



ecojudaism
OUR FAITH IN THE PLANET

Why should we love our leftovers?

Adapted from “EcoShabbat 2022 Presentation on Food Waste” by Donna Cohen for Barnet United Synagogue

“Food, glorious, food!” as the song goes in the classic musical *Oliver!* with lyrics by Lionel Bart. And he seemed to know what he was talking about.

Who owns a pet? Think about when your pet is hungry and you offer them food. What happens? Face down, straight in there, down it goes! As Jews, we are supposed to act differently... because this is not just food this is... Jewish food!

In Judaism food is elevated, it's sanctified, it truly is **glorified**. How? By pausing before we eat and saying a *bracha*. For instance, imagine we have a juicy apple in our hand; before we munch into it, we think about how miraculous it is that it's the fruit of a tree. We thank Hashem for that when we pause to say *boreh perie ha'etz*. And we have *brachot* for just about everything. So in this way, eating is not just a primal experience, it's a spiritual one where we satisfy our soul as well as our body.

Food is at the heart of our Jewish culture and calendar. From Friday nights with chicken soup and kneidlach, the cholent and kugel on Shabbat, the marathon menus between Rosh Hashana and Simchat Torah, the latkes and doughnuts at Chanukah, the Purim Seuda, the Pesach Seder, the cheesecake at Shavuot. By the end of it, we feel like a communal Mr. Bumble! Then we start all over again!

Food defines us literally from the cradle to the grave. There's the food after the *Brit Mila* or the Baby Blessing for a girl, the lavish Bar or Bat Mitzvah party, the wedding feast and even (*lo aleinu*) at a shiva what do people bring the mourners? – not flowers, but food.

Coinciding with COP28 is EcoShabbat and I'd like to share some alarming statistics about food waste and to challenge you to change your mindset around food.

According to the most recent report by the charity Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), the UK produces a staggering 6.7 million tonnes of food waste per

year which translates to a cost of over £14 billion a year. Worse still, it is associated with more than 25 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. Everything we throw away has an impact on the environment and climate change. Because it's not only the food we're wasting, it's the resources that go into producing it that get wasted too.

As Jews, it's in our DNA to question "have I made enough food?" Chances are you've made too much! How can we change this mindset? Plan ahead, look at your numbers, make a list, set a budget and buy only what you need. If there are only 2 of you at home now, cook for 2, not for 6! If it's a dinner party for 8, cook for 8! We won't starve and are just happy and grateful not to be having to cook ourselves!

Vegetables like carrots, potatoes and sweet potatoes – don't peel them! They're lovely and nutritious as they are! Saves waste and time! Don't take it from me, take it from Jamie Oliver! Chop it up and in it goes into the pan - the whole thing - *lovely, jubbly!*

Supermarket offers – don't fall for them! For instance: buy one bag of carrots, get one half price. It's just shrewd marketing! A scam! If you don't need it, then it's not saving you money and just creating senseless waste.

Sell by dates and use by dates: what's the difference? A sell-by date is basically just for the store's inventory so you can pretty much ignore that. A use by date on the other hand is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. This is the one where we can use our common sense. In previous generations, consumers used their eyes and noses. Morrisons have recently removed the use-by labels from their own brand milk and are instead asking customers to make their own decisions, using what they call a "sniff test". A colossal 490 million pints of milk are wasted every year in this country because people have become so reliant on instructions. It's time we used our own initiative! I would certainly ignore the use-by dates on things like spices, for instance. Whilst they might lose a bit of pungency over time, they pretty much last forever.

Leftovers. However hard we try, there always seems to be something... so let's love our leftovers. Make a risotto with the chicken leftovers from Friday night or a bread pudding with the Challah.

Smart fridge storage. Believe it or not, fridge doors are the warmest part of the fridge which is where most of us store our milk! Milk (as well as meat) should be stored (away from each other, of course!) at the back of the bottom shelf which is the coldest part of the fridge. The fridge door should be for juice and condiments which have a longer shelf life. Fruit and veg should be kept in separate humidity control drawers as they require different levels of humidity – fruit requires low humidity, whereas veg as well as strawberries like it high. You could also create an "eat me first container" to stash foods that need to be consumed imminently – for instance yogurts. If we just rearrange our fridge, our food will last longer and there will be less waste. It's so simple and effective.

And finally, I'd like to challenge you to change your relationship with your bins. Your recycling bin is blue, the colour of tranquillity and trust. That bin is our friend. The items we

put into it will return to us at some point reincarnated and useful. Your general waste bin is black/grey - colours that conjure up gloom and negativity. This cavernous and ravenous bin is **not** our friend. The food we feed it ends up in landfill, decomposes, and enters the soil and air, creating greenhouse gases, severely damaging the environment. I challenge you to **starve** this bin!

I'm going to leave you with that great challenge and would like to end on a positive note. Let's still enjoy our food but let's not waste it, because it IS glorious, as I said at the start. And... remember I mentioned Lionel Bart? He was, of course, Jewish!