

Chef Batya Kahan

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When I asked my friends to suggest chefs to interview, they all brought up Batya Kahan of Batya's Kitchen. Batya is known for her delicious homemade food, which she delivers in 9X13 tins anywhere, anytime. She was the only chef I met in person instead of on Zoom, and when we finished our interview, she offered to send me home with some baked goods, because she is truly a generous soul. I declined her offer because I myself am a polite soul and not a crazy person who takes kind people up on their generous offers. As I walked out (empty-handed and sad about it), I left in awe of a chef who views her opportunities to take care of Hashem's children as a privilege.

Batya: When my parents got divorced, my mother was in Israel and my father lived in Brooklyn with all the kids. I was sixteen and basically running the house, raising the kids, and making a full Yom Tov and Shabbos. I loved hosting and having my friends for meals. We had a real open house.

Later, I made my friends' bridal showers and their *sheva brachos*. But after my fourth kid was born, my husband suggested that I start cooking as our second income. It was a natural idea, because I enjoyed it so much, and friends and family had already hired me to cook for them. In 2008, I got a hashgachah and began to work out of my house. Fourteen years later, I moved the business into a commissary.

It's much easier there. When I was cooking at home, there was no boundary between my business space and personal space. If I wanted to make a private phone call, I had to leave the house. My kids didn't have a kitchen. They never knew if the food being prepared was for them or for a client. Now, home belongs to our family. I don't bring work home now, but I do miss a lot of happenings in my personal life.

Hadassa: What are some of the challenges you now handle that you didn't see coming when you first got into this business?

Batya: My biggest challenge is keeping the peace and managing the various personalities in the tight confines of my kitchen. For instance, I have a Venezuelan worker who is

ex-military and another Venezuelan worker who was part of the rebellion. I've had to step between them and talk them out of a physical altercation, which is something I could never have anticipated being part of my regular workday.

Hadassa: I'm guessing that Yom Tov is your busy season. How do you manage to juggle work and family time? Do you make Yom Tov for your clients and again for your family?

Batya: Making Yom Tov at home isn't stressful because I love to cook for my family. I'm able to make fresh staples really quickly. The hard part about my job is the family time that I miss out on all year when I work long hours.

But I do it because I truly believe that Hashem put me where I'm supposed to be. Aside from the *kiddush Hashem* that I can make by being a nice boss to my non-Jewish workers, I have a talent that helps people and I can provide a much-needed service. There are women who physically can't make Shabbos or Yom Tov, and now they have a delicious, homemade option available for their families. There are overwhelmed working mothers who hire me so I can take this off their plate.

Hadassa: I know women who have bought your food in the past, particularly on Yom Tov. They were so grateful they had homemade food for their families, even though they couldn't stand in the kitchen for hours.

Batya: We provide more than Yom Tov. People hire us to send food to a shivah house or a new mother or their elderly parents. There are many situations where people want homemade food and not takeout.

I love the chesed aspect of the job. On the bottom of my website, before you check out, you can add a donation. I take that donation, add eighteen percent, and we partner with our customers to send food to needy families for Yom Tov. I love being the conduit for community chesed. There's someone who gives me enough money to send a full Yom Tov menu to ten families in the community. I can't afford to give like that, but Hashem knows I really would love to, so He sends me tzaddikim who allow me to be a part of that mitzvah. We once had a mom call to let us know that we were approved to send Seder food to an Alabama correctional facility. Apparently, we made history, because we were the first food establishment ever to be approved. I got heartfelt thank-you cards from the inmates after an emotional Seder. I don't know if they were all Jewish, but if there was even one Jew attending, it was worth it.

We're equipped to ship meals anywhere in the US — to patients in hospitals without access to kosher food, or children in non-kosher rehab facilities. During Covid, we worked around the clock. A family would lose a parent, there would be fifteen people suddenly sitting shivah, and now, they had a full Pesach waiting at their door.

I have also promised that as long as I am in this business, I'm committed to sending Yom Tov food to "The Ranch," a rehab center for Jewish girls.

Hadassa: I feel like you love cooking, but it's chesed that is your passion.

Batya: That's correct — chesed for my family and chesed for the community. It's why I do what I do, even on the hard days. I've never turned down a chesed opportunity. I keep in mind that Hashem is the Boss, and I'm just His manager, striving to do my best every day.