



Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Dancing at Eight Family Feasts

"Abigai, Esther, I'm waiting for you in the kitchen."

"Coming, Bivi," the two girls call. Abigai and Esther live in Samarkand. Bivi is their grandma on their father's side.

Tonight is the first night of Hanukkah and the family will sit down to the first of eight festive family meals. Uncles Minash and Yacob will be there along with their families. But Aunts Mazal and Shoshana will celebrate in the homes of their husbands' families. In Uzbekistan, it is customary for sons to bring their families to their parents' homes to celebrate the first night of the holiday.

Bivi is getting impatient. She wants the girls to help her prepare *jarkoff*, the traditional Uzbekistan dish served on holidays. "I'm waiting!" she calls again.

"One minute," the girls giggle, tying bells around their wrists.

"What's that jingling?" Bivi asks them, when they come into the kitchen.

Holding their hands up in the air, the girls gracefully turn their wrists to the left, then the right.

Smiling, Bivi convinces them to remove the bells and help her peel potatoes. As they work, they clap their hands, snap their fingers, and tap their feet to the beat of a song.

"You must be up to something," insists Bivi. She hands them tomatoes. Abigai chops, while Esther stirs, moving her head back and forth. The two look at the clock, and as soon as they are finished, they run out the door.

Back home, Ona, their mother, is filling bags with candy for her nieces and nephews. The kitchen smells of freshly baked cake. Abigai and Esther rush in and head straight for their room.

"What are you girls doing?" calls Ona.

"You'll see," Esther answers.

As dusk begins to fall, Dadda, Bobo (their grandfather), and their uncles leave for synagogue. They will join the women and children afterward.

When they finally gather, Bobo lights the hanukkiah for the family, and they sit down for dinner. Everyone compliments Bivi on the delicious food.

"Abigai and Esther helped me prepare *jarkoff*," she admits. The family turns to thank the girls, but they're not in their seats. Suddenly, music is in the air. Dressed in colorful costumes, the girls make a grand entrance, moving to the beat of the *besh karsak* folk dance.

Local tradition claims that the Jewish community of Bukhara, the oldest in Uzbekistan, was established 2,000 years ago, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some say that the Jews who arrived there had fled Persia. Others say that they were Jewish merchants who were traveling on the Silk Road to China. Most were artisans and merchants, since land ownership was forbidden to Jews. Over the last centuries, they lived under a variety of rulers, not all of whom were friendly. Today, approximately 25,000 Jews remain in the newly-independent republic of Uzbekistan, residing in the cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent. These communities enjoy many Jewish activities and communal services.

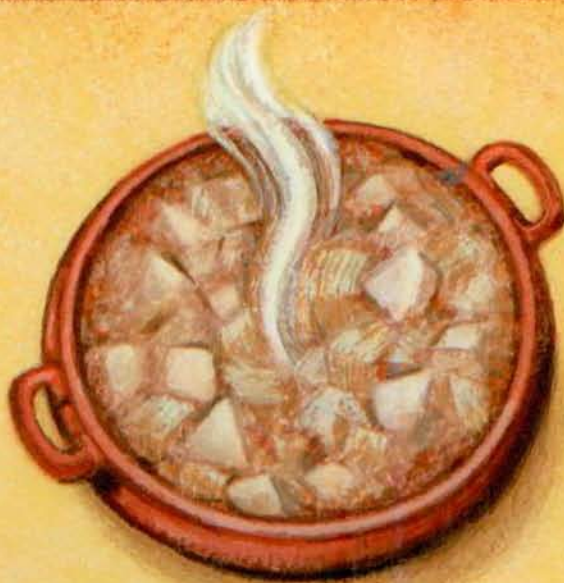
"I knew you were up to something," grins Bivi, getting up to join her granddaughters. Within minutes, everybody is up, laughing and dancing. While they whirl and sway, Uncle Minash calls out, "My house, tomorrow night!" Smiling at his nieces he adds, "And I expect a different dance."



Bivi's Jarkoff

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp. oil
- 1/2 chicken, cut and skinned
- 1 lb. potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 3 medium tomatoes, chopped
- Dash of spices: salt, black pepper, and cumin
- 1 c. water



Preparation

1. Heat oil in a medium-sized pot and brown chicken.
2. Add potatoes and fry until golden.
3. Stir in tomatoes and spices.
4. Add water, bring to a boil, then lower flame to medium.
5. Cover the pot halfway and cook for 30 minutes.
6. Serve hot.

