



Haman's Pockets?

by Sandra Niedrauer

One of the most recognizable of the foods of Purim is the three-cornered, filled cookies that children love to eat. They are popularly called *hamantaschen*, which means "Haman's pockets." The interesting thing is that Iranian Jews, from the location where the Purim story actually took place, do not celebrate Purim with hamantaschen. So where did the idea come from?

There are several possible origins for the popular cookie. One possibility is that it was a traditional German specialty called *mohntasch*, meaning "poppy seed pocket" in German. How *mohntasch* evolved to *hamantaschen* is anyone's guess. Adding a Hebrew "the" to the front of *mohntasch* renders it *hamohntasch*. The resemblance to the name of Haman (pronounced *Ha-mohn* in Ashkenazi Hebrew) could account for the adoption of *hamantaschen* as a Purim specialty. The similarity to Haman's name in the Hebraized version of the cookie name could have been accidental, but more likely it is an example of typical Purim silliness.

There are many explanations for why the pockets we eat on Purim are *Haman's* pockets. One such reason is that, just like the sweet filled cookies, Haman's pockets were filled with bribes to "sweeten the deal" for the king when Haman tried to get him to agree to do away with all the Jews. There are other explanations as well, some of which give the cookies such titles as "Haman's Ears" or "Haman's Hat." The reasons behind these names are enough to spoil anyone's appetite, even if it is Purim.

The first historical mention of hamantaschen is in an eleventh century Ashkenazi prayer book (which seems a rather odd place to discuss cookies). The original hamantaschen were made with a sweet yeast dough and filled with poppy seeds. Modern hamantaschen are usually made with a sugar cookie

dough and can be filled with any combination of nuts, fruit, or even chocolate.

No matter what our hamantaschen are filled with, the hidden fillings in the middle are a yearly reminder of the fact that God's hand is often hidden in the circumstances of our lives. Just because God's name is not mentioned in the book of Esther does not mean that He was not actively involved in the situation that faced the Jews of Persia. And just because we do not always see His hand in the circumstances of our own lives does not mean that He is not actively involved in working out events for our good. Just as the sweetest part of the hamantaschen is the hidden part, so the blessing God is working to bring about in our lives is not always evident.

Here is one tasty variation on the hamantaschen tradition:

Whole Wheat Hamantaschen

1 ½ cup butter, softened
 2 cups sucanat or turbinado sugar
 2 eggs, beaten
 1 t almond extract
 3 cups whole wheat flour
 2 t baking powder
 2 t cinnamon
 ½ t cloves
 ½ t nutmeg

Thoroughly combine softened butter and sucanat. Carefully mix in eggs and almond extract.

In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg. Mix well. Add to the sugar/butter mixture stir until well-mixed, using your hands if necessary.

Put the dough in a covered bowl in the refrigerator for several hours, or until firm enough to roll out.

Note: If refrigerated too long, the dough becomes dry and crumbly, and difficult to handle until it warms up.

On a floured surface, roll out the dough to approximately ¼ inch thick. Cut out circles. In the center of each circle, place one teaspoon of filling. Fold three edges of the cookie over the filling in the middle, making a triangle shape. Dampen the edges and pinch them together, leaving a little bit of filling showing in the middle. Place on a greased cookie sheet and bake at 350° for about 15 minutes, or until lightly browned. Let the cookies cool before taking them off the cookie sheet, since they are quite soft while warm. Once cool they will harden.

Fillings

Fruit filling – Jam in any flavor makes a good filling. The kind of preserves with big hunks of fruit in it works the best.

Date or raisin filling – Combine grated apple, chopped dates or raisins, and a bit of honey and cinnamon.

Hamantaschen S'mores – Fill each cookie with a combination of chocolate chips, chopped walnuts or pecans, and snipped bits of kosher marshmallows.

Do you know
 the quick
 summary
 of a Jewish
 holiday?
 They wanted
 to kill us,
 we survived,
 let's eat.

— The Complete Idiot's Guide to Jewish History and Culture,
 by Rabbi Benjamin Blech

Kids in the Kitchen

Persian Purim Punch



You will need:

- 2 ice cube trays
- approx. 1½ Cups of grape juice
- approx. 1½ Cups of Cranberry juice
- 2 Cans of pineapple juice concentrate
- 9 Cups of Club soda or seltzer water

Directions:

1. Pour grape juice into one of the ice cube trays; pour cranberry juice into the other tray.
3. Freeze overnight.
4. Just before serving, mix the pineapple concentrate with the seltzer water or club soda.
5. Pour juice into a punch bowl.
6. Add the grape juice and cranberry juice ice cubes.

L'chaim!

