her eyes to
read.

She crushed coriander in her palm,
releasing its green signature into the kitchen air.
The dough she kneaded sighed beneath her fists.
She shaped it like she shaped a line of text.
She whispered to the yeast – not quite a coaxing
– more like a sentence spoken into light.

II.

We peeled the pomegranates over the sink,
their juice ran red like calligraphy.
“Don't bite,” she said. “Just press them with your
tongue – they open sweeter when they rest.”
She placed a seed against my lower lip.
“Let it dissolve,” she said. “Like words in wine.”
Behind her, lamb with garlic simmered low,
its scent a script of salt and lemon rind.

III.

She salted loaves with thumb and finger, slow –
“Not for taste,” she said, “for memory.”
The crust was dark, ashened;
she cracked it open like a hidden name.
She never used a knife to cut the bread.
She tore it, each piece passed from hand to hand.
It steamed the way a page still warm will steam
when pulled too soon from where the truth was
pressed.

IV.

Chickpeas crushed to cream with lemon oil –
each bite a margin wide enough for joy.
Tomatoes stewed until they lost their form,
then poured along the rim of bowls.
The lamb she served was tender, touched
with thyme.
Its sauce like ink that runs in rain.
She always made enough for one more guest
– a space held open, blank.

V.

Tea in glass, the mint still breathing green.
Pastry flaked like pages.
She dipped her finger in a dish of honey,
touched it to my brow, kissed it off.
“For sweetness in your thoughts,” she said.
She wiped the table, with even strokes.
Then sat awhile, hands curled in her lap,
watching the final candle spell its smoke.
The table was not wood. It was a scroll,
unrolled in chapters made of taste – a
grandmothertongue,
a grammar passed from hand to hand, then
gone.

CHEF'S SPECIAL

Asaf Karela



In Israel, food photography always carries more than flavor – it touches on memory, migration, and identity.

How does your agency approach food not only as aesthetics, but as a cultural story that seeks to be heard?

In every photo shoot or project – whether a modest workers' restaurant or a Michelin-starred establishment – our priority is to craft a story through the lens, in collaboration with the client. That story can emerge through color, texture, taste, and the people who stand behind the dish or the product. We have a vehicle that allows people to be moved, to identify, to express something Israeli, to connect.

Here, every dish can spark debate over belonging, origin, or appropriation. How do you see the role of photography in shaping Israeli culinary identity?

Israel has become one of the world's leading countries in food – both in quality and in variety. The beauty lies in the sheer diversity: countless kitchens and cuisines from different countries and cultures. And yet, within each of them, one can still taste the distinct Israeli DNA.

Since October 7, food in Israel has taken on new layers of meaning – of memory, of rupture, and of connection.

Is there one dish or food photograph that, for you, symbolizes Israeli identity at this moment?

The image of the fish, wrapped in a shroud of flowers, reflects how the lens perceived the events of October 7. In the foreground lies the fish, charged in Jewish tradition with motifs of continuity and livelihood, yet here motionless, inert. Around it, ash and shadow, the palette darkened. The only trace of color from the flowers' wrapping, a hint of optimism, recalling the belongings left behind in homes after the terrorists' incursion. The result is a stark dissonance: between death and destruction on one side, and on the other, the enduring fact that we are still here – sustained by hope and faith.



Photo by Asaf Karela

ON FOOD

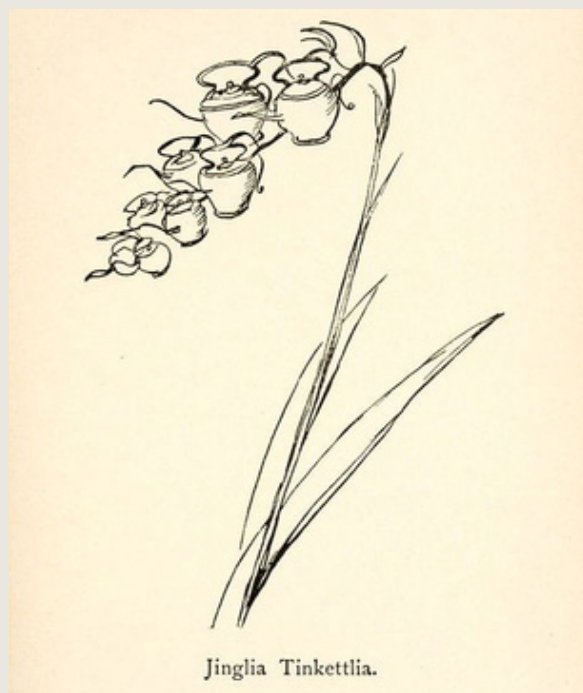
Hedai Offaim

Food and eating play an important role in my life – not only in nourishing the body, which is self-evident, but also in nourishing the soul. Food offers immediate, unmediated contact with mind, with love and with memory, as well as with desire, comfort, and connection. Food and music are for me the most elemental expressions of the bond between the world and the human soul.

This is most visible in immigrant societies: libraries can be burned, architecture toppled, theaters closed, art torn to shreds. Yet as long as a person lives, you cannot take from them taste and song. Communities that fled war zones with nothing carried with them the memory of flavor into their new lands, and the melody still on their lips. What enters and exits through the mouth, taste and song, are the deepest and most intimate elements of human identity.

And though I have made my living for decades from growing and preparing food, broadly speaking, food itself does not interest me at all. I am occupied with meals. Food on its own – whether raw ingredients or a decorated plate – is only a point in time. When not connected to direction and intention, not linked to its source and not moving toward its purpose, it is completely arbitrary, and I find no meaning in it. This is also why I chose to be engaged not only in cooking but also in agriculture and food production: to grow food and then prepare it, to bring it to the table. The chance to make my heart into a conduit, a channel amplifying the flow of abundance between earth and human and back again – that is the spiritual movement I need, the practice that leads me to connection and elevation.

This is the power food has over me: in the life of the moment, it is the most intuitive of substances, requiring little thought, its consumption natural to me. Yet when I manage to clarify and direct, to dedicate a salad or a sandwich to the present instant, to



recognize who grew the vegetables, who baked the bread, who thought of me in preparing the dish, to know their heart and intention, then that is the soul's portion in the flesh.

I have sat at sumptuous banquets made of rare ingredients flown in from across the globe, surrounded by people with titles longer than their stature, and I remember nothing of the meal. But I will never forget the two-day-old pita and the tahini I mixed with spring water on a desert hike with my beloved. That was one of the best meals of my life, because I intended it for my beloved, and the food fulfilled its purpose as movement and longing in our love.

And another thing to say about my relation to food: it is *not* art. Food is craft. Even when prepared by a chef-artist, it remains craft, because unlike art, its purpose is the other. A poet can write a poem or a painter paint a picture and then burn or lock it away; the artistic act is complete. Its purpose is the expression of the creator's soul. But a meal, if cooked and never eaten, is like a tree falling in a forest with no one to hear. Food has a purpose, and that purpose is the meal, the person, the other. Like a cobbler making shoes, or a carpenter building a wardrobe, it carries an intention for movement and connection, for extending material into human hearts. I love the craft.

Food, then, is at the intersection of longing: the longing of the grower for the cook; the the cook for the eater; the eater for those who cooked and grew, and so on, endlessly. Longing is the basis of movement in the world, and movement is the vehicle of love. I am occupied with love.

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SCAN ME



Art by Zeev Engelmayr

THE MYSTERY OF MURI

Uri Mayer-Chissick

Once, the Levant was renowned for its flavorful, salty sauces – today, they’ve largely been forgotten.

In ancient times through the Middle Ages, salt was costly and difficult to obtain, but using some of it to ferment produce allowed for larger batches of sauces and dishes that preserved food longer and added flavor. From this practice came our famous Muri.

Yes, famous.

For the last 25 years I have been researching and writing the history and politics of food and medicine in the Levant. In the university library I found and read ancient medical texts, cookbooks, and even poetry. Together, by wandering the fields, foraging and cooking, I sustain myself: like a child discovering each day a new word, another concept – for me, a new way of preparing wild edible plants, an opening into a vast world.

For the longest time, there was a word I could just *not* figure out. Among the cookbooks and medical writings from the medieval Arabic empire, I repeatedly came across a word unfamiliar to me – Muri. Reading the recipes, I understood that it was a salty sauce, appearing in almost every list of ingredients from that period. But what was it made of? And how did we lose the knowledge of such a common ingredient?

The first Muri recipe I found came from a 10th-century Baghdadi manuscript. Translated by the scholar Charles Perry, *The Description of Familiar Foods*, offers several recipes for Muri.

One recipe, originating in North Africa, explains how to make loaves of barley dough wrapped in fig leaves, with fig branches inserted inside. These loaves were placed on a bed of bran in the shade for forty days, until they rotted. They were then crumbled, mixed with salt, water, and spices, and placed in a clay pot on the rooftop in the sun. After fermentation, the liquid (the Muri) was strained, and even the sediment was used.

Separated at Birth? Muri and Miso

This process belongs to a category of fermented foods known as “high-salt fermentation.” It is a combination of organic matter (such as soy, wheat, barley, or even fish), enzymes (usually from mold), and a salt solution. Together, the bacteria, mold, and salt turn the raw material into an exceptionally nutritious, though very salty, sauce.

In East Asia, miso developed in the same way – a salty, rich condiment essential for nutrition and health, with hundreds of variations.

That ancient recipe for Muri recalls something I had read in *The Book of Miso*, written by two American scholars of East Asian heritage. They describe the traditional preparation of miso in China: first, soybeans are soaked, cooked, mashed into balls, wrapped in rice straw, and hung in the cellar for thirty days until mold develops – the source of the enzymes. Then, in the second stage, the moldy balls are placed in a high-salt brine (about 18%) for around a year. At the end of the process, the liquid is soy sauce and the solids are miso.

Two different places, separated by vast geographies, each with its own local ingredients: in East Asia, soy and rice straw; in our region, barley, wheat, and fig leaves. Later, I discovered further parallels from other parts of the world, all based on the same principle.

Discovering parallels throughout the world made me want to revive, on the same principle, local Muri, and to transform this ancient knowledge into practice.

Slow Cooking

Whenever I asked experts how to make miso on my own, they explained that I would first need to order *Koji* – a special mold culture – from Japan or China, and then grow it under controlled conditions in an incubator. It all sounded complicated and unattainable.

But I reasoned: if people were making Muri here a thousand years ago, without postal

shipments from Japan and without advanced machinery, surely there must be a simpler way.

In the quiet offered by COVID in 2020, I embarked on my quest to make a 'local' Muri. In a fourteenth-century [BCE] Egyptian cookbook, *Kanz al-Fawā'id fī Tanwī' al-Mawā'id* (*Treasure Trove of Benefits and Variety at the Table*), I discovered a recipe for 'Clean Muri.' The ancient recipe specified that the best season to start the process is early spring. Perfect, just in sync with the pandemic!

I gathered local barley, ground it into flour, and kneaded a salt-free dough. I shaped small cones, pressing a small hole at the base of each with my thumb. I placed the cones on a bed of wheat bran, outdoors in the shade. The first batch was eaten by cats, so for the second one, we built a wire cage and began again. After about twenty days I turned the cones, and after another twenty days they were ready for the next stage.

At this point one of the mysteries was solved: where do the enzymes come from? In the Asian recipes, *Koji* mold is added, but here nothing was mentioned. When I broke open the dried cones, I discovered that in the hollow space I had made at the start, a white mold had developed. This, I realized, was our local *Koji*.

From there I followed the recipe exactly: I added barley flour, salt, and water, and placed the mixture into a clay jar coated with olive oil. I set it in the sun, stirring four times a day with a fig branch. Later I added hardened wheat bread that I had baked and broken up. Then I baked salt-and-flour discs overnight, broke them, and added those as well. I stirred the mixture daily for two more months – in total, about half a year.

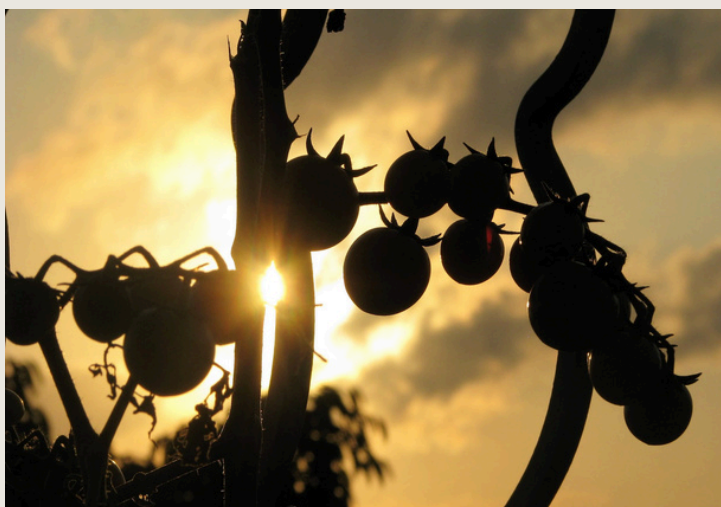
“The result: a deep black liquid, tasting uncannily like a fine soy sauce, with a sediment reminiscent of miso. After six months of work, I had two small bottles of this ‘black gold.’”



Contact
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for more info

And then – just as the recipe described – the Muri floated and rose to the surface. I strained the liquid, with the remaining solids in water, left to ferment again.

The result: a deep black liquid, tasting uncannily like a fine soy sauce, with a sediment reminiscent of miso. After six months of work, I had two small bottles of this “black gold.”



Making the Traditional New

Nawal Nasrallah, who the modern editor *Kitab al-Tabikh*, describes Muri as a salty, sour, and bitter fermented sauce, used much like East Asian soy sauce. She lists various types of Muri: from grains, from fish, white Muri, aged Muri (after long maturation), Nabati Muri (from Iraq, which al-Razi called the strongest and most common), Razi Muri (from a Persian province, black in color), barley Muri, fresh Muri, and more.

The Jewish physician Isaac ben Solomon Israeli, who lived in the 10th century, also mentions Muri in his writings – both fish-based and grain-based. Even Maimonides refers to it in a medical treatise.

I chose to engage with food not only because I love to eat, but because it is a basic element of life – a primal, communal, and cultural need. Food can unite or divide; the question is always how we choose to use it. Beyond that, these traditions carry knowledge: food-processing techniques developed over thousands of years, adapted to our bodies and to our climate.

Those first two bottles of Muri became the start of a new-old tradition. Each year we prepare more. In the beginning, I wondered what I would do with it all, but I quickly discovered the secret: once you have Muri, it finds its way into almost every recipe – just like soy sauce in East Asia.

When I make Muri I continue an ancient tradition and bring it alive again for our own time – connecting with the land, with our health, with our collective memory, and with our shared table.

I don't expect everyone to begin making Muri at home, but I do have a related recipe you ought to try: *Conserva Cruda di Pomodoro*, which I learned in Italy.

I call it "Tomato Miso."

Recipe: Tomato Miso

Ingredients:

- Ripe tomatoes
- Salt

Preparation:

1. Score the base of the tomatoes with a small cross.
2. Soak for about 5 minutes in boiling water.
3. Peel, halve, remove the seeds, and puree the flesh.
4. Place in a bowl, cover with cloth.
5. For 5 days, stir in the layer of mold that forms on top each day.
6. Then strain through cloth, press down with a weight, until a paste forms.
7. Knead the paste with 15-20% salt by weight and leave it for a few days in a bowl.
8. When you see fluid accumulate in the bowl, strain it and knead again.
9. After two weeks, store in a clay jar.

The result keeps indefinitely and can be used in place of salt in any tomato sauce.



Photo by Shira Tamir

CHEF'S SPECIAL

Jacob Herriotts

Can you tell us about your business, and how you found your way into pickling here in Israel?

My pickle journey began in 2015 when my friend Jeremy brought spicy garlic Habanero pickle spears in Baltimore, which my friends and I devoured. In 2016, I discovered Israel and moved here after my birthright trip with two backpacks and no plan. Seven months later, I was learning to make pickles from Jeremy. I'd go to work – my first job here – and my coworkers perched above the jars, inhaling and begging for more. I then built a store with an accompanying apartment in the back, quit my job, and opened up shop against everyone's advice. The Pickle Jar was born. I also took two months to rewrite my recipes for Israeli tastebuds, ensuring the flavors worked locally as well as they did in the U.S.

Do you see what you're doing as symbolic – something meaningful in connection to the land of Israel and its produce?

Yes, both. The cucumbers I use – known in Israel as “cornichons” – are rare here, and supporting farmers who grow them helps expand the Israeli produce market. Choosing to live in Israel is also significant; life is challenging, but this is home. Finally, American pickle history is tied to Jewish diaspora history. The Jews who pioneered pickles in New York brought Eastern European traditions with them, and my business carries that story back to Israel.

Has your business – or your sense of its meaning – changed over the past two years, especially in how it connects you to the land and community?

Yes, again. It gives me the chance to explore Israel, meet people, learn the culture, and fully embrace life here. Recent tragedies and conflict have strengthened my resolve to put down roots – because the deeper the roots, the harder they are to wash away. I came here at 27, am 36 now, didn't serve in the army, and have a slight handicap, but I hope to volunteer one day. For now, I'm building a stable life as a humble American-Israeli pickle maven.

Photo by Harry Ehrlich







בשנה והרצי האחרונות התאסרה
 בז'בוז עבודת הארץ
 הציבורית אולם ומאין
 הוקפצו עמילונים
 עלי נכסות
 ארוכה
 עם המציאות
 נפלת לתוכה
 שמצאתי היה
 מצאת פלה קטנה וצימתי עליה אבמה שקורה מסביב
 כך הערתי את כל המין הפנוי שלי



Photo by Dmitry Pomazan

CHEF'S SPECIAL

Dmitry Pomazan

In conditions of frontlines and warfare, the food you photograph shifts from something everyday into a charged object. How do you see food through the lens – as an aesthetic subject, as testimony, or perhaps as a kind of symbol of survival? Especially today, when food has become directly tied to our identity and who we are, and at the same time the kitchen itself has turned into a global battleground over culture and self-definition?

For the past year and a half, I have worked exclusively as a food photographer. On October 7th, I was called up for reserve duty and entered Gaza with my unit. To come to terms with this unexpected reality, I turned to photography. I brought along an old film camera and documented everything happening around me. When I returned to civilian life, I tried going back to work, but it was emotionally too fraught and overwhelming. Over time, I stopped taking commercial assignments and focused solely on taking photographs during my reserve-duty call-ups. With all of my attention towards food, I began to see meanings previously overlooked – the emotions embedded in food and what they mean to others. Photography became my way of finding emotion; otherwise I felt completely numb.

The popular trend of beautiful, sanitized food presentations in Israeli restaurants relies on a minimalist aesthetic in inviting spaces, with smiling diners, replicated from one place to another. It's visually appealing – but that's all. When working on my project, I tried to understand what gives meaning to a dish, and why a pastrami sandwich made in the field, in less-than-hygienic conditions, appears so tempting and delicious in photographs. The lack of aesthetic perfection adds authenticity, drawing viewers into the scene, allowing them to almost taste the food. Every imperfection becomes part of the narrative, an expression of character reflecting the personality of the person who prepared it. It's a way to understand someone's character – how they eat, what they eat, who they share their meal with – and resonates with themes like respect, fear, faith, love, and desire.





Photo by Dmitry Pomazan

Soldiers eat within a reality of tension, fatigue, and war. How do you think the flavors they experience take on new meaning in this context – do they become dulled, heightened, or infused with a new emotional layer? And to what extent do you see your photography not only as documentation, but as a creation that charges food with the meaning of memory and identity – especially since you are there both as a soldier and as a photographer?

In my reality, with the exhaustion, constant stress, and threats of danger, food takes on a new role. No longer a search for the perfect 'bite' on a Thursday evening in Nahalat Binyamin, but rather a moment for something comforting, sustenance for just carrying on. Ingredients remain basic, nearly identical everywhere, but for each soldier, they carry a different flavor – a distinct taste of home, of personal memory. Sharing food becomes a small yet essential ritual: calming, strengthening, and morale-boosting through the simplest and most ordinary actions. The flavors in the field might not be fully appreciated in the moment, but the memory remains powerful. My photography captures these wartime meals with the understanding that behind each one lies an emotionally charged, significant story which, properly captured, will not be forgotten.

When you return from the field to everyday life in Tel Aviv, how do you experience food differently through the eyes of a photographer? Does the tension between what you captured there and the abundance here in the city change the way you choose to look at and document food? And how has this dissonance shifted or broadened your perspective on Israeli-ness, on who we are right now?

When returning home and meeting friends at a restaurant, I carry with me the experience of soldiers' meals in the field. I also bring the understanding that a meal can be a ritual of intimacy or a narrative of its maker, which makes me acutely aware of the difference between food prepared with meaning and love versus commercial food lacking any story or significance.

That awareness can feel frustrating, lingering as I move from one restaurant to another, and it often draws me back to cooking at home or sharing meals with friends. Through my photography, I've learned to capture those moments – the meaning in food prepared with care – and it's that search for connection and depth that continues to guide my work.



Photo by Dmitry Pomazan

CHOCOLATE ABSTINENCE

Deborah Prinz

Up until October 7, chocolate had been a source of delight and discovery in my life; it consumed me. My “*choco-dar*” – serendipitous radar for chocolate discoveries – was always on alert, especially when traveling. I tasted chocolate from hundreds of companies on several continents, collected wrappers, and read labels to guide my purchases: origin, percentage, process. Over time, my palate sharpened: no waxiness, no excessive sweetness, and always attentive to the bean variety and the steps that shape flavor. For me, chocolate implies an ethics as well: I sought out companies that prioritize sustainability and worker justice, and I tried to understand how beans were sourced and paid for. Most importantly, chocolate became my medium for uncovering Jewish stories of resilience. These chronicle nourishment, sweetness, a mild antidote to the worn, tragedy-themed view of Jewish history.

Consider that chocolate itself is a resilient product. Chocolate goes through a lot to become the treat that we love. It starts as purplish seeds nestled in white pulp contained in variously colored pods of yellows, purples, and greens. The pods grow off the side of the cocoa tree in the latitude between 20 degrees north and 20 degrees south of the equator. The seeds get fermented and dried at place of origin. That’s when they start to turn brown and taste like chocolate.

Before industrialization, beans were roasted and tended over a fire on a stove or on a sheet of metal, shelled, and ground by hand to produce a beverage. The chocolate drink preceded tea and coffee consumption in Europe, first arriving in Spain in the late sixteenth century. Chocolate revolutionized food customs and triggered the development of specialized utensils for preparing, serving, and imbibing the delicious elixir. New technologies sped up these stages, refined the product, and also enabled chocolate for eating. It’s no longer only grown in Central and South America but also in West Africa, Indonesia, Madagascar, Vietnam, and a teeny section of Hawaii: a migrant food, transplanted to new settings and regions.

As I followed chocolate's journeys, I found Jews everywhere along its trail. Sephardi Jews fleeing the Inquisition carried chocolate tastes and techniques into Europe and the Americas, tying together trade routes through kinship and mercantile networks. In port cities and market towns – Amsterdam, Bayonne, London, Curaçao, Mexico City, Newport – Jewish emigrés helped build demand for drinking chocolate and learned to source beans, manage transport, and handle preparation.

L'dor va-dor – from generation to generation – chocolate making migrated to Europe and North America, in part with Sephardi Jews of Iberian heritage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The chocolate trade followed the migrations of these Jewish refugees.

Jews in New Spain (which included Mexico, Central America, Southwest and Central US and Spanish Florida) ritualized chocolate. They not only took an active role in trading cocoa beans, they also secreted chocolate into their undercover Jewish ritual life hidden from the Inquisition. Chocolate seeped into Jewish customs and celebratory meals for holidays and life-cycle events. For Jews attempting to follow the dietary laws, the *pareve* nature of the local chocolate drink, prepared without milk, lent itself to the separation of milk and meat. Mexican crypto-Jews used chocolate to welcome the Sabbath because wine was scarce in New Spain. Chocolate accompanied meals at the beginning and end of the fast of Yom Kippur and it was gifted for meals of consolation, *seudot havra'ah*.

In the British Colonies, from the start of the eighteenth century, Sephardi Jews played a central role in the chocolate trade, trading cocoa beans, processing them into chocolate, and enjoying the beverage themselves. Estate inventories of New York Sephardim included quantities of beans, chocolate grinding equipment, and related utensils, reflecting both personal consumption and commercial activity. Prominent merchants, such as Aaron Lopez of Newport, Rhode Island, and the Gomez family of New York City, participated in far-reaching intercolonial and intercontinental chocolate trade, building wealth and influence through their expertise in chocolate making and related import/export business. Chocolate was not only a commodity but a “Sephardic Jewish specialty,” as American Jewish historian Jacob Rader Marcus aptly noted, contributing to the growth and sustenance of the nascent Jewish American community.

From his British wall-papered, wood-timbered office overlooking the port of Newport, the Portuguese immigrant, Aaron Lopez, used labeled pigeon holes in the rafters to monitor his many vessels and related businesses, which included chocolate. He imported

cocoa beans, hired people to grind the cocoa beans into chocolate, retailed that chocolate, and exported chocolate. Not only that, but he recorded *tzedakah* that included “two pounds of chocolate” for the needy and “six pounds of chocolate for Pesah.” Chocolate for charity! By the mid-1770s, he was Newport’s highest taxpayer and among its richest men, in part because of his chocolate business.



The story continued in the twentieth century as Ashkenazi refugees carried chocolate across borders. Stephen Klein brought Barton’s from Vienna to New York; Eliyahu Fromenchenko founded Elite in pre-state Israel after leaving Latvia; Karina Chaplinsky built De Karina in Israel after emigrating from Argentina. Chocolate, like its makers, proved malleable – familiar enough to comfort, flexible enough to fit into new places.

For many years, I delighted both my mind and my taste buds in expeditions into the history of chocolate in Jewish life. The early stories of resilience were uplifting. My presentations on chocolate from a Jewish values perspective, the historical connections between Jews and chocolate, text studies, tastings – this was work that felt concrete and useful. Chocolate suffused my life.

But since October 7, my chocolate consumption has nearly stopped. It now feels like an indulgence in a time of mourning and upheaval. (Disclosure: I do eat some chocolate-covered espresso beans almost daily, for the caffeine.) I realize that I’m grieving for what felt like a safer, saner Israel and world order. I’m not finding comfort from chocolate and I’m not surprised or critical if others do. We need comfort wherever we can find it. Since my social media posts primarily focused on chocolate, I’m abstaining from that as well. I’m not tracking new companies or shops. For the time being, my *choco-dar* lies dormant. At this time of cruelty, division, and suffering, chocolate feels indulgent. A luxury. I’d rather spend money on contributions to support threatened social and political projects here in the US and in Israel.

Maybe soon I’ll reach for chocolate again, and when I do, I’ll be tasting a Jewish heritage steeped in history – chocolate as a food of resilience in the face of trauma.



CHEF'S SPECIAL

Jamie Geller



When I moved to Israel thirteen years ago (armed with precisely three recipes and a concerning attachment to takeout containers), I never imagined food would become my language for processing everything from everyday chaos to national trauma.

Living in this land transformed my relationship with cooking. Here, the markets overflow with stories, each pomegranate and olive connecting me to this ancient soil. My “bride who knew nothing” days (for those of you who don’t know, I used to store sweaters in my oven!) evolved into something deeper as I learned that Jewish food isn’t just sustenance, it’s resistance, memory, and healing rolled into one delicious package.

My journey from CNN producer to kosher cooking personality and then to building up a massive social media following at a Jewish educational institute wasn’t exactly planned (G-d has quite the sense of humor!). But this unexpected path taught me that quick meals aren’t just about convenience, they’re about creating space for what matters. When hostage mothers shared recipes of their children’s favorite foods, I recognized the universal language we speak through chicken soup and chocolate chip cookies, one of resilience, where enjoying one’s favorite food, or the favorite food of a missing loved one, is actually fighting trauma from taking over.

Today, when I share my 5-minute recipes or 20-minute miracle meals with busy moms, I’m really sharing something deeper: permission to find joy in feeding those we love, even amidst heartbreak. Jewish kitchens have always been command centers for processing both celebration and grief, one measuring cup at a time. This is especially true now, when keeping Jewish customs and traditions in one’s home, or in public, has become not only an act of self-declaration but one of defiance of those who wish to silence us and attack us. We will keep our Jewish traditions alive, one meal at a time.

THE APPLE TRICK

Amy Gottlieb

Even on sunny days I linger in the library,
seduced by perfect syntax and winding plots,
yet no book revives the steady hands

of my grandfather who'd peel an apple
in a single spiral, wordlessly,
wasting none of the fruit, never sneaking a bite.

He'd lift the skin, dance it between his thumbs
as if he were Geppetto and the apple peel Pinocchio,
the kitchen table a theater for our dreams.

He was a bodhisattva from Bessarabia,
a Jewish furrier who never quoted
verses of Torah or sutras of the Buddha.

He made mink coats and sweet borscht, played
cat's cradle, made us laugh. One summer morning
he sailed a boat around Sheepshead Bay,

cast a line and pulled up a brilliant sea bass,
his mirth soaring with the gulls as the
scales of the fish shimmered in the sunlight.



CHEF'S SPECIAL

Erez Komarovsky

Photo by YesChef



Since what happened in Gaza, the Iran war, and above all what is happening with the never-ending war and the disregard for us sane, human-loving, and kidnapped citizens, the entire attitude toward Israeli cooking in the world has undergone a dramatic change – and not for the better.

From the trendiest kitchens in New York, London, and Paris, we have become shunned out of disgust. The change is sharp and painful for me as an Israeli chef, of course, but it is beginning to feel like something that all of us in the Israeli culinary world need to recognize and confront directly. Is this truly culinary antisemitism, or legitimate political sanctions that every diner in the world who decides not to go to an Israeli restaurant is aware of...?

Will Israeli cooking become increasingly global in its flavors in order to blur its national identity? Will Israeli cuisine turn into Mediterranean cooking with Asian and Nordic influences?

Will we all give in to some new culinary identity that will disguise – or at least try to disguise – our old culinary nationalism?

As someone who was among the fathers of the local kitchen, I deal with what is happening here with great interest, and sometimes with great joy at the change the new generation brings with it, at the globalism in its flavors, and at the new techniques that sweep us toward a multinational horizon that escapes a narrow definition.

What is happening now is a tectonic shift in Israeli cuisine – and *that* is a good thing.





Photo by Shira Tamir

DUSTLING

Patricia Ezratty

1. Having no precedent for how to create humans, God created Adam from dust and water and breathed life into him. Adam from *adama*, meaning earth, the same root as the Hebrew *adam*, red, from *dam* or blood. Adam means Red Man, Blood Man, Life Man. Dustling.
2. You were killed on a Tuesday, it was the day before Rosh Hashanah, 2024 – or 5785 depending on which calendar you observe. You were at the supermarket in the Noga neighborhood of Jaffa, getting things for dinner, and a man with a machine gun shot into the store while the man with him stood by and watched. I return to the store often in my mind and get stuck there: wondering what exactly you needed; if you were wearing that fabulous chunky hot pink cardigan of yours; if there was anyone else in the store with you, perhaps someone who ran to you as you fell, whose face was the last one you saw. I wonder if the items in your hands were returned to the shelves and sold as if nothing had happened. Or had the bread been soaked with blood?
3. In working on my thesis, I've been spending a great deal of time on passages which speak to the transcendent and mystical qualities of bread. I read them with rapt attention, a part of me hoping that I will find evidence of a way to go beyond the physical limitations of this world to reach you. I know all about bread's history as a food with which one mourns. There wasn't any bread at your funeral, though, no cakes or wafers, no 'sin-eater' hired to eat bread which had sat on your cold body and absorbed your sins, thus retaining them and absolving you.
4. The 14-century Franciscan Friar Niccolò da Poggibonsi wrote in the 14th century of a Hebron field whose soil, said to be the dust from which God formed Adam, was traded like a precious spice. I wonder if the dirt and the field are still there; bridging the distance between life and death feels more possible than reaching the men who killed you.
5. My past in baking got me wondering about the amount of bread getting into Gaza and, after your death, finding a number became my mission. I spent hours scouring websites: World Central Kitchen, World Food Program, UNICEF. I downloaded the spreadsheet of aid deliveries from COGAT, (Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories) the branch of the Israeli government tasked with overseeing the delivery of aid into Gaza. Their files do not detail the contents of the deliveries, only the general type – mixed items, water,

shelter equipment, medical equipment, food – so I kept looking.

In the meantime, more are dying.

6. One night at 11:05 pm I find a video on *Middle Eastern Monitor*, from the Instagram handle @manarmotea. It was filmed in February 2024 and it is of a man collecting a bag of flour from the beach. You were still alive then. Panting, he says, “*A bag of flour after a month ... it felt like a thousand years ... Praise be to Allah ... Our bread is dipped in blood. We have two options, we either die of hunger or die from the bombing...*”

I watch in short bursts, overwhelmed by the suffering that is not my doing. But for the people in his posts, there is no turning it off.

7. Diana texted the night you were killed, worried sick that you were missing and had been in the area of the shooting. In an hours-long text chain, Tami and I told her it would be okay. That you might just be laying low until the danger passed. I wish we hadn’t said that.

Diana introduced us right after the kids were born. We walked through the city and joked about how tired and hungry and cranky we were, about nipples and poo. You made me feel less alone. I don’t remember if I ever told you that.

I saw you the week before the shooting, at a Saturday brunch with all our families at Diana’s. You had a new job as the Office Manager for a high-tech company, you had just moved to Jaffa to be closer to the new school your daughter was attending, and you seemed so good, like the hardest years were behind you.

8. After a month of looking I find the specific breakdown of food items in a study draft examining the claim that Israel is

“Diana texted the night you were killed, worried sick that you were missing and had been in the area of the shooting. In an hours-long text chain, Tami and I told her it would be okay. That you might just be laying low until the danger passed. I wish we hadn’t said that.”

not allowing enough aid into Gaza. They give a full list of the “food commodities” category from January 2024-July 2024 and I find the grains section:

Supplementary material

Supplementary table 1. Defined food commodities delivered to the Gaza Strip, food group categorization, nutritional value, and proportional weight in food commodities shipments

Food name	Energy (kcal/100 gr)	Protein (gr/100 gr)	Fat (gr/100 gr)	Iron (mg/100 gr)	Food group	Food weight (Tons)	Proportional weight (%) from all shipments
Flour, wheat, all-purpose, enriched	359	13.1	1.48	3.44	Grains	206,306	62.68
Rice, white, long grain, unenriched	359	7	1.03	0.14	Grains	6,017	1.82
Pasta, dry, unenriched	371	13	1.51	1.3	Grains	7,975	2.41
Bread, pita, white, unenriched	275	9	1.2	1.4	Grains	355	0.11
Crackers, wheat, regular	455	7.3	16.4	2.64	Grains	362	0.11
Buckwheat groats, roasted, dry	692	23.4	2.71	2.47	Grains	200	0.06
Corn, sweet, yellow, canned	61	2	0.77	0.36	Grains	245	0.07
Corn meal	371	8.8	1.2	1	Grains	80	0.02
Oat Bran	728	34	7.97	8.07	Grains	20	0.01
Semolina	720	26	1.05	1.23	Grains	340	0.1
Bulgur, dry	342	12.3	1.33	2.46	Grains	160	0.05
Barley	139	2.2	2.74	1.28	Grains	1,780	0.54
Energy bar, emergency ^a	440	16	15	9	Fortified Grains	240	0.07

Source: COGAT

The conclusion of the study states that ample calories are entering Gaza, but acknowledges that distribution logistics were not investigated, and so there is no way to know if the calories are arriving to their intended targets. The fact remains that the media says it is not enough.

9. The Jewish faith teaches that people are created in God’s image, and thus all human life has inherent value. The men who murdered you did not see how valuable you were. Over a year into this and the loss of precious, valuable lives is immeasurable.

All faiths honor the dead with care: Muslims and Jews return bodies to the earth: “we created you from it, and return you into it”; *“me afar bata, v’el afar tashoov”* (“from the earth you came, and to the earth you return”). Christians say “ashes to ashes.” Each ritual gestures to life’s value and our shared mortality. We too took turns covering your coffin with earth.

10. This is a new grief, different from mourning those who died of natural causes, even if those deaths are tragic and too soon. I know that grief, I carried them like stones in my pockets. But it is the weight of the natural world revolving, reducing with each turn. Those deaths speak to the impartiality of Time, unconcerned with what humans perceive to be too little.

This is different from the loss I felt after cancer, when the presence of the non-present parts of my body, and soul, were pulsing voids of vantablack, so dark that they seemed to exist distinct from space and time.

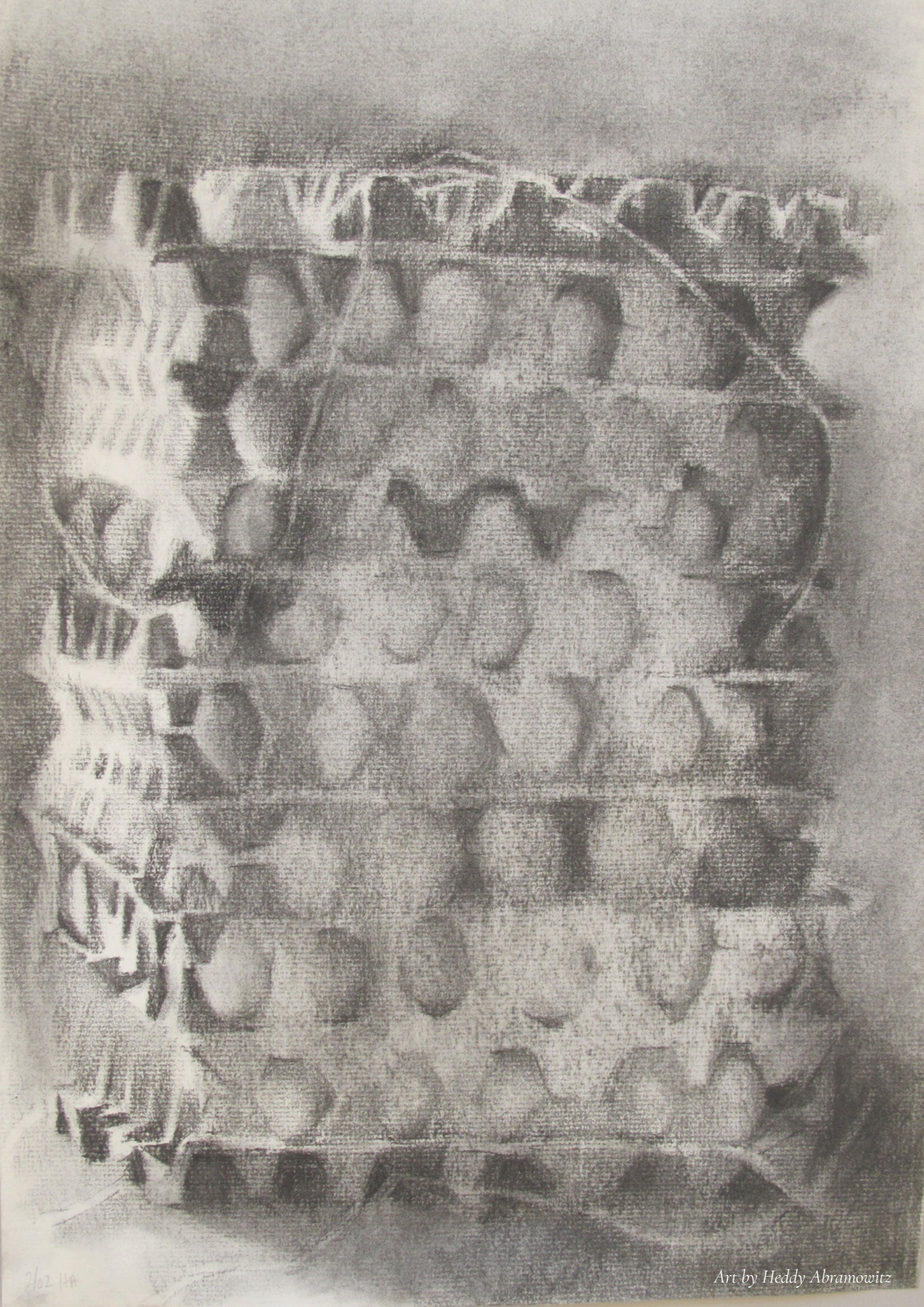
11. Your death is tainted by a global narrative, by political agendas, by the image of your face printed in newspapers underneath front-page headlines. You have become a symbol, making the grieving process collective, and thus allowing everyone to feel like they have a piece in it, though they didn't know you at all. At your funeral the Knesset representative who arrived for her governmental photo-op, called your daughter by the wrong name, and I had to suppress the impulse to scream out loud. And now the newscycle has decided that your death is part of history, and they have moved on to the next stage of the plot.

Across cultures, food is offered to the dead. In the apocryphal Book of Tobit, bread (sometimes mixed with wine) is poured on graves. In Mexico, *Dia de los Muertos* altars include favorite foods to nourish returning ancestral souls, coinciding with the monarch butterflies' migration. Ancient Greeks and Romans used feeding tubes in graves to share bread and wine during the long wait for the afterlife – they didn't want to be haunted, or they wanted to maintain a relationship, or they just couldn't figure out how to let go.

12. I did not pour out a libation on your grave, but I did get extremely drunk the night after you were killed. It was the Jewish New Year and it marked nearly one full year of terrible since the Black Shabbat.

Yesterday Diana packed away your clothes. She carefully folded and put them in a giant plastic suitcase for your daughter to go through when she gets older. Diana sent me a picture of the hot pink cardigan, the last time I saw you wear it was on the dance floor at Teder, where we danced together next to off-duty soldiers tracing patterns on the floor with their rifles' laser sight.

13. I have no idea how you would react to all this. I have yet to find a spell or charm or enchantment that would put these words to your ear. I want you to know how much I regret that I didn't put more than a jagged stone and a yellow *gerbera* on top of your grave – it didn't feel like enough then, and it still doesn't now. Maybe that is just grief, maybe it always feels like too little. But what would have felt different? Should I have rent my garments? Should I have emitted a tortured wail? Should I have bowed my head and prayed to a God that I just cannot believe exists? Some say that we can only meet grief with silence. And so, dearest Dustling, perhaps I should have bent down to the earth and taken a handful of the reddish dirt and eaten it, instead.



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Art by Heddy Abramowitz

CULTIVATING HOPE

Bat-Ami Sorek

I have been farming for almost twenty-five years, working the same field, raising the same crops, never bored. But I came to farming almost by accident. I began as a student of psychology and literature, working in mental health, in a community rehabilitation hostel. Yet by the end of my degree, I decided I was not of the resilient material of those who care for others. I asked myself what I wanted to do “when I grew up”.

In 2000, my partner’s job took us to San Francisco: beautiful, bohemian, full of promise. The move gave me space to reflect and explore new directions. I chose urban gardening over carpentry, drawn in by a weekend course that left my weekdays free.

That January, plunging my hands into fragrant, loosened earth, I knew I’d found my path. For the next three years, I apprenticed on organic farms, where extraordinary mentors taught me that true farming is about nurturing the soil. Their words still guide me: “if you cultivate living, fertile soil, it will do the work for you and give you happy vegetables.”

Returning to Israel, I was still filled with the promises offered by the American dream and with an Israeli sense of mission, I decided to found a farm here, in my own land.

My farm would follow the California model of Community-Supported Agriculture in which the farm becomes an extended vegetable garden for a circle of subscribers. The latter receive regular boxes of the season’s harvest, fresh from the field. For farmers, it offers stability and planning; for members, it offers a share in the work, and a weekly box that connects them directly to the land.

I turned to the Organic Agriculture Association in Israel, which offered guidance for new farmers. My would-be instructors were delighted to welcome a young woman into the field. But they did everything they could to dissuade me: “Israelis aren’t *freiers* (suckers),” they told me. “What works in California won’t work here.” The men went on: “Israelis want to go to the market, to touch and smell what they’re buying.” The men went on: “They’ll never agree to a box someone else fills for them with whatever happens



Photo by Eyal Fischer

to be in the field that week.” With the stubbornness I inherited from my father and the naïve optimism my mother taught me, I was determined to try. And so, on Sukkot 2003, I rented ten dunams of organic land on the plot of the Poker family, pioneers among Israel’s organic growers, in Moshav Kfar Bin Nun. I divided the field in two, and on five dunams I mowed, cultivated, plowed, and built beds, and began to fill them with spring seedlings. With devoted friends who pitched in with the tractor, the computer, the plantings, and the irrigation system, I began to cultivate my plot, which I named **Chubeza Farm**, after the Arabic name for the plant Common Mallow (in Hebrew, *Halamit*).

In spring 2004, we reached harvest. The first baskets of vegetables were packed full of the winter’s produce, picked with care that very morning: lettuce, chard, carrots, potatoes, onions, fennel, radishes, beets and herbs. Even though we packed only about a dozen boxes, the harvest took almost half a day. When I loaded them onto my ragged, worn Subaru pickup and sent my brother on his first delivery, my hands trembled and my stomach churned with excitement.

After about a year, my friend Alon joined my Chubeza journey, and together we co-manage Chubeza farm, with a lot of support from our families, first and foremost, our spouses and later, from our kids as well.

Since then, almost 25 years have passed over our farm. Countless suns and moons have

risen and set; we have endured heat, winds, frosts, and rains. When I established the farm, I hoped for 100 subscribers. Today, more than 600 boxes (about 1,000 families) leave Chubeza with vegetables that find their way into pots and onto plates, dirtying the sink with a bit of soil, adding scraps to the compost bin, and filling bellies and hearts.

Arriving each morning to a growing, yielding field is, for me, a gift. The intensive, physical labor – the ability to work in the soil of my homeland; to help it preserve and improve its fertility; and to help plants grow, blossom, yield, ripen. All this is possible thanks to our customers, a loyal group of who have accompanied us since the farm's first year. They sustain this place, a place very different from the way people think about agricultural production, vegetables, and how business supposedly must be done today.

Alongside the freedom to get muddy doing what I love most – growing vegetables – the farm community gives me two worlds: one, the quiet daily life of a farmer, conversing mostly with broccoli and lettuce. But I also have the joy of educating subscribers about a new tomato variety, or a new way to trellis peppers. I share my struggles with wild boars in the cornfield, and our continuing fight against squash flies.

For me, the drama of the seasons is enough to sustain me: the tension before planting (as the Psalmist says, “those who sow in tears”) and the joy of harvest (“shall reap in song”). More than twenty years ago I planted my life in the beds of Chubeza Farm, and I could have continued indefinitely in the seasonal rhythms of sowing, watering, weeding, staking, pruning, harvesting. I left the challenges of mental health for a quiet life of farming, balanced with the ties to my customers, our partners in the farm. I knew we brought joy to some, but it wasn't serious care. After all, I reminded myself, it's just vegetables.

And then came October 7th.

“That the events happened against the familiar backdrop of the magnificent agriculture of the western Negev turned the facts into a choking lump in the throat. Places we associated with growth and life filled with grief, loss, and terrible pain.”

As the details of the horrors became known, our hearts, along with those of the entire country and the world, were torn from their place. That the events happened against the familiar backdrop of the magnificent agriculture of the western Negev turned the facts into a choking lump in the throat. Places we associated with growth and life filled with grief, loss, and terrible pain. The orchards from which the avocados and bananas in our fruit boxes are picked, the fields where we buy potato seeds and sweet potato slips, and the nurseries that grow the seedlings we plant in our beds – they have all been our partners for years. We knew people who were harmed and people who survived. We all lost friends and acquaintances, including our Thai workers.

But on Sunday, October 8th, we awoke in the morning and continued on with our routine: we went to the field to harvest the vegetables that would go into Monday's boxes. Our faithful team – field workers and packing house staff – all showed up as usual for their chores (and those called to reserve duty went to other tasks). We worked in silence, for there were hardly any words, and continued with the monotonous, familiar, stabilizing labors.

We continued to cling to our soil and to grow our produce on it, and we found comfort in nature's complete indifference to the human storm raging here. These were the days of late autumn, one of the most beautiful seasons in the field. Against our torn hearts and scorched souls, the field gave its same stunning display of sprouting and growth, blossoming and fruiting. Here, in the field, everything went on as usual, despite everything that was happening outside.

In the initial chaos, we didn't know if the drivers would be able to deliver the boxes. But everyone responded: Yes, they were on board. And they all showed up to ensure that business continued as usual, mirroring the constancy of the soil, maintaining the work. When the vegetables reached their destinations, we received heartfelt feedback: People told us how important it was to receive the box as usual, how much it touched and strengthened them, how meaningful it was.

Amid the whirl of pain, fear, confusion, frustration, sorrow, lack of control, and uncertainty, I was comforted knowing that the faithful vegetable box outside their door provided grounding routine and support. Unpacking the vegetables, washing and drying them in the sink; arranging them in the refrigerator, choosing some for a salad; and deciding what to cook in the pot or oven, allowed them to engage in a simple, daily practice that shielded them from the great storm outside their door.

It was then I realized the Chubeza box offers more than physical nourishment. It had

become a thread connecting people to the steadiness of nature, to the ongoing rhythm of non-human organic life which continued to sprout and grow, unfazed by the uncertainty and instability of our world.

I have been working in agriculture for almost 25 years. For a long time I thought that we were “just” growing vegetables. Today I understand that along with those vegetables, we cultivate renewal, stability, community, and hope.



AGAINST – Inbal Klainer

Translated by Aliza Raz-Melzer

*Against all odds, this morning
My soul regained its place.*

*This morning, against all the blades
I planted a bulb in the ground's embrace.
Against all nightmares
Crows landed on the balcony
To slake from watering trays*

*I do not hurry to drive them off.
I will wait long days*

*Until, soft and precise and brave as Nahshon
A sole stalk will storm from the earth's depth
Casting itself – blind, green –
Into the whirlwinds of our days.*



בחורה
דת מהא
ים, אבל
ה נגלה
שזה לא
ן יכולה
בדרך כל
וייקר
הוונני
איל
2

נון קפדני מה
"המכשפות" שמת
מאנץ מנוחל שמס
משחקים "רישבל"
מאנצ'ים" אומרת
ככה מלש
ות,
הגיבור
ירכיב
ה יחסים

במסגרת
מפתיעים על עיני
מנסים לבחש
קרה מי קרה
חולצת 38 אורי
עם ריבון המשחק
אשיות ותרם זמן
שורלות סדיפ
את האפשרות
רה הנשקלת
או הפעמים ה
הלסינה ענה
היא אומרת
של חיכיות

רבים ל
כך פאו
האמלל
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TEL AVIV MON AMOUR

Ronit Eitan

We're headed to this new high-end Ethiopian restaurant in Tel Aviv – Jaffa that's been calling my name since I first read about its *injera* brioche. For three weeks, I checked the reservation site daily, my happiness hinged on this one outing. Finally, I landed a table – on a Saturday. The day of the demonstrations. Neglecting my civil duty while supporting the economy.

Tel Aviv needs me, I whispered to myself.

Or was it the other way around?

We stand on the sidewalk waiting for the taxi – him smoking a thin, rolled-up cigarette under a flashing half-light; me, stoic as a mannequin, staring at the road in my fancy black-and-white ensemble. Like bored extras in a French film. Are we allowed, as Israelis, to appear in French films, even as a metaphor?

“I don't want us to talk about the war,” I announce to my husband, to the world.

“Tonight, we're going to enjoy ourselves!”

“Sure,” he says with a smile.

A cluster of teenagers soaks in the last days of summer break – the closing remnants of vitality pushing them forward, toward us. They part, swallow us, then rejoin.

“It's like we don't exist,” I say, looking at their retreating backs.

As we pass down Yigal Alon Street, my face is pressed to the taxi window like a child's, the tip of my nose cold. The hostages' faces stare out at me from posters – some bearing a single face, others a collage of many. Snapshots of who they were, not who they are now.

“How was your day today?” I ask, as if I haven't been with him since this afternoon.

“Great,” he says.

“This is going to be so much fun,” I say, their gaze following me.

“Those demonstrations should be outlawed. Every road here is closed,” the taxi driver

complains. The never-ending construction of Tel Aviv – cranes, blockades, protests, closed roads – demands we stop. We ignore it.

The restaurant sign greets us. So does the dirty street around it.

Jaffa at night – a mixture of ancient architecture and dog piss.

We pay. Step out.

I brought a clutch. I wedge it under my arm – a youthful reminder of who I was.

My husband opens the glass door.

“Did you make reservations?” the young hostess asks, barely looking up from her laptop.

“Of course,” I say. Does she think I just happened to walk by – a war raging outside, useless clutch in hand – and decided to eat in a restaurant?

The place is packed. Every seat taken.

And yet, it feels empty, as if the absence haunting the city has infiltrated this place as well.

We’re led to the bar. It’s a short walk – not enough time to fix my hair. The music is indistinct, nothing I’d chase on vinyl.

The space is fine – high ceilings, an open kitchen. I count six chefs.

That’s a good number.

Decorative light fixtures, shaped like thin cylinders, cast a soft yellow glow – a forgiving hue for my wrinkles.

Tables for groups. Tables for couples in need of conversation.

At my age, I recognize it as the first sign of divorce.

High, uncomfortable bar stools.

Silver utensils. Paper napkins.

Glasses clink as I lift myself onto the stool.

The staff all wear black. I look around – everyone’s

“The restaurant sign greets us. So does the dirty street around it. Jaffa at night – a mixture of ancient architecture and dog piss. We pay. Step out. I brought a clutch. I wedge it under my arm – a youthful reminder of who I was.”



Contact
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for more info

drained of colors.

A charming bartender introduces himself. “Hi.”

His hand glides along the bar, leaning to the point of bowing. I recoil.

“Have you been here before?” he asks – a line designed as both hospitality small talk for us older clientele, or a pickup line for the attractive women sitting next to us. He’s a multitasker, that one.

“No,” I say. There’s no place for my clutch; I shove it to the back, fitting it between me and the low backrest.

We’re handed a menu: two black-and-white pages, the print small.

I resist using my phone’s flashlight.

“I’ll give you a couple of minutes.” He slithers away.

The prices are shocking – but no longer surprising.

So is the heat.

The war.

The inflation.

The world’s hatred.

Even my mediocre four-dollar coffee from the café every morning feels like penance. But that same café with the overpriced coffee stayed open on October 8, while Harvard students screamed their solidarity with rapists and murderers.

“Need any help?” the bartender, whose name we now know, materializes to take our order.

I order several dishes from the medium-size section of the menu, the new standard – this size has taken over Israeli menus: not too big, not too small.

Even the food doesn’t know where it belongs.

An Ethiopian Israeli chef and his wife have created this space in Jaffa where their ancestors’ food intertwines with Spanish gazpacho made from sunflower-yellow cherry tomatoes – our second dish – then flirts with summer squash – the third dish – and mingles with finger-lime aioli on two other dishes.

We marvel at the *teff* – a gluten-free Ethiopian grain – paired with lightly seared beef tartare in clarified butter, spiced with *mitmita*, served with lime aioli, crispy shallots, and *injera*-crusted potato purée. We order a dish where their famed *injera* dough morphs into a giant dumpling that takes over the plate.

The roast beef arrives. It’s lovely – like layered brown petals on a white plate.

I see the same dish on nearly every table. A quiet consensus.



Photo by Shira Tamir

No one around us draws a breath at these combinations.
Experimentation in Tel Aviv is nothing new.
We carry each ethnic dish like a roadmap to our identity.
To the world, we're reduced to a singular image – devoid of nuance.
Tell that to my dad's Moroccan chickpea soup, now made by my Romanian mother.
To my husband's Bulgarian kebab slathered with fiery Yemenite *schug*.
To every Shabbat dinner table across Israel, where Bulgarian, Tunisian, Yemenite dishes
mingle. I'd say an Ashkenazi dish is somewhere there making its presence, but we are lost,
not desperate.
We are the dumpling, I say to my current plate.
Full of bits from everywhere, contained within this delicate dough.

I look for a safe space as I bite into the dumpling – standard procedure. A siren could,
and probably will, occur. I hope it doesn't happen now; my dish will get cold.
My first night out after October 7 was on my birthday, three weeks after.
I insisted we go.
Because we were alive.
Because the economy had to move.
Because I needed a margarita.
The streets of Tel Aviv were quiet. No honking. No yelling.
Like zombies, we walked – heads up to the sky, then down to our feet.
Are we being attacked? Still? From which border?
The waitresses wore hostage and soldier tags over crop tops.
Their smiles didn't reach their eyes – but they brought us nourishment.
A siren hit mid-dinner. We filed through the kitchen into the safe room.
I clutched my glass and my clutch tight to my chest, sipping between long pauses.
The food was forgettable.
The tequila was resistance.

“Everything good?” the bartender interrupts just as my fork reaches my mouth with
another bite full of the Awaze Fish Tartare with pickled pumpkin sauce, berbere oil, teff
cracker – our nod to the ceviche of the world.
“Well, I think it's missing a...” I say. “Great,” he responds, as his gaze moves to the
attractive women beside me.
I used to be as attentive as this bartender back when I worked behind the bar in the early
2000s, when Tel Aviv stood for:
Affordable food. Cheap rent. A hostage-free zone.
I worked at the hippest bar in town: Georgian food – *khinkali*, *khachapuri*, *churchkhela*.

Balkan-Georgian playlist.

People dancing on the bar. Loud talkers. Hand bangers.

Alcohol chasers. Vodka shots. Cheap beer.

Arak cost 18 shekels.

We'd finish our shifts and drift into the night, smiling into other people's smiles.

We'd go to Allenby for *meloukhia* at 3 a.m., then wander into a sleazy bar on Dizengoff so dark we could barely see each other.

We'd stumble home – our hair smelling of smoke, lips bruised, feet aching – shielding our eyes from the sun.

Marveling at the people already up and heading to work.

Now, the young are missing – Nova kids. Soldiers.

No one's drunk enough to burst at the seams, to laugh too loud, or even say *l'chaim*.

No pickup energy.

No beautiful chaos of Yemenite, Moroccan, Iraqi, Polish, German Israelis colliding in the dark.

Just quiet conversations in undertones, enjoying bites of tartare with mustard oil.

We function: the fork moves in the right direction. The hand lifts the glass.

The wine tastes like wine – taken more for the buzz than for any hint of terroir.

My Tel Aviv was selfish. Reckless. Electric chaos.

That's gone. The guilt of eating while hostages starve clings to every bite.

The perverse joy of going out while others walk among us as shadows keeps us grounded.

The unbearable privilege of living while others died hovers between me and the scantily dressed women hogging all the attention to my right.

As I bite into the sour cream ice cream, *teff* crumble, and Ethiopian basil syrup, I realize that the melting pot is melting. And that sticky, stubborn, concentrated mush at the bottom – what's left – is who we are now.

Me, my clutch, and my husband make our way back home to our sleepy side of Tel Aviv, already planning my next outing to one of the many new places that keep popping up.

The city mimics functionality. I mimic someone holding it together, someone who goes out to eat pan-African food in her Tel Aviv on a Saturday night.



Photo by Shira Tamir

Food

BALAGAN

\$72.00

PLAYLIST

Watermelon Man – Herbie Hancock
I Want A Little Sugar In My Bowl – Nina Simone
Tei Oseh S'charchoret – Gazoz
Mashed Potatoes U.S.A. – James Brown
Cheeseburger – Gang of Four
Crying Lightning – Arctic Monkeys
One More Cup of Coffee – Bob Dylan
Shawarma – Ravid Plotnik
American Pie – Don Mclean
Pennyroyal Tea – Nirvana
Coffee Cantata – Johann Sebastian Bach
Everything in Its Right Place – Radiohead
Savoy Truffle – The Beatles
Stay Hungry – Talking Heads
Ani Ohev – Gidi Gov, Yehudit Ravitz, David Broza, Yoni Rechter



SCAN WITH SPOTIFY APP

CONTRIBUTORS

Heddy Breuer Abramowitz is a Brooklyn-born Jerusalem-based artist. Her graphic medical memoir, *Life-tumbled Shards*, was published in 2025. Since October 7, 2023, she keeps a street photography journal.

Sarit Arzitz is a former product designer who combined her passions for food and illustration. She now creates artwork that celebrates cuisine, from ingredients to full dishes.

Benjamin Balint is the author of *Kafka's Last Trial* (winner of the 2020 Sami Rohr Prize) and of *Bruno Schulz* (winner of a 2024 National Jewish Book Award).

Gil Dahan is the chef of Mashya Restaurant. He has a unique culinary philosophy developed over years of working in top kitchens, including Kitchen Market, Weiss, and Tzina.

Elizabeth Edelglass is an award-winning American fiction writer and book critic who started writing poetry during pandemic isolation.

Harry Ehrlich is an international commercial photographer and director having lived in Tel Aviv for 5 years. He is based in Boston, MA.

Ronit Eitan is an Israeli writer, humorist, and co-founder of Balagan magazine. She is the Creative Director of *Writing on the Wall* and the author of the forthcoming novel *Memoulaim* (Stuffed Vegetables).

Zeev Engelmayer is an acclaimed Israeli artist, activist, illustrator, comic creator, Gefilte lover, as well as Shoshke, his comic alter-ego. He is creator of the Daily Postcard Project, a postcard every day since 7/10/23.

Racheli Errera is a chef, creator and culinary producer. Born in Jerusalem. Writes, cooks, eats, and explores the world, the culture, and the relationships in it through food.

Patricia Ezratty lives in Tel Aviv with her family, and writes for the Culinary Department of ANU – Museum of the Jewish People.

Eyal Fischer spent 20 years as a photojournalist and now enjoys his work on a farm, continuing to photograph for pleasure in his free time.

Jamie Geller, the “Queen of Kosher,” is an eight-time bestselling cookbook author and chief communications officer and global spokesperson for Aish.

Sarit Goffen is an Israeli photographer specializing in food photography.

Amy Gottlieb is a novelist and poet based in New York. She is the author of *The Beautiful Possible*, finalist for a National Jewish Book Award.

Jacob Herriotts was born in Maryland USA. Survived a near fatal car crash. Fell in love with Israel, made Aliyah. Passionate about pickles.

Asaf Karela is a distinguished Israeli photographer, acclaimed for turning dishes into visual stories. Founder of the Asaf Karela Agency, he leads Israel's first collective for commercial and creative photography.

William Kolbrener, is an activist and writer – with books on John Milton, the proto-feminist Mary Astell, and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. He took time off from scholarship to found *Writing on the Wall*.

Erez Komarovsky is an Israeli chef, baker, and educator who pioneered artisanal bread in Israel and focuses on seasonal, local, and Mediterranean-inspired cuisine.

Uri Mayer-Chissick is an Israeli historian and food scholar who explores the history of nutrition and medicine and leads educational foraging experiences with wild plants.

Shira Nachshon is an artist who explores unexpected connections through bold colors and paper cut-outs. She is a first-year visual communication student at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design.

Chana Netzer is a photographer, photo, and art therapist. Over the course of a year, she returned regularly to the Chubeza Farm, documenting the cycles of nature - a place which continues to inspire her.

Hedai Offaim is a farmer, chef, winemaker, cheesemaker, TV presenter, and food author. He co-founded Ofaimme Farm for Sustainable Agriculture, and is a vintner at Mekomi in the Ella Valley.

Dmitry Pomazan began his journey as an assistant Asaf Karela and quickly developed his own artistic voice. Today he is one of the leading artists at the Karella gallery, specializing in food and art photography.

Avivit Priel Avichai is a chef and co-founder of *Ouzeria* in Tel Aviv. She is known for bold Mediterranean flavors and award-winning creativity.

CONTRIBUTORS

Deborah Prinz is a rabbi and author of *On the Chocolate Trail* (2nd ed.), which inspired two traveling museum exhibits and the picture book *The Boston Chocolate Party*. She has a forthcoming book on Jewish breads.

Karen Reiffman has made art since childhood, using drawings, staples, and tape to create masterpieces at her parents' dining room table. She continues now at her own, in Maale Adumim.

Michal Revivo is a leading photographer in Israel. She studied professional photography at Hadassah College in Jerusalem, phototherapy at Musrara School of Art, and group dynamics and facilitation at Bar-Ilan University.

Bat-Ami Sorek is a mother of four daughters, and the founder and co-manager of Chubeza farm, one of Israel's first community-supported agriculture (CSA) organic farms.

Erela Taharlev Ben Shachar is a historian of science at the Open University of Israel, explores women's roles in nutrition and agriculture and is the author of *Magic Ladle* (in Hebrew).

Shira Tamir is an Israeli-American student with a growing passion for politics, diplomacy, and media. She is the Communications Director at *Writing on the Wall*.

Luba Zagl is an artist and art teacher, working mainly with linoleum prints, depicting everyday objects in a style that is playful, colorful, and full of nostalgia. (@Luba_Basin)



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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We're now accepting contributions
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LANGUAGE

Poets know that **every word matters** – a single word can shift a mood, redirect a thought, reframe a life. **Language** defines us. It is expression, communication, the very rhythm of how we move through the world.

It can ignite connection. It can launch wars.

For our upcoming issue of BALAGAN, we invite essays, poems, visual art, and photography – pieces that explore language as a way of life, as a mark. We are looking for work that asks what **language** makes possible – and what it makes impossible. Pieces that recognize its beauty, its power, and its limits.

Send us your words, your images, your visions. Let's think together about the ways **language** shapes who we are.

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Deadline for Submissions: December 3, 2025

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