

When I dip, you dip, we dip



My hubby is saying musaf, which is an additional service said on holidays, shanbat and rosh chodesh, both days of Rosh Hashanah this year. He'll stand before the small congregation in the Chabad house (conveniently located next to a head shop) of this North Carolina mountain town we find ourselves happily in this holiday season and proclaim his love both for Hashem, the community and our people. But, before he can truly feel ready to do all that he had to dip. Now I'm not talking apples into honey though we have big plans for that over the next several days. No, I'm talking the big dip--taking a plunge into the mikveh, literally translated as a collection of water, to cleanse and purify. The requirements of a true mikveh are pretty intense. A mikveh must consist of a natural spring or well of naturally occurring water, and thus can be supplied by rivers and lakes which have natural springs as their source. It is usually found in the form of a bathing facility in a local synagogue that remains in ritual contact with a natural source of water, yada yada, you get the picture. Needless to say, this small town doesn't have one. But, what this small town does have plenty of are natural rivers, lakes and creeks. It's not hard finding a natural body of water in the mountains but it is a little hard finding a secluded spot for a traditional dip (read: naked dip). After driving for a bit we settled on a gorgeous spot in a national forest (thanks government!) and well, there was some dipping. It wasn't hard connecting to Gd in this pure place and it got me thinking just how much I haven't been paying attention to the beauty of this season lately. As much as I work surrounded by my fellow Jewish community members and as much as "doing Jewish" is embedded in most everything I do, I feel like this Rosh Hashanah season might be passing me by before I have time to truly give thanks for the incredible gift that is my life. I mean heck, I didn't even make one thing outta apples and post it to this here kosher food blog. Nevertheless, I have 3 days of reflection (and eating) ahead of me and with the dipping of today, the dipping of apples into honey tonight and the pride I feel for this huge honor my hubs is about to

undertake, well, I think it all means I'm ready to be present this Rosh Hashanah. Shana Tovah—to a sweet new year filled to the brim of peace and goodness.<

Let's do this...

So I met with my Rabbi a week ago. It was the first time in a long while that I've met with him to talk about my conversion. We set a lot of goals and even developed a timeline for my conversion. It looks like in six months I'll go to the Mikveh. I'm very excited. I know that this is the right choice for me. I am Jewish. Let's make it official already, I'm tired of talking about it. One of the things that I took away from our meeting is a list of questions that I need to be prepared to answer for my Beit Din. I thought it might be fun to prepare my answers for those questions here before my next meeting with my Rabbi. Please join in on the discussion. If you have something to add or would like to answer these questions for yourself (some of them are really thought-provoking) please do! Please share your thoughts, feelings and opinions. I'd love it.

What has/have been major turning points for you in your journey to becoming Jewish?

One moment stands out pretty clear in my memory. I don't know if it was a turning point necessarily, but it was definitely a moment that changed the way I think and feel about Judaism. That moment is my friend Dana's wedding. I learned a lot that night. Dana's wedding was my first Jewish wedding. I didn't

know what a Ketubah was. I had never heard of a Chuppah. I had never seen the Horrah. I understood what it was to be Jewish on a very basic level. Her wedding taught me something beyond basic cultural symbols. I might even go so far as to say that converting was, up to that point, sort of a joke to me. I had always been told I looked Jewish, had Jewish sensibilities and a Jewish sense of humor (whatever any of that means). I had even been told by a college acting professor that I shouldn't move to New York City to pursue an acting career because NYC was already full of Jews from Brooklyn, I'd just be another. I know, gross right? The best part is that *that* professor is JEWISH. That night? Dana's wedding night, changed everything. It made me look deeper. It made me pay attention and ask questions.

The biggest lesson that I learned that night was what (for me at least) is maybe the biggest difference between being a Christian vs. being Jewish. That lesson? Live right now. Here. Today. In this space. The space where you are. Celebrate with every single stinking molecule of your being. Dance. Yell. Laugh. Now, I'm not insinuating that Christians don't get to do that. No. What I'm saying is Jews aren't preparing for a mansion on cloud 9. We aren't preparing for a better place that's supposed to come. We're living right here in **this** world. We're trying to make this world a better place. I want my dance TODAY. Not only do I want my dance today? I deserve that. I deserve joy and happiness right now. I saw people celebrating. I mean *really* celebrating. I saw true joy in a way that I had never witnessed before.

What changed me, what that joy changed in me was all of the anxiety that I had ever felt. I've had some serious issues with Anxiety. That's neither here nor there, but it got me thinking. If I could work harder at living for this moment and if I could stop worrying about the things that I can't control, then maybe I could appreciate my life more. Maybe I

could live with more gratitude and be a happier person. Maybe I could be happy. I'm not perfect with that. I get anxious. I worry. I just try give that up and away to something greater than myself. That night was a game changer for me, because it stirred me up and made me really research what being Jewish is.

So I ask you the same question...what has/have been major turning points for you in your journey to becoming Jewish? Think about it...

Salsa Lessons

A few nights ago we decided to have a picnic in our living room. As with most things in my life, our little living room floor adventure was clouded with the kind of comedy that most people only see in movies. It was supposed to be a picnic outside with friends but Fall weather intervened and everyone cancelled. I know. You'd think that a little nice Fall weather would get people excited. Instead we visited with the weather through windows. We gathered humus, cheese, carrots and crackers along with my famous (ha!) black bean salsa and whatever else we could scrounge together and settled in for an evening of emptying the DVR.

I got my recipe for black bean salsa from Paula Deen's cookbook. No, butter is not required. It might actually be the healthiest thing she makes. It's also so completely easy that I make it without thinking. Don't you love it when you find a recipe like that? A recipe that is instantly memorized and requires little to no thought to prepare? It's awesome.

So I made my salsa in a huge bowl and we sat down and got caught up on our DVR. Somewhere in the middle of watching the

season finale of True Blood? My husband (ever the drama queen) starts complaining of a stomach ache. It get worse. There are moans from his chair. Then he's convinced that he's dying of a appendicitis. The pain is so great that he takes to our bed. I'm rolling my eyes as usual. Then it hits me too. The only difference is that I'm not planning my funeral. I'm frozen on the couch with the worst gas pain ever. EVER. I tell him, "YOU HAVE GAS, YOU'RE NOT DYING." We giggle a bit and then take turns in the bathroom. Yes, friends. We had a great bout of wind. Dare I say it? We were farting up a storm. It was hilarious and awful.

Somewhere in the middle of laughing ourselves to tears my husband comes to me with a sassy face complete with arched eyebrows. He hands me a bottle of red wine vinegar. The same bottle of red wine vinegar that I had used to make our black bean salsa. "Check out the expiration date, Mr. Paula Deen." Um...you guys? Apparently? Apparently red wine vinegar expires. Who knew. The expiration date on the vinegar was FEBRUARY 2010. Yeah. Check your calendar. It's SEPTEMBER 2011. I poisoned my family!! Who even looks at expiration dates? Not I. As much fun laughing ourselves blind was, I'll never not check the expiration of anything again. I suggest you do the same.

WHAT?

1 can of black beans

1 can whole kernel corn

1 cup edamame

1 medium red onion diced

1 can diced tomato

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

1 lime (juiced)

salt and pepper to taste.

How?

Wash and drain the cans of beans and corn. Toss in a large bowl. Add your edamame. Dice your onion and throw that in the bowl. Add the tomato, lime juice, red wine vinegar and salt and pepper to taste. You can add extra flavor by getting the canned diced tomatoes that are seasoned with garlic or whatever flavor that your grocery store has that you like. You could also spice it up a bit by adding a can of Rotel or even a dash or two of Louisiana Hot Sauce. I find that I like more than the one table-spoon of red wine vinegar that is called for in this recipe...and that's what got me into trouble.