

TASTING THE WORLD WITH AUTHOR LEAH KOENIG

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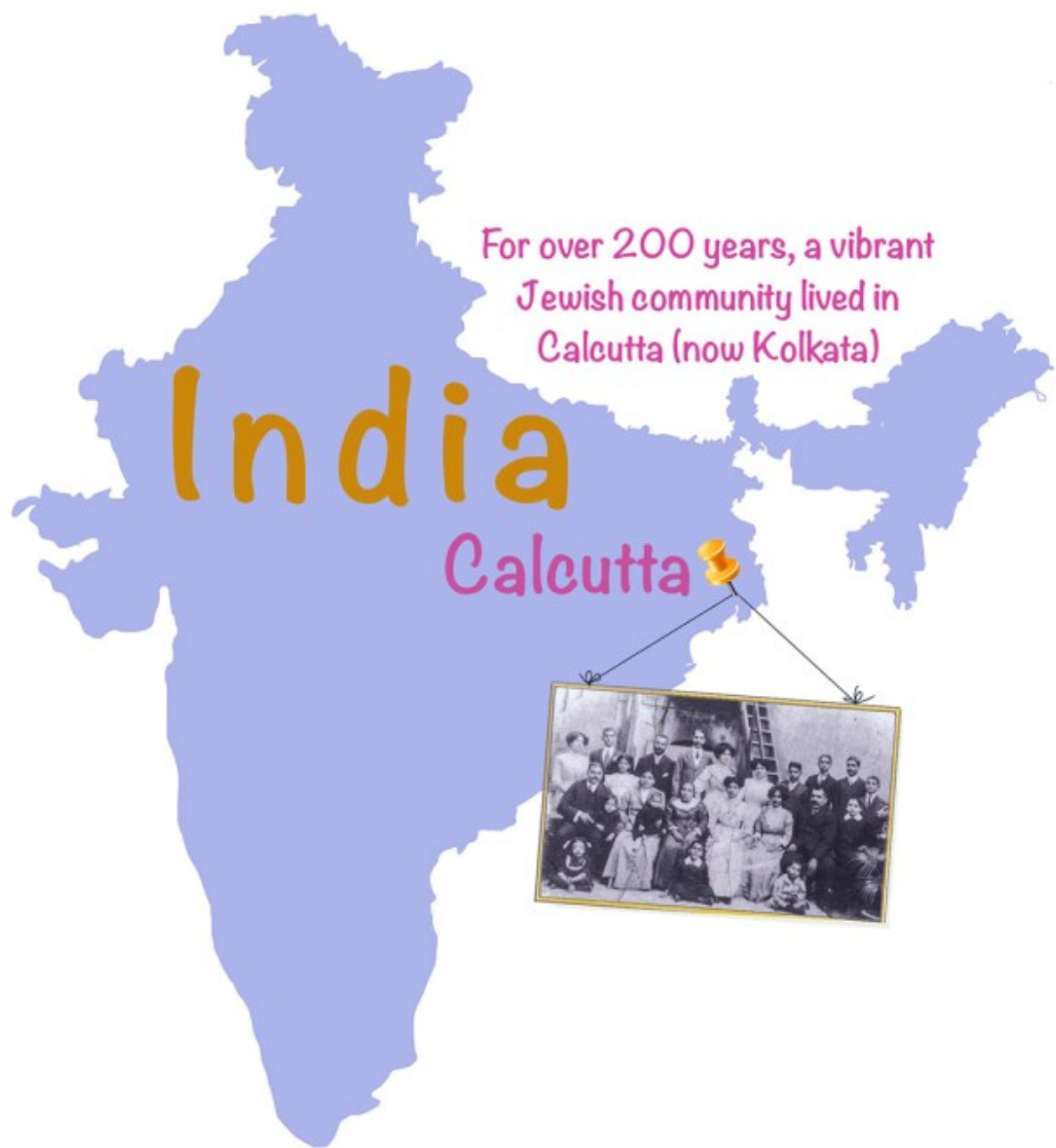


ILLUSTRATION BY ROD MORRISON

By Zoe Singer

Joining the Coop was one of the first things cookbook author Leah Koenig did when she got to Brooklyn in 2004. These days, you'll find her strolling the aisles picking up ingredients for her seventh cookbook about global Jewish food. "My philosophy about

Jewish food is that it's a chance to see the world: Jews have lived and cooked almost everywhere. Especially right now, while we're still in this pandemic, there's this desire to travel for a lot of us, and for me cookbooks have been a way to tap into the world when I can't visit in person."

Through more than 400 home-cooking recipes in her most recently published book, *The Jewish Cookbook*, Leah celebrates the diversity and breadth of the Jewish culinary tradition, with flavors from the Middle East to the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. To give us a taste, she shared a stunningly delicious recipe for chicken (or fish) fritters flecked with scallion, jalapeño, and fresh ginger.

THE JEWISH



COOKBOOK

PHAIDON

LEAH KOENIG

The fritter recipe is from Kolkata (formerly “Calcutta”), where a vibrant community of Jews from Iraq and Syria settled and thrived for more than 200 years before eventually dwindling almost to extinction during mass migrations to Israel in the 20th century. “This one recipe shows how Jewish food is constantly evolving and is so much broader and deeper than what people think of, far beyond Eastern European foods like brisket and latkes,” Leah said. As culinary traditions evolved over time and across distance, the originally Iraqi fritter dish acquired more typically Indian flavors. Simple enough to make on a weeknight, they’re a favorite in her house served over coconut rice (that recipe, also in *The Jewish Cookbook*, hails from Mumbai).

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For her next book, Leah is focusing on the cooking of Rome’s 2,000-year-old Jewish community. Leah reminisced about visiting the area in her twenties, attributing her decision to become a cookbook author to her love for Roman Jewish cooking. “It exploded my curiosity, and I fell in love with this ancient community,” she recalled. “The history of the cuisine predates what we think of as Jewish cooking. My hope is that these recipes are interesting to people whether or not they have Jewish backgrounds.”

Through the flavors and stories in her books, Leah aims to “widen the world and build conversations.” Especially now when getting a taste of far away places and times is particularly welcome. And it’s nice to know that we can find most of the ingredients in these recipes right here at the Coop.



Chicken or fish scallion, ginger fritters—ready to serve as a snack or pre-dinner appetizer.

Chicken, Scallion and Ginger Fritters

Recipe reprinted, with permission, from The Jewish Cookbook (Phaidon, 2019) by Leah Koenig

Jews hailing from Calcutta serve these savory and gently spiced fritters, called *arook tahine*, as a snack or pre-dinner appetizer. This recipe uses chicken, but they are also commonly made with an equivalent weight of firm fish fillets. The fresh herbs and scallions give the fritters a gorgeous green color.



Serves 4-6

- 1 bunch scallions, white and green parts, roughly chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and roughly chopped
- 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1/2 cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro or flat-leaf parsley
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour (or gluten free all-purpose flour)
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- Vegetable oil (like sunflower), for frying



Scallions, jalapeño, ginger and cilantro ready for the food processor.



Transfer thick pancake-like batter to a bowl then refrigerate.

1. In a food processor, combine the scallions, jalapeño, ginger, and cilantro and pulse, scraping down the bowl as necessary, until very finely chopped.
2. Add the chicken, flour, eggs, and salt and pulse until a wet batter forms—it should be the consistency of thick pancake batter. Transfer to a bowl, cover, and refrigerate for 1 hour.
3. Line a large plate with paper towels and set aside. In a large frying pan, heat about 1/4 inch of oil over medium heat. Working in batches of 4-5, scoop out the batter by the 1/4 cup and add to the pan, gently flattening and nudging into rounds. Fry, flipping once, until golden brown on both sides and cooked through, about 8 minutes total. Add more oil in between batches, as necessary.

4. Transfer to the paper towel-lined plate to drain. Serve hot.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Fry batter until golden brown on both sides.



Transfer to the paper towel and serve hot.

Coop member Leah Koenig is the author of six cookbooks including 'The Jewish Cookbook' (Phaidon, 2019) and 'Modern Jewish Cooking' (Chronicle Books). She is currently at work on her next book, which explores Rome's historic Jewish cuisine. Her writing and recipes can be found in The New York Times, New York Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Food & Wine, Epicurious, Food52, and Tablet, among other publications. She also writes a weekly newsletter, The Jewish Table, which shares recipes and stories from the world of Jewish food. Leah also leads cooking demonstrations and workshops around the country and world.



PHOTO BY SOPHIE BARBASCH

Leah Koenig

Zoe Singer is a former food writer and recipe developer turned grant writer. She is a lifelong Brooklynite and longtime Coop member.