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For Your Discussion Group: *On the Chocolate Trail*

Q&A with author Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz

How did you discover the connections between religion and chocolate?

I wandered into a chocolate store in Paris and happened to pick up a brochure that I was fortunately able to read in my high school French. It described how Jews were the first to bring chocolate to France. This amazing morsel of history had been overlooked in my serious Jewish education as had many other Jewish stories related to chocolate. With further exploration I learned about the significant, provocative and intriguing chocolate stories of Mayans, Aztecs, Catholics, and Quakers.

How and where did you conduct your research and chocolate tasting?

Chocolate sleuthing occurred during my travels within the United States and to several other countries, including Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Spain and Switzerland. My chocolate discoveries also were unearthed in numerous libraries and archives.

Do you have any special connections to chocolate?

Yes, I call it *choco-dar*, my radar for chocolate discoveries and experiences. During my research, I discovered a Jewish proclivity to *choco-dar* as well.

What are a few of the more surprising findings from your research?

Here are some of my favorites:

- Chocolate makers in Bayonne, France, insist that Jews brought chocolate making to France.
- In eighteenth century Amsterdam, Jews were known as chocolate specialists.
- North American Jewish Colonial traders such as Aaron Lopez and Rebecca Gomez were involved in the American chocolate trade.
- Jewish values such as *oshek* (honest and fair labor practices) and *baal tashchit* (saving that which has potential for future use) help us select chocolate.
- A Jew was the first to bring coffee and chocolate to England via Oxford.

Discussion Questions for Your Group

- What surprised you the most about the connections in the book between chocolate and religion?

- Do you agree with the criteria for selecting quality chocolate that Prinz lays out? Would you add anything else? Which certifications will you look for in your future chocolate purchases?
- Did you have any favorite chocolate rituals, customs or stories in your family or community?
- The Catholic Church exhibited ambivalence toward chocolate. Why do you think there was less ambivalence in the Jewish community?
- Which of the several narratives about chocolate makers resonated most for you and why?
- What might these findings about chocolate and religion suggest about the future of inter-religious dialogue?
- Which future adventures might be on your personal chocolate trail?

Chocolate Tasting Suggestions for Book Clubs

- Prepare recipes from the book to share.
- Bring favorite chocolate treats or recipes.
- Invite local chocolate maker(s) to contribute samples.
- Provide a sample of chocolates that reflect Jewish values as in final chapter of the book.

Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz

Rabbi Deborah Prinz lectures about chocolate and Jewish celebratory breads nationally and internationally, in person and virtually. After thirty years of congregational work in San Diego County, in Teaneck (New Jersey), and at Central Synagogue in New York City, and following seven years at the Central Conference of American Rabbis as director of Program and Member Services, Rabbi Prinz headed onto the chocolate trail with the publication of *On the Chocolate Trail: A Delicious Adventure Connecting Jews, Religions, History, Travel, Rituals and Recipes to the Magic of Cacao*, now in its second edition.

Order Now! *On the Bread Trail: Jewish Baking Around the World* (CCAR Press) takes readers on a captivating journey to uncover the deep historical, cultural, and spiritual connections embedded in a wide menu of Jewish breads. In this sequel to *On the Chocolate Trail*, Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz explores the values that inform Jewish baking, the cherished seasonal and holiday breads that adorn our tables, and the everyday breads that accompany us throughout our lives. *On the Bread Trail* feeds our souls with global recipes, historical insights, and

delicious inspiration. From babka to *berches*, challah to *lachuch*, this book is a celebration of heritage, resilience, and the stories that emerge from Jewish kitchens around the world. The book includes a discussion guide.

Available! *The Boston Chocolate Party*, a picture book co-authored with award-winning children's book writer, Tami Lehman-Wilzig. With historic irony, the Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773, coincided with the last night of Hanukkah. In *The Boston Chocolate Party*, a narrative of friendship, redemption and celebration, readers learn about the parallel stories of freedom sought by the American colonists and by the Maccabees.

**Rabbi Prinz is available to speak on the following topics:
(includes book signings)**

On the Chocolate Trail

1. Jews on the Chocolate Trail
2. Jewish Chocolate Parties: From Generation to Generation
3. Jewish Resilience through Chocolate
4. What is the Best Chocolate? Jewish Ethics Mix into our Chocolate Eating
5. Questions Rabbis Ask About Chocolate
6. Chanukah and Christmas Chocolate Melt into Gelt
7. A Haggadah for a Socially Responsible Chocolate Seder

On the Bread Trail

1. Breaking Jewish Breads: More Than Challah: Explore the diversity of Jewish communities through celebratory breads. These fancifully shaped breads express Jewish hopes and ideals through the seasons of the year.
2. The Polemics of Leaven: Why Matzah?
3. Instead of Wedding Cake, Try Bread
4. Untangling Shabbat Challah
5. Enhancing Body and Spirit Through Bread
6. Whose Babka Is That?