

...And Then There was Khash! *Nov. 6, 2005*



Last year, I was introduced to tan (tahn—all As are ahs, like in Annette rather than Ann.) It's a mixture of yogurt, water and salt. I didn't like it the first time, but came to appreciate it so much that, the last thing I drank in Armenia before boarding the plane with my mother, was tan.

I figured khash (hahsh) would be the same way. And it was. I did it!! I ate khash and enjoyed it!! And, like tan, it was much tastier than when I first tried it.

You know how they make gelatin, right? "Those parts" are all ground together and, when cooked, form a gelatin that is quite tasty when mixed with lots of sugar and fruit flavoring.

Forget it. In Armenia, nothing is left to waste. Just about every beef butcher shop features, off in the corner, a large selection of delectable lower legs and hooves. Clean and inviting. The basis of khash.

In a pot of water, cooked until they're gelatin-like, you put the lower legs and hooves. After many hours, the gelatinized hooves and any other part that might be attached creates quite a rich broth. Mix in some garlic, sprinkle in some salt and break up some dry lavash (used as a cracker) to soak up the broth and you end up with khash.

It's an autumn and winter delicacy once served only as a rich-person's leftovers to the poor. Now it's a Saturday or Sunday morning tradition because you must drink at least a bottle of vodka (between everyone at the table, not a bottle just for yourself) to get the notion of what you're actually eating out of your head.

My brother Armen and his very good friend, Arshavir Martikyan, picked me up at 9 a.m. sharp and we drove to a restaurant (and sports club) nestled inside the rim of the river gorge. We didn't have reservations – that's how big a deal this is – but the staff kindly got us a table that we could use only until about 10:30, when they had a very big party of people coming to eat khash.

The soup arrives in a large bowl that sets atop another bowl inside of which is sometimes placed a candle to keep it warm. Looking at the large knuckle – or whatever it was – staring me in the face gave me a moment of doubt. But Armen said to take out the gelatin mass and put it on my plate, covering it with soft lavash. Then we sprinkled in the salt and I put a heaping teaspoon of minced garlic into the bowl. Breaking up about 4 pieces of dry lavash, each of which is the size of a TV tray, I was ready to dig in.

You don't use the tablespoon that arrived with the khash. Instead, you use a soft piece of lavash like a tissue, draping it over the now-soaked dry lavash, and grabbing up some to shovel into your mouth. I noticed that Arshavir was cutting his gelatin mass into tiny pieces, so I did, too. A little bit of mass in the soft lavash, a scoop of the wet lavash broth and down the hatch it went. The first bite was the scariest. But I discovered it was quite tasty and Arshavir gave wonderful toasts to the day, the khash, the friendship we share. However, the bowl was too big and I found I was full before the bowl was empty and the gelatin mass was gone. Armen said it was no problem to leave what I could not eat.

What have you tried to do that you didn't like? Have you tried it again? Can you muster the strength inside yourself to persevere? Have you prayed for the strength to keep going, to keep trying? It's in the tough times when you need to give your struggles to God. Life isn't always easy, but God is always there to carry your burdens. You never know when you'll suddenly find a bowl of khash in front of you. It's then that your faith – and your friendships – will sustain you, making the khash tastier than you remember it to be!

Peace!

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