

Havva's Kuymak

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Sidar Tekin



Takuhi Tovmasyan's [*Sofranız Şen Olsun*](#) (*Let Your Table Be Cheerful*) is one of the valuable sources that inspired me both while collecting recipes and during my writing process. Thanks to Tovmasyan's candid stories about food, desserts, seasons, and loved ones, I developed a very close relationship with the book. Tovmasyan also uses a lot of old family photos in her book; these are photographs that show the streets, family members, acquaintances, dinner tables, and the spirit of the times. That's how I started shuffling old family albums, not knowing where or when they would take me. This journey took me to kuymak, Aunt Haskız and my grandmother. My mother told me, and I listened.

My grandmother got married when she was 15 and lived with her in-laws in the village where she was born in Trabzon for two years until she gave birth to her first child, my uncle Dursun. At that time, my grandfather worked in the iron and steel factory in Karabük. When

my grandmother came to Karabük, her first friend and neighbor was Aunt Haskız. Above is their photo, my grandmother on the right and Aunt Haskız on the left. Let's lend an ear to my mother:

“For example, a certain number of basic meals were prepared in the village. It was not a village with many bazaars, you cook what you sow. It was potatoes, green beans, kidney beans, corn, wheat. For example, they used to grind them in the mill. Even if they were making börek or something, they used to make börek with potato or meat. Börek was made with the unique cheese of our village. They didn't have many different böreks. There were local dishes.”

My grandmother's arrival in Karabük not only started a friendship and neighborhood with Haskız, but also started the interaction and flow of information between different food cultures from different geographies. While my grandmother learned eggplant dishes like imambayildi from Haskız, Haskız learned dishes such as kuymak from her. My mother and her siblings met with different fruits and vegetables in the city and acquired new eating habits. While talking about the richness of living in the city, it is necessary to mention that the fruits and vegetables that grow naturally in the field or garden in the village are healthy and cheap.

“Those meals were like city food for a village. My mother had always learned them from Haskız. I mean, I don't remember eating watermelon from my childhood, for example, when we went to my grandmother's. The village had its own fruits, the ones on the tree. Strawberries, for example, grow by themselves, there is no special cultivation required. Strawberries popped up everywhere. Like apples, pears, medlar, plums... These are always full. Be it hazelnut, walnut, chestnut, these were always natural. I don't remember buying fruit from the market.”



Another person famous for her kuymak is Aunt Havva. She is my mother's aunt and unlike most people, she used to make kuymak inside a pot. This photo was taken at Aunt Havva's house in Zonguldak. From left to right: My grandmother, Aunt Havva and Aunt Mevlüde.

Kuymak is one of those intimate dishes, like kısır, with lots of memories, and lots of discussions. Just like kısır, it is good when eaten from a huge pan in the middle. Since we are 4 siblings, imagine 6 people waiting around a table with our spoons when kuymak was made at home. The most valuable part of the kuymak is the scraping. Fights break out over scraps; bargains are also made. During our conversation with my mother, we found it funny that both I and my mother had similar memories of kuymak, and we laughed a lot.

“You couldn't say you ate kuymak if you didn't eat the bottom scrape anyway. Kuymak scraping is our memory since childhood, it would be a scraping eating race. It would be so much fun. For example, my father always wanted to eat scraps himself. He would have even turned the pan upside down so we wouldn't take it. It would be fun. First he would say that no one should take it from the bottom. He would say, 'I will share the scraping'. We used to eat it from top to bottom, we wouldn't eat the scraps when we were kids. When we got to the bottom, my father would take them all. We would be both disappointed and amazed. We would always fall into the same game.”

Now let's lend an ear to my mother and learn about this delicious kuymak recipe that my grandmother taught both Haskız and my mother:

“First, put 2 tablespoons of butter. It will turn slightly brown. Put the cornflour and then roast it. Then put 4-5 spoons of yogurt. I hear from most people, they don't put yogurt in it. My mother used to pour yogurt. She would put both from the solid and wet part of

it. It would make our kuymak a little sour. Then we have our own village cheese called Minzi, she used to put some of that in it. Now, in the shops selling kuymak related products, they call that cheese with a different name. But ours was different, it was specific to the village. It would be very salty. Because there were no refrigerators in the past, Minzi cheeses are salty so that they do not get worms and spoil. We had a cow then, so we would make it ourselves. The reason it is called Minzi is that it's Greek, I guess. If you have realized, place names around the village are all Greek names. They have changed a lot of names, but it hasn't even been 30 years since they have changed them. For example, we do not know what Kanduraş (name of a place) means.

Anyway, she would put Minzi in kuymak also, she would put 1 handful. It would be stringy, like stringy cheese. After I put it in, my mother would put some water on it. She would mix that mixture with a wooden spoon mixer by striking it and turning it with her hand, as if making ayran. She would whisk it well, it would be smooth inside. Then she would leave it, it would be cooked by itself. Lastly, all the butter would rise to the top, the base would stick to the pan and burn. The bottom would be crimson red. You couldn't say you ate kuymak if you didn't eat the scrape at the bottom anyway."

Ingredients

- Corn flour
- Village cheese (Minzi)
- Yogurt
- Butter

A note from me

My grandmother's recipe uses animal products such as butter, yogurt, and cheese. But it is also possible to make vegan kuymak and create this tasty dish without exploitation. Thanks to veganlik.org for sharing the recipe.

Here's the vegan kuymak recipe: <https://veganlik.org/muhlama/>