

July 28, 110 Wednesday 25 Av 3870 10:10 IST  Print

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Waiter, there's locusts on my plate!

By GIL HOFFMAN
23/07/2010

Dinner tucks into outlandish kosher grub.

Where can you get an 18-course meal in Jerusalem that features a pheasant and guinea fowl pastry as an appetizer, water buffalo, swordfish and deer as main courses, and fried locusts for dessert? At Eucalyptus Restaurant in the capital's Hutzot Hayotzer artists quarter, across from the Old City walls, where a "mesorah dinner" was held on Thursday night in an effort to pass along the "chain of tradition" of which animals, birds, fish and locusts are kosher and which are not.

The meal was the result of 28 years of hard work by Ari Greenspan of Efrat and Ari Zivotofsky of Beit Shemesh, who started their efforts to research traditions of kosher slaughtering when they were 18-year-olds studying ritual slaughter and wanted to know how to slaughter a pheasant.

Because a bird is kosher only if a chain of tradition exists that it has always been kosher, each community had its own customs regarding whether local birds were permitted to be eaten.

The two Aris realized that in an industrial food age, the old rabbis and ritual slaughterers who remembered those local birds and kosher locusts were passing away. So they began interviewing these holders of tradition and collecting their chains of tradition via oral, video and photographic evidence.

"Ari and I feel we are on a mission to make sure these chains of tradition don't disappear," Greenspan said. "It's not sufficient just to talk about it. It must be real. That's why we eat it."

Thursday's meal was only the second of its kind in the country. The first happened in 2002. Mesorah meals have also been held in conjunction with the Orthodox Union in New York in 2004 and in Los Angeles in 2007.

Thursday night's meal was a rambunctious affair, with Greenspan, Zivotofsky and rabbis presenting evidence of the chain of tradition of each animal, often while standing next to live examples.

Renowned chef Moshe Basson cooked the scrumptious meal, which started with Ethiopian Injera bread and "Shiluach Haken soup." The soup commemorated the mitzva of sending away the mother bird, because it featured a fleishig egg (an egg extracted from a slaughtered chicken) inside a noodle nest in sparrow, dove and pigeon broth.

The soup was followed by quail in caramel sauce; figs stuffed with wild chicken and wild rice; duck, goose, muscovy and mullard in honey-ginger sauce; the

pheasants/guinea fowl pastry, and turkey that the chef unveiled with great fanfare.

The heart of the meal featured cow udder in saffron; a combination swordfish, kingklip and blue marlin; and the shibuta, a fish from the Euphrates River that is famed for tasting like bacon. The shibuta was brought from southeastern Turkey, and the swordfish was caught by a tuna fisherman in the Mediterranean.

The next courses were sheep and goat in endives; water buffalo; and spotted deer and red deer.

The locusts, which were raised by the Agriculture Ministry, were saved for last, perhaps as a dessert, and perhaps because by then, the participants in the meal were already full.



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