



What's for DINN

by Mary Ann McGann

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THE OLD SAYING, "YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT," WHICH BASICALLY MEANS THAT TO BE MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY HEALTHY, YOU NEED TO EAT FOOD THAT IS NUTRITIONALLY GOOD FOR YOU. AMONG MANY OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, THE KIND OF FOOD YOU EAT AND HOW YOU PREPARE AND COOK IT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH AS WELL.

TRADITION!

Challah, or hallah, straight from the oven is a sweet treat and part of many Jewish celebrations.



ER?

"Food and faith are closely intertwined," says Angel F. Mendez Montoya, professor of theology at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, Mexico, and author of *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*. "Since food is an essential means of survival, it is understandable and interesting to observe that most ancient religions developed faith practices on the basis of food, farming, harvesting, and so forth."

Every faith has its own rituals and rules governing when, what, and how its members eat. Certain religions share similar food customs, too.

Some people of the Jewish faith, for example, do not eat meat and dairy products as part of the same meal for religious reasons. Many Jewish families have two sets of pans, plates, and silverware — one for dairy, the other for meat. Jews observing such *kosher* dietary laws are also not allowed to eat certain kinds of seafood or any meat that comes from a pig (such as bacon or ham).

Muslims also do not eat meat from a pig because pigs are considered to be unclean. In Islam, the permissible food is called *halal* and, just as Jewish people might buy their meat from a *kosher* butcher, Muslims trust a *halal* butcher to carefully prepare their meat according to their religious requirements. During the holy month of Ramadan, adults do not eat or drink (called fasting) from before dawn until sunset each day.

Many Christians fast, too, on certain days during Lent (the 40 days leading up to Easter) and eat fish instead of meat on Lenten Fridays. Eggs, a symbol of new life, are a part of every Easter celebration; some may be real eggs that have been hard-boiled and decorated; others are made of chocolate. Yum!

"All religions concern themselves with food in a number of ways — in customs, rituals, laws and



(TOP) FOOD FOR GOOD MERIT

People give offerings of food to monks during a New Year Day festival in Thailand. Helping monks earns Buddhists good merit.



(MIDDLE) FOOD AND FUN

Muslims in the Netherlands celebrate Eid al-Fitr, a joyous three-day celebration following Ramadan.

(BOTTOM) NO MEAT FOR SHAVUOT

Fish, not meat, is part of the Shavuot meal. This two-day Jewish holiday celebrates God's gift of the Torah more than 3,000 years ago.





(TOP) SWEET!

This honey-covered treat sold on the streets of Morocco will be a special snack after the fasting of Ramadan.

(BOTTOM) FELLOWSHIP

In Christianity, the communion host and wafers represent the body of Christ and the wine his blood.

(LEFT) BLESS THE HARVEST!

A lemon-like fruit called an etrog is used during the rituals of Sukkot, a Jewish holiday celebrating the harvest.

**(RIGHT) FA-LA-LA-LA-LA
LA-LA-LA-LA...**

Christian Greeks sing carols during a Christmas dinner.

celebrations," says Susan Reuben, a writer who lives in London, England, with her husband and three children.

Reuben, who is Jewish, is the author of *Food and Faith*, in which six children of different religious and cultural backgrounds explain how food is central to their religious practices.

In the book, 11-year-old Akhil tells us that many Hindus are vegetarian and that they do not eat beef because the cow is sacred in the Hindu faith. He talks of Diwali, the "Festival of Lights," and of a special Diwali meal made up of *sev* (a salty fried snack), *aamras* (mango pulp), *laddoo* (sweets), and other treats.

Francis, an 11-year-old Buddhist, helps cook the communal meals at a monastery for the monks and nuns, who rely on the lay community (non-monks/nuns) to provide food for them. "It isn't so important what kind of food we prepare," he is quoted as saying. "What counts is that we are cooking together with a giving heart."

Ten-year-old Tavleen, a Sikh, explains that, at the end of each religious ceremony, everybody shares a meal (*langar*) in the temple (*gurdwara*), to which anyone is invited. "The food in the gurdwara is always vegetarian so that anyone can eat it, whatever their faith. It's important to us that everyone feels welcome," she says.

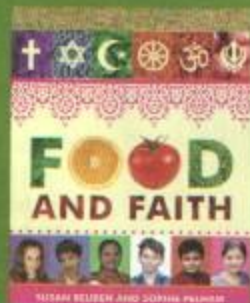
"It's important in our day and age that children grow up understanding and respecting all of the different faiths, not necessarily just the one that they know at home," says Sophie Pelham, a mother of two from London, who designed *Food and Faith* and who professes no particular faith herself. "I want my girls to understand that just because we live one way doesn't mean it's the right way. It's the right way for us, but it's not the right way for everyone."

"Youngsters should humbly ask curious open-minded, open-hearted questions of each other," adds Michael Pardee, executive director of the Boniuk Center for Religious Tolerance at Rice University in Houston, Texas. "There are lots of ways that eating and cooking are manifestations of religious and cultural traditions. And I do think it's incumbent on us to know our own history and traditions and to be curious about those of our neighbors." ★



INTERVIEW

BEHIND THE SCENES OF *FOOD AND FAITH*



AUTHOR SUSAN REUBEN
AND ILLUSTRATOR
SOPHIE PELHAM SHARED
A BEHIND THE SCENES
LOOK AT THEIR NEW
BOOK, *FOOD AND FAITH*.

Why did you choose food and faith as the topic of your book?

Susan: Food is an interesting and accessible topic for children. And it seemed to be a good entry into understanding something of the major religions of the world.

What struck you most as you spent time with each of the children and their families?

Sophie: I was touched by how well a group of children (at the Buddhist monastery) worked as a team to make a salad together. They didn't seem to take much, if any, direction from any adults. They knew what was expected of them and they got on and did it. They made huge amounts of salad, chopping various sorts of vegetables with great ease and with such good will and lovely chatter. I was also impressed that they all seemed grateful for the food — no picky eaters, no fussing!

Susan: I was struck by how important cooking was in the Jewish family. The mom made everything from scratch. She made her own *challah* (bread) every Friday, even though practically everyone around here buys it. She told me of how, at the end of one particular week, they'd gotten back late from holiday on a Friday, leaving very little time for the Sabbath. She has four children and she must have been completely exhausted, but she still made her own *challah*. Not

because it was a rule, but because it was culturally very important to her and to her faith.

What did you learn about any of the religions that you didn't know before?

Susan: The Buddhist monks we visited not only are not allowed to buy or cook their own food, they may not grow it either or serve it to themselves. I also learned that Sikhism is a religion where everyone is considered to be equal. For example, men and women cook and wash up in the *gurdwara* and everyone sits to eat in rows with no one at the head of the table.

Sophie: Um... Christingle! **Note:** The Christingle is a symbolic object made just before Christmas in certain Christian denominations, using an orange (the world), a red ribbon (the blood of Christ), a mixture of dried fruits and sweets skewered on cocktail sticks (the four seasons and the fruits of the earth), and a lighted candle (Jesus, the Light of the World). ★

! CONTEST !

Win a Copy of *Food and Faith*

We are giving away two copies of *Food and Faith* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, June 2012) by Susan Reuben and Sophie Pelham. To enter just send your name and address to facesmag@yahoo.com. Winners will be chosen at random on January 7, 2013.