



Plenty of room at the table (Dedicated to a radical global citizen) SART

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Warm, open, mixed, adaptable, flavored, healthy, conscious

All words that describe the food in this cookbook and the man behind the recipes. You can't understand the symbolism and the significance of this cookbook, *Queen of Months: An Eco-halal Sufi Vegan/Vegetarian Cookbook for Ramadan and Beyond*, without knowledge of Dr. Ibrahim Farajaje. He was a peaceful revolution who touched many people and left behind a legacy of activism and inclusion that continues to connect the soul and desires of people—through his scholarship, of course, and through food.

Dr. Farajaje was performance art, someone gifted with words. A sexual identity and health educator who gave speeches that opened minds, revealing opportunity and truth about the world. And when he wasn't living up to his icon status, he was providing safe spaces for people, building his community by being a part of his community. He and his wife, Katherin, traveled and created a home wherever they went, providing warmth and mental pause from the everyday grind and circulating negativity. Everyone is family. And that desire for oneness, for people to realize that we are all connected is what he fought for. In 2016, he passed away, still devoted to change and servicing others. This cookbook welcomes all to Ramadan, to celebrate, to feast, and certainly invites all to the table but more importantly, the kitchen.

Why create a cookbook for a celebration that prioritizes fasting? Well, the Foreword explains that Ramadan focuses on the balance of feasting and fasting. The fasting reminds you of the importance of food and the privilege of having food to eat. The opening also addresses the concept of eco-halal and how that is reflected in the recipes and the culture of the cookbook as a whole. As a part of one global community, we all play a role in one another's lives and have to take responsibility for our bodies, our health, our beliefs and what we give back/leave behind.

Upon reading through the cookbook, I realized that, maybe by skillful design or happy accident, these vegan/vegetarian recipes act as an equalizer. It satisfies those who are looking for Ramadan recipes, vegans or vegetarians who are looking for new recipes to try throughout the week, people who are trying to eat healthier, home cooks who need delicious, healthy food that is simple to make, and everyone in between. Even those who eat meat can always add meat to a salad or a main dish if they so desired, but there's no denying that the food is delicious as written. Don't be thrown off by the use of Ramazan instead of Ramadan, it is not a typo, just an alternative. Similarly, don't fret when you see the word *adhan* casually used in an example. There aren't always definitions for unfamiliar words, but there is some context, and always a dictionary. I find the exchange of consonants in Ramazan and the use of cultural language brilliant because, though slight changes, they work to immerse readers into a world of Islamic culture that is not discussed or popularized in society. Although the recipes in this cookbook make up most of the content, the first few pages tell you that the culture and the symbolism are equally as important, reframing the culture in its proper light, one of positivity, community and freedom.

This is a 227-page cookbook of vegan/vegetarian recipes that makes you feel like a guest being hosted while cooking what precedes the festivities (or maybe just a satisfying homemade meal). Because if you are going to learn about Ramadan why not engage and fully participate? The introductory pages provide a supported environment, one that is set to prepare you, immerse you, educate you, and mainly welcome you to the world of Ramadan feasting and the significance of the celebration. Simple in design and layout, this book lets the recipes speak for themselves. If perusing for insight into participating in Ramadan, you will find not only recipes but also a poetically formatted blessing when a new food section begins. I highly recommend this book no matter who you are or what you may need it for. This book is for everyone. Under the Carrot Ginger Soup recipe, the instructions say "if you do not have a blender, cut all vegetables as finely as possible." Despite these recipes being useful and popular during Ramadan, they also pay homage to other cultures by using flavor combinations and techniques from places such as Turkey, Central Asia, Iran, Morocco, and so on with ingredients like sorrel and Chinese 5 spice.

Be welcomed by familiar favorites like falafel, hummus, pita, and tacos!

Throughout the recipes are tips and notes on how to enrich and customize the food to fit your tastes and your needs. This commentary adjusts for access, location, and skill, making sure that if you can't find a certain flour at your local store, you don't have to be left without something delicious and nourishing on your table. Just as in life, we learn to accept and work

with what we have and do something great with it. Substitutions abound: No wok? You can use a frying pan. Measurements are in cups and grams for those who use a scale. Provided are instructions for everything from drinks to soups, main entrees, breads, salad/vegetables, morning recipes, and desserts. Try new things like cumin mashed potatoes or crepes, enjoy cold brewed coffee and peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies. Just because it is only vegan/vegetarian doesn't mean plain, repetitive or vegetable only.

Anecdotes by Farajaje are sprinkled throughout each section, commemorating memories of whom he shared these meals with and where, as though flipping through someone's family photo album before dinner, familiarizing you with what you missed.

In a time of self-care and of increased social, political, health consciousness, food is healing and a reminder of the divinity in life and in enjoying it. Dr. Farajaje explored multiple religions including Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity and their connections. Inspired by these intersections, the reader is asked to at least consider the religious, political, and dare I say sexual, undertones of food and how they connect us to one another and to the world around us. Although I have never met the intersectioned master educator and activist leader, it comes as no surprise to me that this cookbook is subtly nuanced. Food is symbolic and coded which reflects causes, principles, communities that were keystones in his life and work. How fitting that this cookbook be a part of Dr. Farajaje's legacy, left for us to be reminded of what he fought for and what he cherished most, community and love.

Through the simple act of sharing these recipes, I am convinced that Ramadan is not just "a month of compassion, a month of delight, a month of healing that which is broken, a month of journeying to wholeness, a month of remembering, a month of transforming" but a month of meals that contain all of this as well. And fueled well, we can be warriors for one another, providing protection and love. Thank you for feeding my mind and soul.

Until the next meal, Baba.

Notes on contributors

Rekara Gage is a writer and health/wellness professional with a master's degree in Professional Writing from Towson University. More interested in the journey than the destination, she enjoys helping others grow into their potential and is a firm believer in creativity and communication as gateways to happiness and healing.