

TORONTO

Food for thought at Shoresh Conference

By Eryl Kupfer

CONTRIBUTOR

Last week, more than 130 people, young and old, religious and secular, residents of Toronto and other cities and countries converged at the Miles JCC for the Shoresh Food Conference.

Shoresh was launched more than 10 years ago with the goal of building a more connected, ecologically sustainable Jewish community.

Shoresh and the Jewish people are deeply intertwined culturally, socially and religiously with a myriad of laws and regulations in the Torah governing agricultural integrity, the ethical treatment of animals and human beings and types of food fit for consumption.

At the end of the Shoresh conference, a roundtable of speakers offered a variety of sessions to satiate every kind of intellectual appetite regarding this intersection of food and Judaism. These ranged from *Planning a Vegan Seder* to the *Hows and Peas*

in the Middle East: Israeli Agriculture and Regional Food Security, a look at Torah mandated preservation of agricultural and wild spaces, and much more.

A well-attended session dealt with how to get a *hechsher* – kosher certification – in the Greater Toronto Area.

Richard Rabkin, director of marketing and business development for COR – the Council of Orthodox Rabbis, pointed out that it was not just Jews who want to eat kosher. Jews surprisingly make up a mere 15 per cent of kosher consumers. Vegans, vegetarians, and people from other faiths, like Hindus and Muslims, prefer kosher products since there is outsider oversight and inspections, that can translate into safer, cleaner or healthier food.

Rabkin described getting kosher certification as “an extremely meticulous process” – an assessment shared by panellist Sher Kopman, who, along with her sister-in-law Michelle Kass, launched a vegan line of products. She described the process



Sabrina Malach (left), director of community outreach for Shoresh, with Myrte Rotstein, a holistic food and wellness coach with Tasty Life Wellness

as “arduous.” Every ingredient and its source has to be listed, e.g., sesame seeds from Turkey, so that the information can be entered into the COR computer data base.

Audience members brought up the issue of the inability of small, newly launched businesses to pay for a *hechsher*. Unfortunately, since COR is a non-profit, cutting the cost would be difficult, Rabkin said.

Professor Andrea Most of the University of Toronto moderated

the discussion.

Michael Wex, a Yiddish food maven and *New York Times* best-selling author, gave an informative, witty look at Toronto's Jewish food culture, which basically reflects Jewish food culture everywhere.

Wex pointed out that Jews have more dietary laws than anyone else and thus kosher food acted as an “edible *mechitzah*” – a barrier that would impede socializing with pagans that could ultimately lead to idol

worship.

Many Jewish favourites are tied to religious observance. Gefilte fish, for example, became a Shabbat staple because it avoided the problem with the prohibition on Shabbat of separation, i.e. ripping fish flesh from bones.

Wex described *cholent* as the “the ground zero of Jewish food” – or as he pointed out ruefully, “the big bang of Jewish food – based on what it does to you.” Eating hot food on Shabbat, “*chumim*” as the Talmud referred to it – showed one's commitment to rabbinic Judaism during the 8th century when the practices of the Karaites, a sect that did not use any fire on Shabbat (based on a literal interpretation of the Torah) were becoming popular.

Potatoes were to our great grandparents what sushi is to the current generation, since potatoes were a relative newcomer to Jewish cuisine – and that potato kugel did not exist in the time of the Baal Shem Tov.

And who knew the blueberry

bun was hard to find outside Toronto, having been duplicated here by Jewish immigrants from a part of Poland where they usually uncommon berries were in abundance. They were known as *stritzelach*.

Another session, led by Myrte Rotstein, a holistic food wellness coach with Tasty Life Wellness, addressed the virtue of mindful eating. Rotstein explained how uttering blessings before eating, or taking deep breaths or simply pausing before eating relaxes you, helps savour your food and enhance digestion.

Rotstein described mindful or distracted eating, out of control cravings and their various triggers. Triggers were loneliness, peer pressure, stress, get your money's worth – like a *you-can-eat-buffet* – even music.

She pointed out that “if you're hungry, then eating will not satisfy it.” Being mindful and conducive to better eating habits.

Sudoku

MEDIUM

EASY

	5		9	1				4
		6	2					
2	9	3		5	8			
3		5	6					1
7		2	5		1	4		8
	4				3	5		6
			3	4		7	9	1
					2	8		
	3			8	9			2

Puzzle by websudoku.com

	5	7						4
			8	1		5		
4					3		9	
7					6	4	3	
3		4		2		9		6
	1	5	3					8
	4		2					9
		3		9	8			
7						2	1	

Puzzle by websudoku.com

			8	5		9		
	1	3	2					
	6				9	7		
7	3							
			8	3	2	1	6	
							5	1
		2	5				9	
						2	1	6
	7		9	8				

Puzzle by websudoku.com

SOLUTIONS TO JANUARY 24 PUZZLES

EASY

1	5	4	8	6	2	3	9	7
3	7	2	9	4	5	1	6	8
9	8	6	3	1	7	5	2	4
7	1	3	4	2	8	6	5	9
4	2	5	1	9	6	7	8	3
8	6	9	7	5	3	4	1	2
5	4	1	2	3	9	8	7	6
6	9	8	5	7	4	2	3	1
2	3	7	6	8	1	9	4	5

MEDIUM

3	4	5	7	2	1	8	9	6
8	2	7	9	5	6	1	4	3
9	1	6	4	3	8	5	7	2
5	7	9	1	4	2	3	6	8
6	8	2	3	9	5	7	1	4
1	3	4	8	6	7	9	2	5
7	6	1	2	8	3	4	5	9
2	9	8	5	1	4	6	3	7
4	5	3	6	7	9	2	8	1

HARD

3	4	6	1	8	2	9	7	5
1	7	8	5	9	4	6	2	3
2	5	9	3	6	7	1	8	4
5	1	3	2	7	6	8	4	9
9	6	7	4	5	8	2	3	1
4	8	2	9	1	3	5	6	7
7	2	5	8	3	1	4	9	6
8	3	1	6	4	9	7	5	2
6	9	4	7	2	5	3	1	8