

Cooling the Rhetoric in Your Sukkah of Peace

By Edmon J. Rodman

Los Angeles (JTA) — In an election year, a sukkah divided against itself cannot stand.

Especially in the swing states, where each party is basically claiming that if the other wins we'll all be living in sukkahs, political dinner conversation this Sukkot could really topple an already shaky house.

With potential verbal sparring over which candidate is best for Israel, health care, and increasing Uncle Bernie's chances of finally landing a job, the evening has all the hallmarks of a below the Beltway battle.

For the festival, we are supposed to build a "sukkah sh'lo-me'chah" - a sukkah of peace. But how much peace can there be in the confines of small hut when your family or friends are divided about who is getting their vote for president?

In our season of joy in this election season, will our guests be unhappy and at odds like the lulav and etrog before they are assembled - willow, myrtle, palm — disparate elements seeking a whole?

As Lyndon Johnson said in quoting Isaiah, "Come now let us reason together." How best can we come together over our differences and keep a holiday sense of joy and camaraderie?

Should we be politically correct with the *ushpizim* - the guests from the Bible that are symbolically invited, one each night, into



the sukkah — and for every liberal Hillel invite in a conservative Shammai?

Politics and family dinners seldom seem a good match. As a child, I remember a Passover when two of my uncles nearly came to blows over what my mother described later simply as "politics," and another Seder that was almost ruined when my mother and her brother tussled over the morality of Woody Allen.

How about just invoking and enforcing the universal table rule of no conversations about politics, religion, or sex? It's a plan, but just try selling that to your libertarian dentist uncle, former flower child aunt, or brother-in-law home for a visit from the West Bank.

Where is all this division coming from? Despite our disagreements, aren't Jews more or less a political bloc?

Looking for advice about how to prepare for a politically divided sukkah, I contacted an expert on

political issues and American Jewish affairs — Steven Windmueller, emeritus professor at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles.

A sukkah filled with Jews of divergent opinions was no surprise to Windmueller. Going against the commonly held view, he already had written that the "Jewish vote" was actually a "series of voting constituencies."

According to Windmueller, sitting around our sukkah tables we might find a mixture of these five groups:

* Southern and Midwestern Jews, "who have longstanding family ties to these regions and their respective home communities," he said.

* Immigrant Jewish communities, who arriving from Iran, the former Soviet Union, or other societies "frequently identify with the foreign policy principles of the Republican Party."

* Traditional religious Jews, who "emulate the political patterns of the Christian evangelical community."

* Red diaper baby voters, who like their grandparents, identify with "socialist causes and left-wing political ideas."

* Urban Jewish elites, who are supportive of Democratic Party candidates and identify with "an array of liberal organizations and

often high-profile social causes."

Imagine a sukkah filled with one from each group trying to sway your lulav.

When I explained to Windmueller my fears about a politically divided sukkah, he suggested that we each "come to the table with an open hand." And to be on the safe side, he also advised, with a laugh, to keep any knives off the table.

How about just invoking the universal table rule of no conversations about politics, religion, or sex?

Windmueller said the more recent division among Jews is not a result of turning Republican or flocking to the Democrats as much as becoming independents. He sees younger Jews especially as being tied less to the political orientation of their families.

As to whether Jewish voters are turning away from President Obama, "The amount of movement we are seeing is actually small," said Windmueller, which he estimated this election cycle at 9-12%. He doesn't see a dramatic change in the Jewish vote like in 2004 for Reagan or 2008 for

George H. Bush.

Windmueller adds that the issue of Israel, which has been receiving much partisan coverage in the Jewish media and has the most potential to cause a Sukkah conflagration — is "not a top priority for many Jewish voters."

"Not even in the top five," he said, listing the economy, health care, Social Security, and international terrorism as among the priorities of Jewish voters.

As to how to help keep the holiday peace in this charged-up season, Windmueller suggested coming to the table "prepared" with more than just the usual political slogans.

"You don't want to lose friends and family over an election," he said.

"People are scared to have their minds changed," said Windmueller, who rarely talks about politics at the dinner table and has found that even at temple speaking engagements, organizers often are nervous that he will sneak in an endorsement. For a more congenial evening, he also suggested sticking close to issues on which many Jews can still come together - the Iranian threat, the concern over civil order, and the health of our society.

Shaking those subjects together in each political direction might not bring an evening of peace, but at least we'd be talking. ✧

(Edmon J. Rodman is a JTA columnist who writes on Jewish life from Los Angeles. Contact him at edmojace@gmail.com.)

Try a Sukkot Bash with a Thanksgiving Flair

By Jamie Geller

(JTA) - I would rather host 50 people at my house for a Shabbat than travel overnight with my kids. So that means if I don't want to miss the big family party, I'd better bring the party to me.



Jamie Geller

On Sukkot, if you have lots of company, surprise them by raiding ye olde Thanksgiving recipe box. Believe me, the recipes will taste completely different in your sukkah and they are a creative change from standard holiday fare.

Over the years, my husband and I have hosted countless kiddushes, major holiday get-togethers for family, Chanukah parties, and other events - even a Shabbat for 50 when I had a five-week-old newborn.

No, I'm not superwoman and I don't try to be. I delegate like crazy, and it works out fine.

That's one of my secrets. Here are more on cooking for a big crowd without going bonkers.

Menu Choices

* Plan your menu with the precision of an astronaut going to the moon.

* Delegate, delegate, delegate.

* This is why God created turkeys.

* The more people at your table, the simpler the menu should be.

* Stay on the beaten path.

How to Make it Happen

* Watch out when multiplying

ingredient quantities for larger yields.

* Be realistic about your equipment and your space.

* Refrigerator space has a way of shrinking too.

* Relax (yeah, right!)

* Two small platters are better than one big one.

Below are some Sukkot menu choices.



Southwestern Turkey Breast and Green Chili Stuffing

Prep time: 15 min.; cook time: 60 min.; ready time: 1 hr. and 15 min.; servings: 8.

Ingredients:

For Turkey

- 1/2 t. chili powder
- 1/2 t. mustard powder
- 1/2 t. kosher salt
- 1/2 t. dried oregano
- 1/2 t. ground coriander
- 1/4 t. cayenne pepper
- 1 boneless skinless turkey breast (2 to 2-1/2 lbs.)

For Stuffing:

- 1 T. olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 bag frozen corn, defrosted (10-oz.)
- 2 cans chopped green chilies, drained (4.5-oz.)
- 1 T. ground cumin
- 8 c. cubed bread (day old or dried

out overnight)

- 1-1/2 c. chicken stock
- 1/2 t. kosher salt
- 1/2 t. freshly ground black pepper

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a sm. bowl, combine all spices for turkey rub and mix well. Place turkey breast on a greased baking sheet or roasting pan and rub all over with spice mix to coat well. Bake for about 1 hr. or till internal temperature reaches 170. Let rest 10 min. before slicing. Heat olive oil in a lg. skillet over med.-high heat. Add onions and cook 5 min. or till softened. Add corn, green chilis, and cumin and saute 3 min. or till fragrant. Transfer to a lg. bowl and add bread cubes, stock, salt, and pepper; mix to combine. Transfer to a greased baking dish. Bake with turkey breast for 1 hr.

Yield: 1 turkey breast and 8 c. stuffing



Cider Glazed Vegetables

This simple apple cider glaze works well with any fresh or frozen vegetable you have on hand for a quick side dish. The recipe uses green beans, but it's great on sliced carrots, parsnips or other winter root vegetables. Also try it with other types of vinegar or nuts.

Prep time: 5 min.; cook time: 10 min.; ready time: 15 min.; servings: 8-10.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. green beans, washed and trimmed
- 4 T. apple cider vinegar
- 2 T. olive oil
- 2 t. honey
- 1/2 t. kosher salt
- 1/2 c. sliced almonds

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 400. Spread green beans on a lg. sheet pan in a single layer. Toss with vinegar, olive oil, honey, and salt. Roast 8 to 10 min. or till tender but still crisp. Transfer to a serving platter and sprinkle with sliced almonds.



Pumpkin Pie with Caramel Whipped "Cream"

To save time, use a store-bought prepared graham cracker pie shell instead of making your own.

Prep time: 15 min.; cook time: 50 min.; ready time: 1 hr. and 5 min.; servings: 8

Ingredients:

- For Pie:
- 1-1/2 c. crushed chocolate graham crackers
- 4 T. margarine, melted

- 1 c. pumpkin puree (15-ounce)
- 1 c. soy milk
- 2 lg. eggs
- 1/2 c. brown sugar
- 2 T. maple syrup
- 2 t. ground cinnamon
- 1/2 t. ground nutmeg
- For Caramel Whipped Cream:
- 4 T. caramel sauce
- 2 c. non-dairy whipped cream

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350. In a sm. bowl, combine crushed graham crackers and margarine and stir. Press mixture into a 9" pie plate in an even layer, across the bottom and up the sides. Bake for 10 min. and remove. Increase oven temperature to 400. In a lg. bowl, combine pumpkin, soy milk, eggs, sugar, maple syrup, and spices; whisk. Gently pour into pie shell and bake 40 minutes or until set. Let cool completely or refrigerate overnight for best results. Gently fold 4 T. caramel into whipped cream. Spread over chilled pie just before serving and slicing.

Yield: 1 (9") pie ✧

(Jamie Geller was "The Bride Who Knew Nothing" — until she found her niche as everybody's favorite kosher cook next door. She is the author of the best-selling "Quick & Kosher" cookbook series, creator of the Joy of Kosher with Jamie Geller magazine and host of the popular Quick & Kosher cooking show online at youtube.com/joyofkosher and on-air on JLT.V.)